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An Exploration of the Use of MOOCs for Malaysian  
Teachers' Professional Development

By

Misrah Hamisah Binti Mohamed

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of Warwick, Centre for Education Studies

November 2018

## DECLARATION

I certify that the material included in this thesis is my own work.

I confirm that no part of this thesis has been submitted for a degree at another university.

The following papers were published during the writing of this thesis and some parts of these papers appear in this thesis.

Misrah Hamisah Mohamed & Michael Hammond, (2018). MOOCs: a differentiation by pedagogy, content and assessment. *The International Journal of Information and Learning Technology*, 35 (1), 2-11. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJILT-07-2017-0062>

Misrah Hamisah Mohamed. Researching MOOCS for practitioners: A preliminary study. In Henderson, Holly and Penant, April-Louise and Hand, Michael (2017) *Papers from the Education Doctoral Research Conference Saturday 26 November 2016*. School of Education. University of Birmingham. ISBN 9780704428669

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is a presentation of a project undertaken to explore the contribution that Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) can make to the professional development of Malaysian teachers who teach English as a second language in school and higher education institutions. MOOCs are seen as a platform with huge potential in this field, but their application is subject to the accessibility of teacher networks, suitability of course structures and organisation, challenges in the transferability of knowledge and skills, teachers' readiness in using MOOCs and the opportunities and constraints which the work and family context provides.

This thesis includes observations of ten newly available MOOCs and interviews with 14 Malaysian MOOC participants. The ten MOOCs observed are from existing providers: NovoEd, Coursera, FutureLearn and Canvas. They were analysed and compared using a matrix with three main focuses: pedagogy, content materials, and assessment. 14 participants were later recruited as volunteer participants in these MOOCs. All 14 were currently teaching or planning to teach ESL in Malaysia. Their responses were coded and analysed using qualitative analysis software, *Atlas.ti*. Realising how important it was to find out the context where the participants worked, a series of ethnographic style observations were also carried out. The data gained was coded and analysed using *Atlas.ti* too.

The findings revealed that all ten courses corresponded to the idea of an xMOOC, in that they were run on a model of instructional design. However, in terms of the degree of openness, the MOOCs differed. They were more or less open, or simply contained, depending on how they were pedagogically organised, the materials provided, and the way the assessment was

conducted. Reflecting on the participants' responses, all the MOOCs used had the potential to be an effective medium for teachers' CPD because they had the characteristic of an ideal CPD programme. Further, they offered teachers certification, rooms for informal learning and the flexibility that a CPD programme cannot offer. However, MOOCs are found to be difficult to fit into the Malaysian EFL teachers' context because the participants had other things going on in their lives. Further investigation revealed that the participants valued the physical presence of others and thought they learned more by having the face-to-face conversation. Thus, a hybrid of MOOCs and face-to-face interaction seemed to be a logical solution to promote CPD.

The study succeeded in showing the value and variation in MOOCs and the opportunity for providing teachers with a desirable CPD programme, thus demonstrating the range of possibilities open to course designers and providers. Through careful consideration of the key characteristics of an ideal CPD programme, along with an opportunity to create a community of practice online and offline, a hybrid MOOC could be designed and implemented to best meet teachers' local and contextual needs. Such an approach could generate positive change among schools, students, and even the education system at large.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATION AND CONTEXTUAL EXPLANATION

<b>Abbreviations</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
CALL	Computer-Assisted Language Learning
CCK08	Connectivism and Connective Knowledge
CMOOCs	Connectivist Massive Open Online Courses
CMT	Computer-mediated Task
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
ESL	English as a Second Language
FAQ	Frequently Asked Questions
GF	Google Form
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
MA	Masters Degree
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
MIT OCW	Massachusetts Institute of Technology OpenCourseWare
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoHE	Ministry of Higher Education
MOOCs	Massive/ly Open Online Courses
OCW	OpenCourseWare
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OER	Open Education Resources
OOC	Open Online Course
PDF	Portable Document Format
PMR	<i>Penilaian Menengah Rendah</i> (Lower Secondary Assessment)
PT3	<i>Penilaian Tingkatan 3</i> (Form 3 Assessment)

SPM/MCE	<i>Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia</i> /Malaysian Certificate of Education
TBLT	Task-based Language Teaching
TEFL	Teaching English as Foreign Language
TESL	Teaching English as a Second Language
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
UPM	University Putra Malaysia
UPSR/PSAT	<i>Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah</i> /Primary School Achievement Test
XMOOCs	Extended Massive Open Online Courses

### **Contextual explanation**

Students – refers to trainee teachers or students who attended schools/universities.

Learners/ Learner participants – refers to those who participated in MOOCs.

## THESIS ORGANISATION

I find telling stories exciting and creative and have provided a narrative of my research into MOOCs and the opportunities they offer for Malaysian teachers' CPD. Providing the story of my research enables me to describe my study in a more personalised manner and to be more faithful to the ebbs and flows in the research journey. This, I think, is an approach that others coming after me will find accessible and helpful. To maintain the narrative flow, the organisation of this thesis follows an unusual layout, even if the parts expected in a thesis (a review of literature, a discussion of methodology, a reporting of findings and so on) are contained within it.

In Chapter One, I describe my experience navigating through the education system in Malaysia. The experiences that I have led me into pursuing an explicitly educational view of MOOCs, which combined my interest in technology with my understanding of teaching and teachers' professional development. In this chapter, I hold back on describing MOOCs because I want readers to understand the education system in the context of Malaysia, as a developing country.

In Chapter Two, I elaborate my need to learn more about MOOCs. I first describe the methods I used in searching and reviewing the literature. Then, I discuss the initial concept of a MOOC and the growth of MOOCs, the debate about their instructional design, and key issues of MOOCs in relation to accessibility, quality, and completion rates.

Getting to know MOOCs, theoretically, is not enough to understand how MOOCs can be helpful for teachers' professional development. I needed direct involvement. Therefore, I decided to

become a MOOC participant and observer. I describe and elaborate on my experiences, including how I gathered and analysed the data. I describe all this in Chapter Three.

Experiencing MOOCs was an eye-opener. However, the way I learnt in a MOOC might have been different from the way others would. To maintain the trustworthiness and credibility of the project, it was necessary to gain different perspectives. Thus, in Chapter Four, I present the participants' responses that I gathered from interview sessions. To maintain the flow of the story, I describe how I recruited the participants and interviewed them. I also explain the methods I used in analysing their responses.

I discovered all participants gained positive outcomes from their participation in MOOCs, especially for their professional development. However, I realised that I had not discussed CPD itself. Thus, I set out a literature search on CPD and describe debates surrounding CPD in Chapter Five. Reflecting on the review, I present the definition of CPD, models and frameworks of CPD, effective CPD programmes, and the evaluation of CPD programmes.

After obtaining a clear idea of what CPD is and how an ideal CPD programme should be characterised, I discuss participants' experiences and perceptions of attending CPD trainings in Malaysia. Thus, in Chapter Six, I present findings about the participants' experiences and perceptions of attending CPD trainings, and how they felt about replacing the work/school-based CPD with MOOCs.



Aside from interviews, I also observed three participants as they went through their daily life as teachers. I did this when I realised I needed to report on the context in which MOOCs were used. What I saw would help me to understand the ecology around participation and to explain why participants act in different ways within a MOOC. In reflecting on my exploration, I discuss the possibility of MOOC supported CPD within Malaysian education. This is described in Chapter Seven.

Chapter Eight, known as a discussion chapter, offers an overview of the main thesis and points out the main findings. The chapter also provides some recommendations to be taken by the Ministry of Education, MOOC designers, school leaders, academics and teachers.

In Chapter Nine, I include final reflections on my methodology in this research and introduce the idea of a reflective research practice. This will help readers to understand my paradigmatic position underlying my research approach. It is also in this chapter that I discuss further the ethical concerns relating to my research methodology.

Finally, in Chapter 10, I conclude the thesis by summarising all the work I have presented in other chapters. I describe how the experiences I have gained have developed me and how I have become a better teacher, a MOOC participant, and a researcher. While presenting these ideas, I highlight my awareness of the limitations of the study and how these create new opportunities for future studies.

Overall, this thesis consists of ten chapters: Chapter One is the opening stage of the thesis; Chapters Two and Five present the literature review around MOOCs and CPD respectively; Chapters Three, Four, Six and Seven discuss and present the analysis of all data; Chapter Eight discusses the overall findings; Chapter Nine details out the methodology and approaches I used; and Chapter Ten concludes the research.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

I navigated successfully through the Malaysia education system and had the opportunity to pursue higher education overseas. Being in a new environment, I realised there were many things I did not know about the outside world, and this left me with curiosity about the differences I had seen. This chapter presents a chronology of my life experiences navigating through the Malaysian education system, and how such experiences led me into my research project.

In Malaysia, primary education was made compulsory to all seven to twelve-year-old children. Thus, when I reached the age of seven, I had to attend a primary school as a Standard One student (equivalent to Grade 1 in the UK). I was registered at a public, national primary school. Education, however, was not free at that time. Since my parents were both employed and earned more than RM 3,000 a month, they had to pay for my education fees on the registration day. They also had to buy me textbooks and school uniform. I remembered how excited I was going to the bookstore and the wholesale market to purchase textbooks and school uniform with my mother. It was a lifetime moment that I could never forget. I would not have been that excited, though, if I had known how much it had cost my parents back then. I only found out how costly the textbooks were when I was in Standard Three (equivalent to Grade 3). I followed my friends to the library and saw the librarian gave them similar textbooks that I also had. It shocked me that they could use the textbooks for the whole year, without spending even a cent! That was when I learned from them that their parents were self-employed or unemployed, and they could

not afford to pay for the textbooks in lump sum. For these reasons, the school lent them the textbooks. The school also allowed their parents to pay their education fees in instalments for 12 months or less, depending on how much they could afford each month.

Learning about the privileges my friends received, I was dissatisfied. I felt guilty that my parents had to pay for my education fees and textbooks, at the same time paying for three other children who were also at school. Thus, a year after, I tried my luck to apply for a textbook loan. My only reason at that time was my parent's liability was more than what they earned. My application was successful. From then onwards, I did not have to buy textbooks from bookstores any longer. After that day, any kind of benefits offered to students with low-income parents, I would apply for too. Thus, I received free food through a programme called *Rancangan Makanan Tambahan* (Additional Meal Plan). The programme was carried out by the government to encourage low-income parents who could not afford to give their children pocket money, to send their children to school.

My primary education was the most unforgettable period in my life. It was then that I learned to read, write and do arithmetic for the first time. I was exposed to various subjects like Malay and English Languages, Mathematics, Science (known as Human and Universe during my time), Music, Physical Education, and Islamic Education. Similar to what other students have today, I also had the opportunity to get involved in extra-curricular activities organised by the school, such as Annual Camping, Cross Country Running, Sports Day, and School Graduation Day, to name a few. Apart from that, I was also one of the school athletes, so I experienced going to various tournaments at District and State levels. When I was in Standard Six (equivalent to

Grade 6), I had to sit for the *Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah/The Primary School Achievement Test* (UPSR/PSAT). This examination was centralised; therefore all Standard Six students in Malaysia would answer the same question papers, regardless of where they were from and what type of school they were registered in. There were four papers altogether: Malay Language 1 (Comprehension), Malay Language 2 (Writing), English Language and Mathematics. Since the main aim of primary education was for students to be proficient in reading, writing and arithmetic, other subjects were not tested in the UPSR. This examination was considered vital for me, at that time, because the results would define my level after six years of education and it could help me to obtain a place into elite, cluster, or science boarding schools. Two months after the examination, I received my results. I could not remember exactly my reaction, but I remember being hugged by my parents who seemed so proud of me. I found out later that I was one of the 12 students who got straight As in my school. That was when I realised how meaningful it was for my parents to see me succeed in my examination.

Even though all primary school students were promoted to Form One, the first year of secondary education (equivalent to Grade 7), getting into a secondary school was not compulsory during my time. However, being educated themselves, my parents knew that I needed to be provided with proper education until I was old enough to find a suitable job and live on my own. Thus, they worked hard to make ends meet so that all four of us, me and three other siblings, could continue into our secondary education. My excellent results in UPSR were worthwhile, for I was offered a place at a boarding school. It was a new school, in which the vision was to produce excellent, intelligent, all-rounder Islamic students who could become successful future leaders. The founder of the school, who was the Malaysia School Inspectorate at that time, hoped that the

school could become one of the top Science schools in Malaysia that could produce Islamic scientists. He named the school *Sekolah Menengah Sains Mulia Bestari*. ‘Sekolah Menengah Sains’ meant science secondary school, while ‘Mulia Bestari’ referred to noble and smart. Unfortunately, due to political interference, the school had to be classified as a pure Islamic school. Thus, the school name was changed to *Sekolah Menengah Agama Rantau Abang*. The word ‘Agama’ represented Islamic and ‘Rantau Abang’ referred to the location of the school. The day the school was announced to be an Islamic school, I found out that I had to learn Arabic as my third language, after Malay and English. Therefore, I had to learn nine subjects altogether, instead of eight.

When I was in Form Three (equivalent to Grade 9), I had to take another centralised examination, *Penilaian Menengah Rendah* (Lower Secondary Assessment), which was also known as the PMR examination. This examination, currently known as *Penilaian Tingkatan 3* or PT3 (Form 3 Assessment), was another important assessment in the Malaysia education. It was meant to determine students' academic streaming to the upper secondary level, whether to be in science, arts, technical or vocational streams. Therefore, the subjects tested in the PMR were Malay Language, English Language, Arabic Language, Mathematics, Science, History, Living Skills, Geography and Islamic Studies. Since I was in a boarding school, all preparations for the exam were carried out in school. From evening classes to night classes, weekday discussions to weekend camps, all activities were organised by the school to prepare us, the Form Three students, for the PMR exam. It was a stressful year for me, but it was worth going through. I got 8As and 1B for the PMR. I got a B for the Arabic Language paper. I was never good at it, so it was expected.

Going into upper secondary education (Form 4 and 5 – equivalent to grades 10 and 11) was also optional for Malaysia students during my time. This meant that many school leavers quit school at the age of 16. In my case, however, I could not leave school even if I wanted to because education was a priority in my family. My father made me believe that people could only be successful (defined by my father as having a good job and making a comfortable living) if they received an education. I am glad I chose to remain in school. However, in order to continue to the upper secondary school, I had to choose only one academic stream. There were many streams offered by the Ministry of Education, such as Pure Science, ICT, Islamic Pure Science, Islamic Ikhtisas and Technical Science, Catering, Visual Arts, Landscaping and Business Trade. Nevertheless, schools were given the freedom to choose the streams depending on the facilities they had, including teacher specialisms.

My school only offered three streams; Islamic Pure Science, Islamic Ikhtisas and Technical Science. There were four core and seven elective subjects offered in each stream. Students in any stream had to take the same core subjects, which were Malay Language, English Language, Mathematics and History. However, for the elective subjects, students had to take a different set of subjects, depending on the stream they chose. For example, students in Islamic pure science had to take Additional Mathematics, Physics, Biology, and Chemistry. Students in Islamic Ikhtisas had to take Additional Mathematics, Science, Account Principles and Basic Economics. In the meantime, students who were in the Technical Science stream had to take Additional Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, and Engineering Technology and Drawing. Since my school

was an Islamic school, we had to take *Syariah Islamiah* Studies, *Al-Quran and Al-Sunnah* Studies, and Arabic Language as our elective subjects, regardless of the stream we chose.

It was difficult for me to decide on my academic stream because I never had any preferences for particular subjects. My parents would have liked me to take the Islamic Pure Science stream. They said I could prepare myself to become a scientist or a doctor if I were to take that stream. However, I knew I was not interested in becoming a doctor, or a scientist. If I were to choose the Islamic Ikhtisas, they said, I would probably end up becoming an accountant or economist, which was not my interest either. I could not tell what I really wanted at that time. I could not even pick a subject that I liked the most. My parents, the school counsellor, Form Three teachers and my elder sister (who was already in her first year at the university) convinced me that choosing Islamic Pure Science stream would be the best. They assured me that, if I chose the Islamic Pure Science, I would still have a chance to redirect my focus to the other two streams when I start my post-secondary programme (equivalent to A-level). However, if I were to choose one of the other two streams (Ikhtisas or Technical), I could no longer apply to get into pure science stream during the post-secondary programme. For that reason only, I finally chose to be in the Islamic Pure Science stream.

Learning pure science subjects were not really my favourite. For two years, I struggled, trying to understand all the scientific terms. When I realised how difficult it was, a year had passed, and I knew I had no choice but to proceed with what I had chosen because I had to sit for another compulsory national examination, known as *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia/Malaysian Certificate of Education* (SPM/MCE). The SPM certificate was equivalent to O-level Cambridge University



Examinations. This was also considered a ‘school-exit’ examination. For two years, I prepared myself for this exam. It was the same pressure I had when I was in Form 3, but much stronger because the results that I would gain from the SPM would influence my future direction. If I gained straight As, I could choose any programmes offered at the university, ranging from arts to science streams. However, if I did not get straight As, the programmes I could choose would be limited, depending on which subjects I scored best. I guess my SPM results defined the struggle that I had with science subjects. I did not score in any Science papers, and I only got As for Malay and English language papers, Mathematics, History, *Syariah Islamiah* Studies, and *Al-Quran and Al-Sunnah* Studies. Consequently, I had no chance to apply for any Science programmes. I had nothing to regret though, for I knew I could always navigate myself to follow other streams in the future. Despite the results that were less impressive, choosing the Pure Science stream was indeed the best decision I had ever made in my school years. Otherwise, I would not have been able to change direction.

