

Examining EFL Students and Teachers Attitudes towards E- learning: A Focus on MOOCs

Djahida Abderrahmane* University of Mascara (Algeria), djahida.aberrahmane@univ-mascara.dz
Dr. Nawal Mebitil University of Mascara (Algeria), naouel.mebartil@univ-mascara.dz

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Abstract:

The present paper investigates students' and teachers' attitudes towards using MOOCs for language learning and teaching. To this end, the researchers conducted a descriptive study using students' questionnaires and teachers' interviews as the primary research tools to collect data. Given the Covid-19 crisis, Convenience sampling is deployed for this research. The results indicate that EFL students and teachers have positive attitudes towards online learning courses; their readiness to use MOOCs is still moderately low. Also, it is found that there is a correlation between MOOCs adoption and PU with PEOU. ICT competence, ICT preparedness, technological expertise, and ICT training directly impact users' attitudes. Students' and teachers' awareness of MOOCs potentials needs to be further developed to meet the 21st digital world's requirements.

Keywords: Connectivism; e-learning; MOOCs; students' attitudes; teachers' attitudes.

Jel Classification Codes: XN1, XN2.

* Corresponding author: Djahida Abderrahmane,

1. 1 INTRODUCTION

Massive Open Online Courses, abbreviated as 'MOOCs,' are gradually gaining much fame in language learning. They provide holistic, innovative learning materials, create supportive instructional opportunities and environments and guarantee knowledge and collaboration among many participants. Despite MOOCs' facilities in the learning process, students and teachers' participation is still limited. Their attitudes have a part of responsibility in MOOCs use. Remarkably, the extent to which they perceive these online courses as valuable and easy to use influences the users' adoption decisions. Mere consideration has been devoted to assessing student's and teachers' acceptance or rejection to manage the use of MOOCs. Inquiring these attitudes can provide deep insights into the importance of both training and teachers' role in developing students' ICT competence to implement and use these online learning platforms appropriately.

2. Background to the Study

The rapid growth of technology in each life's sphere led to the emergence of a new theory of learning known as connectivism, which elucidates the different ways people interact in and share information through the use of internet technologies, including YouTube, wikis, e-mails, online applications, social networks, online forums and platforms and much more. In contrast to behaviorism, cognitivism, and constructivism; the learning theories that aimed to create appropriate educational atmospheres and emerged in a period when learning was not highly influenced by technology, connectivism offers the landscape for learning through non-human appliances; defined by the definition of learning as E-learning (Siemens, 2005).

Technology is rewiring nowadays' people's brains whereby new needs came into existence. This shift of demands and the massive proliferation of information, technological resources, and social networks connecting multiple communities all over the universe have caused practitioners and educators to opt for new methodologies and resources of knowledge for use in the classroom (Duke et al., 2013). The field of education is being revolutionized and remodeled with the integration of ICTs. Mainly, new pedagogical implications have been presented for English language learning and teaching (ELL/T). Consequently, impediments that students stumble upon in ELL might be mitigated through the use of E-learning (Robinston, 2011).

In addition to traditional technological materials, such as audiotapes, videos, filmed lectures, and others, MOOCs can be an instructional option that brings students and teachers to a shared learning platform, promoting interaction, collaboration, and peer learning plus putting forward unlimited attendance of students. MOOCs brought a drastic change in language learning, and they allowed learners to learn a language for free through communication in a learning environment with no space and time limitations (Yuan and Powell, 2013). Much of the current studies on ICTs use in language teaching and learning particularly pay attention to the benefits of MOOCs and the prospects provided to the educational transformation.

2.1. MOOCs Overview

In his work, *An Overview of the World of MOOCs*, Baturay (2015) scrutinizes the foundation of MOOCs. Baturay mentions that the term MOOCs was first coined to refer to a course developed by Stephen Downs and George Siemens in 2008 entitled 'Connectivism and Connectivity Knowledge' aiming at creating a rich learning environment based on interactions among a cohort of participants; using online tools rather than using the traditional ones. Twenty-

five (25) students of Manitoba University, Canada, took part in this course first, and then their number increased to 2300 students around the world. In 2011, the University of Stanford introduced three courses wishing to reach massive participants. In 2012, a company named *Udacity*, founded by Sebastian Thrun, began to develop MOOCs independently. Within the same year, the two Stanford university lecturers, Andrew Ng and Daphne Koller launched *Coursera* offering free courses.

