

UNDERSTANDING EFL LEARNERS' EXPERIENCES IN MASSIVE OPEN ONLINE COURSES (MOOCs): A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO INTERACTIVE PEDAGOGY AND LEARNER AUTONOMY

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ABSTRACT

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) have increasingly been adopted to support English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning due to their flexibility and accessibility. However, previous studies have predominantly focused on the effectiveness and technical aspects of MOOCs, providing limited understanding of how EFL learners construct meaningful learning experiences, negotiate challenges, and perceive pedagogical features that facilitate language development in online environments. Addressing this gap, this study explores learners' lived experiences through a narrative inquiry to generate a deeper understanding of learner-centered online language learning. Five EFL learners who actively participated in online English courses were purposively selected, and data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using narrative analysis. The findings reveal that interactive feedback, authentic discussion forums, structured learning pathways, and mobile accessibility are the pedagogical features that most effectively foster learner engagement, autonomy, and sustained language development, whereas limited interaction, non-adaptive assessment, technological constraints, and insufficient opportunities for authentic communication remain significant barriers. Beyond identifying these facilitating and inhibiting factors, this study demonstrates that meaningful language development in MOOCs is constructed through the dynamic interplay between interactive pedagogy, learner autonomy, and sociocultural engagement rather than through technological affordances alone. The study contributes theoretically by extending the understanding of learner autonomy in MOOC-based EFL learning from a narrative perspective and offers new insights that effective online language learning emerges from the integration of pedagogical interaction, reflective learner agency, and authentic social participation. These findings provide a conceptual foundation for designing more learner-centered, interactive, adaptive, and socially engaging MOOCs to improve the quality of online EFL instruction.

Keywords: *EFL Learning, Interactive Pedagogy, Learner Autonomy, MOOCs, Narrative Inquiry, Sociocultural Engagement.*

Introduction

Engaging and motivating students to learn English as a foreign language (EFL) independently from home presents a range of challenges (Khasbani & Hidayat, 2020; Purmama et al., 2019). Historically, EFL instruction has heavily relied on in-person classroom settings, where educators can directly guide students, facilitate interactive activities, and provide immediate feedback (Fang & Abdullah, 2024; Saleh, 2023). These classroom environments offer structured opportunities for practice, which are crucial for language acquisition. However, in today's digital age, advancements in educational technologies, particularly massive open online

courses (MOOCs), offer new possibilities for delivering EFL instruction remotely (Margaryan et al., 2015; Pampouri et al., 2021). Furthermore, MOOCs provide flexible accessibility and a wealth of resources, supplementing traditional methods with diverse multimedia content, interactive exercises, and virtual interaction forums (Kumar & Al-Samarraie, 2018). Despite the potential of these digital platforms, transitioning from classroom-based to independent online learning requires careful consideration of factors such as learner autonomy, digital literacy, and the effectiveness of virtual pedagogical strategies (Al Ghazali,

2020; Darwin & Burhan, 2021; Wei, 2023). Therefore, effectively utilizing MOOCs for EFL instruction requires a strategic approach that integrates technological tools with evidence-based teaching practices to enhance learner engagement and motivation in a remote learning context (Dinh, 2026).

Furthermore, MOOCs have experienced significant growth in recent years, providing a flexible and cost-effective way to deliver online education to a global audience (Guerrero-Quiñonez et al., 2023; Rulinawaty et al., 2023). In the field of EFL, MOOCs have the potential to establish inclusive learning communities accessible to all, allowing students to learn at their own pace with instructor support and interaction with other language learners (Hafifah, 2024). Despite the potential benefits, there is a lack of empirical research on the experiences and viewpoints of EFL students engaging in language-focused MOOCs (Yang & Wei, 2023). The existing literature on MOOCs has highlighted various challenges, such as high dropout rates and limited participant interaction, which are particularly relevant in the EFL context, where active engagement and sustained motivation are essential for language learning (Dollah et al., 2021). The asynchronous nature of MOOCs, although offering flexibility, can lead to feelings of isolation among learners and hinder the development of communication skills (Rahimi, 2024). Moreover, the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of MOOC participants can complicate interaction and collaboration within these courses (Rizvi & Rienties, 2024). Understanding the specific obstacles and opportunities encountered by EFL learners in MOOCs is crucial for designing more effective and engaging language learning experiences (Zhu et al., 2021).

Moreover, it is essential to understand the perspectives of EFL learners who are enrolled in language MOOCs in order to optimize these educational platforms and better meet their needs (Özgür Yaşar, 2020; Rahimi & Tafazoli, 2022). Valuable insights can be gained from students who have completed such MOOCs, providing feedback on various aspects of course design. This feedback includes the effectiveness of the technologies used, the types of support that are most beneficial, and the strategies that encourage continued participation (Jati, 2023). This information is crucial for improving the design and delivery of MOOCs, enabling more effective and independent English language learning in an online setting (Sinha, 2014).