I did not make any application to any institution after I received my SPM results. My mother did everything for me; from filling in to sending out the application forms to the Ministry of Education. I did not really know what happened after that. However, I knew that as a school leaver with SPM qualifications, I could opt to obtain a pre-university qualification (such as the sixth form, matriculation programmes and GCE A-levels) or study for a certificate or diploma at higher educational institutions. The next thing I remember, I received three offers from different institutions. The first offer came from a matriculation college. It was a one-year academic foundation programme, which aimed to prepare students for admission to public universities. I was not ready to embark on another journey, for which I had to continue struggling to get a place

in a better institution (in this case, a university). Thus, I declined the offer. The next offer I received, I was so happy about because my dream to go to university was coming true. It was an offer from the University Putra Malaysia, Serdang (UPM), one of the top five research universities in Malaysia. It was a three-year diploma programme in Human Resource. A diploma programme was considered an undergraduate programme and I did not have to obtain any pre-university qualifications. Without hesitation, I told my parents that I wanted to accept the offer. My parents could not have been happier to know that I was excited to be going to university. The registration went well and there I was, getting comfortable with my new beginning as a university student. However, two weeks after I got into the university, I found out from my father that I received another offer letter. It was from a teacher training college, and I was offered a place to do a six-year Bachelor in Education programme. I was shocked! I knew what I would get myself into if I were to accept this offer. It would be like going back to where I came from, the boarding school. All the rules and regulations, fixed timetable, and hostel curfews, those were things I would have had to deal with again if I were to go to the teacher training college. I knew I could not be wrong about this for both my parents were lecturers at teacher training colleges. However, what was meant to be was meant to be. My parents were so eager to see me following in their footsteps, so I accepted the offer. After three weeks in UPM, I finally left for Temenggong Ibrahim Teacher Training College, Johor Bahru, to pursue Bachelor of Education in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL).

During the induction week as a TESL student, I found out that my education would be sponsored entirely by the Ministry of Education. In fact, all the other 49 students who enrolled in this programme were also sponsored. This meant that we would be bonded with the Ministry after we

finished our programme at the college. One good thing I realised about this was, I would not be jobless, and I could teach at school immediately after I graduated. Then I discovered that the programme I enrolled in was a new twinning programme. It was to be run by two institutions at once; a teacher training college and a university. There were ten teacher training colleges, seven local universities and three international universities involved in this programme. All trainee teachers in the programme had to do a two-year foundation course at the college, a two-year undergraduate course at the university, and return to the same college during the final two years to complete the undergraduate course and go through teaching practicum.

I have to admit that I was half-hearted when I began the TESL programme. The first month of the enrolment was the most challenging time for me. I had to get back to the normal seven am-to-two pm school routine. I had to endure the pain of 'going back' to school, acknowledging the freedom that I no longer had. It got even harder because I was not used to an environment in which the medium of instruction was English. However, as time flew, I embraced the fact that I was to become not only a teacher, but an English teacher. This recognition made learning easier and interesting for me. However, it was not until the final year that I realised how passionate I was to teach. It was when I did my teaching practicum in a secondary school. I could spend hours of time planning my teaching materials, not realising how tiring it had been for me. I could also teach for long hours, without realising I had missed my meal time. My aim was always to get the students to love learning English. There was nothing more satisfying than having the students speak their minds using the language they learned. I would be the happiest person in the world to see the students achieve their learning goals successfully. I was forever grateful and

happy that my parents made me go to the teacher training college. Even if I could turn back time, I would never want to change direction.

After I graduated, I was posted to a rural secondary school in my hometown, the State of Terengganu, which was located in the East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia. Even though I was no longer a student, things had not changed at all. I still had to wake up early to go to school, listen to the principal's speech during weekly assembly, attend morning and evening extra classes, and join extra-curricular activities. Only this time, I did everything as a teacher. As an English teacher, I felt I had to work ten times harder than teachers of other subjects because English was considered a '*killer*' subject (with all negative connotations) in many schools in Terengganu. Most of the time, students who took the PMR and SPM exams could not get straight As because they did not score A for English papers. Therefore, whenever there was an opportunity, I was always asked by the school administration to do extra classes, be it after the school hours, or during weekends. At the same time, I had responsibilities as an English club teacher, Police Cadet teacher, netball coach, Choral Speaking group teacher, and the president of Teachers' Club Association. These responsibilities required me to spend about 11 hours at work every day. Apart from that, I also had to keep up with the expectations drawn by the State and District Education Department by providing English camps and courses for both poor and excellent students.

Having so many responsibilities was normal among teachers in Malaysia. I had no complaints, and I learned to cope with it. However, one thing I could not stand was the so-called exam-oriented style of teaching. Making sure students achieved excellent results in the exam had become the main priority for all teachers in the school that I taught. Teachers had to skip the

details and only focus on things that might be questioned in the exam. If students failed in the exam, teachers had to come up with reasonable explanations as to why. I was so frustrated with this situation that I was not enjoying teaching anymore. There was an occasion when I carried out a speaking and listening activity with my students, a discipline teacher came to class and told me to keep the class quiet. How could I do that? I also used to be called by the Principal Assistant and was told to teach only the important content. I was totally demotivated at that time. Teaching language became very superficial then. The time that I had with students was used to teach them how to write a good composition, and how to answer comprehension questions rather than how to become a good speaker of English. There were no longer fun activities carried out to prompt students to converse in English. Feeling frustrated, I shared my experience with my colleagues from other schools. It shocked me that I was not alone! I found it was the State Education Department that had set a benchmark for schools' academic achievement in Terengganu. Therefore, all schools had to try to achieve the benchmark. The school with the highest achievement would be rewarded with money incentives.

It had never occurred to me before that the Malaysia education system was exam-oriented. However, to think about it all over again now, this must have been going on for decades. This explains why my teachers, both at the primary and secondary schools, worked so hard to get me to excel in the exam. They even came to school and gave me extra classes on school holidays. They also made me practise the same type of questions over and over again so that I could remember how to answer them during exams. The struggles I had to face and the pressures I had to endure, everything was for one reason; excel in the exam. This has made me realise how far

behind Malaysia is, in terms of its holistic evaluation in education, in comparison with other countries like America, England, Canada or Finland.

The pressure and the frustration that I had at school burdened me. I knew I was no longer happy to be at school. I was surrounded by those who were too comfortable in their zones. I also felt I had been deskilled by not having the opportunity to make changes in the way I taught my students. Hence, I decided to challenge myself and apply for the post of a language tutor at a local university. I was hoping to be able to get out of school and continue teaching English as a language, not as a subject of examination. I also wanted to develop my teaching skills. About a year later, when I was about to give up hope, I received a call from the university. I was invited for a closed, one-to-one interview with the Academic Vice Chancellor of the University of Sultan Zainal Abidin. The interview went well, and I was accepted as a Language Teacher at the university about a month later. That was in 2011, three years after I started teaching at school.

I had an entirely different experience teaching in the university. My primary role as a Language Teacher was to teach English for Academic Writing. It was a compulsory course for all undergraduate students. I had to teach undergraduate students who were young adults, ranging from 19 to 23 years old. This group of students were different from the students I had in school. Therefore, I had to make my teaching more appropriate for their age. It was quite challenging to come up with the teaching materials and activities for these students because they came from different backgrounds, with different language abilities and learning preferences. However, I never gave up, and I kept on finding ways to develop my teaching strategies. I also thought of ways to engage my students in language learning. For example, I created more group activities

rather than individual to enable students to have more opportunities to use the language they learned among themselves. Group activities could also encourage them to work in a team. It was a lot easier to manage this group of students because they were more mature compared to those in school. However, teaching English to these students was not as easy as I thought it would be. This was mainly because some of the students, especially those from Cambodia and Thailand, had no experience of learning English. I found these students did not like learning English because they could not keep up with it. It was challenging to teach them, but I enjoyed every lesson I had with them. I felt relieved that I made the decision to leave school.

A year after I started teaching at the university, I was assigned to teach core courses (e.g. Teaching of Listening Skills, Teaching of Writing, Teaching of Grammar, etc.) to a group of students who had undertaken a Diploma in TESL programme. Considering myself as new, I was honoured and happy to be given that opportunity. I was assigned the duty because I had a teaching certificate (equivalent to PGCE). Teaching the TESL students was an eye-opener and an enjoyable experience because I could try out different teaching strategies and materials with students. These helped me to improve my teaching skills and gave me ideas for the kind of teaching materials I should or should not use for students. Among the materials that I had used, I found students really liked those that involved games.

Apart from games, I realised my students liked the materials that I incorporated with the use of information and communication technology (ICT). Despite the technical challenges that I have had to go through, I have always been positive about the integration of ICT in classroom teaching. This positivity that I have had begun years before I started teaching, when I was in

college. It was the first time I was introduced to the use of ICT in a classroom. I was given a set of PowerPoint slides by the lecturer in charge. I was asked to read the slides and answer the questions provided at the end of the slides. The reading part was all right. Then, when I began to answer the multiple-choice questions provided, phrases like "Try Again", "You're Right!", "Correct!" and "Excellent!" appeared on the monitor screen. I was amazed by the immediate feedback. It was a total light-bulb moment for me, experiencing such technology. To reflect on it now, this kind of computer-assisted instruction is, from my present perspective, really quite boring. However, it intrigued me at that time, so my mind naturally moved to ICT.

I went on to use ICT in my own life, and whenever I had the opportunity to use it in my lessons, I would use it. Therefore, when I was given full authority to decide on the teaching materials I wanted to use with the TESL students I taught, I incorporated ICT. I realised my students liked it very much, both in and out of the classroom. Perhaps they liked using the Internet searches outside of the class because they could be done whenever it was convenient for them. They also participated in and enjoyed discussing with an open social media platform I had set up for them. The students who attended my virtual classes, once came to me and told me how much they enjoyed learning 'Teaching of English' because they could gain more information compared to when they were in a face-to-face class. It really pleased me because that was the kind of responses I hoped to get from them at the time.

Upon receiving positive feedback from learners about the idea of using ICT in teaching and learning English, I decided to ask a few of my colleagues to join me to develop an online course. The course was called English 1. We used Moodle, also named as e-Kelip by the university, as



the main platform. This platform was accessible to everyone in the university, so it was not difficult for me to create a network with other colleagues who taught the same course. In the online course that I created, all language teachers were given the authority to share their lecture notes and weekly schedule on the same dashboard. Thus, all students who took English 1 would be able to access this information, regardless of who their teacher was. Whenever they needed to ask for clarification, they could directly email any one of the language teachers or post the questions they wanted to ask in the discussion forum that was made available to them. Apart from the notes, I also created a section for assessment and assignment submission. This section allowed the language teachers to assess students through online quizzes or assignments. Students, on the other hand, benefited from the feedback they received directly from their teachers.

I was happy with what I had achieved so far with the English 1 course. I received positive responses from my colleagues. However, thinking about it now, I realise there were more questions I could have asked about the materials I invented on the e-Kelip. I could have considered putting up my own lecture videos, rather than embedding videos that I found from other sources. I could have also created a code for identification. That could have avoided fraudulent assignment submission among students. Even though I no longer have the authority to make any of those changes now, the early experiences I had with my students and colleagues while developing the online platform allowed me to see at first-hand how much ICT could help teachers and learners achieve their teaching and learning outcomes. This had awakened my interest in technology in teaching and learning more than ever before. Thus, when I had the

opportunity to pursue my Masters Degree (MA), I could not do research on anything else, but ICT.

Following on from my first experience as a teacher in school and a language teacher in the university, I had always been interested in my own professional development. Thus, it was natural for me to pursue my MA, even though as a language teacher, it was not an obligatory. When I first started my MA project, it was in 2012. I aimed to explore the use of ICT in a task-based language teaching (TBLT) and its challenges. I chose TBLT because I found many Malaysian teachers frequently used the approach in teaching English as a second language (ESL). I also discovered that 'task' was identified as the seventh most frequently used keyword identifier in the corpus of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) research between 1999 and 2005. Thus, I narrowed down my focus into the use of computer-mediated task (CMT) in language teaching and its challenges.

The project was a mixed-method research, conducted with 63 primary school trainee teachers and nine lecturers. The trainee teachers were those whom I used to teach when they were in their first year, and the lecturers were all my colleagues. I found that the majority of the trainee teachers were comfortable, even excited, using computer technology in teaching. However, some believed that the lack of computer technology in some schools made it impractical. Sharing, in particular, made classroom management more challenging for these trainee teachers. I was also quite shocked to discover that some of the trainee teachers were scared of the idea of integrating CMT in their teaching. I could not understand why they felt that way, until I met them at the focus group sessions. I discovered that some had never been given the opportunity, not even

once, to use computers as a teaching tool. Instead, they were trained in using photocopied worksheets. I could not believe my ears. This group of trainee teachers could be among those teaching in a 21<sup>st</sup>-century classroom. Thus, they should have been taught how to use and apply ICT (in this case, the computer) in their teaching. I was so frustrated that it did not happen.

Things became very clear after I interviewed the lecturers who were responsible for training, observing and evaluating the trainee teachers during their teaching practicum. I discovered that four of the nine lecturers seldom used CMTs when they trained the trainee teachers. They found that preparing tasks using the computer was time-consuming. The reason was partly the lack of knowledge and skill, and they felt that they needed backup tasks, in case there was no electricity or technical problems occurred. Consequently, these lecturers had never thought of encouraging their trainee teachers to use CMT. As someone who was very concerned about teachers' professional development, I was disappointed to learn this. However, as a new language teacher, I realised I had no power or control to change what was happening. I was only wearing my hat as a researcher, so presenting the findings and discussing the implications in a formal report, were all I could do.

As frustrated as I was with what was happening, I felt relieved because the majority of the trainee teachers still used CMT during their teaching practicum. In fact, 47 of them were reportedly using CMT during all four of their observation sessions, and 14 others used it one to three times. This convinced me that the use of ICT was feasible in language teaching. Otherwise, the trainee teachers would not have continued using CMT after their first attempt. When I asked the reasons for using CMT in teaching, all of the trainee teachers said they used it for the

students' benefit. For example, they used CMT to motivate. They felt ICT activities were more engaging for young people because some of the students found learning a language boring and disheartening. The trainee teachers also believed that by using CMT, they could expose the students to natural language in an engaging context. Even though these trainee teachers were positive about using CMT in their teaching, they revealed the challenges they had to face. These challenges had demotivated many of them. For example, the schools did not have sufficient computer facilities to cater for every person in a class. There were also times when a number of computers could not be used due to breakages or technical errors. Thus, students usually had to share the computers. Even though the school higher management was aware of the situation, no action had been taken to overcome the issue. Some trainee teachers also said that it was not easy to deal with “naughty students who did not listen to instructions”. This had made it difficult for the trainee teachers to manage the whole classroom and focus on the teaching. Other than that, time had been another factor that demotivated the trainee teachers from using CMT. The distance between the classroom and the computer lab was quite far, thus affected time for teaching enormously.

I realised the challenges these trainee teachers had to face were common in many schools. I knew it because I was a former teacher and I had many friends who were also school teachers. Even though some of the challenges were solvable, I knew exactly what it was like to be in a school that lacked facilities and support from the higher management. It was distressing. Knowing how challenging it was for the trainee teachers to use CMT in their teaching, it was predictable that they would feel demotivated. This was why I found many trainee teachers preferred to resort to a more didactic teaching approach rather than CMT, even though they were

very positive about the use of CMT in language teaching. This made me unhappy. I was very concerned about what was happening in school. I was also worried that the trainee teachers would end up using the ‘chalk and talk’ method. If this happened, I would not blame the schools or the trainee teacher institutions. Instead, I would question the lecturers who were responsible for training the trainee teachers. I believed if the trainee teachers received good training and were well-trained in how to overcome the challenges, they would be able to continue using ICT as a tool for teaching. The project, unfortunately, revealed unwelcome insights into how lecturers trained the trainee teachers. Thus, I was determined to bring change to the way trainee teachers were trained.

The timing was right. After I finished the project in 2013, I was given a new responsibility. It was to train the TESL trainee teachers into using instructional technology in teaching. This was the turning point in my career as a language teacher. My focus shifted from that moment onwards. I started to think about the new technology that I could use in education. I believed trainee teachers would be receptive to the changes that I was to put forward. At this time, I started my own flipped classroom. I had to admit that it was quite stressful and time-consuming to create videos and interactive lessons, with instructions that were to be accessed at home, in advance of class. Therefore, I tried to find a shortcut to save time. I browsed Khan Academy, an online repository of thousands of instructional videos, and chose relevant videos and materials for my lessons. It was a time saver, indeed, but I had to ensure the trainee teachers could review the lessons and come to class knowing what to do and ask. Most importantly, I had to foresee if they would be able to work through the problems and engage in collaborative learning in class. Despite the challenges I had to face, the flipped classroom could give me extra time to query

individual trainee and clear up misconceptions about teaching ICT among them. The flipped classroom also provided an opportunity for these trainee teachers to become more self-directed in learning new things. I really hoped the flipped classroom I had carried out with the trainee teachers would be an eye-opener for them.

I also became interested in mobile learning. I had various readily available applications, and most of them were user-friendly. I was so happy to find out that Khan Academy App was also available in mobile mode. It was easier to manage lessons from that application compared to the one I found on the website. Since every trainee teacher had a smartphone and could afford to buy one if they needed to, mobile learning seemed to work just fine for them. I found many useful applications available for mobile teaching and learning such as *'Learn to Speak English'*, *'English Conversation Practice'*, *'Hello English: Learn English'*, and *Learning English: BBC News'*. *'Edmodo'*, *'Socrative Student'*, *'Canvas'*, or *'Brainly Homework'* could be used to manage the classroom. I made the trainee teachers try out all these applications. Some of the tools were also effective messaging tools, and I could keep in touch with the trainee teachers even when they were at home. They seemed to enjoy mobile learning. However, I realised that school students could not use mobile phones at school. Thus, mobile learning might not be the best aid for school students.

After a while, I decided to look for alternatives. That was when I found out about FutureLearn, a digital education platform that offered a diverse selection of courses from leading universities around the world. The courses it delivered were accessible on mobile, tablet and desktop. When I found out about this platform, the trainee teachers were on their three-month semester break.

Therefore, I took the opportunity to become a participant myself, and learn more about the platform. I signed up in two of the courses I found interesting: '*Teaching Computing: Part 1*' and '*A beginner's guide to writing in English for university study*'. I chose the former course because I intended to gain new experience in teaching something that I was not trained. The latter one, of course, because it was familiar to me. I needed to know how similar/different my teaching was compared to that course.