Similarly, MIT established the MITx platform to be renamed edX after the consortium with Harvard University. After that, the wave of MOOCs moved to Europe by Furtherlearn (British) and Iversity (German) platforms. Yuan and Powell (2013) note that the focal interest of MOOCs enables an immense number of students to have free access to university-level education.

Yousef et al. (2015) mention that the acronym MOOC; itself describes the type of courses;

- **Massive:** the term entails the enormous number of participants taking part in MOOCs.
- **Open:** refers to the free affordance of courses, no fees or requirements to the entrance.
- **Online:** MOOCs offer online content via the web rather than textbooks; based on e-learning patterns. Lately, blended MOOCs have emerged to combine face-to-face and online modules.

The figure below offers a brief description:

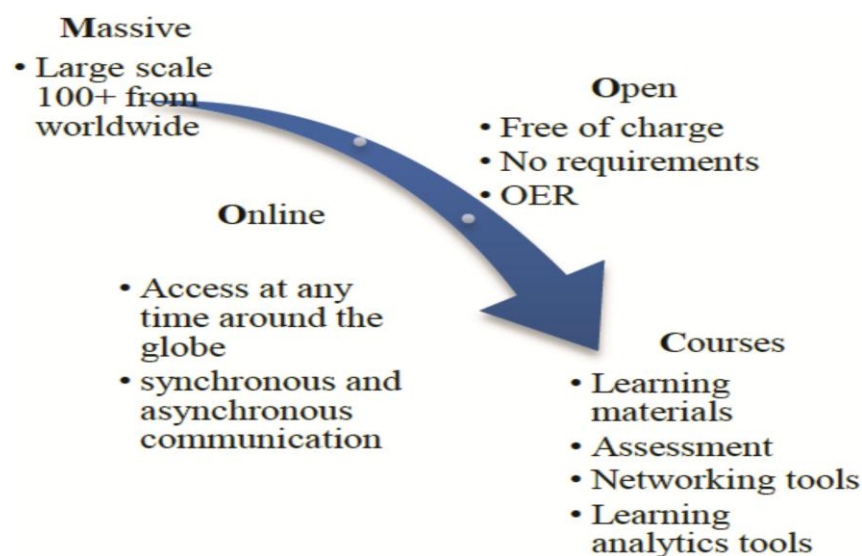


Figure.1. Critical elements of MOOCs (Adopted from Yousef et al., 2015).

In instructional settings, there are three types of MOOCs. cMOOCs were the first types that focused on learning in a networked context to examine the value of connectivism by Siemens and his colleagues. xMOOCs are more centralized and content-driven courses. Then, Hybrid MOOCs gather different types and pedagogies from a diversity of MOOCs with the presence of the teachers to ease the learning process (Baturay, 2015; Alanazi & Walker-Gleaves, 2019). For a better illustration, the figure below is used.