Previous studies have consistently recognized Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) as an innovative platform for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning because they offer flexible access, abundant learning resources, and opportunities for self-paced learning beyond traditional classrooms (Ding and Shen, 2022; Özgür Yaşar, 2020; Guerrero-Quiñonez et al., 2023). These studies collectively demonstrate that MOOCs can enhance learners' language competence by providing authentic learning materials and expanding opportunities for independent learning. Nevertheless, the literature also consistently reports persistent challenges, including limited learner interaction, high dropout rates, technological constraints, and inconsistent learner engagement (Ding, 2020; Rahimi, 2024; Yang & Wei, 2023). Although these findings have substantially advanced the understanding of MOOCs from technological, instructional, and outcome-oriented perspectives, they largely conceptualize learning success in terms of platform effectiveness, usability, or measurable learning outcomes.

This dominant perspective leaves an important conceptual issue insufficiently addressed. Existing studies have been successful in identifying the strengths and limitations of MOOCs but provide only limited explanation of the learning processes through which EFL learners actively construct meaningful language learning experiences. In particular, previous research has rarely examined how learners interpret pedagogical support, respond to interactive learning environments, negotiate learning challenges, and develop learner autonomy through continuous social interaction within MOOCs. Consequently, MOOCs are frequently understood as technological delivery systems rather than dynamic sociocultural learning environments in which language development emerges through the reciprocal interaction between pedagogical design, learner agency, and authentic participation. As a result, the mechanisms explaining how these dimensions collectively shape meaningful EFL learning remain theoretically underdeveloped.

Addressing this unresolved issue requires a shift from evaluating MOOCs as instructional technologies toward understanding MOOCs as learner-centered environments where experiences, interactions, and reflections become integral to language development. Therefore, this study employs Narrative Inquiry to explore EFL learners' lived experiences in MOOCs, enabling a deeper understanding of how learners construct

meaning from their online learning journeys. Unlike previous studies that primarily emphasize technological effectiveness or learner satisfaction, this study reconstructs learners' narratives to explain how interactive pedagogy, learner autonomy, and sociocultural engagement operate as interconnected processes that support sustained language learning in online environments. Accordingly, the novelty of this study lies in proposing a more integrative perspective that positions meaningful EFL learning as the product of continuous interaction among pedagogical support, learners' reflective agency, and authentic social participation rather than technological affordances alone.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on MOOC-based EFL learning by extending the concept of learner autonomy beyond an individual self-regulated learning perspective toward a narrative and sociocultural understanding of language learning. The findings demonstrate that learner autonomy is not merely an individual capacity to study independently but is continuously constructed through pedagogical interaction, reflective learning experiences, and participation in meaningful social contexts. This conceptual contribution enriches the existing literature on online language learning and provides a stronger theoretical foundation for developing learner-centered, interactive, and socially responsive MOOCs that better facilitate meaningful English language learning.

Method

This study employed a qualitative research approach to gain an in-depth understanding of EFL learners' experiences in participating in Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to explore how learners interpreted, constructed, and reflected on their learning experiences rather than to measure the effectiveness of MOOCs quantitatively (Creswell, 2006). This approach enabled the researchers to capture the complexity of learners' experiences, including their perceptions of pedagogical practices, learning engagement, technological challenges, and learner autonomy within online learning environments. By emphasizing participants' perspectives, qualitative inquiry provides rich and contextualized insights that contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of language learning in digital contexts (Nigar, 2020).

Within this qualitative framework, the study adopted Narrative Inquiry as its research

design. This design was selected because the primary objective of the study was to understand how learners made meaning of their experiences throughout their participation in MOOCs, rather than merely identifying common perceptions or describing a particular educational setting. Narrative Inquiry is particularly appropriate for examining educational experiences because it enables researchers to explore participants' lived experiences through the stories they construct and share (Riessman, 2012). Furthermore, this approach emphasizes that individuals' experiences evolve across time, social interactions, and specific contexts, allowing researchers to understand learning as a continuous and contextual process (Clandinin & Huber, 2006). Through participants' narratives, the researchers were able to examine how learners encountered challenges, developed learner autonomy, interacted with instructional support, and sustained engagement during their online learning journeys. This approach provides a deeper understanding of the dynamic relationship between learners' experiences, pedagogical practices, and sociocultural contexts, which may not be adequately captured through other qualitative designs. Consequently, Narrative Inquiry offers a robust methodological framework for explaining how meaningful EFL learning is constructed within MOOCs while generating contextual insights that can inform the development of more learner-centered and pedagogically responsive online language learning environments.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, as this technique enables researchers to recruit information-rich participants who possess direct experience relevant to the research objectives (Campbell et al., 2020). The inclusion criteria required participants to (1) have completed at least one English-language Massive Open Online Course (MOOC), (2) actively engage in key learning activities, including discussion forums, assignments, or peer interactions, and (3) be willing to reflect critically on their learning experiences. These criteria ensured that participants had sufficient experience to provide detailed narratives regarding their engagement with MOOC-based EFL learning.

Based on these criteria, five participants voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. All participants had prior experience with online English learning and were actively involved in MOOC-based learning, enabling them to provide rich accounts of their learning experiences,

perceived challenges, and strategies for sustaining engagement in online learning environments. The participants also represented diverse educational backgrounds and English proficiency levels, allowing the study to capture a broad range of

perspectives on learning through MOOCs. The sample size was considered appropriate because Narrative Inquiry emphasizes the depth and richness of individual experiences rather than statistical representation.