Surprisingly, I did not only gain additional information, but I was also overwhelmed by so many new things I learned in the courses. In *Teaching Computing: Part 1*, everything was entirely new to me because I had no background in computer science and digital literacy. It was not that difficult, though, as there was a glossary provided and all terms that I needed to learn were defined clearly. I found this very helpful, especially when I wanted to participate in the discussion forum. Besides, I also learned a great deal of new things through real-life event videos. I found that I could learn the subject better when authentic situations were involved. In the meantime, participating *A Beginner's Guide to Writing in English for University Study* was an eye-opener. Even though I did have some prior knowledge in teaching English for academic writing, I realised there were so much more I did not know. The way the educators analysed and commented on an original sample of text taught me how to assess writing from a different perspective. The course not only gave me input on how to be a better writer, but also a good essay examiner. It was also a pleasant experience for me to be able to learn new things, virtually, with so many people from different parts of the world.

Attending the online courses for about four to five weeks was such a new, yet insightful experience for me. I believed it was something that might work, not only for trainees, but also teachers. The features that FutureLearn had could help the instructors and learner participants to make progress in their teaching and learning process. As the learner participant, I found the videos, discussion board, assessments and many other features really useful. For example, the English transcripts attached to the videos were helpful when I was not familiar with the speakers' accents and had difficulty to catch up with the talking speed. I found it useful too because I could save a copy of the transcript for future reference. The discussion board, on the other hand, had a feature that could filter thousands of conversations within seconds. This helped to narrow down my search on specific topics that I was looking for. Additionally, there were 'next' and 'back' buttons which allowed me to go back and forth throughout the course. These features were indeed very accommodating, especially to learn at my own pace.

Participating in FutureLearn courses had strengthened my viewpoint that virtual learning was possible and could be effective for language teaching and learning. As a learner participant, I could get involved easily in authentic conversations. As a teacher, I could see there were several suitable courses that I could direct my students to join. The opportunities these courses offered for teachers and students triggered my interest in creating my own module that was accessible for participants to learn and teach English as a second language. I felt that Futurelearn was a better platform compared to the e-Kelip because it was more open, in that anyone could access and sign up as a participant, regardless of which institution they attended. In producing a new module, I first investigated how FutureLearn was designed and developed. That was when I encountered the term 'Massive Open Online Courses', widely known as MOOCs. I found out



that courses developed in FutureLearn were considered MOOCs. From then onward, I redirect my focus to MOOCs instead of FutureLearn.

I was overwhelmed by the range and quality of MOOCs on offer. In terms of accessibility, anyone with an Internet connection could join a MOOC. This gave me the confidence to integrate the use of MOOCs into my teaching modules. Concerning instructional design, MOOCs came in various formats, but very often involved listening to online lectures and completing tasks, reading articles and self-assessments. They also provided interactive user forums to support community interaction between learners and educators. Having had the experience of navigating through the Malaysian education system, I felt that MOOCs had a huge potential to overcome the limitations of the system. The key features MOOCs had, which I will discuss in Chapter Two, could offer immense learning opportunities for my future students.

I was in the middle of starting a project on MOOC in 2015, when the university I worked for offered me a scholarship to do a PhD. I was so excited and happy. I used that opportunity to turn my project into a PhD research. To cut the story short, I finally decided to do my doctoral research at the University of Warwick. It was sensible, I believed, because the supervisor whom I chose to work with had broad knowledge about instructional technology in education and the university had a team working with FutureLearn. I felt it was convenient for me because all the resources I needed would be on hand.

When I first met my supervisor, I was very clear about what I wanted to do with my PhD research. I wanted to build an online module using a MOOC and investigate its effectiveness

towards trainee teachers who were going to teach English as a second language. However, considering the timeframe given by my sponsor (to finish PhD in three years), my supervisor convinced me that not only investigating effectiveness would be time-consuming, but developing a MOOC module would be costly for a small-scale project. I concluded he was right. Thus, I decided to rethink what I wanted to do and revise my research proposal. I started by revisiting all the journals and online databases that I could access. I looked for previous and recent studies carried out on MOOCs, and then read them all critically. The readings helped me to understand the initial concept and the growth of MOOCs, the debate about their instructional designs, and the key issues they had in relation to accessibility, completion rates, and quality of assessment (I will discuss these in Chapter Two). I also found that MOOCs were relatively new in Malaysia. Very few studies were carried out in the Malaysian context. This gave me an opportunity to do something that had not been done before by Malaysian scholars. However, I knew I needed to take certain things into consideration. With the limited time given for me to complete the PhD, I had to choose a field that I was familiar with and interested in. That was when the idea of continuing professional development (CPD) came into mind.

I decided that having had the experience as a teacher in school and university, I knew how teachers and academics were expected to develop professional careers across different disciplines. In the case of Malaysia, the Ministry of Education had a policy of providing CPD trainings for teaching practitioners. As a language teacher, I was tasked to complete a seven-day training in a year. This was a standard requirement every teacher and academic in Malaysia had to achieve. The training could help me to meet my annual evaluation criteria, both in terms of skills and knowledge. However, with such huge responsibilities and extra workload I had to

shoulder (as I described earlier), attending a face-to-face CPD training had become a problem. The CPD training, which was mostly carried out on weekdays, affected my teaching hours. I had to replace classes that I missed, and for that reason, I had to work overtime. Consequently, I had less time to spend with my family. This seemed to be a similar issue faced by many teachers and academics in Malaysia. Thus, offering CPD training using MOOCs, for me, seemed to be a possible solution.

Online CPD courses had the potential to provide teachers with formal or informal training ‘at the click of a finger’. In online CPD courses, teachers would not have to be physically present in a face to face session at a specific time. This could give them ample time to do what they had to do first as in managing teaching. However, I was not sure what teachers would get out of their participation in MOOCs, what they would have to go through while participating in MOOCs and whether MOOCs would benefit them in continuing their professional development. I had no clue whether the transfer of knowledge from MOOCs to practice was possible for teachers’ CPD. Could teachers connect the course content they learned in MOOCs to their job roles or duties? I was unsure about many things. I also had no idea whether all MOOCs were the same. Were they organised and structured similarly? Would MOOCs be possible for teachers’ CPD? These questions made me realise that I needed to explore how MOOCs were similar/dissimilar from each other. I needed to know the kind of opportunities MOOCs could offer for teachers’ CPD. Thus, I believed, the project needed to use an exploratory approach and research the unknown (I discuss this in detail in Chapter Nine).

Exploring if and how MOOCs could benefit teachers' CPD would make a huge contribution in the teaching field in Malaysia. I believed moving the research in this direction would make a significant contribution to servicing the community, especially to those teaching practitioners who wanted to continue their professional development in learning and teaching English as a second language.

The chapters that follow describe the journey of this exploration starting from reviewing hundreds of scholarly reading materials to collecting and analysing the data. I want to stay true to the flow of my exploration. Therefore, the organisation of this thesis, at least for some people, is unusual. Each of the elements expected in a thesis (a review of literature, a discussion of methodology, a reporting of findings and so on) is contained within it (as I described in the Thesis Organisation on page xiii) but presented in ways which follow the chronology of my research journey. This means that a review of the literature appears in Chapters Two and Five, a formal discussion of methodology in Chapter Nine, presentation of data analysis in Chapters Three, Four, Six and Seven, and discussion of the overall findings in Chapter Eight as this reflects the time line of the research itself.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **WHY MOOCS?**

As I described in Chapter 1, my initial idea for the PhD project was to develop a MOOC module. The project was triggered by my interest in technology and my concern for the lack of pedagogical exposure among trainee teachers. However, after meeting with my supervisor, I knew my project needed a change in direction because I realised I had insufficient time and funding to develop a module from scratch. It was then that I decided to put more energy into the literature search. The first time I carried out the literature search (before I decided to create the MOOC module), I was aware of the key opportunities and constraints within the MOOCs. However, I wanted to look again at the literature and attempt to gain a better idea of the gaps. Awareness of these gaps would allow me to initiate a project that could be a potential contributor to MOOC literature. I believed it was a good starting point to help me orient the ideas of MOOCs too.

When I set out a literature search for the second time, I only had the broadest notion of what I was looking for and was happy to snowball my reading. I read all the articles by skimming and scanning. I tried to understand what others had done with MOOCs. I have to say the reading stage was awful, for I had no focus. I remember making notes on everything I read, but ended up not knowing what to do next. I was overwhelmed by too many details so that I forgot what my aim was. Looking back, I wish I had been more systematic in accessing and managing articles, and organising my thoughts. It could have saved a lot of my time. Then I came across a research

paper, *MOOCs: A systematic study of the published literature 2008-2012* written by Liyanagunawardena, Adams, and Williams (2013). The paper presented a review of published MOOC articles, which the authors identified through journals, database and web searches. Some of the articles were identified from the snowballing technique too. The review categorised the literature into eight different areas of interest; introductory, concept, case studies, educational theory, technology, participant focussed, provider focussed, and others. I did not know how the categorisation was made up, but I found this useful because it gave me an idea to set up categories for the articles I wanted to read. I also learned from the paper the value of searching within specific years and for specific objectives. This could help me to narrow down the search. The paper also highlighted some salient themes that appeared in earlier researches, and for me, this was significantly helpful in my review.

Inspired by what I had learned from the paper, I decided to carry out the literature search more systematically. Since the word MOOC was first introduced in 2008, I decided to search for articles published from the year 2008 up to the 'present' (at the time my 'present' was 2016). I knew I was being too ambitious because there were thousands of published articles with the same keywords found in Google Scholar within that timeframe (I still used 'Massive Open Online Courses' and 'MOOC' as keywords). I knew I could not read them all; not with three limited years I had. Therefore, I outlined specific criteria so that I could constrain my search. For example, I decided to search for empirical papers and those written only in the English language. I also limit my search to the educational discipline only. Therefore, articles discussing the use of MOOCs in other disciplines, such as engineering, health and medicine, or hospitality and tourism were not selected (e.g. *Software engineering education (SEEd): Is software engineering ready*

*for MOOCs?* (Ardis and Henderson 2012), *Exploring Massive Open Online Courses for Nurses* (McCartney 2015), or *A Snapshot of MOOCs in Hospitality and Tourism* (Ryan, Horton-Tognazzini, and Williams 2016).

Even though I had set up the search criteria, the articles still returned in large numbers. To reduce the number to a more manageable quantity, I made a small change to my search and narrowed it down to articles published between 2011 and 2016. I chose articles that included citations from authors writing about MOOCs in 2008, 2009 or 2010. For example, I chose a paper written by Liyanagunawardena *et al.* (2013) because this paper cited Downes (2008). I did this for two reasons. First, as I said earlier, I had to limit the number of articles. Second, I was aware that my search strategy might lead me to miss important debates in the early years of MOOCs. By taking articles that had cited those debates, I could cover those areas. I was very pleased because the number of articles that came back afterwards was workable.

I downloaded articles in a 'portable document format' (PDF) that were accessible and gathered all the references to a reference manager called *Mendeley*. I then exported the articles in PDF to *Atlas.ti*, a qualitative analysis software, so that I could code the papers and their content to specific themes easily. I saved a lot of my time using this software because I could do the coding while reading the articles. The reading process was more manageable now, compared to before. This time I was fully aware of what I wanted to know about MOOCs, why I needed to know about them, and how I could perhaps contribute in that area. However, I did not stop with these articles. Whenever I found interesting points and wanted to know more, I would, again, follow a snowball technique by looking up the sources cited in the articles, which could be in the form of

blogs, websites, chapters in books, magazines or newspapers. It was at this stage I started to understand what MOOCs were, how they came to exist, and how learner participants could benefit from MOOC participation. I also discovered key issues raised by scholars in relation to MOOC concept, design, and development. All these will be elaborated in the following subsections: the MOOC key features, the development of MOOC, and issues within MOOCs.

### **The MOOC Key Features**

Before I proceed with an in-depth discussion on MOOCs, it feels natural for me to begin with an introduction to MOOCs and their key features.

I discovered that MOOCs had no single definition. Even though they had been discussed in many blog posts and social media sites, and become an object of scholarly research, there was no certain definition formed to cover what a MOOC was. Some said MOOCs were delivered according to pre-defined schedule fixed by the course instructor (Armellini and Rodriguez 2016). Others said MOOCs were self-paced, giving learners the opportunity to participate flexibly in terms of time and space (e.g. Blagojević and Milošević 2015; Sun, Zhou, Xiang, Cui, and Jin 2016). Very often, MOOCs involved listening to online lectures, reading articles, and completing tasks or self-assessments (Sun *et al.* 2016). In addition to the course material, MOOCs usually provided interactive user forums that supported community interactions between learners and educators (Agrawal, Kumar, and Agrawal 2015). As someone who was new to the field, I found it difficult to identify a MOOC as there was no single MOOC came with all the above features.



However, I found many scholars agreed that key features of a MOOC were represented in the name itself: ‘massive’, ‘open’, ‘online’ and ‘courses’ (Blagojević and Milošević 2015; Grainger 2013; Harrison 2014; Sun *et al.* 2016; Tschofen and Mackness 2012). It had never occurred to me that this could be the case. Yet, I could see this was sensible. Scholars referred ‘massive’ to the number of course participants because a MOOC could literally reach over hundreds of thousands of people at one time (Agrawal *et al.* 2015; Chen 2015; Conole 2015; Grainger 2013; Harrison 2014; Robinson, Kerski, Long, Luo, DiBiase and Lee 2015; Stokes, Towers, Jinks, and Symington 2015; Sun *et al.* 2016; Tschofen and Mackness 2012). As much as I agreed with this, I still found it questionable because there was no specific explanation on how many participants a MOOC could have for it to be considered massive. For an institution with fewer learners, having 250 participants in a course might mean massive. For some, however, 2500 might still be considered small in number. ‘Massive’ was also referred to the extent of activity a MOOC could offer (Blagojević and Milošević 2015; Sun *et al.* 2016). I agreed that the more extended the activities a course had, the more massive it was. However, the question I had in mind remained unanswered. How many activities could a MOOC have for it to be considered massive? To what extent a course could be expanded? For me, this idea of ‘massive’ was too subjective, and I needed further explanation.

The second key feature that was reflected in ‘MOOC’ was ‘open’. ‘Open’ was usually referred by scholars to mean free access to courses (Anderson, 2013; Tschofen and Mackness, 2012). In other words, no restriction on registration and no payment or prerequisite (Bates 2014; Conole 2015; Levy 2011; Martin 2012; Pappano 2012; Robinson and Nelson 2015; Chen 2015; Sun *et al.* 2016; Terras and Ramsay 2015). I found this debatable, though, because I came across

courses which required learners to pay in order to gain full access to the course. Quite shockingly, these courses were listed among MOOCs. This reduced the idea of openness that some scholars were trying to indicate about MOOCs. From a different perspective, though, I discovered in Tschofen and Mackness (2012) that MOOCs were considered ‘open’ because learner participants could openly share resources, ideas and experiences. I could not agree more with this. However, I had to question the level of openness these learners had. Did they always have complete freedom to create their own knowledge or were there constraints? I believed there were constraints to a certain extent; otherwise, a course would not need instructors. This was something I did not find clearly discussed in the literature.

The two key features above, ‘massive’ and ‘open’ were questionable to me, for they were too subjective and inconsistently applied. However, the other two features, ‘online’ and ‘course’, were defined clearly and agreed by majority of the authors. ‘Online’ was referred to use of the Internet in the course delivery and ‘course’ was the curriculum presented, with clearly defined learning objectives and outcomes (Blagojević and Milošević, 2015; Sun *et al.* 2016) with, usually, start and end dates (Padilla Rodríguez, Bird and Conole 2015).

The four features I discussed above were helpful to distinguish MOOCs from other online courses. However, I believed only ‘massive’ and ‘open’ could distinguish a MOOC from other courses. For example, being ‘massive’ and ‘open’, a MOOC could easily be identified and distinguished from Open Education Resources (OER), most of which were usually produced for a specific part of a larger educational experience within a specific educational framework (This will be explained in the next section).

Learning about the features of a MOOC helped me to understand its general structure and organisation. Having had the experience participating in MOOCs (the FutureLearn courses), it made it easier for me to relate what I read from the literature to what I had seen in the courses. However, I still struggled with the concept behind MOOCs and did not know why they had been introduced in the first place. Thus, I investigated the development of MOOCs and was awed by how little I actually knew about the development of online education. I will explain this in the section that follows.

### **The Development of MOOCs**

I discovered that the concept of openness in education was not new. It had been evolving for decades, before the term MOOC was first coined in 2008. For example, Open Distance Learning and Open Learning had the concept of openness, in that they enabled people to learn at the time, place and pace which satisfied their circumstances and requirements. The emphasis was on opening up opportunities so that people could gain access to the training they needed, regardless of where they came from and the commitments they had at home or at work. The OER was another initiative introduced with the concept of openness. It was the OER that I found had often been associated with the development of MOOCs. Hence, I tried to look for earlier peer-reviewed articles on OER.

The term OER was first introduced at a conference hosted by UNESCO in 2000 and was promoted in the context of providing free access to educational resources on a global scale. OER were most often defined as “digitised materials offered freely and openly for educators, students

and self-learners to use and reuse for teaching, learning and research” (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD] 2007, p. 30). Looking at this definition, I first thought the word ‘resources’ in the term referred to learning content, such as full courses, courseware, modules, learning objects, and journal papers. I was correct, but I did not know that ‘resources’ also encompassed tools/instruments and implementation resources. Tools or instruments comprised of creation, distribution, usage and improvement of learning contents, learning management systems, development instruments and online learning communities. Meanwhile, implementation resources included intellectual property licenses to promote open publishing of materials, design principles of best practice and localise content (OECD 2007).

OER could enhance higher education in two ways. Firstly, access to educational materials, which were previously reserved for a limited number of enrolled students, could be increased. Secondly, instruction through shared materials and feedback among educators and learners could be improved (Bissell 2009; Huijser, Bedford, and Bull 2008). I believed these were the reasons the number of OER related projects, from numerous small-scale activities to large institution-based/supported initiatives increased.