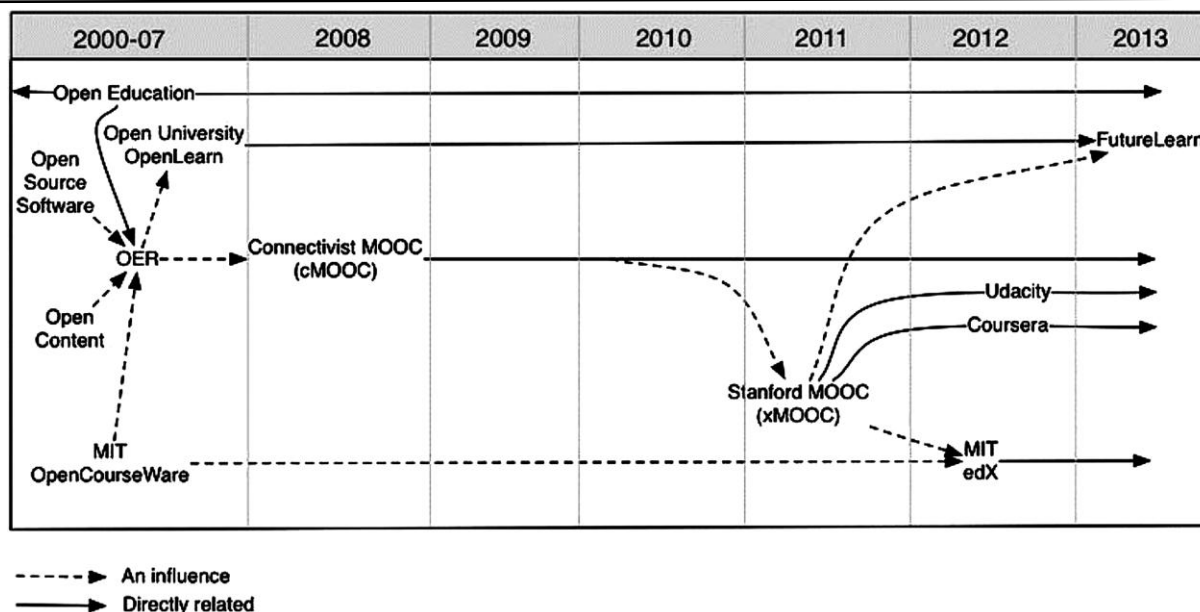


Figure.2. MOOCs and open education timeline (Adopted from Yuan & Powell, 2013).

2.2. MOOCs Implication to English Language Learning

The deficiency of traditional classroom practices proves its limitations to respond positively to today's technocrat students; as a result, they abandon English language learning. In compensation, technology use becomes the new paradigm in learning. Beltrán (2017) reports that MOOCs put forward innovative methodological opportunities for distance language teaching and learning. "Learners now have access to innumerable online resources to help them with grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and more, and can even join free or cheap Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)" (Qian & Bax, 2017, p. 1). They mention that due to such technologies, students dare to communicate, express their ideas in classrooms, develop their vocabulary, and become proficient in planning their learning together with appreciating peer and social learning.

Interaction, co-creation, community building, and networking are critical determiners for successful language learning, and MOOCs could be the ideal environment (Beltrán, 2017). To take parts in MOOCs, students could get tutorial support to attain higher standards and have the chance to attend various online courses; even contact colossal course participants whereby paving them the way to engage in working teams promoting a sense of collaboration or crowdsourcing, strictly speaking, this what "collective scaffolding" process refers to. When MOOC participants assist other course participants run interference for improvement and work on their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1995, as cited in Saker, 2019). English learning is about continuous practicing and outputting rather than mere inputting.

MOOCs seem to gain much importance to be a revolutionary teaching/ learning methodology. In that respect, multiple questions; are asked by a variety of authors like Paldy (2013, as cited in Beltrán, 2017), need to be answered, such as how to make use of MOOCs in language learning, what are their advantages and limitations and the factors that affect teachers and students attitudes to use them

2.3. Attitudes towards MOOCs

To Ajzen (1993, p. 42), attitudes are" an individual's disposition to react favorably or unfavorably to an object, behavior, person, institution, or event- or any other discriminable aspect; of the individual's world". Furthermore, "attitudes develop due to the beliefs people form about

the object of the attitudes which are in turn correlated with certain attributes, i.e., former existing objects and their characteristics", adds Fishben and Ajzen (1975, cited in Ajzen, 1993)

In the same vein, the subjective value towards an attribute of a particular object determines the strength of the belief. The attributes of the pre-valued objects affect the attitudes towards the new object (Ajzen, 1993). To scrutinize such attitudes, scientists devote much time and effort to develop methods and instruments of measurements.