Table 1.
Participants' Information

Name (Code)	Gender	Grade	School Level	Online Course Types
P1	Male	10	Senior High School	English Course
P2	Female	12	Senior High School	English Course
P3	Male	11	Senior High School	General Course
P4	Female	11	Senior High School	General Course
P5	Female	10	Senior High School	General Course

Throughout the interview process, the researcher constructed a well-organized set of questions to gather data effectively. This set consisted of five thematic questions that were carefully designed to gather initial information during in-depth interviews. These questions were crucial in exploring important aspects related to the research topic, ensuring a thorough examination. Each question was thoughtfully created to delve into particular aspects of the participants' experiences, perceptions, and insights, leading to a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. By following a systematic approach, the framework aimed to improve the accuracy and credibility of the data collected, ultimately enhancing the overall quality of the research study.

Data collection continued until narrative

saturation was achieved, defined as the point at which additional interviews no longer generated new themes or meaningful insights relevant to the research objectives (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Saturation was established through the repeated occurrence of participants' narratives concerning learner engagement, pedagogical support, technological challenges, and learner autonomy across successive interviews. The consistency of these themes indicated that the data had adequately captured the breadth and depth of participants' lived experiences in MOOC-based EFL learning. Therefore, participant recruitment was discontinued after five interviews, as further data collection was unlikely to yield additional insights or substantially enhance the understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

Table 2.
Interviews' Guideline

No	Outline of interview questions
1	What platform or course features do you find most helpful for your English language learning?
2	What platform or course features do you find least helpful or engaging?
3	In what ways do you interactive course activities enhance or hinder your learning experiences?
4	How do you assessment and feedback methods support or inhibit your language development goals?
5	What suggestions do you have for improving the design of online English language courses to better meet learners' needs?

Researchers used a semi-structured interview approach during the data collection phase to obtain in-depth insights into participants' experiences learning English through MOOCs. This method enabled a detailed examination of individual viewpoints. Given the participants' widespread locations, face-to-face meetings were not feasible, so Google Meet was used for interview sessions. To guarantee clarity and minimize the risk of misinterpretation, the interviews were carried out in Indonesian. This strategy enabled researchers to capture intricate details, resulting in a comprehensive comprehension of the participants' encounters and

viewpoints, thereby bolstering the credibility and dependability of the study.

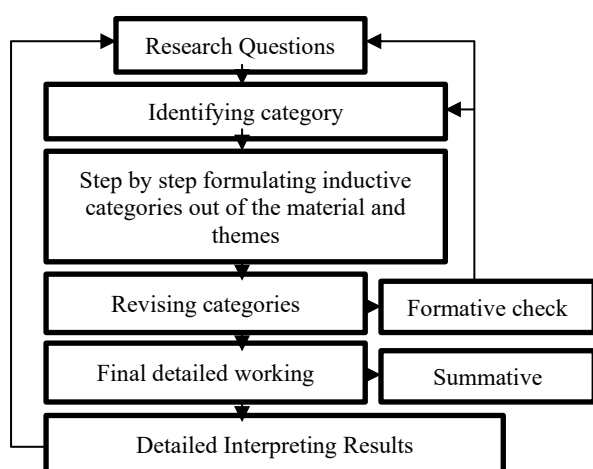
During the data collection phase, the researcher commenced the interview procedure by sharing preparatory details with the participants through a WhatsApp chat group. Following that, a Google Meet link was furnished to the participants. Subsequently, individual interviews were carried out, with each session lasting anywhere between 30 to 60 minutes. Throughout these interviews, the researcher diligently recorded all pertinent information and documented the sessions. In cases where specific details required further investigation or lacked in-

depth analysis, additional interviews were scheduled with the participants. This iterative approach ensured the thoroughness and precision of the gathered data, thereby augmenting the overall validity and reliability of the research findings.

The data were analyzed using Keats's (2009) narrative analysis framework, which provides a systematic approach to interpreting participants' lived experiences through their narratives. The analysis began with the verbatim transcription of all interview recordings to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the data. Each transcript was read repeatedly to familiarize the researchers with the participants' stories and to gain a comprehensive understanding of the context of their experiences.

The coding process consisted of three stages. First, open coding was conducted to identify significant statements, meaningful events, and recurring ideas related to participants' experiences in learning English through MOOCs. Second, axial coding was employed to group similar codes into broader categories by identifying relationships among emerging concepts, such as learner engagement, pedagogical support, technological challenges, and learner autonomy. Finally, selective coding was undertaken to integrate these categories into overarching themes that reflected the central narratives of participants' learning experiences.

Figure 1
Data Analysis Process



Following the coding process, the identified themes were organized according to the narrative analysis framework proposed by Keats (2009). Data reduction was then performed by removing information that was not directly relevant to the research objectives while preserving the coherence and authenticity of each participant's narrative. The researchers continuously compared the emerging themes with

the original interview transcripts to ensure that the interpretations accurately represented participants' intended meanings. The final stage involved synthesizing the validated themes into coherent narratives that explained how learners constructed meaningful experiences, negotiated challenges, and developed learner autonomy within MOOC-based EFL learning. This systematic process enhanced the credibility, transparency, and trustworthiness of the findings by providing a clear analytical trail from raw interview data to the final research themes.

To ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the research findings, several validation strategies were employed throughout the study. Member checking was conducted by asking participants to review interview summaries and preliminary interpretations to verify that their experiences had been accurately represented (Lindheim, 2022). Data triangulation was also applied by comparing participants' interview narratives with relevant supporting documents, such as learning records and course-related materials, to enhance the credibility and consistency of the findings. Furthermore, the researchers maintained reflexive notes throughout the research process to critically examine personal assumptions, document methodological decisions, and minimize potential bias during data collection and interpretation (Olmos-vega et al., 2023).

On the other hand, to ensure the credibility and dependability of the study, interview transcripts were analyzed systematically through multiple stages of coding and continuous comparison between the emerging themes and the original data. A clear audit trail was maintained throughout the analytical process, ensuring that the findings remained consistent, transparent, and grounded in participants' lived experiences. Collectively, these procedures strengthened the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the research, thereby enhancing the overall trustworthiness of the study (Enworo, 2023).

Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study are organized into three interconnected themes that emerged from the participants' experiences of learning English through MOOCs: (1) technological and pedagogical affordances supporting EFL learning, (2) pedagogical and technological constraints limiting language development, and (3) learner agency and social interaction as mechanisms for improving MOOC-based English learning. These themes indicate that MOOCs

provide substantial opportunities for English language learning through flexibility, accessibility, multimedia resources, immediate feedback, and opportunities for international interaction. However, these affordances do not automatically guarantee language development, as learners also encounter limitations such as fixed pacing, non-personalized assessment, technical issues, and insufficient opportunities for productive language use. The participants' recommendations further demonstrate that learner agency and social interaction are essential for transforming MOOCs from content-delivery platforms into more interactive and sustainable EFL learning environments.

The first theme concerns the technological and pedagogical affordances that participants perceived as supporting their English learning. The findings show that the usefulness of MOOCs was not determined merely by the availability of technology but by how technological features were connected to pedagogical purposes. Five affordances were particularly evident in the participants' narratives: immediate feedback, mobile accessibility, cross-cultural interaction, graded progression, and multimedia resources.

One important affordance was the availability of immediate feedback. P1 emphasized that interactive activities and rapid responses could facilitate the identification and correction of errors. At the same time, P1 stressed that technological systems should not replace teachers:

"I am willing to explore adjustments that improve student achievements; nevertheless, I firmly believe that genuine language proficiency requires creativity, dialogue, and practical implementation-components that artificial intelligence cannot completely imitate. The primary focus should always be on the students, acknowledging the essential contribution of human educators. The integration of technology in educational settings should be handled carefully, making sure it enhances rather than replaces the human teaching experience. Human teachers possess a nuanced comprehension, emotional intelligence, and the capacity to adapt to various learning requirements, all of which are vital for cultivating a profound and enduring language mastery." (P1)

This finding suggests that automated feedback and human feedback perform complementary functions. Automated feedback provides immediacy and efficiency, particularly for repetitive language exercises, whereas

teachers provide contextual interpretation, emotional support, and individualized pedagogical responses. Thus, the pedagogical value of feedback in MOOCs does not lie in automation itself but in its capacity to help learners recognize their learning problems and determine what they need to improve. This finding extends the earlier discussion of formative assessment in the existing literature (Meldia & Melani, 2022; Menéndez et al., 2019). Formative feedback in MOOC-based EFL learning should not be limited to informing learners whether an answer is correct or incorrect. Instead, it should help learners understand their weaknesses and guide subsequent learning.

Recent research by Luo and Wang (2023) similarly demonstrates that self-regulated learning plays an important role in the relationship between learners' emotional experiences and perceived effectiveness in language MOOCs. The present finding provides a possible explanation for this relationship: immediate feedback can provide learners with information that supports monitoring and regulating their own learning. Another important affordance was mobile accessibility. P2 described the importance of being able to access learning materials regardless of location and time:

"The language learning platform experiences a substantial improvement in its functionality with the inclusion of a mobile application. This particular feature grants users the ability to conveniently access instructional materials and engage in English language practice from any location, thus offering a significant degree of flexibility. This convenience proves to be especially advantageous for individuals with busy schedules, as it seamlessly integrates language learning into their daily routines. Additionally, the capacity to learn while on the move facilitates consistent practice, which is crucial for effective language acquisition. The mobile accessibility provided by this application creates an environment that promotes continuous learning, ensuring that learners can make the most of every available opportunity to enhance their language skills, regardless of their physical location or time constraints." (P2)

This finding reinforces the argument that accessibility and flexibility are among the major advantages of MOOCs (Guerrero-Quíñonez et al., 2023). P2 particularly emphasized the value of mobile accessibility, which allows learners to access instructional materials and practice

English anytime and anywhere. This flexibility is particularly significant for EFL learning because language development requires repeated exposure and continued practice. Mobile access therefore enables learners to distribute language practice across different times and locations, supporting continuity and allowing learning to be integrated into daily routines. This finding is also related to (Luo & Wang, 2023), who found that self-regulated learning contributes significantly to learners' perceptions of the effectiveness of language MOOCs. However, flexibility should not be understood as learning without structure, as learners still need appropriate instructional guidance, feedback, and interaction to use this flexibility productively.

The findings further show that accessibility becomes more meaningful when combined with structured learning pathways and engaging multimedia resources. P4 appreciated the structured proficiency levels because they enabled learners to progress according to their abilities without feeling overwhelmed, while P5 recognized the contribution of immersive multimedia materials to developing different language skills. These findings suggest that MOOCs should balance flexibility with pedagogical structure: graded levels provide direction and support learners' progress, while multimedia resources enrich linguistic input and make learning more engaging. The findings therefore indicate that technological accessibility alone does not guarantee effective learning; its value depends on how technological features are pedagogically organized to support sustained and purposeful engagement (Meyer et al., 2021; Moon et al., 2023).