OER, I believed, were made available to encourage and enable free, open content sharing. Nonetheless, the idea of openness was not entirely embodied in implementation. As OER were built heavily on the idea of reusing and repurposing materials created by different people/groups from different places, learning resources needed to be searchable across repositories and possible to download, integrate and adapt across platforms. However, many of the resources produced by one educational institution could not be exported easily due to inconsistent interoperability

standards in virtual learning environment (Yuan, Macneill, and Kraan 2008). Apart from this, earlier OER were often built within the IP environment of the institution's digital library/repository, allowing access to copyright material only to authenticated members of the community. These marked the idea of openness of OER, and the limitation was particularly frustrating for many aspiring learners and educators attempting to use them directly (Liyaganawardena 2012; Weller 2007).

Trying to overcome the weaknesses above, in 2002, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) established an MIT OpenCourseWare (MIT OCW), which was later considered as the best-known example of OpenCourseWare (OCW) sharing and the most copied institutional OER model (Yuan *et al.* 2008). MIT OCW provided a snapshot of how a particular course was taught in MIT classroom teaching at a specific time. It offered lecture notes, problem sets, syllabi, reading lists, tools and simulations as well as video and audio lectures. Approximately 1,800 courses were made available to educators and learners worldwide at no cost, so that they could draw on the materials for their own teaching and learning, use them as a curriculum and course planning tool, or as inspiration for their own open content initiatives. Following the launch of MIT OCW, more than 3000 OCWs were available from over 300 universities worldwide (OECD 2007). Most of the courses, however, were mainly produced to serve the initial OER purpose – to use and reuse digitalised materials for teaching, learning and research – and interaction among participants was not expected.

Intending to complement the MIT OCW and some other earlier OCW, the UK Open University launched the OpenLearn initiative in 2006. OpenLearn provided not only a collection of free

course materials but also a set of tools to enable authors to publish and support collaborative learning communities. It had been organised in two ways: the LearningSpace, which offered 5400 learning hours of materials for learning, and a LabSpace, where content could be downloaded, re-mixed, adapted and reused (Yuan *et al.* 2008). The two key aims of the OpenLearn initiative were to make a selection of their materials freely available worldwide and to build communities of learners and educators around the content using a range of tools and strategies. Even though efforts were put forward to create an opportunity for communication among communities, the level of interaction was still inadequate.

In 2007, David Wiley, a professor at Utah State University held a course, *Introduction to Open Education* (OpenEd). Like the MIT OCW and OpenLearn initiatives, the OpenEd course was also available to anyone worldwide, free of charge. The course could be attended in three different ways: credit; non-credit; and informally (Fini 2009). Learners who needed credit had to sign up for an independent study at their university and find a supervisor to whom the course instructor should send a grade at the end of the term. However, learners who preferred to attend the course without credit could still participate in the course and would not need any grading from the course instructor. Even so, if learners completed the course, they could get a certificate at the end of the experience saying that the course had been “successfully completed”. The course could also be attended informally, allowing learners to participate the activities occasionally. Even though learners were given freedom to choose their pattern of attendance, it was compulsory for them to have a blog so that they could complete the weekly assignment by publishing posts on the various topics of the course. I believed it was the use of blogs that developed interaction among learners because they shared their own ideas and experiences about

the learning process. The instructor's role of taking part in the discussion of posts also encouraged learners to do more cross-reading and cross-blogging, creating more opportunities for interaction. This was probably the reason why OpenEd was considered a 'special' type of OER; it encouraged interaction that was typically absent in most OER initiatives (Fini 2009). This extended the definition of the OER as a new learning culture, in which new teacher-student relationships were part of the culture.

Due to the growing interest in community-based approaches to produce content and promote sharing and use of resources, the role of instructors significantly changed. Instructors no longer worked 'behind the scene' because learners expected their direct participation in the blog discussions. This was why, I think, the 'special' OER initiative created a more innovative interaction and collaboration between instructors and learners. However, it was unreasonable to expect an instructor to evaluate hundreds or thousands of blog posts weekly. Hence, a live, synchronous open online course (OOC) could be a possible alternative to overcome the weakness of the 'special' OER. It would not only include the direct participation of instructors but also interaction among participants themselves (Fini 2009). For me, the emergence of learning networks among participants in a many-to-many relationship, rather than the one-to-many model of interactions between an instructor and the learners, highlighted the real potential of an OOC.

In 2008, George Siemens and Stephen Downes from the University of Manitoba, Canada, created an OOC, *Connectivism and Connective Knowledge* (CCK08). This course was based on Connectivism theory, in which connecting and building relevant networks were essential for a

successful learning/training (Cormier 2008). This paralleled the model of many-to-many relationships. The CCK08 instructors allowed learners to form groups they might be interested in and provide a communication stream among themselves. Learners also had the freedom to add on and change the learning content in the discussion forums provided in the course. These enhanced not only the concept of many-to-many relationship, but also the “co-creation of knowledge” among learners (Cormier 2008). This course, which was initially created for a group of 25 enrolled, fee-paying students to study for credit, was opened up worldwide and ended up attracting about 2,200 registered learners (Rodriguez 2012). Not only was there a massive number of participants, but the extent of “co-creation of knowledge” was also limitless. This inspired Cormier (2008), an educational activist, researcher, and an online community advocate to use the term ‘massive’ OOC or MOOC for the first time to describe the CCK08 in his educational blog.

The concept of open access to learning was taken in a different direction with the introduction of MOOCs (Fini 2009). From what I understood, the processes of teaching and learning in MOOCs required conceptual changes from the perspective of teachers and students alike. It was more participatory and distributed. It also encouraged lifelong networked learning. The success of CCK08 tempted instructors to come up with other several courses alike: *Connectivism and Connective Knowledge* in 2009 (CCK09), *Personal Learning Environments Networks and Knowledge* in 2010 (PLENK2010), *Connectivism and Connective Knowledge* in 2011 (CCK11), and *Learning Analytics and Knowledge* in 2011 (LAK11). These courses, which were later categorised as connectivist MOOCs (cMOOCs), had given rise to a more specific focus on the human networking factor within open courses. I will return to this later.



In 2011, Sebastian Thrun and his colleague at Stanford, Peter Norvig, opened up access to the course they were teaching, *Introduction to Artificial Intelligence*. This course, also known as the ‘AI-Stanford like courses’, attracted 160,000 learners from more than 190 countries within weeks (Beckett 2012; Hill 2013; Martin 2012; Rodriguez 2012). This course attracted a great amount of media attention and within a year, three US-based companies, Coursera, edX and Udacity, had started to offer MOOC-hosting services to selected partner universities. The New York Times went so far as to declare 2012 as “The Year of the MOOC,” (Pappano, 2012). Since then, a growing number of educational institutions had been experimenting with MOOCs, including those in the United Kingdom (FutureLearn), Australia (Open2Study), EU-based countries (OpenUpEd), and Asian countries (OpenLearning). For this reason, MOOCs were also available in various languages, although the majority were still in English.

In 2013, more MOOCs were made available and more than 6.5 million people registered for a MOOC (Gallagher and Garrett 2013). Enrolments accelerated in 2014 with 17 million people registered, and 35 million in 2015 (Shah 2015). In 2016, 58 million learners signed up for at least one MOOC and 23 million of them were those who registered for the first time (Shah 2016). In 2017, Class Central recorded the cumulative number of MOOCs as reaching nearly 8,500. These numbers are still growing as many institutions begin to develop more open courses within and beyond their institutions. However, as with many other initiatives, I found that MOOCs also had their own critiques. These critiques will be elaborated in the following section.

## **The Key Issues within MOOCs**

While investigating MOOCs key features and their development, I discovered MOOCs were criticised for various reasons. Among many of them, I found the distinction of MOOCs, accessibility, quality of assessment, and completion rates were thought-provoking and worthy of discussion.

### MOOC distinctions

From my experience as a MOOC participant, I could say that each MOOC had a different structure and was organised differently, from one to another. This was why, in my opinion, scholars had different views about MOOCs and categorised them into groups. There were two groups that were often discussed in the literature: connectivist MOOCs (cMOOCs) and extended MOOCs (xMOOCs).

Generally, cMOOCs were based on open-learning principles, in which learners interacted within an open network and shared their contributions, allowing collaborative knowledge building. From the literature, I could see that cMOOCs were connected to “principles of connectivism, openness and participatory teaching” (Jacoby 2014, p. 76) and emphasised “human agency, user participation, and creativity through a dynamic network of connections afforded by online technology” (Ebben and Murphy 2014, p. 333). CMOOCs were seen as having initiated the concept of massive education, and were developed as a platform for learners to interact and form knowledge through their collaborative contributions. It was suggested that learners with a preference for cMOOCs were often those who “self-organised their participation according to

learning goals, prior knowledge and skills, and common interests” (McAuley, Stewart, Siemens and Cormier 2010, p. 4).

On the other hand, so-called xMOOCs adopted a more traditional pedagogy and relied on a tutor-centered approach. XMOOCs followed a more instructional model, which was more cognitivist-behaviourist in approach (Hew and Cheung 2014), and relied on the transmission of content (Bates 2014; Stacey 2014). As such, it seemed to me that XMOOCs were an extension of widely followed pedagogical practice and were commonly dominated by video presentations, reading texts and automated assessment (Bayne and Ross 2014). According to the literature, learners with a preference for xMOOCs were often those who were comfortable with and valued the traditional pedagogical mode of education.

For the moment, this distinction made sense for me. However, I could see that scholars had been arguing about the value of the distinction between cMOOCs and xMOOCs. Based on a number of reviews (e.g. Hew and Cheung 2014; Jacoby 2014; Kennedy 2014; Liyanagunawardena *et al.* 2013), one distinction between cMOOCs and xMOOCs often discussed was the degree of openness. CMOOCs were created without a centralised core content because learners were expected to generate the content for their own learning (Baggaley 2013; Hew and Cheung 2014), through collaborative networking. Thus, cMOOCs were largely open in terms of the range of opportunities (Siemens 2013). In short, cMOOCs focused on the principles of autonomy, diversity, openness and interactivity (Rodriguez 2012; Jacoby 2014; Kennedy 2014). In contrast, openness was less present or defined differently in xMOOCs. They were centralised networks on one designated main platform (Jacoby 2014; Kennedy 2014), and the course content was usually

defined by designers (Baggaley 2013; Hew and Cheung 2014). Most of the time, interactions took place only in discussion forums (Sokolik 2014).

It seemed clear that cMOOCs could be distinguished from xMOOCs in terms of openness. In fact, I could tell now the courses I had attended in the FutureLearn were xMOOCs. However, each had a different structure and organisation. Thus, I thought the breakdown criteria into two categories seemed straightforward, yet too broad to differentiate one xMOOC from another. I believed a study investigating whether the organisational features of MOOCs could be broken down using a more fine-grained approach would be helpful.

### Accessibility

The second issue scholars raised was related to accessibility. MOOCs, according to Friedman (2013), were intended to give the world's neediest students access to quality higher education. MOOCs had also been referred to as a tool that could close the space between the most privileged and the most underprivileged learners (Kay, Peter, Elliot and Kummerfeld 2013). However, a few large-scale studies showed that MOOCs were not reaching their intended population, if indeed, the needy students were really their intended population. For example, Christensen, Steinmetz, Alcorn, Bennett, Woods and Emanuel (2013) carried out a survey that attracted over 34,000 responses from students of 32 MOOCs offered by the University of Pennsylvania on the Coursera platform. They found that the majority of the participants (65.3%) were from OECD countries and 80 per cent of them were wealthy and educated people. Nearly four out of five (79.4%) participants had a Bachelor's degree or higher. In a different study of the first 17 courses on the edX platform, Ho, Reich, Nesterko, Seaton, Mullaney, Waldo and Chuang

(2014) reported only 2.7 per cent of the participants were from least developed countries, and the median of education level across all courses was a Bachelor's degree. A further study carried out on the first 21 courses of the FutureLearn platform showed that participants had a university degree or higher educational qualifications (78%) (Liyanagunawardena, Lundqvist and Williams 2015).

I was not surprised by the results reported above. Reflecting on it, I believed in Malaysia, MOOCs were only widely known among university learners because universities were the only institutions promoting MOOCs. Since 2015, local universities had been trying to develop MOOCs and create better access to higher education. Disadvantaged learners who could not afford to go to university were left unaware of how MOOCs could help them develop their skill set, especially for future employment purposes. Besides, access was not always simple for disadvantaged learners because the majority were poor and lived in rural areas. I used to teach in a rural school; therefore I could understand first-hand how difficult it was for learners who could not afford high-quality broadband to gain access to online learning.

Liyanagunawardena *et al.* (2013) threw more light on this. They argued that very few participants from developing countries accessed MOOCs because computer literacy was still in its infancy. For example, Sri Lanka, despite being one of the best performers in basic education, with an adult literacy rate of 91% in 2010, only achieved 20% in 'computer literacy' (Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka, 2009 cited in Liyanagunawardena *et al.* 2013). They also claimed that there was insufficient support available for novice learners. As a result, learners became demotivated and finally disengaged from the online activities. Furthermore, many people

in developing countries had local languages, and only a small proportion of them were competent in an international language; especially the English language. Since the majority of the MOOCs were set up in English, people from developing countries who were not competent in a second language were restricted from taking up an online course. Furthermore, MOOCs were offered to a global audience of culturally diverse people; thus dynamic discussions inclusive for all participants became a challenge to many learners from developing countries. For example, humour in one context could be interpreted differently in another. Therefore, one could take offence at a forum post, even though that was not intended. This led the participants to cease posting on forums, which sometimes demotivated them from participating in the entire course.

I believed, at least from my previous experience teaching in rural areas and learning online courses, that Malaysia was also facing similar challenges as highlighted by Liyanagunawardena *et al.* (2013): computer literacy; insufficient support from experts; and differences in language and culture. However, there was no large-scale study carried out in Malaysia investigating Malaysian learners' participation in MOOCs. This intrigued me, and I wanted to find out more.

### Quality of assessment

The third issue raised by many scholars was related to assessments in MOOCs. Assessment models for MOOCs varied, but mostly relied on simple, auto-graded Multiple-Choice quizzes, and peer-reviewed assignments because the number of participants was too large for an instructor to grade manually. These two forms of assessments had their weaknesses. For example, the auto-graded quizzes might be quite ineffective for higher-order learning objectives (Robinson 2015). On the other hand, peer grading could not easily be moderated by a MOOC

instructor because there might be thousands of assignments and reviewers working at the same time. However, peer grading could provide learners with open questions and overcome the limitation that came from the auto-graded quizzes (Suen 2014).

In many MOOC articles that I reviewed, peer grading always had more critics than other forms of assessment. For example, some scholars claimed that peer grading was inadequate because learners, who had not yet proven mastery or even understanding of the materials, had to become the assessor. They might not be able to balance their critiques of content and style. Since rubrics might be a good solution to this, instructors needed to give special attention to the evaluation criteria because MOOC learners had a diverse range of backgrounds with different expertise. I had to agree with this because some learners might have had insufficient knowledge or experience to assess others' work. Instructors also had to consider the language they used to describe rubric elements because more than 50 per cent of the learners might not use English as their primary language (Robinson, 2015).

Peer grading, in my opinion, could stimulate cooperation or even collaboration. However, in practice, it was often restricted. For example, a study carried out by Toven-Lindsey, Rhoads and Lozano (2015) showed that learners had to complete the activities independently and they often received minimal feedback in the end. Even the discussion board assignments, in which learners were required to post a response to the instructor's prompt, did not necessarily encourage group collaboration and learning. Learners usually responded to the question but did not engage in dialogue. I could not remember whether peer assessments were provided in the courses that I had participated in (FutureLearn courses), but I was pretty sure that I, too, did not get involved in any

collaborative activities throughout my participation. Even so, I believed discussion boards might be effective for collaborative learning if learners themselves took the initiative. This led me to ask whether MOOCs could give learners space and opportunities to connect learning to their own lives in meaningful and critical ways.

Another prominent issue often discussed by scholars regarding assessment was quality assurance. The use of standardised auto-generated grading systems might not be suitable in more subjective and discursive subjects such as arts and social sciences, which required a degree of individual judgement (Pappano, 2012). Hence, open, peer grading assignment could be a better alternative. However, academic misconduct and dishonesty might become common among MOOC participants (Daniel 2012; Pappano 2012), especially when it could be very easy for them to claim another's work as their own. Thus, more intelligent software could be developed, for example in the areas of peer marking reliability and cheating detection – which dealt with verifying the identity of a learner and ownership of work (Robinson 2015). I did not know, however, whether MOOC providers had started developing this kind of software. All I knew was various institutions and platform providers had experimented with awarding credentials such as certificates of completion, 'Signature Track' certificates, 'Verified Certificates of Achievement', 'Mozilla Open Badges', and 'American Council on Education (ACE) credit recommendations' (Das, Anamika and Soumit 2015). However, with the lack of a reliable marking system, I believed this reward system might be problematic.



## Completion rates

Completion rates was another controversial topic that I found often discussed by scholars (e.g. (Hew and Cheung 2014; Ho *et al.* 2014; Kolowich 2013; Macleod, Sinclair, Haywood, and Woodgate 2015; Terras and Ramsay 2015).

Studies had indicated that learners enrolled in MOOCs for four main reasons: to extend or develop their skills and knowledge of certain areas; curiosity about MOOCs; personal challenge; and the acquisition of qualifications (Hew and Cheung, 2014; Kolowich, 2013; Macleod, *et al.* 2016; Terras and Ramsay, 2015). Yet, in a range of studies, I found that only about half of those who enrolled turned up in the first week and many left after a short time. This happened because some people were only interested in accessing information resources (Kolowich, 2013), some were simply curious about MOOCs and did not intend to engage (Hew and Cheung 2014) and some were affected by the pressure of time or had poor time management skills (Jordan 2014; Macleod *et al.* 2016). More detailed analysis carried out by Kolowich (2013) revealed a significant decrease in participation occurred immediately after registration. Many of the participants, according to Kolowich (2013), were perhaps following a herd instinct in enrolling the course (probably influenced by the media hype regarding MOOCs) and then losing interest thereafter. However, Toven-Lindsey *et al.* (2015) offered a different perspective, suggesting that completion rates had been extremely low in MOOCs due to limitations in the design and execution of the courses.