Recent examples of research examine attitudes towards the use of ICTs through the lenses of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM); which is one of the frequently accredited theories in ICT integration studies and which forms the theoretical framework for the current study, demonstrate that attitudes and perception are increased due to Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEoU) (Davis, 1989). PU refers to the degree to which an individual thinks using a particular technology or system will contribute to better performance. PEOU addresses the degree to which a person believes that this technology or system is free from difficulties and easy to use (Davis, 1989, p, 320). Perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes lead to intentions, which generate or guide behaviors (Ajzen, 1993). Users' malleable perceptions impact their technology adoption decisions. Abd Majid et al. (2019) find that postgraduate students' perceptions of MOOCs are utterly linked to their needs and characteristics. They suggest providing numerous options to MOOCs platforms by making further intensive studies about the users and the problems would grease the wheels for more engagement and moisturize the technical glitches.

2.4. The Aim of the Study

In this study, MOOCs, including the recently developed open and accessible digital platforms, refer to any Open Educational Resource (OER) that brings together students and teachers for the sake of learning English. Though MOOCs award them online accessibility, righteousness, and an avalanche of contents, it remains somehow vague if MOOCs are accepted among tertiary EFL students and teachers. On that account, the present paper aims to examine the factors that impact students' inclination and teachers' attitudes to use MOOCs and to explore the symbiotic relationship between students' predilection and teachers' role in training them to use these online sources because teachers are the critical component of the learning process. Also, this paper endeavors to highlight how training develops students' ICT competence and provides them with the support that influences their retention of MOOCs. Hence, it is necessary to seek answers to the following questions:

- What factors affect the attitudes of University EFL students and teachers to use MOOCs as an English language learning tool?
- In what way do ICT competence and training affect students' attitudes towards using MOOCs?
- To what extent the role of the teacher impacts students' attitudes towards MOOCs?

Since MOOCs' use in EFL learning is still a long-standing issue; it is hypothesized that:

1. Students' positive attitudes towards MOOCs are owing to the avalanche of information delivery.

2. Technological competence has a significant effect on MOOCs retention among students and teachers.
3. Teacher-student interaction and collaboration facilitate online learning and the use of MOOCs.

The overall results will offer valuable data to decision-makers, administrators, and teachers regarding the adoption of MOOCs in the teaching/learning process and ICT integration in general.

3. Methodology

The current study adopts mixed methods research where quantitative and qualitative approaches are combined to provide more understanding of the research problem and accurate data from multiple vantage points than each approach individually (Creswell, 2014). ICT training is the independent variable in this paper, while students' and teachers' attitudes are the dependent variable.

3.1. Participants

This research opted for convenience sampling procedures due to Covid-19 confinement restrictions and following respondents' availability and readability. The participants consist of forty-seven (47) 2nd year EFL Didactics master students from Ibn Khaldoun University, Tiaret, who receive a web-based questionnaire, and five university EFL teachers with whom the researcher conducts the semi-structured online interview during the academic year 2020- 2021.

The informants involved in this study are described as follows:

- Students: 29 (61, 7 %) female and 18 (38, 3 %) male, their age is ranged from 22-48 years old. (72, 3 %) from urban areas and (27, 7 %) are from rural places.
- Teachers: 3 (60 %) female and 2 (40 %) male aged between 34- 62 with six up to 27 years of teaching experience.

3.2. Research Tools

Web-based questionnaires and online semi-structured interviews are the main tools of the present study. Second-year master students are asked to fill in the questionnaire. This latter consists of 4 sections. The first section aims to collect data about the demographic features such as gender, age and region, in addition to the quality of internet accessibility and the frequency of participating in online courses. Section 2 is designed to know about students' preferences and beliefs towards online learning. It consists of 6 statements. The third section includes nine statements, whereas the fourth section encompasses five statements; both tend to measure students' attitudes regarding their PU and PEOU towards MOOCs. All the statements of the last three sections are in a five-point scale format. The last part of the questionnaire includes open-ended questions to get deep insights and remarks from students about the constraints that hinder them from using online platforms and the quality of ICT training.

A semi-structured interview comprises open-ended questions designed to seek answers about teachers' attitudes towards online learning and to what extent they are interested in training workshops to develop their students' abilities to use MOOCs.