Another important affordance is cross-cultural interaction. P3 valued discussion forums because they exposed learners to different accents, vocabulary choices, and perspectives from students from various parts of the world. Such exposure provides opportunities to encounter linguistic variation in authentic contexts while also promoting cultural awareness and motivation. Taken together, these findings indicate that the affordances of MOOCs emerge from the interaction between technological accessibility, learner self-regulation, structured learning pathways, multimedia resources, and social interaction. Thus, MOOCs can support EFL learning most effectively when technological flexibility is integrated with pedagogical structure and meaningful cross-cultural engagement, transforming access to digital resources into sustained, self-regulated,

and socially mediated language practice.

"The discussion forums proved to be highly beneficial as they provided me with the opportunity to engage with the perspectives of students hailing from various parts of the globe. This exposure not only allowed me to familiarize myself with different accents but also enabled me to observe the diverse usage of vocabulary within different contexts... (P3).

The findings demonstrate that MOOCs can function as sociocultural environments for EFL learning, particularly through cross-cultural interaction. P3 valued discussion forums because they exposed learners to different accents, vocabulary choices, and perspectives from students with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Through these interactions, learners encounter English not only as a set of linguistic forms but also as a language used in different cultural contexts. Such exposure helps learners understand linguistic variation and cultural subtleties while providing opportunities to practice and refine their language skills in relatively authentic situations. This finding is consistent with Salsabila (2024), who highlights the value of technology-supported exposure to diverse language input, and Fudhaili (2023), who emphasizes the role of social interaction in developing language and communication skills. It is also supported by Yamaoka (2024), who found that MOOC-supported CLIL activities could contribute to Japanese EFL students' willingness to communicate and international posture. Therefore, the value of MOOCs extends beyond access to instructional content, as they can provide an international communicative space that promotes language practice, motivation, cultural understanding, and awareness of different forms of English.

The findings also reveal that meaningful interaction is strengthened when learners have access to appropriate learning structures. P4 explained that graded proficiency levels enabled the learner to progress according to their ability without feeling overwhelmed. The systematic progression of proficiency levels provides a more personalized learning pathway, allowing learners to consolidate essential language skills before moving to more challenging materials. This structure can foster confidence and motivation because learners can recognize their progress while maintaining an appropriate level of challenge. In this sense, graded progression complements the flexibility of MOOCs by providing direction and reducing the risk of learners becoming disengaged or overwhelmed in

an open and self-paced learning environment.

In addition, P5 highlighted the value of engaging multimedia materials, which made learning more enjoyable and provided exposure to different accents and authentic English use. Multimedia resources can enrich linguistic input by combining auditory and visual modes, potentially supporting vocabulary retention, listening comprehension, and awareness of pronunciation and cultural contexts. Taken together, the findings suggest that effective MOOC-based EFL learning emerges from the combination of sociocultural interaction, structured progression, and multimodal learning resources. Cross-cultural forums provide opportunities for socially mediated language use, graded levels provide pedagogical direction, and multimedia materials enrich learners' exposure to English. Thus, MOOCs can be understood not merely as flexible platforms for delivering language content but as digitally mediated learning environments in which interaction, structure, and diverse linguistic input work together to support learners' communicative and intercultural development.

... The levels of progression enable me to advance at my preferred speed. I do not experience a sense of being overwhelmed if I commence at a level that is too advanced. This grants me the opportunity to concentrate on attaining proficiency in the fundamental principles before proceeding further... (P4)

This finding indicates that graded progression can reduce cognitive pressure and give learners greater control over their learning trajectory. This is particularly important in MOOCs, where learners have different levels of English proficiency. By organizing materials according to proficiency levels, learners can progress gradually without feeling overwhelmed. This finding supports research on learner autonomy and personalized learning (Ding and Shen, 2022; Taylor et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2020) and corresponds with Ma (2025), who found that cognitive load negatively affected EFL learners' perceived usefulness, expectation confirmation, and satisfaction with MOOCs. Thus, graded progression is not merely a technical feature but a pedagogical mechanism that manages cognitive demands while supporting learner autonomy, confidence, and engagement.

The fifth affordance concerned multimedia resources. P5 described videos, podcasts, and audio stories as particularly helpful because they provide diverse auditory and visual exposure to English. Such multimodal resources can make

learning more engaging, support memory and comprehension, and help learners recognize pronunciation, intonation, vocabulary use, and cultural references that may be difficult to acquire through text alone. Taken together, graded progression and multimedia resources serve complementary functions: graded progression provides structure by managing learning difficulty, while multimedia enriches the quality and variety of linguistic input. Therefore, MOOCs can support personalized and manageable EFL learning when digital resources are appropriately structured and presented through diverse modes.