Based on the studies above, I was convinced that despite MOOCs popularity and extraordinary enrolments rates, their high dropout and low completion rates had become unpleasantly

challenging. In a study carried out by Breslow, Pritchard, DeBoer, Stump, Ho and Seaton (2013), only 5 per cent of 841 600 people who registered for edX courses earned a certificate of completion. 35 per cent never viewed any of the course materials. In a different study, only about 350 of the 12,700 Coursera participants who registered for the course took the final exam, with a dropout rate of 97 per cent. The course lost nearly 5,000 of its learners before it began because they did not watch even the first lecture (Belanger and Thornton 2013). There were many other statistics pertaining to completion and dropout rates, and in most courses, completion rates were low, especially in the humanities because these courses might require peer grading of essays rather than computer auto-grading (Jordan 2014). In fact, the average completion rates for MOOCs were reported as less than ten per cent or between ten and 20 per cent of enrolled learners.

In trying to understand the issues behind low completion rates, some scholars drew attention to differentiation among learners. For example, Kizilcec, Piech, and Schneider (2013) categorised learners based on their patterns of engagement: completing; auditing; disengaging; and sampling. Completing learners mirrored traditional classroom-based learners and complete the majority of their assessments; auditing learners preferred watching video lectures and completed their assessments infrequently; disengaged learners started off with good intentions and then decreased their engagement as the course progressed; and sampling learners briefly explored the material and preferred to watch videos at the beginning of the course for only a couple of assessments.

Using the same approach (patterns of engagement), Milligan, Littlejohn, and Margaryan (2013) divided learners into three categories of participation: active; lurking; and passive. In their study, active participants maintained blogs and Twitter accounts and regularly discussed the course. All the active participants formed networks, connecting with other learners through Twitter and blogs. Active participants were also highly motivated to persist with the course and were able to overcome challenges that might have proven a barrier for others. “Lurkers” seemed to be the largest category identified in their study, and the term referred to learners who did follow the course but did not actively engage with other learners. They preferred to learn independently. The final group identified was the passive participant group. This category represented learners whose needs were clearly not being met. They were frustrated or dissatisfied with the course. The learners ended up not seeing the value of learning through a network and seemed to be looking for a more instructional course.

In a blog discussion, Hill (2013) put MOOC learners into five categories: no-shows (those who registered but never logged-in); observers (those who logged-in and might read content or browse discussions, but did not take any form of assessment beyond pop-up quizzes embedded in videos); drop-ins (learners who took part in some activities such as watching videos, browsing or participating in discussion forum, but did not attempt to complete the entire course. Some of them used MOOCs informally to find content that helped them meet course goals elsewhere); passive participants (those who viewed a course as content to consume but did not engage with the assignments); and active participants (those who fully intended to participate in the MOOC and take part in discussion forums, the assignments and all quizzes and assessments). Even though there were several categories of learners in MOOCs, Hill (2013) claimed that all groups

witnessed a decline in engagement as the weeks progressed. I had to agree with this because there was not a single study I reviewed that showed any increment in the level of participation as the course progressed.

To fully understand why learners engaged in the course in the way they had, I believed it would be helpful to understand the demographics of the people using MOOCs, the reasons for their participation, and the ways their motivation played out in social culture settings. I also believed it was important that participants fully recognised what they were signing up to, but this had not been given much attention in the studies I reviewed.

### **What had I Learned about MOOCs?**

It was very difficult to remember as I wrote this, how novel and exciting MOOCs had been for me. In Chapter One, I described my interest in MOOCs and how I had been really engaged in understanding MOOCs, for I thought they offered a revolutionary idea of pedagogy, in that I had not seen anything like this before. I could see how they might change the whole shape of education by offering flexibility for people to do what they wanted to do, anywhere, anytime, as long as they had the interest and access. This was perhaps the reason why MOOCs could attract millions of people within just a couple of years after 2012 (the year of the MOOC). However, after reading the literature further, I could see that in terms of structure and organisation, there was a strong overlap with more learner centred approaches to teaching that I had seen. Thus, it was the technology that was revolutionary rather than the overall design of MOOCs. I also discovered that MOOCs were not as straightforward as I imagined. Earlier in this chapter, I discussed the key features of MOOCs and found the idea of defining a MOOC was more

complicated than it first appeared. There was something problematic, at least about being ‘massive’ and ‘open’. These two terms were very subjective. No one seemed to know how massive was massive and how open was open. In most instances, ‘massive’ referred to thousands of participants, and ‘open’ referred to free access to the course without prerequisites for registration. However, as someone new in the field of MOOC, these descriptions had misled me. In practice, not all courses had a massive number of participants, and not all of them were free.

Perhaps ‘massive’ was a matter of perspective rather than an actual number. For example, a course seemed massive when it attracted larger numbers than the initial target numbers. Even a small course with thrice as many participants than had been expected appeared massive, particularly for the course organisers. In contrast, a course with 80 participants might not be massive if the course was designed for 800 people. In terms of the expansion of activities, massive was again, a state of mind rather than numbers. The concern was not how small/big the numbers were, but how wide the opportunities provided for learners to apply the knowledge they had gained in their personal/working lives.

Speaking of MOOC activities, I believed they could also be associated with the term ‘open’. Based on my understanding of reading the literature, ‘open’ could refer to open pedagogy and/or the opportunities learners had to share resources, ideas and experiences. Thus, I believed the more opportunities an activity could offer for learners to interact freely, the more open a MOOC could be. As I mentioned earlier, cMOOCs were seen as more open than xMOOCs because cMOOCs offered learners opportunities to generate the content for their own learning through collaborative networking (Baggaley 2013; Hew and Cheung 2014; Siemens 2013). XMOOCs

were less open because they were offered on one designated platform (Jacoby 2014; Kennedy 2014), and the course content was usually defined by designers (Baggaley 2013; Hew and Cheung 2014). I found this confusing because in the Futurelearn courses that I attended (I considered these as xMOOCs), I had the opportunities to ask questions in the forum and discuss new topics that were not initiated by the instructors. I could also collaborate on new ideas with other participants, if I wanted to. I did not think being carried out on a single platform with an instructor's designated content prevented me from sharing new content and ideas with other participants. For this reason, I thought the idea of breakdown between xMOOCs and cMOOCs was more flexible than the literature suggested. Therefore, the idea of openness needed to be investigated further.

While the term 'open' that I discussed above seemed to reflect the feature of a MOOC quite well, I had to confess that I first thought about 'open' as referring to free access to MOOCs (Anderson 2013; Tschofen and Mackness 2012). This was not always the case, though. I found out some MOOCs did require payment for learners to get full access to the course. In addition, MOOCs were also described as 'open' because they required no prerequisite from participants; anyone, regardless of age, background, or economic status could become participants (Levy 2011; Martin 2012; Pappano 2012; Bates 2014; Chen 2015; Terras and Ramsay 2015; Conole 2015; Robinson *et al.* 2015; Sun *et al.* 2016). This was acceptable. However, on second thoughts, this was untenable. Could people participate in a MOOC without an Internet connection? Could people become active participants if they did not know how to use online technology? Could people maintain their attendance when they had no interest to learn? Would people take part in the course if they did not have specific aims they wanted to achieve? In my opinion, the answers to

these questions might show that there were preconditions people needed to meet before they could participate in a MOOC. Therefore, I believed ‘no prerequisite’ was more complicated than it first appeared.

I felt ‘open’ seemed more significant than ‘massive’. However, I believed being ‘open’ might also be the root to high dropout and low completion rates. As in other courses, attendance would depend on various internal and external factors. Based on my readings, the internal factors that affect MOOC attendance were consequences of learners’ and interests, and motivation usually decreased after a short time. Some only participated because they wanted to achieve one or two of the learning outcomes; once they had, they stopped taking part. On the other hand, the external factors revolved around media influence (Kolowich 2013) and limitations in the design and execution of the courses (Toven-Lindsey *et al.* 2015). These factors were quite common in not only MOOCs, but many other courses too. However, in the case of MOOCs, it was clear that some participants wanted to engage in different ways and they preferred to do the course independently (auditing, disengaging, passive). Looking back at the differentiation of learner types, I believed many participants stopped taking part in the course because they were not looking for a structured xMOOC approach.

Apart from the participants who were not keen on engaging in openness, I also found that some participants did not grasp the idea of a MOOC being a course. For whatever reasons, many participants did not internalise the idea of taking a course. They were digging for information (completing, sampling, lurking, no-shows, drop-ins) instead of following an entire course. This was why I thought the completion rate was very low. They did not take part in all of the

assessments. I was not sure why this happened, but the assessments, as I discussed before, might not be seen as helpful. The multiple-choice quizzes were ineffective for higher-order learning objectives (Robinson 2015), and peer grading could not easily be moderated by a MOOC instructor because of the massive numbers of assignments and reviewers involved (Das *et al.* 2015). The assessments were also lacking reliable systems of marking and cheating detection (Robinson 2015). While scholars had been so concerned about the system of the assessment, I was pulled towards different questions. Could assessments help learners understand the content better? Could assessments encourage learners to apply the knowledge they gained? Could assessments help learners to connect learning to their own lives in meaningful ways? To define whether an assessment was good in quality, I believed it was necessary to find the answers to those questions. Unfortunately, these questions were not given much attention in the literature I read.

The questions above were not the only questions I had in mind. After reading the literature, I was left with many others, which I had not thought about when I first participated in MOOCs: What was it like to participate in a course? How were MOOCs organised? Were MOOCs similar to or different from each other? How was content delivered in a MOOC? What type of assessments were there in each MOOC? Was there a different way to describe MOOCs? How could I relate what I learned in a MOOC to a context? Were MOOCs really going to change everything? These questions had made me realise there were so much more I did not know. At this stage, I believed it was necessary for me to participate in MOOCs again in order to relate the literature to more practical contexts. However, this time, I wanted to play not only the role of a participant, but also an observer. I might be able to see more clearly how MOOCs were structured and



organised, thus find out from my own experience what they could offer learners. I describe this experience in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER THREE

### UNPACKING MOOCS: MY OBSERVATION

In the previous chapter, I discussed MOOCs key features, development, distinctions, accessibility, quality of assessment, and completion rates. Even though there were many new things I learned from the literature, I realised there were more things I did not know, especially in practical contexts. Therefore, I decided to become a participant in MOOCs once again. This time around, not only did I want to take part, but also to observe. I wanted to see how MOOCs were organised and how they were similar/different from each other. I also wanted to find out which materials were used and how learning was assessed. Most importantly, I wanted to know what it was like to participate and find out whether I could learn what MOOCs could offer to address the problems that I discussed in Chapter 1.

Before I started my observation of MOOCs, I filled in an ethical form for the project (see Appendix 1). Once I gained approval for the project, I looked for codes of conduct every course provider had outlined for educational researchers. This was to ensure that I could observe and collect relevant data without having had to ask for any individual permission. It was then that I found the Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research outlined by British Education Research Association (BERA). After reading the guidelines, I finally understood how the findings of the study should be presented, so that there would be no issues raised in relation to copyright. For example, it was clearly stated that learner created content, which had been published on the platform under a Creative Commons License (Attribution-Non Commercial-NoDerivs; BYNC-

ND), must be attributed to the author. Acknowledgement should also be given to providers in research publications.

After finding out about the codes of conduct, I created a simple observation schedule. I believed the schedule could help me to be consistent in recording what I observed. Every time I participated in a course, I would complete the schedule by noting the week/date, time, and length of the participation/observation, the course name, the platform, the materials used, the types of assessment provided, and certification/badges to name a few (see Appendix 2). These elements were created in the schedule based on my experience of participating in the first two FutureLearn courses (I describe these courses in Chapter One). For example, I became aware of certification because there was an issue with certification discussed in a forum. In the same forum, I could see learning materials were a similar object of discussion. The schedule was based on what I read about observational protocol in research methodology books (e.g. Creswell 2014; Christensen, Johnson and Turner 2014). I made sure there was a column prepared for reflective notes so that I could write my personal thoughts including feelings and impressions (Creswell 2014). The schedule was a guideline but I expected there would be more elements to note as I progressed. Thus, I included a space to note any other issues I found interesting. At this stage, I had already read the literature but I had not seen a schedule used in any of the cases that matched what I wanted to do. However, in applying the schedule, I realised I was influenced tacitly by some of the debates within the literature I had read. In the literature, there were a lot of discussion around the value of videos as against texts (e.g. Chauhan and Goel 2015; Hew 2014; Johnston 2015). This gave me a hint that I should be looking at format of material when carrying out observation. Likewise, in terms of the assessment, the literature raised assessing learner participants as a key

issue and this needed to form part of my assessment schedule (e.g. Robinson 2015; Suen 2014; Toven-Lindsey et al 2015).

Once I had the observation schedule, I began to search for and select appropriate courses. Of course, I could choose any course to participate, but I decided to select those that were relevant to me; English language learning and teaching. It would not only be easier for me to follow the course, but it would also help me identify the strength and weaknesses of the course easily in terms of its content. I searched for relevant courses using the portals at <http://www.mooc.ca/providers.htm> and <https://www.class-central.com/>. I first used the terms ‘teacher training’, ‘teacher education’, ‘teacher professional development’ and ‘professional learning in education’ to narrow down the search. I carried out a three-day search in May 2016 and successfully gathered 35 providers with 126 teacher-education-related courses. The courses covered topics on teaching techniques and strategies, instructional design, technology tools, and teaching of languages (see Appendix 3). Among the courses I gathered, I was quite surprised to find that a few of them were created by Malaysian instructors from local universities. From the literature I reviewed, I knew MOOCs were becoming popular in the Asian region, but I never thought I would find courses produced by Malaysians. I was very excited to find out more.

Reflecting on my interest in English language teaching and learning, I shortlisted 28 courses aimed at teachers or learners of the English language. Even though this number was manageable, I realised some of the courses were no longer available for registration, and some were already ongoing. Some of those ongoing courses were self-paced and could be taken anytime. However, I had to bear in mind that I might end up taking an individualised course if other participants had

already completed or stopped participating. To avoid such a situation, I further reduced the sample of courses based on two criteria: course start date and open access. Of the 28 courses, I finally identified ten courses that were already and about to open for registration. I was very happy with the number. I thought ten courses were more manageable than 28 and I could now participate and observe each course without worrying about the limited time I had (less than three years). However, there was not a single course out of the ten from Malaysian providers.

For now, I would like to describe my experience participating in the ten MOOCs; what I did before, during and after participating in each course. I organised my account based on four platform providers (NovoEd, Canvas Network, Coursera and Futurelearn), and compared the ten MOOCs at the end of this chapter.

### **NovoEd**

On May 10, 2016, I signed up for eight courses at the same time (I joined two other courses a month later when the registration opened). Once I signed up, I had to complete my registration by verifying my email address. Only then did I receive a welcome email from each course provider. In the email, I was reminded of the start date and given a link to access the course. Since there was only one course available straightaway, I went to this one. It was *Integrating English Language Development and Content Area Learning: A Conversation-Based Approach* (Course 1). This course was created by a team of instructors from Stanford University and the platform used was NovoEd. The course was carried out from Feb 1 to June 16, 2016 (20 weeks). When I signed up for this course, it had already started and was going to end soon. Even though I knew I was far behind than others who had started earlier, I was determined to participate.

I had to answer a 15-minute course ‘pre-survey’ before I could start the first lesson. According to the providers, the pre-survey aimed to help them gather the experiences and backgrounds learners brought to the course. It also identified where I stood in terms of my knowledge of language teaching. The pre-survey would also aid the teaching team in the design of future courses. After I completed the pre-survey, I was asked to tick my enrolment status; either to ‘actively participate’ or ‘audit’. If I were to become an ‘active participant’, I had to choose to be in either the teacher or coach team, depending on my learning interest. If I were to be in the teacher team, I would be sharing my knowledge and experiences with other teachers who were teaching in elementary or secondary schools. In the meantime, the coach team gathered people who were not school teachers, but interested in teaching. As ‘active participant’, I would receive a Statement of Accomplishment from NovoEd, but with two conditions: I had to complete two course surveys – pre- and end-of-course; and complete and submit all four assignments. I would be eligible to receive a Statement of Accomplishment with Distinction if I could complete three peer reviews each for assignments 1, 2, 3, and 4 (12 peer evaluations in total). However, if I were to ‘audit’ the course, I would not be assigned to either team. Instead, I could follow general discussions and both teams. I could also follow the activity but not take part. I would have access to all the sessions, readings, and resources too. However, I would neither be able to submit any peer assignments nor receive a Statement of Accomplishment. Since I was 15 weeks late, I chose ‘audit’. It did not take me long to decide on the status because I could change to ‘active participant’ anytime I wanted as the course progressed.

After deciding on the enrolment status, I was led to the welcome page. I was informed that the course was for teachers and others who work with English learners and other linguistically and culturally diverse students. The main focus was to help them use a conversation-based approach to develop students' language, literacy, and thinking skills. There were four sessions altogether, aimed at assisting participants to create a culture of conversation in a classroom to teach the skills of interpretation, argumentation, and application across disciplines. Those who had no experience could collaborate with other teachers to obtain student language samples and implement lessons. To keep up with the lectures and assignments, participants could refer to the course calendar available. They could also attend the orientation session. This session aimed to give participants some information related to the course pre-survey, enrolment options, syllabus and organisation, honour code, participation agreement, and housekeeping tasks. I found this orientation session helpful because I could familiarise myself with the course structure and how to work in the NovoEd platform.