3.3. Data Collection Procedure

Students are given an online version questionnaire through e-mails, and teachers are interviewed online to gather information on MOOCs adoption.

3.4. Data Analysis

Students' questionnaire is analyzed via a descriptive tabulation. Interviews also have in-depth analysis and interpretation.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the sections below, Findings are summarized as follows:

4.1. The Extension of Online Platforms Usage and Internet Accessibility

To get information about students' attitudes towards MOOCs, they are asked about internet accessibility and the frequency of participating in online platforms. Over half of participants indicate that the quality of their internet is medium (53, 2%), over a third report that they have a good quality (34%), and for (12, 8 %) was terrible. Internet connection and limited accessibility can be factors that obfuscate students' access to such platforms, especially in rural regions; most of them have unreliable internet connection or total absenteeism (Abdel-Maksoud, 2019).

4.2. Students Preferences and Beliefs towards Online Learning

Table 1: Students' Preferences and Beliefs towards Online Learning

Scale Items Statements	Percentages (%)				
	SD	D	N	A	SA
<i>I enjoy learning English in face- to face classes</i>	6,38	4,26	14,89	48,94	25,53
<i>I enjoy learning English from online courses</i>	6,38	17,02	29,79	40,43	6,38
<i>Working within online learning groups is helpful</i>	6,38	12,77	19,15	51,06	10,64
<i>I have more contact with instructors in an online classroom (learner- teacher collaboration)</i>	8,51	31,91	34,04	12,77	12,77
<i>Learning online gives me the chance for self-development and enhance academic performance</i>	6,38	12,77	17,02	46,81	17,02
<i>Online sources enable me to complete my assignments quickly</i>	4,26	10,64	6,38	48,94	29,79

Scale: SD= Strongly Disagree, D= Disagree, N= Neutral, A= Agree, SA= Strongly Agree

Many published studies endorsed that online learning is picking up steam, promising to expand educational opportunities and modernize language learning/teaching (Koehler et al., 2004; Chen, 2013; Butnaru et al., 2021). In the same vein, the effectiveness of online learning is generated in the flexibility of learning, the exposure to different learning environments and communities (Zhang et al., 2006; Arkorful & Abaidoo, 2014). (61, 7 %) of the participants agree that working with online learning groups is helpful. Moreover, (63 83 %) are cognizant of online learning enables them to expand their knowledge and accomplish their assignments.

Conversely, the majority of the respondents in this study (74, 47%) are more inclined to learn in face-to-face classrooms though a total of (46, 81%) of students have generated favorable

reactions to English online courses. These findings have concurrences with findings from various studies, which stated that students have higher rates of appreciation to traditional classroom classes because of schoolmates, professors and instructors' presence. They refrain from attending online courses due to lack of feedback, insufficient interaction, and scant authority or management over students groups (Anderson et al., 2011; Fischer, 2014; Alsaaty et al., 2016; Manther & Sarkans, 2018; Butnaru et al., 2021). As depicted in table 1, student-student collaboration is higher than student- teacher. Students prefer this format of courses when there is continuous collaboration and assistance.

4.3. Perceived Usefulness (PU) Attitudes

Table 2: Students' PU Attitudes towards MOOCs

Scale Items Statements	Percentages (%)				
	SD	D	N	A	SA
<i>Learning English via MOOCs is motivational</i>	4,26	6,38	14,89	38,30	36,17
<i>MOOCs develop my writing skill</i>	00	4,26	21,28	40,43	34,04
<i>MOOCs develop my reading skill</i>	4,26	8,51	17,02	51,06	19,15
<i>MOOCs develop my listening skills</i>	4,26	12,77	17,02	42,55	23,40
<i>MOOCs develop my speaking skills</i>	2,13	14,89	27,66	27,66	27,66
<i>Participating in MOOCs improve my grammar and vocabulary</i>	00	19,15	21,28	36,17	23,40
<i>MOOCs provide overwhelming information in English learning</i>	4,26	10,64	27,66	42,55	14,89
<i>MOOCs improve my self- confidence and autonomy (self-direction)</i>	2,13	12,77	21,28	34,04	29,79
<i>MOOCs reduce my anxiety</i>	8,51	6,38	23,40	31,91	29,79