"The inclusion of multimedia elements such as videos, podcasts, and audio stories captivated my interest and enhanced the enjoyment of my learning experience. It felt as though I was immersing myself in authentic English, which in turn contributed to the development of my listening skills and cultural sensitivity." (P5)

The finding confirms that multimedia provides contextualized language input and increases learners' engagement by allowing them to experience pronunciation, intonation, vocabulary, and cultural information through multiple modes. This finding is consistent with Ding and Shen (2022) and supported by Chang (2024), who found that combining MOOCs with data-driven learning activities can support EFL university students' readiness to learn academic content in English. Taken together, the technological and pedagogical affordances of MOOCs operate through three interconnected mechanisms: accessibility, autonomy, and exposure. Accessibility enables learners to study across contexts, autonomy allows them to regulate their learning, and exposure provides access to diverse linguistic and cultural resources. However, technology alone does not ensure effective EFL learning; its value depends on how well technological affordances are aligned with language-learning objectives and appropriate pedagogical design.

Therefore, a balanced approach combining digital and human pedagogy is recommended. Although technology can enhance access, flexibility, engagement, and language exposure, genuine human interaction remains important for developing cultural understanding and nuanced language skills (Ghamrawi et al., 2024). Future learning designs could integrate multimedia, practice tools, and discussion boards within blended learning that combines online and face-to-face components (Mulyadi et al., 2024). Such integration can balance the flexibility of

technology with the interpersonal benefits of human interaction, ultimately providing personalized and engaging learning experiences that support the development of dynamic EFL skills.

Although participants identified several advantages, they also experienced limitations that restricted the effectiveness of MOOC-based English learning, particularly decontextualized grammar instruction and fixed pacing. P1 criticized the grammar instruction as comprehensive but lacking interactive, engaging contexts, making it less interesting and harder to remember, while P1 and P4 also noted that the fixed pace of the course content did not always match learners' individual abilities and needs. These findings suggest that comprehensive content alone is insufficient; MOOC-based EFL learning also requires contextualized and interactive instruction and greater flexibility in pacing to support learners' engagement and individual learning needs.

"The detailed grammatical explanations offered are comprehensive, yet they may sometimes fail to captivate the learner. I believe that applying grammatical rules in real-life contexts is more beneficial for learning than simply studying theoretical concepts. Introducing interactive exercises would greatly improve the retention and practical application of the content. Participating in dynamic and contextually relevant activities promotes a deeper comprehension and proficiency in grammatical rules. This method not only solidifies theoretical understanding but also fosters active engagement, which is essential for grasping intricate language structures. By incorporating additional interactive components, the educational experience could be significantly enhanced and rendered more efficient." (P1)

This finding reveals a gap between knowing about English and using English. Although MOOCs can provide comprehensive grammatical knowledge, learners may still struggle to apply grammatical forms in meaningful communication when instruction emphasizes explanation rather than contextualized and interactive practice. P1's concern about slow and insufficiently contextualized lessons, together with P4's frustration with the pace of certain lessons, shows that standardized content delivery may not match learners' different abilities and learning speeds. This supports research on interactive and contextualized language learning (Mulyadi et al., 2024) and personalized instruction (Taylor et al.,

2021; Zhang et al., 2020). It also complements Ma (2025), who found that excessive cognitive load can negatively affect EFL learners' satisfaction with MOOCs. Thus, flexibility in MOOCs should extend beyond access to learning materials and include adaptive pacing, differentiated learning pathways, and opportunities to apply grammar in realistic communicative contexts.

Another constraint concerned standardized assessment. P2 criticized quizzes for evaluating learners' knowledge in a general manner rather than identifying their specific weaknesses. This suggests that assessment may fail to provide sufficient information for learners to understand what they need to improve and how they should adjust their learning. The combination of fixed pacing, standardized assessment, and limited contextualized practice can therefore reduce the potential of MOOCs to respond to individual learning needs. Adaptive learning technologies and performance-based feedback could address these limitations by adjusting content difficulty, pacing, and practice according to learners' progress. In this way, MOOC-based EFL learning could move from standardized content delivery toward a more personalized learning environment that supports engagement, appropriate challenge, and meaningful language development.

"The quizzes at the end of each lesson do not provide personalized feedback, often testing topics in which I am already proficient instead of focusing on areas that require additional practice. By implementing adaptive features, the effectiveness of these assessments could be improved, ensuring that they correctly pinpoint and cater to individual learning requirements. This strategy would not only streamline the assessment process but also cultivate a more customized learning environment, facilitating a deeper understanding and mastery of the subject matter." (P2)

This finding demonstrates that the problem is not the absence of assessment but the lack of diagnostic assessment. P2 argued that standardized quizzes evaluate learners' knowledge in a general manner rather than identifying individual patterns of difficulty, indicating the need for more personalized and flexible assessment. This finding extends the discussion of formative assessment by emphasizing that effective feedback should diagnose specific areas of language development rather than merely classify answers as correct or incorrect. In EFL learning, this is particularly

important because language competence consists of multiple interrelated dimensions, such as reading, vocabulary, pronunciation, and speaking, which require different forms of support. The finding is further reinforced by Pham & Abdullah (2026), who identified learner analysis and feedback as core components of an effective blended MOOC model, while adaptive assessment technologies have also been shown to improve the identification of individual learning gaps (Kabudi et al., 2021; Ramu, 2023). Therefore, the present study contributes a learner-centered perspective by showing that students themselves perceive standardized assessment as insufficient when it does not correspond to their specific learning needs.