Once I had a clear idea of what to do as a participant, the learning began. It was already Week 15 when I joined the course. I had missed three out of four sessions of the course. To understand the whole idea of the content and proceed with Session 4, I started to browse Session 1 to Session 3. In Session 1, for example, I found short video clips in which course instructors addressed the role of classroom conversation in learning and teaching and assessing of key thinking skills across disciplines. They explained how important it was for teachers to attend to student conversation skills, particularly if their goal was to improve the overall quality of academic learning. Using both short and longer texts (tips, page, longer discursive articles), participants were taught about instructional scaffolding and teacher modelling to support their students' conversation skills. I

found Sessions 2 and 3 followed a similar pattern, but with different topics covered. As someone who had experience in teaching, I thought the lessons were quite straightforward. My guess was that anyone with an interest but without direct experience in the classroom could follow the content quite easily. Before each session ended, participants were given assignments which I thought of as classroom tasks. They had to observe and analyse paired student conversations, model and scaffold conversation skills. Then, they had to write reflections of their observations and submit them through a link provided in the course. The reflections would finally be assessed by peer participants. To give a clear idea of what to assess, the instructors provided a simple rubric (assessment guidelines) for participants to grade their peers' reflections. I found the rubric was very clear and helpful, especially for beginners who had no experience assessing assignments.

After ascertaining what I had missed in Sessions 1, 2 and 3, I finally had the opportunity to take part in Session 4 alongside other participants. Even though I was just 'auditing', being able to read others' current posts and assignment submissions made me feel as if I was also taking part as an 'active participant'. As in other sessions, Session 4 also provided participants with short video clips and articles to cover new topics. However, in terms of assessment, participants had to complete two tasks instead of one. The first one was a similar task to the first three sessions; participants had to observe and analyse conversations, then write a reflection. The second task, however, was different from others. Participants had to pull together what they had learned in the course and design lessons that used conversation to strengthen language learning. This final task, I believed, was a good summative task because it provided an opportunity for participants to apply what they had learned in the course to their classroom teaching.



Even though I could not submit assignments, I was happy I could view others' work and learned from this. I did not feel like I was 15 weeks behind. It took me at least three hours to read the materials and watch the videos in each of the session. However, it took me 'ages' to finish reading the samples of conversations produced by other participants in the assignment gallery. There were so many interesting submissions, and they were very different from each other. I was overwhelmed by what I gained from this course, even though I had been on the course for less than five weeks. However, I was left frustrated because I could no longer get in touch with the instructors or other learners after the course ended. I could not even access the resources once the course finished. I did not expect that at all, for in the previous FutureLearn courses, I could view everything even though the course had ended. If had I known this would happen, I would have saved a copy of everything I read. I also had not created conversations with other participants in the community forum. This left me with no network. Nevertheless, what happened had happened. I was determined to be extra cautious in the other courses I participated in, hoping that I would not miss anything like this again.

### **Canvas Network**

As I mentioned before, I registered my participation in eight courses at the same time. A week after I participated in Course 1, I returned to my inbox and traced the welcome emails I received from seven other course providers. Of the seven courses, six of them had the same start date (May 16, 2016) while the other one started a week later (see Appendix 4 to get a clear idea of how my schedule worked). In this section, I describe my participation in and observation of *Creating Engaging Environments for English Language Classrooms* course (Course 2). This

four-week course, which started on May 16, 2016, was created by a group of instructors from University of Oregon, on the Canvas Network platform. The course aimed to help English language teachers create engaging classroom environments. Hence, participants would learn key methods and strategies to help their students learn more effectively.

When I started the course, I was welcomed with a short video clip which introduced me to the topics to be covered, how to get started and complete the course. It was from this video clip that I discovered the course was a self-paced course. However, I had to complete all tasks/quizzes/assignments before the course end date so that I could gain a badge (I would explain this later). Before I could start the lesson, I had to answer a ‘welcome survey’. It was carried out to gather information about myself and why I chose to enrol in the course. As in Course 1, I presumed this survey was also to help the provider design future courses. After completing the survey, I started the course by introducing myself in a discussion board. It was optional, but I could see many of the participants had done this. I thought this could be a good opportunity to get to know each other and create a network.

After that, I familiarised myself with the structure and the platform by going through the course navigation tab. It was during this process, I found out that the participants of this course had various roles: students; teachers; discussion facilitators; teacher assistants; researchers; designers; reviewers; and observers. For those who were new to teaching, a glossary of common terms was provided and this could be downloaded for future reference. I found this idea considerate and thoughtful because it could avoid confusion and help participants to maintain their motivation during the learning process. Apart from this, I also learned that there were four

modules provided, and each module came with a 'to-do-list'. This list informed participants of the learning objectives and suggested a sequence of activities to carry out. I thought the list was very clear and every activity mentioned was linked to the activity page.

Becoming familiar with the course and knowing what to do, I started the lesson. The first thing I did was to watch a one-minute introductory video of the first module. This video gave a brief overview of the topics I would learn. Once I knew what I would be learning, I moved to the next activity, which was 'required reading'. This activity required participants to read two to three articles. I had no difficulty to maintain my focus on the reading materials because I was given a 'reading guide' beforehand (a set of questions to be answered while reading). I found this very helpful, especially in preparing for the module quiz. After the reading activity, I was encouraged to join in one of the discussion groups (a maximum of 100 participants in each group) set up by instructors. I could choose any group I liked and switch to a different one anytime. The group discussion was meant to enable participants to discuss their readings. Therefore, I participated in the discussion group only when I needed clarification on the topics I had read.

Once I was happy with what I read, discussed and learned in the current module, I took the quiz to test my knowledge. I could take it three times, and only the highest score would be recorded. I felt the questions were simple and less challenging because most of the time, the questions required me to recall for information that I had just learned from the reading activity. After completing the quiz, there were optional activities provided for participants: optional readings; photo sharing; fun survey; and a social forum. The optional readings activity was meant for those who had extra time and were interested in gaining more information. In addition, three other

optional activities were available to enable socialising. As I was looking forward to get to know people from other parts of the world, I joined each activity at least once. I found they were interesting and fun.

The three following modules fitted a similar pattern to the first module I described above. Each module covered a different but related topic on a weekly basis. I could follow the flow of the activities easily. If I did forget what I should be doing, there was a 'to-do-list' I could refer to. What I liked the most about this course was it provided badges for participants to collect. There were seven badges available altogether. I found out from the course instructor that the idea of badging was part of Canvas Network. It aimed to help motivate learners in achieving the course learning objectives. In this course, participants would only be rewarded with badges when they carried out activities as required by the instructors. For example, participants would get the 'Classroom Management' badge if they read the required readings, viewed the introductory video, participated in the module discussion, and scored at least 15 points on the quiz in Module 1. The badge they received would be a visible reminder that they had achieved a milestone in the course.

As with Course 1, I could not participate in the discussion group after the course ended. All I could do was read the comments and replies others had posted while the course was ongoing. Before the course ended, participants were invited to answer a user experience survey. I had to confess that I was one of the participants who did not manage to answer the survey; therefore I could not comment on the questions. All I could say was, I had fun participating in this course,

and the experiences shared by participants in the discussion group had been an eye-opener. They were very valuable for my continuing professional development.

## **Coursera**

In the previous two sections, I have described my experience participating in and observing two different courses presented in different platforms. In this section, I describe my participation in seven courses. All of them were on the same platform: Coursera.

Before I could participate in the courses, I had to verify my email address. I found this common among courses in any platforms. However, in Coursera, all I had to do was a one-time email verification, and I could take part in any Coursera courses. Once I verified my email address, Coursera sent me an email on how to get started in its courses. It was then that I realised how Coursera worked as a platform. It gathered all the course titles together on a single webpage and gave participants the freedom to choose the ones they were interested in. As I mentioned earlier, I chose to take part in seven courses that I found relevant to my field. Once I had chosen the courses, I received a welcome email from each. In the email, I was greeted by the instructor team, introduced to the course, and given an access link. It was then the participation began.

I was still taking part in Courses 1 and 2 when I started my participation in five Coursera courses: *Lesson Planning with the ELL in Mind* (Course 3); *Assessing Achievement with the ELL in Mind* (Course 4); *Teach English Now! Foundational Principles* (Course 5); *Teach English Now! Theories of Second Language Acquisition* (Course 6); and *Teach English Now! Lesson Design and Assessment* (Course 7). I was very excited to see what these courses had in common

and how they were different from each other. After a week, I joined the sixth course, *English for Teaching Purposes* (Course 8), which started on May 23, 2016. I only joined the seventh course, *Engaging ELLs and Their Families in the School and Community* (Course 9), about a month later because it started on June 27, 2016 (see Appendix 4 for a complete schedule). In the case of Coursera courses, I had some flexibility over when to start because they were offered in sessions. This meant I could start each course from the beginning by switching the sessions. I did not have to worry about joining late, unlike in Courses 1 and 2.

When I started Course 3, I realised it was intended to complement Courses 4 and 9. These courses had the same instructors and organisation. Participants who took part in Course 3 were encouraged to continue with Courses 4 and 9. Once they completed all three courses, they could join a Capstone Project, which provided them with the opportunity to apply the knowledge they had gained to a classroom context. Interestingly, these were not the only courses with this concept. Courses 5, 6 and 7 were also complementing, but the idea here was to go from a foundation level (Courses 5) to advanced (Course 7). Those who completed all three courses would receive a 150-hour TESOL Certificate if they could complete the final Capstone Project assigned to them. I was amazed by this. I never thought anyone could gain such a recognised qualification for taking part in online courses. I realised these six courses were organised by the same university (Arizona State University) and this explained the integrated approach. I thought it was a sound idea to provide related courses and end with a final project. It was a total light-bulb moment for me. If I could bring back this idea to Malaysia, I believed MOOC for CPD would be possible. However, I first had to see what these courses could potentially do for me. To

simplify my description of participating in each Coursera course, I divided my account into three sub-sections: Courses 3, 4 and 9; Courses 5 to 7; and Course 8.

### Courses 3, 4 and 9

From my experience, I found Courses 3, 4 and 9 were similarly structured, easy to follow and predictable. Before each module started, I would be provided with a short introductory video that explained the module objectives. This was then followed by a few other short videos (three to five minutes in length) discussing different but related topics. I was surprised to see that transcripts were provided for participants with disabilities. Not only that, I could also switch on the subtitle button while watching the videos. I thought this was very considerate and well-thought-through. Listening to the lecture while reading the subtitle had really been helpful for me because I could learn the correct pronunciation. I believed this could also be helpful to those who were weak in English and had a problem trying to grasp what the speaker was saying. Even so, I had to confess that I found the lecture quite boring because it was not interactive or visually appealing. Apart from the videos, I also learned by reading the articles provided. In Courses 3 and 4, I was given lesson plan samples with annotations from the instructors as additional learning materials.

There were 'Practice Quizzes' provided in Courses 3 and 4, which I thought of as formative assessment. All questions asked were related to what I had learned from the lecture videos. After I completed the quizzes, I would receive replies from the provider, showing the correct/incorrect responses. The auto-generated answers helped me to see what I had understood and where I had gone wrong. If I were to improve my quiz score, I could attempt the quiz for two more times.

This might be a good method of motivation. I, myself, felt motivated to repeat the quiz so that I could get my best score recorded in the system. However, I saw two major drawbacks of this multi-attempt idea; the questions asked were the same and there was no time gap between each attempt. I could simply learn the answers by heart and attempt the quiz for the second time straightaway. Most of the time, I scored 100 per cent in the second attempt. After a few times doing this, I realised I was no longer testing my understanding, but my ability to recall answers. If the provider set new questions or prolonged the time gap between each attempt, I believed multi-attempt quizzes could be useful, but as things stood, it was not.

Different from Courses 3 and 4, Course 9 only had Practice Quizzes in the first week. In other weeks, I was encouraged to discuss the topics I had learned with peers in a 'Discussion Prompt'. This was a forum space in which the course provider would create a new topic each week. Participants could also share ideas and best practices in their schools in this forum. There were also 'General Discussion' and 'Meet and Greet' forums provided. General Discussion forum was used to discuss technical issues that occurred while taking part in the course. Meet and Greet, on the other hand, provided participants with an opportunity to get to know each other before they started the course.

After completing the Practice Quizzes or participating in the Discussion Prompt, participants were provided with 'bonus' videos, readings and references that were linked to different websites. All these resources were available in all three courses and they were meant to give participants extra information and tips. I liked the bonus videos and I thought they could be useful to participants with less teaching experience. For example, in Course 9, one of the videos



showed participants a case study. It taught them about activities carried out at school which engaged students and families from a wide range of cultures and experiences. At the end of each module, I was provided with a video that summarised all topics together. This helped me to recap everything I had learned from the current module. After that, I was directed to 'Module Assessment Quiz' or 'Peer Review' activity.

The Module Assessment Quiz was a weekly quiz which every participant could attempt, but only those who were willing to upgrade the course could submit their answers and be graded by experts. To upgrade the course, though, participants had to pay the required fees. Those with upgraded course would also receive an 'Accomplishment Certificate' in the end. As I did not have any intention to gain a certificate, I did not upgrade the course. The Peer Review, on the other hand, was a peer-graded assessment. It was a platform where participants could showcase their experiences and knowledge to others. It was optional, and I could skip it anytime. However, if I did so, I could not review others' submissions and send them feedback if I wanted to. Thus, I completed the task. I was very excited to read others' feedback and how they reacted to my responses. It was interesting and an eye-opener for me to read others' responses too. I believed this activity could be a great springboard for ideas on the Capstone Project.

Finally, after participants covered all modules and watched a final review video, they were given another opportunity to test their understanding of everything they had learned. They could attempt a 'Final Assessment', which I considered as a summative assessment. However, this was a graded assessment, and only those who had upgraded the course could submit their answers. Even though I could still attempt the assessment, I was frustrated by the fact that participants had

to pay to feel they had fully completed the course. I was informed that these courses were free and open to anyone. However, now that I was part of these courses, I realised how commercialised they had become.

### Courses 5, 6 and 7

Courses 5, 6 and 7 were my favourite courses of all the ten. They were similarly structured, easy to follow and predictable. I also found additional elements in these three courses that appealed to me: engaging presentations; interactive videos; and authentication system.

Each course started with a short introductory video which reviewed the modules. The introduction was given by the instructors themselves. To obtain more information on how to get started in the course, participants could read the welcome guide provided after the video clip. I found the welcome guide clear and easy to follow. It listed the answers to frequently asked questions (FAQ). After getting to know the course objectives and how to get started, I began by watching the videos provided (three to five minutes). I found it interesting that each video followed sequentially and automatically. This meant that I could sit and follow through all the videos for two to three hours non-stopped. Of course, I could stop the videos at any time. However, for the most part, I found them interesting and went well together. For example, in Course 6, the instructors taught about different learning approaches using a time travel machine. Each stop they made, they would explain a single approach. I thought this idea was very creative. In addition, the instructors carried out role-plays instead of giving dull speeches. It was simple, straightforward, yet very interesting and different from other courses I had participated in.

For participants with disabilities, these courses prepared them with subtitles and transcripts too. The transcripts could be downloaded for their future reference. Apart from the videos, there were also reading materials provided. These tended to be short and easy to understand. The pictures or additional resources used throughout these courses were credited to their owners in ways other courses did not do.

Videos and reading texts seemed to be the most used materials in the three courses. However, some courses came with additional materials. For example, in Course 6, I was provided with a template on a pdf document to support note taking. Each time I watched a video, I would have to jot down information. I thought this was an interesting way to maintain my focus on the videos. In Course 7, I was provided with interactive videos. In the middle of the videos, I was asked to give a poll response. For example, there was a video showing three different teachers giving a lesson in a real classroom situation. I was asked to identify the teaching approaches the three teachers used. I also had to decide which teacher came up with the best lesson plan. I could not continue until I completed the poll. In addition, I was given samples of lesson plans. They were not new to me. However, I believed, they might help participants who were new to teaching.

In terms of assessment, all three courses provided Practice Quizzes with automatic feedback after a few lessons taught. As with Courses 3, 4 and 9, I could attempt the quizzes three times, and the highest score would be recorded. However, this time, the choices of answers provided were different, even though the questions remained the same. For this reason, I could not memorise the correct answer. I found the quizzes helped me to be more active and engaged in the course.

After watching all the videos and completing the Practice Quizzes, I was given bonus materials to read and watch. After that, I was provided with a four-minute video that summarised the module. This video served as an aide memoir to prepare for the graded assessments. I found this video very helpful because I did not need to go back to the videos I had watched earlier. After watching the video summary, I was given opportunities to attempt graded assessments: 'Peer Review Assessments'; and 'Module Review Quizzes'. These activities were carried out at the end of each module.

In the Module Review Quizzes, I was required to answer multiple-choice questions. The questions were all related to the content delivered in the videos. In the Peer Review Assessments, I had to complete an assignment and provide feedback to peers. I believed this activity provided me with an opportunity to discuss my understanding regarding the topics I had learned. I also thought it was a good platform for beginners who had never experienced evaluating assignments. There were a set of questions provided for me to answer while reviewing others' work. The questions served as a guide for me to evaluate the content of each submission. To complete the activity, I had to send one submission and review at least three submissions from others. Similar to Courses 3, 4 and 9, I would not be able to review others' work if I did not submit mine first.

Before I could attempt both graded assessments above, I had to validate myself either by retyping a statement of honour code (where I needed to have a keyboard) or capturing my self-image (I needed to have a camera connected to my laptop). I was informed by the providers that this system was to gain academic credibility among participants. It was also to ensure that the participants who learned the modules were the same people who submitted the assignments. In

short, I believed this was meant to reduce cheating among participants. This was why anyone who did not go through the authentication process would not be able to acquire a certificate at the end of the course. I had no intention to gain the certificate. However, I was very excited to try out the system. Thus, I tried to retype the statement of honour code and capture my image. It was a new experience for me, and I never thought such a system could be developed. Even so, I believed there were loopholes in the system. There was one time I failed to complete retyping the honour code. I did not know what happened. I tried three times but still failed. Since I could not attempt the assessment straightaway, I decided to skip it without notifying the instructors about the problem.