Their PU towards MOOCs is tested to gain a detailed comprehension of EFL students' attitudes because "perceived usefulness is a strong correlate of user acceptance" (Davis, 1989, p. 333). The findings are presented in Table 2. A significant proportion of the respondents believe that MOOCs offer significant and valuable advantages for improving their linguistic skills and overwhelming information; not only that, they provide functional performance gains. Irrespective of time and location, users have identical access to information (Khan, 2005; Zhang et al., 2006)

Butnaru et al. (2021) argue that those online courses encourage reliable, efficient and less stressful learning processes for students and teachers. Over half of participants agree that the given online courses improve their self-confidence and autonomy in learning. (61, 7 %) of the

students acknowledge that their anxiety can be reduced using these platforms. On the other hand, the rate of neutral students is; remarkably, high which gives the conclusion that PU sometimes depends on how innovative a person might be and to what extent a particular technology is essential to an individual in a particular context (Venkatraman, 1991 cited in Straub, 2009).

4.4. Perceived Ease of Usefulness (PEoU) Attitudes

Table 3: Students' PEoU towards MOOCs

Scale Items Statements	Percentages (%)				
	SD	D	N	A	SA
<i>Surfing on MOOCs is easy</i>	27,66	40,43	12,77	12,77	6,38
<i>I do not make use of MOOCs because I do not possess the essential computer basic skills</i>	6,38	14,89	19,15	42,55	17,02
<i>I do not use MOOCs because I do not possess the essential internet basic skills</i>	2,13	21,28	19,15	29,79	27,66
<i>It would be difficult to use MOOCs because of internet breakdowns</i>	17,02	6,38	12,77	44,68	19,55
<i>I need training to use computers/internet to learn English effectively through MOOC</i>	6,38	17,02	23,40	25,53	31,91

The above results show that the more students perceive MOOCs as valuable and easy to be used, the more they have positive attitudes and are motivated to adopt them. When respondents are asked about the ease of enrolment on MOOCs, (40, 43 %) disagree and (27, 66 %) strongly disagree because surfing on these platforms needs various ICT-related skills and competencies. Obviously, (42 55%) agree and (17, 02 %) strongly agree that they do not possess the essential computer skills, in addition to (57, 45 %) of the respondents have an agreement that they do not also possess the fundamental basic internet skills. Furthermore, students report that internet breakdowns make them hardly engaged in MOOCs. These results concur with findings from descriptive- correlational research; conducted by Fook et al. (2017), which revealed that a large bandwidth and broader WiFi coverage is fundamental when delivering online courses as it facilitates their participation.

Besides, the success of MOOCs' integration in language learning requires EFL students to learn about different computerized and software operations to be capable of directing self-learning and enrolment in MOOCs (Palvia & Shailendra, 2001). In this regard, more than half of respondents (57, 44 %) express their need for training to make better use of MOOCs and computer in general. The high rate of neutral respondents for each statement refers to their fear of using MOCCs owing to their lack of ICT competence. Technology's embracement is less likely to happen if individuals view it as a difficult task despite the compatibility and usefulness such innovation can have with the existing users' understanding task (Straub, 2009).

It seems appropriate to say that ICT knowledge is a vital skill in addition to linguistic competence. Students' lack of that knowledge hinders their involvement in such ICT- based courses despite their positive attitudes and enthusiasm. This view is better explained in a large number of studies. For instance, in a descriptive study, Chen (2013) states that for students to acquire the skill to learn, they need information literacy, i.e., to be adequately digitally competent. In other simple words, Liyanagunawardena, et al. (2013) point out that the vital component to shaping learners' s MOOC experience is Digital literacy in addition to other" critical literacies" such as the ability to evaluate vast quantities of information (e.g., peer discussion), and the proficiency in structuring learning among others.

4.5. Teachers' Roles and Attitudes

Teachers are the experts in their classrooms who allow and guide students to learn from their expertise, and this role is ingrained with a long-standing history and tradition of the profession (Straub, 2009). They are the change agents who can tailor, adopt and adapt learners' educational practices.