Another important constraint concerned technological reliability. P3 explained that technical problems, particularly in breakout-room activities, frequently disrupted speaking practice and reduced opportunities for meaningful interaction. These interruptions not only hindered the flow of communication but also limited learners' ability to participate in authentic language practice, ultimately diminishing the effectiveness of MOOC-based language learning. This finding highlights that technological quality is not merely an operational issue, but a pedagogical requirement, as stable digital platforms are essential for sustaining interaction, collaboration, and productive language use. The result is consistent with Romadhon and Heriyawati (2023),

who emphasized that dependable technology is necessary to maintain learner engagement and support uninterrupted language learning activities.

"The integration of technology may encounter challenges that hinder the smooth user experience. Issues such as technical glitches, system conflicts, and user interface problems can all play a part in reducing the perceived effectiveness and satisfaction, ultimately thwarting the desired advantages of the technological solution..." (P3)

This finding demonstrates that technology is simultaneously an affordance and a constraint in MOOC-based EFL learning. When it functions effectively, technology increases access and interaction; however, technical problems can directly interrupt learning, particularly during speaking activities where communication itself depends on stable digital connections. P3's experience with technical problems and P5's concern about limited opportunities for language use show that

technological and pedagogical constraints are closely connected. This finding is consistent with Hafifah (2024), who identified challenges related to online interaction in a MOOC-based public speaking course, and Dinh (2026), who reported technological problems as one of the challenges affecting cooperative learning in MOOCs. Thus, technological reliability should be considered part of pedagogical quality rather than merely an infrastructure concern. The findings also reveal a limitation in productive language use. Although MOOCs provide extensive English input through videos, readings, podcasts, and quizzes, learners still need sufficient opportunities to speak, practice pronunciation, participate in conversations, and produce written language. This reinforces concerns about limited learner interaction in online language learning (Rahimi, 2024) and corresponds with Yamaoka (2024), who highlights the importance of willingness to communicate in MOOC-supported EFL learning.

P5 specifically expressed the need for more opportunities to evaluate pronunciation independently and participate in conversational practice beyond the existing learning activities. This suggests that additional peer interaction, feedback, and immersive activities could strengthen speaking and listening development. Such activities may include peer evaluation, conversation groups, interactive language laboratories, pronunciation tools, and other technology-supported resources that provide individualized feedback and allow learners to monitor their progress. From a sociocultural perspective, collaborative activities can support language development through social mediation, while pronunciation tools and conversation-based activities can provide additional opportunities for guided and self-directed practice (Sabat et al., 2022; Yan & Li, 2019). These findings therefore reveal an important paradox: MOOCs may provide abundant English input while still offering insufficient opportunities for English output. Dinh (2026) further supports the value of cooperative learning for academic performance, engagement, and social interaction in MOOCs. Therefore, productive language activities should be integrated into the core design of EFL MOOCs rather than treated as optional additions.

Overall, the constraints identified in this study are not simply technological problems; they emerge from the interaction between technological design and the pedagogical requirements of language learning. The central challenge lies in the potential mismatch between scalable digital instruction and the individualized,

interactive, and contextualized nature of EFL learning. Effective MOOC design therefore requires not only reliable technology but also sufficient opportunities for interaction, feedback, pronunciation practice, and meaningful language production. In this sense, technology becomes pedagogically valuable when it supports learners in moving from receiving English input to actively using English in communicative and socially mediated contexts.

The third theme emerged from the participants' recommendations for improving MOOC-based English learning. These recommendations demonstrate that learners are not passive recipients of technological innovation. Instead, they actively evaluate the learning environment and propose ways to make it more responsive to their needs. Four mechanisms were particularly evident: diagnostic feedback, open-ended assessment, peer learning, and language exchange. P2 recommended that feedback should focus on patterns of errors rather than simply identifying correct and incorrect answers:

"... the effectiveness of feedback can be improved by concentrating on identifiable error patterns instead of only binary evaluations of accuracy. This method would enable learners to identify and address specific areas of weakness, thereby enhancing their targeted skill development and improving their understanding." (P2)

The findings demonstrate that learner agency can be strengthened through metacognitive awareness, particularly when learners receive information about recurring errors and specific areas requiring improvement. P2 emphasized the importance of analyzing error patterns to provide targeted feedback, allowing learners to monitor their progress and select appropriate learning strategies. This supports research on formative assessment, which highlights the role of personalized feedback in promoting continuous improvement (Gardner et al., 2021; Lin & Gao, 2020). Such diagnostic feedback extends the concept of learner autonomy discussed by Ding and Shen (2022) and Luo and Wang (2023), suggesting that autonomy should not simply mean having freedom over when to study, but also having sufficient information to decide what to study next.

P3 further recommended open-ended assessment because closed-response quizzes may not fully capture productive language competence. Open-ended tasks allow learners to construct meaning, express ideas, demonstrate

deeper understanding, and use English creatively. Therefore, EFL MOOCs should balance scalable automated assessment with open-ended speaking, writing, presentation, project, and peer-assessment activities. This perspective is consistent with Chang (2024), who demonstrated the value of integrating MOOCs with additional learning activities, and Pham and Abdullah (2026), who emphasized teaching methodology, learner participation, and feedback and assessment as important components of effective MOOC implementation. Adaptive assessment can further analyze learners' competency development and provide personalized feedback loops, while rubric-based open-ended tasks can support higher-order thinking and more comprehensive demonstrations of language competence.