Apart from the Peer Review Assessments and Module Review Quizzes, I was provided with one 'Final Assessment'. This was also graded; thus, I still had to go through authentication steps before I could complete this assessment. In Courses 5 and 6, the assessments were in the form of multiple-choice quizzes. Immediately after I submitted my answers, I received my scores. In this final assessment, I no longer received the answers to each question. Instead, I was only informed of the questions I got wrong. Therefore, if I wanted to retake the quiz, I had to revise the lessons I had learned and find out why I got the questions wrong. Again, I had three chances to retake the quiz. However, this time, each attempt could only be carried out after seven hours. I thought this was a wise step set by the providers to avoid participants from recalling the answers. In Course 7, on the other hand, I had to do a 'Peer Graded' assessment as part of the final assessment. I was required to come out with a sample of lesson plan. Similar to the 'Module Peer Assessment', I had to submit my lesson plan and review at least three others'. I would not be able to review others' lesson plans unless I submitted mine first.

Once I completed the Final Assessment, a pop-up note appeared to congratulate me on the course completion. I could then choose either to unlock a certificate, which I had to purchase, or join the next Capstone project that offered a TESOL certificate. I chose not to do anything for I believed I had achieved what I wanted out of my participation. I was also asked to answer a survey regarding my learning experience. It was optional; therefore, I skipped the survey.

Overall, to reiterate, I thought these courses were the best courses because I found the quizzes were more meaningful, the polling was a variation, the presentations were more engaging, and the opportunity to discuss was valuable.

### Course 8

In this section, I describe the Coursera course created by a team of instructors from Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain. This course, *English for Teaching Purposes* (Course 8), started on May 23, 2016, and continued for four weeks. The course aim was to help university lecturers to teach in English, in line with university internationalisation policies. I kept this course on my list because I found it interesting and very relevant to my post as a university language teacher.

Similar to other Coursera courses, this course provided an introductory video at the beginning of the module. There was also a welcome note provided from the teaching team. I was introduced to the syllabus, which consisted of four units, and was advised to participate in each unit each week. Then I was informed of the grading, and if I were to receive a certificate, I could pay the required fee. However, I had to complete the course, pass all quizzes with a minimum of 70% for

each quiz and obtain at least 20% of the Productive activity. The certificate, however, would not grant credits in any academic programme within the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. Each week, I was reminded of the same 'basic information' (e.g. syllabus, grading and logistics, and FAQ) including solutions to problems I might encounter while completing each unit.

The arrangement of content and assessments of this course were different from other courses I had described. The content was mainly delivered through short videos. There were 12 to 16 short videos shown in each unit and participants were encouraged to watch all the videos before they attempted the assessment. There was no reading material included. However, there was a weekly discussion forum provided for participants. There were times when the instructors requested participants to go to this discussion forum to discuss certain issues in relation to certain topics learned. While I liked that this course created opportunities for interaction and discussion, I had to say I was frustrated with the short video presentations. As with Courses 3, 4 and 9, the instructors of this course gave a very formal lecture in the videos. I ended up feeling bored and struggling to maintain my focus each time I watched the videos. Some of the videos were more than 10 minutes long, and I really struggled. Sometimes I felt that the instructors were reading notes rather than giving a speech/talk. I would say that most of the time, it was like watching a one-way, face-to-face lecture. There was only one time that the instructors showed a real teaching simulation. However, overall, I found the course boring.

As with other courses, this course also provided formative and summative assessments. The formative assessment was the weekly quiz. Before participants completed each unit, they had to attempt the quiz, which came with auto-generated answer. Participants could attempt the quiz

three times. At the end of the final unit, participants were no longer learning any new topics. Instead, they had to attempt the 'Final Quiz' and 'Peer Graded' assessment. For the Final Quiz, participants had to verify themselves before they could attempt the quiz. It was very similar to what I had to do in Courses 5, 6 and 7. However, in this course, I did not have to capture my self-image. All I needed to do was to retype a given statement on honour code. After I completed the Final Quiz, I had to do the Peer Graded assignment. I was asked to create a lesson plan, film a part of the lesson and submit both to the link provided. I thought the instructions given were very clear. However, I could not complete this assignment because I had no students to teach at this time. Since I did not submit my recording, I could not review others'. Even so, I could see the rubric provided for participants to review each other's work. I believed this might help participants to see the outcomes expected from their video recording. Once participants completed the final assessment, they received a notification telling them that they had successfully completed the course. They could purchase an 'Accomplishment Certificate' if they wanted to. I did not complete the Peer Graded assessment; therefore I could not purchase the certificate even if I had wanted to.

If I were to conclude everything about the seven Coursera courses I had participated in, I would say that there was more flexibility than I had predicted and important differences in terms of presentations of materials, assessments and possibilities for discussions. There were two institutions involved in the seven courses, and they were very different from each other. Even courses offered by the same institution (e.g. Arizona State University) differed. I believed the structure was dependent on the developers, and how they wanted to deliver the content.



Overall, my participation in the Coursera courses had not diminished my positivity: I liked that they were self-paced; I liked that I could switch sessions; I liked that sometimes people could be imaginative in terms of content delivery; I liked that the materials varied; I liked the range of assessment provided; I liked that people were given opportunities to discuss things openly; and I liked that I can still access the resources today (2018). However, I felt that there was room for improvement. For example, the delivery of content could be more engaging. The multi-attempt idea for auto-generated assessment could be revised for more effective testing. In addition, I thought there should be more effort given to authentication than just retyping a statement of honour code or capturing of self-image.

### **FutureLearn**

I signed up for *Exploring the World of English Language Teaching* (Course 10) about three weeks later than other courses. As usual, I had to verify my email address and soon after, I received a welcome email from FutureLearn. On June 6, 2016, I received another email reminding me that the course was already open for participation. At the time, I was still participating in other courses. Therefore, I started the course about three days after receiving the reminder.

This course was designed for anyone with an interest in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), either in their own country or abroad. There was no prior knowledge required to take part. There were two main instructors responsible for this course, and they were from Cambridge English Language Assessment, an organisation that was part of the University of Cambridge. Both were assisted by six mentors from the UK, and one mentor each from Mexico, Turkey,

Spain, Brazil, Germany and France. These mentors assisted the instructors by taking part in forum discussions, providing extra contributions, sharing experiences and sometimes answering questions posted by learners. Their roles as mentors were made public so that learners could ask questions to them directly.

Before I could start the course, I had to attempt a pre-survey of six simple questions related to my experience learning online courses. It took me less than five minutes to answer. Then, I was given a link to FAQs and a guideline on how the course would progress. I was also informed that I could buy a 'Certificate of Achievement'. However, I was only eligible for this certificate if I could mark at least 90% of the steps in the course completion. I was also informed that I could purchase a personalised 'Statement of Participation', on condition I marked at least 50% of the steps in the course completion. I thought this was doable for everyone, even if they did not actively or fully participate in the course.

I started the first activity by going to an online map and filled in my name and location. I was recommended not to give full name and address for security reasons. After that activity, I started the lessons by watching short videos and reading texts including a mix of short and long articles, tips, and web pages. All the videos came with transcripts, which could be helpful for participants with disabilities. Once I completed each activity, I had to click on the 'mark-as-complete' button and my progress would be recorded in the 'progress bar'. After each activity, I was encouraged to post a comment in a discussion forum provided. For me, the discussion forum became the main medium for learning rather than the videos as I learned more from other people's experiences. Thus, I believed the more frequently participants read the posts, the more things

they might learn from others. Even so, participants had very limited interaction with the instructors. Most of the time it was the mentors who replied to questions and comments.

The activities I mentioned above were carried out every week until the course ended. In terms of course content, I particularly liked that the course introduced various teaching and learning tools to participants such as *Vocaroo*, *Padlet*, *Typeform*, *Quizlet*, and *Flashcards*. In the *Quizlet*, for instance, I could create English quizzes for my students. If I ran out of ideas, I could search for other relevant quizzes created by other teachers. I found all the tools introduced were easy to use. However, I discovered some participants had problems using some of the tools due to the Internet connection and other technical issues. For example, I learned that some participants could not record their voices in *Vocaroo*. They ended up writing their responses in the discussion forum, instead. I also found some participants did not use *Padlet*, even though the instructors requested them to try out the application. Some of them claimed they did not know how to use it (even though there was a 'Help' button available that could show them how it worked), while others just decided not to use it.

As with other courses, I was also given an auto-generated multiple-choice quiz on what I had learned. It was ungraded and I could retake the quiz unlimited times. I could also skip the quiz if I wanted to. Apart from this ungraded quiz, there was also a graded progress test provided in the middle of the course. In this test, I was graded and informed of my scores. I thought this test was helpful in recalling my understanding of what I had learned in the previous weeks.

Each week, I would watch a short video that reviewed the lessons I learned. This video, however, could only be watched at the end of the week. Therefore, even if I completed the activities early, I had to return on the final day of the week to view the video. Sometimes, this video was replaced with a live 'Question and Answer' session with the instructors and mentors. The session was conducted through *Google Hangout* or *Facebook* live streaming video. I did not take part in the live session. Even so, I could still watch the video any time after the live streaming ended. The best thing about this activity was that participants could interact directly with the instructors and mentors. They could ask questions and get the answers straightaway. The instructors would also highlight some interesting activities and suggestions shared by participants in the discussion forum. In addition, the instructors would also request participants to give suggestions on what and how they wanted to learn in the coming week. This provided participants with the freedom to give input into the course. I thought this was considerate, for participants were given an opportunity to decide what and how they would learn in the future. I realised, though, that not all suggestions could be considered because there were hundreds of learners giving suggestions simultaneously.

Before each module ended, I was provided with a snippet of the video that I would watch in the next session. It usually gave a hint of the topics to be learnt next. I thought this was a good idea to attract participants' interest and help them prepare. I also believed this could be a good way to motivate the participants to return and keep their participation active. On the final week, after watching a video summary, I had to attempt another graded quiz. This quiz was provided as a summative assessment. It helped me to recall what I had learned in the previous weeks and how far I understood the topics learned. Once I completed the final quiz, I received an email from

FutureLearn telling me that I had successfully completed the course and that if I wanted a Certificate of Achievement or Statement of Participation, I could purchase it.

In comparison to other courses, I found this course was less formal because participants had the opportunity to interact directly with the instructors and mentors in live streaming videos. It felt like having conversations over a cup of tea.

### **Course Comparison**

Early in the chapter, I mentioned that I wanted to see the organisation of the courses, the materials used and how learning was assessed in MOOCs. Looking back at my observation journal, I decided to create a Matrix table and filled in important features that I found in each course. This would allow me to make a comparison across the courses and enable me to see how they could be a possible solution to the problems I addressed in Chapter 1 regarding teachers' CPD courses.

My observation period lasted 16 weeks, with four to five hours given to participation on each course. I could say that the courses were open, self-paced and offered for free or with nominal fees. They were designed with the aim to provide subject knowledge, methods and strategies relevant to teaching English as a second language. Seven of the courses were provided by Coursera (operated by two universities) while the other three courses involved different platforms - Canvas, FutureLearn and NovoEd - and each was based at a different university (see Table 1). The length of all courses differed; from as short as four weeks to as long as 20 weeks. I believed the length of the courses was dependent on the operating universities.

Table 1: Information about the ten courses

Course	Course Aims	University	Platform	Length
Course 1	Help English teachers in developing learners' language, literacy, and thinking skills through conversations	Stanford University	NovoEd	20w
Course 2	Provide English teachers with key methods for encouraging student engagement and deeper learning.	Oregon University	Canvas	4w
Course 3	Provide K-12 teachers with new and more successful strategies to assess achievement with ELLs in their mind.	Arizona State University	Coursera	6w
Course 4	Provide K-12 teachers with new and more successful strategies to plan their lessons with ELLs in their mind.	Arizona State University	Coursera	6w
Course 5	Provide prospective and current EFL/ESL teachers with information on foundational principles and basic techniques founded on those principles.	Arizona State University	Coursera	6w
Course 6	Introduce prospective and current EFL/ESL teachers to second or foreign language theories and practices for teaching and assessing listening, speaking, and pronunciation.	Arizona State University	Coursera	6w
Course 7	Introduce prospective and current EFL/ESL teachers to designing lesson plans based on principles and knowledge of learning objectives, assessment plans, methods, materials, and learning activities.	Arizona State University	Coursera	6w
Course 8	Help university lecturers to teach in	Universitat	Coursera	4w

	English, in line with university internationalisation policies.	Autonoma de Barcelona		
Course 9	Provide K-12 teachers with new and more successful ways to engage ELLs and their families in their course content.	Arizona State University	Coursera	6w
Course 10	Help anyone with an interest in TEFL, either in their own country or abroad.	Cambridge University	FutureLearn	6w

To simplify the features that I had observed, I divided them into three themes: pedagogy, materials and assessment. In terms of pedagogy, I found all courses worked to a fairly similar approach. Each course was introduced, and expectations were explained by the instructors through short videos. The pattern of organisation was of providing content, assessing understanding and in some cases applying understanding to real-life contexts. Reflecting on the content, I found only one course (Courses 8) focused primarily on language, such as ‘Grammar’ and ‘Conversational English’ (see Table 2). Other courses emphasised pedagogy, where teaching techniques and strategies in English language classrooms were the key content. Knowledge transfer appeared a common concern in courses which emphasised pedagogy. This was simply because participants had to try out techniques and strategies in real classroom contexts in order to complete some assessments.

Table 2: The pedagogical assumptions in the ten courses

Course	Content Emphasis	Classroom Application
Course 1	Pedagogy	√
Course 2	Pedagogy	√

Course 3	Pedagogy	√
Course 4	Pedagogy	√
Course 5	Pedagogy	√
Course 6	Pedagogy	√
Course 7	Pedagogy	√
Course 8	Language	-
Course 9	Pedagogy	√
Course 10	Pedagogy	√

In terms of materials, I found all courses provided participants with reading materials (see Table 3). Some courses used videos and lesson plan templates as additional materials, depending on their learning objectives and outcomes. For content delivery, nine courses used videos as the main medium. Course 2 did not have any lecture videos and most of the time, participants had to work from texts. I thought this course was boring because there was no variation in delivery. However, this was the only course which provided badges to participants. There were seven badges altogether, and every time participants completed or attempted tasks, they would be awarded a badge. In terms of social contact, I thought Courses 2 and 10 were more interesting than others because they provided opportunities for participants to discuss and share knowledge among themselves through discussion forums. Additionally, Course 10 also integrated the use of *Google Hangout* and *Facebook* to encourage active participation among participants and extend communication outside the formal learning space.



Table 3: The structure and organisation of materials in the ten courses

Courses	Range of Learning Materials	Instructional Delivery	Discussion Space	Social Media	Badging
Course 1	Videos and Articles	Video Lecture	-	-	-
Course 2	Articles	-	√	-	√
Course 3	Videos, Articles, Lesson Plan Templates	Video Lecture	-	-	-
Course 4	Videos, Articles, Lesson Plan Templates	Video Lecture	-	-	-
Course 5	Videos and Articles	Video Lecture	-	-	-
Course 6	Videos and Articles	Video Lecture	-	-	-
Course 7	Videos, Articles, Lesson Plan Templates	Video Lecture	-	-	-
Course 8	Videos and Articles	Video Lecture	-	-	-
Course 9	Videos and Articles	Video Lecture	-	-	-
Course 10	Videos and Articles	Video Lecture, Notes	√	Google Hangout & Facebook	-

Even though the structure of each course differed, I could see that they were very similar in one respect; all courses provided assessments for participants to test their understanding of what they

had learnt (see Table 4). Each course provided participants with formative and summative assessments. While assessment in other courses was organised in a predictable pattern, I found Course 10 differed because the timing of assessment did not seem to follow a clear pattern. On many courses, participants could attempt the assessments up to three times, but Course 10 differed again as it gave participants as many opportunities as they required. Course 1, on the other hand, provided only written teaching assignments; therefore no further attempts were available. This assignment required peer grading; thus, auto-generated answers were not needed. Peer grading was available in other courses too, except Courses 2, 3 and 10. Of all courses, only four (Courses 5 to 8) required participants to verify themselves before they attempted these quizzes. This self-verification was carried out through a declaration of honour code and image identification.

Table 4: Aspects of assessments in the ten courses

Courses	Frequency of Assessment	Times of Learner Attempts	Auto-Generated Answers	Peer Grading	Self-Verification
Course 1	Weekly, after lessons learned	-	-	√	-
Course 2	Weekly, before each module ended	3	√	-	-
Course 3	After a few lessons learned and before each module ended	3	√	-	-
Course 4	After a few lessons learned and before each module ended	3	√	√ (Optional)	-

Course 5	After a few lessons learned and before each module ended	3	√	√	√
Course 6	After a few lessons learned and before each module ended	3	√	√	√
Course 7	Weekly, before each module ended	3	√	√	√
Course 8	Only on the first week and final week	3	√	√ (Optional)	√
Course 9	After a few lessons learned and before each module ended	3	√	√	-
Course 10	No clearly observed structure	Many	√	-	-

Overall, I thought participating in the ten MOOCs was exciting. I learned many new things about teaching and learning, including the similarities and differences within MOOCs. I stayed enthusiastic about MOOCs. This was mainly because I saw that the courses were well-organised, materials provided were straightforward and clear, learning was assessed, interaction and social networking were encouraged, certification was obtainable, and most importantly, knowledge transfer was promoted. Even the MOOC that I least liked, offered opportunities to transfer knowledge to the classroom (albeit I was not teaching at the time). Additionally, I saw some examples of the support provided for people with disabilities, making MOOCs accessible to any group of people.

## **What had I Learned from MOOC Observations?**

In my introduction (Chapter 1), I explained that I was interested in whether MOOCs could address gaps in career development among language teachers in my country. Looking back at what I had experienced over the past 16 weeks, I believed MOOCs could indeed be a solution to continue career development without having to go to face-to-face CPD events. One of the reasons why I thought this was because the courses were designed with the aim of providing subject knowledge, methods and strategies relevant to teaching English as a second language. This meant that participants might still be able to experience professional learning through MOOCs. The courses were also open, self-paced and offered for free or with nominal fees. This would give participants access to the learning materials anytime and anywhere, without having had to go to a face-to-face course. Having said this, however, I realised there were issues in MOOCs needed to be addressed: presentation; interaction; assessment; authentication; and quality.