In this regard, when teachers possess or master skills and professional knowledge- related to digital competence, ICT literacy, in addition to adequate experiences, learners' digital competence together with ICT- related skills can be appropriately developed. Accordingly, the above mentioned promises the incorporation of such technological innovations and ICT- based courses in curricula and during classes (Al-Khateeb, 2017). In this study, the results reveal that (75, 5 %) of the respondents stated that they have ICT modules. However, (64 7%) receive no training workshops to use online platforms or attend online courses.

Furthermore, results reported from open-ended questions seem to suggest a pertinent role for teachers in training students. Participants showed their motivation to learn via MOOCs, yet inadequate ICT courses brought by teachers, lack of time due to the global pandemic, and insufficient or total absence of computers and internet inhibit their participation in online courses. Some students report that:

"ICT lessons were basic; just about Word and Excel. There were neither PCs nor Internet",

"Due to the pandemic situation, we had only three weeks of studies, so we did not have time. Our teacher focused on what we already knew about computers and neglected what we needed. Wrongly designed syllabus",

"It was mainly about outdated information. The focus was not on gaining competence but on marks."

Measurements of students' attitudes solely cannot be enough. Teachers' attitudes throughout the development and implementation of ICTs are saliently needed. Teachers are asked about their interest to participate and deliver courses on these platforms. As interviewees, they reported that they view online learning as positive. However, they encounter multiple hindrances for the diffusion of ICT usage and MOOC participation; some are common to those reported by students, including internet accessibility and ICT infrastructure as the main barriers. Nevertheless, most teachers find it challenging to prepare and deliver a MOOC because ICT- based courses are effort and time-consuming. Besides, they have a low level in terms of ICT pedagogical competence as they are not digitally competent due to the scarcity of experience and training.

We can concluded that teachers' reaction towards online language learning is based on their proficiency in using online tools, the capability in technically accessing, preparing, and delivering

online courses. Zhao et al. (2002) state that *technology proficiency*, *pedagogical compatibility*, and *social awareness* are the three components of knowledge that must be associated with digital competence.

Consequently, variance in individuals' attitudes towards MOOCs' usage is governed by the ease of usage, considering that the difficulty of using any functional system can impede its adoption (Davis, 1989). Hence, ICT training has become necessary for learners and teachers, especially within the conditions generated by Covid-19 pandemic.

5. CONCLUSION

Practitioners evaluate the acceptability of a given system to identify the factors behind the lack of acceptance among users so that it would be easy to improve adoption. Researchers examined the reciprocity of perceived usefulness and ease of use and how they can be impacted by external factors, including system characteristics, development methodologies, user involvement in design in addition to training and education (Barodi et al., 1986; Nelson & Cheny, 1987; Davis, 1989; Palvia & Shailendra, 2001). In this respect, the present study aims to measure students and teachers attitudes towards MOOCs to assure a successful integration.

One of the most crucial findings in this study is that both EFL students and teachers had positive attitudes towards MOOCs' attributes which show that they are aware of the specific affordances brought by online courses in language learning and teaching. However, their use is still moderate for some reasons, including computer availability, internet accessibility, low hardware and software efficacy. The lack of ICT infrastructure, ICT competence, and ICT training proves to be the main hindrances for ICT integration. In other words, despite the usefulness of a given innovation, contextual factors can lead to non-adoption (Rogers, 1995 cited in Straub, 2009). In the same vein, Chen (2013) determines that "Beside governments, institutions of higher education need to change to cope with the circumstances" (p. 6).

Technology acceptance and persistence are shaped by personal factors, the attributes of the innovation with the individual's context and circumstances. "Successful ICT integration, in general, requires a sound technology infrastructure, convenient curriculum, professionally competent teachers, supportive administrative and technical staff and skilled students" (Semerci & Aydin, 2018, p. 95). Recently, due to Covid-19 consequences, social pressure can be the primary change agent that moderates individuals' attitudes towards technology.

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