The findings also show that learner agency is not necessarily individualistic but can develop through social interaction and collaboration. P4 recommended structured peer study groups to sustain participation, motivation, and responsibility, while P5 proposed a language-exchange community that would enable learners to communicate and exchange cultures beyond the formal course structure. Peer learning can provide social accountability, reciprocal feedback, and opportunities for meaningful language use, while language-exchange communities can transform English from academic content into a means of authentic communication. This interpretation is consistent with Luo and Wang (2023) and the sociocultural perspective of learning through social mediation, while virtual communities have also been recognized as valuable complements to formal language instruction.

Dinh (2026) further demonstrates that cooperative learning can enhance academic performance, engagement, and social interaction in MOOCs, although unequal participation, language barriers, and technological difficulties indicate that peer activities should be deliberately structured. Similarly, Yamaoka (2024) highlights the relationship between MOOC-supported learning, willingness to communicate, and international posture. Thus, peer groups, peer tutoring, conversation activities, and language-exchange communities can help transform learners from passive consumers of MOOC content into active participants in socially mediated language learning.

Taken together, these learner-generated recommendations provide mechanisms for addressing the limitations identified in the

previous theme: diagnostic feedback responds to non-personalized assessment, open-ended tasks address limited opportunities for productive language use, peer groups reduce learner isolation, and language-exchange communities expand opportunities for authentic communication. These findings extend previous research showing that MOOCs can promote accessibility, flexibility, autonomy, and interaction (Ding & Shen, 2022; Guerrero-Quiñonez et al., 2023; Luo & Wang, 2023)) by demonstrating that these affordances become more effective when supported by appropriate pedagogical structures. In this sense, learner autonomy should not be equated with learner isolation. Rather, effective autonomy in MOOC-based EFL learning can be understood as supported autonomy, in which learners retain control over their learning while receiving diagnostic feedback, adaptive pathways, social interaction, and opportunities for authentic

language use. This interpretation brings together the roles of self-regulated learning, supplementary pedagogical activities, willingness to communicate, international posture, cooperative learning, cognitive demands, and feedback and assessment in MOOC implementation.

From an EFL pedagogical perspective, future EFL MOOC design should move beyond the traditional model of delivering content followed by quizzes and course completion toward a more interactive learning process that begins with identifying learners' needs, provides contextualized input and guided practice, encourages authentic language use and social interaction, and incorporates diagnostic feedback, learner reflection, and continued learning. Such an approach maintains the scalability and flexibility of MOOCs while more effectively addressing the individualized, communicative, and socially mediated nature of EFL learning.

Table 3
Summary of Findings and Discussion

Main Theme	Key Findings	Theoretical Interpretation	Implication for EFL
Technological and pedagogical affordances supporting EFL learning	Immediate feedback, mobile accessibility, cross-cultural interaction, graded progression, and multimedia resources supported learners' engagement and autonomy.	MOOC technology functions effectively when technological affordances are aligned with pedagogical purposes, particularly learner autonomy, self-regulation, and meaningful exposure to English.	MOOCs should integrate flexible access, multimodal input, adaptive progression, and opportunities for intercultural interaction.
Pedagogical and technological constraints limiting language development	Learners experienced decontextualized grammar instruction, fixed pacing, non-personalized assessment, technical problems, and limited productive language practice.	Technological access alone does not guarantee language development. Effective EFL learning requires contextualized instruction, adaptive assessment, reliable technology, and sufficient opportunities for language output.	MOOC design should move beyond content delivery by providing contextualized practice, diagnostic assessment, adaptive pacing, and speaking/writing activities.
Learner agency and social interaction as mechanisms for improving MOOC-based English learning	Learners recommended diagnostic feedback, open-ended assessment, peer study groups, and language-exchange communities.	Learner autonomy is more effective when it is supported by feedback, collaboration, and authentic social interaction. Autonomy should therefore be understood as supported autonomy, rather than independent learning in isolation.	EFL MOOCs should facilitate learner reflection, peer collaboration, authentic communication, and sustained language-learning communities.

Conclusion

This study shows that MOOCs offer important affordances for EFL learning, including accessibility and flexibility, cross-cultural interaction, graded progression, multimedia resources, and immediate feedback, but their effectiveness is constrained by decontextualized grammar instruction, fixed pacing, standardized assessment, technological problems, and limited

opportunities for productive language use. The findings contribute theoretically by extending the concept of learner autonomy into supported autonomy, in which learners maintain control over their learning while receiving appropriate structure, diagnostic feedback, social interaction, and opportunities for authentic language use. The study also demonstrates that technological affordances alone do not guarantee language

development; their value depends on how effectively they are aligned with learners' individual and communicative needs. Practically, EFL MOOC developers and instructors should integrate contextualized grammar instruction, adaptive pacing, diagnostic and open-ended assessment, peer interaction, speaking practice, and language-exchange activities while maintaining the accessibility and scalability of MOOCs. However, the study is limited by its small sample of five participants and its reliance on learners' reported experiences rather than direct measures of language proficiency. Future research should therefore involve larger and more diverse samples, longitudinal or mixed-methods designs, and direct measures of language development to examine how adaptive assessment, diagnostic feedback, peer learning, and authentic communication can further improve MOOC-based EFL learning.

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