In terms of presentation, I found some materials provided were very instructional and not interactive. I struggled trying to complete certain courses, and the only reason I kept going was because I was doing this PhD project. I believed materials could be presented in more interesting and imaginative ways. Having said this, however, I should emphasise that presentation alone would not be enough. A presentation had to be of appropriate content. Thus, a good presentation, for me, should not only be interesting, but also built on ideas that were generated from classroom experience that would really help the participants. Courses 5, 6 and 7 had clear examples of interactive and thought-provoking presentations.

In terms of interaction, I found some courses managed to offer discussion forums. The words of encouragement that I received while participating in discussions allowed me to be more open about a lot of things including the differences in culture and experiences. I thought I learned more from other people than the course itself. This linked closely to Ebben and Murphy's idea about "human agency, user participation, and creativity through a dynamic network of connections afforded by online technology" (2014, p. 333). However, the fact that there could be thousands of postings at the same time, meant that participants might not be able to follow-up discussions or have a critical dialogue among themselves. I felt grouping participants into smaller sets could give a greater sense of presence; thus, levels of trust among participants increased, creating more opportunities for critical dialogue. Course 2 was a good example of this. Not only did participants discuss in their own smaller groups, but they could also read others' group posts.

In my experience, assessments were the most crucial element in each course. Whether they were formative or summative, I could test my understanding by attempting tasks. Even though this might only reflect one part of me as a surface learner, they gave me reassurance, confidence and motivation to continue. However, I could see there were things that needed to be improved, especially the idea of auto-generated and multi-attempt quizzes. Not that I disliked them, but I started to understand why Robinson (2015) claimed that auto-graded quizzes were not really effective for higher-order learning objectives. I thought they would be more stimulating and challenging if replaced by more open-question assignments. I believed open assignments would give participants the opportunities to be more critical in their thinking and most importantly, able to apply the knowledge they had learned in real contexts. NovoEd and Coursera courses had

assignments that required participants to report on practice. These assignments needed peer grading, and I thought the rubrics provided for the grading were helpful, especially for participants who were new to teaching and evaluation. I believed this was good. Nonetheless, I thought they needed to be supplemented by specimen assignments.

The authentication system was made available in Courses 5, 6, 7 and 8. I believed the system was not properly developed, for there were times I had to skip the process due to technical errors. Even though the system was made available to gain academic credibility, I did not think it served the purpose well. This was because I could still skip it and cheat if I wanted to. I could, for example, declare that I had followed the course honour code but, at the same time, copy other work and claim it was my own. No one would detect that I had plagiarised because there was no plagiarism detection system used in any of the courses I participated in. I guessed this was why Daniel (2012) and Pappano (2012) claimed that academic misconduct and dishonesty might become common among MOOC participants given it was very easy for the participants to claim another's work as their own. I believed if course developers could build such a system in their courses, people would not be able to cheat, and academic credibility could be achieved.

Of all the issues I mentioned above, I believed it was the overall quality of a course that should be given more focus. Judging the quality of a course was not as simple as looking at how long the clips were, how interactive the materials were, or how many questions there were in each assessment. Instead, one should be looking at the relevance of the materials and how much participants could learn and gain from the course. This raised questions about learning and professional learning. Learning, for me, was about the process of change. It captured the idea of

moving from one state of understanding nature or culture to another. However, the movement was not simply a change, but a change to one which was deeper, involving a new and better state of understanding, perhaps one which was more useful and relevant (e.g. Hammond 2018). In learning, people could learn without being aware that they were learning; they could become familiar with their surroundings through a series of episodes or meetings without ever having set out with learning in mind (Eraut 2000). Even so, I believed that learning should involve some kind of intentional act on the part of the learners in order to differentiate it from socialisation. Only with a concept of agency could people assess what actions were more moral, more social and more useful.

Professional learning was a particular kind of learning with a focus on work-related knowledge or skills. For me, professional learning could be formal or informal. However, it had a particular focus on what people learned at work, for example, through talking to others, especially more knowledgeable and experienced people. It also had a focus on the act of work itself as an opportunity for learning. Schön (1987) linked professional learning to reflective practice. He identified two terms: 'reflection in action' and 'reflection on action'. 'Reflection in action' was the ability to reflect on a particular situation spontaneously; identifying the main features of a situation and drawing on past, tacit knowledge to quickly adapt. 'Reflection on action', on the other hand, was more analytical; reflecting after the event, to review, analyze, and evaluate the situation. I would think that it was only in reflection on action that people became more aware of their implicit knowledge and able to analyse it. In reflection in action, people brought the knowledge to the situation and this knowledge enabled them to think, interact and perform, and finally learned from these experiences.

At the end of the day, I believed professional learning was part of learning in general, but more specific, because it was work related; what was learned should be applicable in practical situations, and probably emerge through experience in these situations. Based on this understanding, I believed MOOCs could be seen not only through a technical lens (what knowledge is delivered?), but through a professional learning lens (what could participants do with the knowledge?). I wanted to see to what extent MOOCs could offer the opportunity for participants to learn and apply the knowledge and reflect on what they had done. It seemed possible that professional learning could be achieved through the transfer of knowledge into the classroom. However, I found not all courses offered these opportunities. Thus, the quality of some courses was questionable.

A course did not have to be visually stunning, but the ideas and the content needed to be useful. It should include the idea of engagement so that participants could be more transformative and active. I found some courses did not do this. Instead, participants had to mark the 'complete' button every time they completed an activity, and this would be recorded in the 'progress bar'. Unfortunately, the system allowed participants to mark the button even when they did not attempt the activity. This, for me, did not encourage active engagement because participants might have a tendency to 'game' the system and it was sad knowing that they could still receive certificates even though they did not properly engage in the learning. I believed learning required effort, thus opportunities to engage more actively in learning should be provided. Some of the ways in which certain levels of engagement were encouraged were promoted in Courses 5 to 7. They required participants to answer a poll while watching videos. The participants clearly had



to step back and reflect on what they were doing, or they would not be able to proceed to the next part of the video. Having given this example, though, I had to say that it could still be ‘gamed’ if someone really wanted to. Within MOOCs, agency could not be enforced, but only invited; a course provider could only give the participant opportunities to learn, but could not make them take up all these opportunities. There could also be learners who might not be interested in the activities provided because they had different learning preferences or styles (Felder and Brent 2009). In other words, reduced participation could be a consequence of the structure of the course. This had made me realise that gaming could come around as a consequence of surface learning; both as a response to what the course providers had given and as a sort of internal mechanism on behalf of the learners (almost in line with Marton and Säljö’s (1976) discussion of surface and deep learning).

At this stage, I drew on my own experiences participating in MOOCs. This had given me insights into not only how it felt to take part, but offered suggestions as to the ways other people might be experiencing the courses. However, I did not really know what it was like for other people. Would they feel the same way I felt? Would they complete the course the way I did? Would they see MOOCs potential the way I did? I really wanted to find out the answers to these questions. I believed interviewing MOOC participants could get me closer to finding the truth about MOOCs potential in CPD. However, I did not have access to other users in the way that I needed. Thus, I decided to recruit a group of MOOC participants. The next chapter is a description of my journey meeting different people with similar aims; to gain new knowledge and skills for their CPD.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### UNPACKING MOOCS: PARTICIPANTS' EXPERIENCES

Participating in MOOCs had made me realise that there were many teachers keen on taking part in online courses. However, I did not know why they did this or whether they managed to complete the course(s) they participated in. I did not know what they gained from their participation. Thus, I became interested in meeting participants and finding out what they had experienced. I believed interviewing was the best method because I could converse with them online or offline, anytime that was suitable for them. Interviewing them could also get me closer to finding a more reliable understanding about MOOCs potential in CPD. In this chapter, I describe the process of gathering information from MOOC participants. It took me through different phases, from trying to contact the participants of the MOOCs I took part to data analysis. The process was much more complicated, time consuming, frustrating at times, than I had thought. However, I felt it was worth the effort because in the end, it was clear to me that MOOCs could potentially be the solution to teachers' CPD.

To begin with, I started by preparing a consent form (see Appendix 5) and a semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix 6). In the consent form, I informed the volunteers of their anonymity, rights to withdraw and confidentiality of all data. The volunteers had to read and sign the form before the interview. In the semi-structured interview schedule, I tried to think about the flow of the interview. It was not easy to do this because I had to foresee and predict what I would encounter. I divided the interview into three parts. For the first part, I created introductory

comments to thank the participants for volunteering, and inform them of the purpose, the approximate length of the interview, and the confidentiality of their input. In the second part, I created some key questions with prompts that I would use while interviewing. I divided the questions into five sections: background; course information; structure and organisation; assessment; and arising issues. These sections were created based on my observation of MOOCs and my evolving research questions. Finally, the third part of the schedule was for closure. I wanted to thank the participants again and guaranteed them confidentiality. If needed, I would contact them again for a follow-up.

After everything was ready, I returned to the courses I had participated in. I initiated conversations with participants whom I knew were teachers. I asked them for their email addresses so that I could contact them outside of the platform. This raised ethical issues, but I checked the protocols for the courses and realised that it was possible to do this, as long as the participants were not bothered by my request. Thus, I was careful, not to ask more than once. I was frustrated, though, because nobody was willing to give me their email addresses. I guessed they were afraid of fraudulent activity. I gave up on this idea. However, I was still determined to conduct the interviews. After giving some thoughts about what I needed to do, it occurred to me that it would be much easier to contact teachers in Malaysia as they might know me, or the university I worked with, or very likely they might even know people who knew me. Thus, I set out to recruit what I hoped would be a large number of volunteer participants who were currently teaching or planning to teach ESL in Malaysia.

To recruit the volunteers, I listed all ten courses I had attended and summarised their details on Facebook groups which I knew from friends. This included *Doctorate Support Group*, *ESL Teachers*, and *Malaysian English Language Teachers' Chat*. These groups were accessed mostly by Malaysian teachers and academics. In the same post, I asked if anyone would be interested in joining any of the courses listed to give me their email address. After a week, I received a total of 55 email addresses from people who came from different parts of Malaysia. As expected, some of them were teachers whom I knew when I was teaching in school. Now that I had the email addresses, I could ask them to take part in interviews and follow up their progress on the course(s) in which they were participating. I started sending out emails to all volunteer participants on July 13, 2016. In the email, I informed them of the project and gave them links to all ten courses that I promoted in the Facebook groups. I was not sure whether the volunteers would sign up the course(s) soon. Thus, I decided to give them some time before following up their progress.

Knowing that MOOC participants might not always complete the courses they participated in on time, I decided to carry out the interviews with each volunteer twice. The first interview would be to find out their background, which course(s) they had signed up for, their progress in the course(s) and reasons for participating. These covered key questions I created in the first section of the interview schedule (Appendix 6). Four other sections would be covered during the second interview. The questions were meant to find out whether the participants had completed the course(s), their experience participating in the course(s) and what they had gained out of the course(s).

Six weeks after I sent the participants the links to each course, I started to ask the volunteers if I could interview them for the first time. I also wanted to build a rapport with them from the start so that it would be easier for me to follow them up after they completed the course. Unfortunately, only 11 volunteers replied to my email and signed the consent form to be interviewed. I waited for about another week, hoping that more people would reply but no one did. Thus, I proceeded with all 11 participants.

The first interview with 11 participants was carried out using Skype. Each interview lasted about 20 minutes and was recorded using a voice recorder. It took me about three weeks altogether to finish the interviews because most of the participants preferred to talk to me during weekends. In my view, everything went smoothly and the participants were all cooperative. Yet, no one had completed the course(s) they participated in. Therefore, I had to give them more time before setting up the next interview. In the meantime, I tried to contact the other 44 volunteers who had not yet replied to my email using *Facebook Messenger*. Again, I received no replies from any of them. I was running out of time and I did not want to wait forever. As an alternative to interviewing, I created a simple questionnaire using *Google Form* (GF) (see Appendix 7). This was the best solution I could think of at the time, hoping that it would be less intrusive, less demanding of people's time and more convenient for people who wanted to participate, but did not have time for the face-to-face online/offline interview. It was also a time saver for me because creating and distributing the form online was a lot easier. Instead of using all the key questions I had created, I asked general questions that I felt relevant and related to MOOCs and CPD (this meant all volunteers could answer, regardless of their level of participation in the course). There were 14 questions altogether, and the last question was intended to identify who

would be willing to be interviewed for further questions. Even though the questionnaire could not give me the answers to every question, I thought it would compensate for the interview data that I could not gather. It was also useful to help me identify which volunteers had/had not participated in and completed the online course.

I sent the GF to all 44 volunteers who had originally offered to take part but had not been interviewed. I was hoping some would answer the questionnaire. I was surprised when I was notified via *Google* that four people had responded to my questionnaire. It was not many, but I was delighted that they were willing to put in their effort to answer the questions. Of the four people, one declined to be contacted again but the other three agreed. While waiting for others' responses, I began to work on transcribing the audio recordings of my first-time interviews with the 11 volunteers. I used a free online tool called Transcribe (at [www.transcribe.wreally.com](http://www.transcribe.wreally.com)) to better control the playback and save time. It took me about one hour to transcribe each interview. After that, I saved all transcripts and named them by numbering each file according to the date of interview. Altogether, it took me a week to complete the process. Then, I emailed each transcript to the respective participant for approval. I was surprised as it only took a week for the participants to approve and reply to my email. Once I received the approval, I exported each transcript to *Atlas.ti*. I did the same for the GFs that I received from the four participants. Therefore, altogether, there were 15 *primary documents* transferred to *Atlas.ti*. I decided to use *Atlas.ti* software because I had used it before when I did my MA. I thought it could save me time, particularly in coding different interviews and aggregating those codes. It took me less than a day to learn how to use *Atlas.ti* for data analysis. It was more intuitive too and user-friendly compared to other software that I had tried such as NVivo.

Once I had all documents ready in *Atlas.ti*, I created the *codes*: work experience; education level; course name; reasons for participating in MOOCs; and aims to achieve after the participation. I had no trouble categorising participants' answers under these *codes* because everything was self-contained and straightforward. I organised each response around each question. In the case of the responses via GF, I had to add *new codes* as the answers covered other issues: advantages of online CPD; disadvantages of online CPD. I took about a week to organise the coding from all documents. After that, once again, I emailed each participant with a report of how I had coded the transcripts. I wanted to test the reliability and credibility of the process. This time, it took about two weeks to receive all the feedback. In general, they were satisfied with the coding, but one or two added some additional information.

It was already four months since I sent the first email to my 55 original volunteers. Realising how long it had been, I had to accept that the potential volunteers who had not replied at all (N=40) were not going to take part. I needed to focus on those who were still interested in sharing their experiences. I sent another email to the 14 participants (11+3) and set a date for the follow-up interview. Out of these 14 participants, only four agreed to carry out the interview online. The others declined to be interviewed online because they were busy and did not have a good Internet connection to carry out long conversations. Even so, they were open to be interviewed again if it was an offline interview. Thus, I decided to go back to Malaysia and meet with each participant in their hometown. Due to financial constraints, I had to request for financial support from the Centre for Education Studies, University of Warwick. Luckily, as a PhD researcher, I was eligible for the financial aid. However, I had to go through some formal

procedures. Therefore, I could not leave for Malaysia immediately. While waiting for everything to settle, I proceeded with the four participants who agreed to do the online interview.

The second interview with the first four participants went well. I followed my original schedule. Each interview took about 75 minutes. Immediately after the interview, I transcribed the audio using the same tool I used before. This time, I had to spend about three to five hours on transcriptions. I saved each transcript using the same number I used for the first-time interview and added '2<sup>nd</sup> time' at the end. When all transcripts were ready, again, I sent them to the respective participants for approval. After a week, I received the approval. Then I exported the transcripts to *Atlas.ti* for coding and analysis. This time, I applied both inductive and deductive coding. I had to say that this process was not as straightforward as the first interview had been. It was far more challenging because the process required open-coding. I had to read the transcripts repeatedly. I highlighted all words, phrases or statements that were meaningful and related to my questions. At the same time, I had to think about the themes, then coded and categorised them into their families. Many of the codes were created from the literature review, as discussed in Chapter Two, my observations and my research questions. I would add new codes if I encountered ideas that belonged to a different theme. I took about one week to finish the process for all transcripts. After that, again, I sent another email asking the four participants to comment on my coding report. I had to wait for about three weeks to receive feedback. It was worth the wait, for I believed this was the best way to confirm the themes I had interpreted, categorised and encoded from each transcript were reliable.



When I finished coding the first four transcripts, I realised I had another three weeks before leaving for Malaysia. I used this time to contact the participants and set dates for interviews. I was very happy that some of the participants (whom I knew) even offered a place to stay while I was in their hometown.

I was in Malaysia for about nine weeks. I started the interviews with participants who were in the South of Peninsular Malaysia. Three participants were there; two in the state of Johor and one in Negeri Sembilan. I was in the south for about two weeks. Then, I went up north and stayed at Sik, which was located in the State of Kedah, for another week. There, I met two other participants. Then I left for my hometown in the East Coast, the State of Terengganu. On my way, I stopped at the State of Selangor to meet one participant. I spent about a few hours there. After that, I continued my journey to Terengganu. I spent the remaining six weeks there to meet four other participants. Two of them lived in the Kuala Terengganu District, while the other two in Dungun and Marang Districts, respectively. All the interviews went well. I thought the participants responded positively to the effort I had made to go and see them. I also found it more natural and conversational to interview the participants face to face. As a result, each interview lasted much longer (about one and a half hours) than the online interviews.

After I returned from Malaysia, I started to transcribe all the recordings of interviews. The process was similar to the first four online interviews, except this time it took me five to seven hours to finish each transcript. Then, I emailed the participants the transcripts for approval. To avoid delay, I informed the participants how important it was for me to get their feedback as soon as possible. The participants were very cooperative. It took me only a week to receive all

their feedback. After making some changes to the transcripts based on participants' clarifications, I exported them to *Atlas.ti* and started the coding process. At this moment, on a technical level, it was relatively straightforward to add the seven transcripts and fit them around the coding scheme I had already devised. However, I did add new codes whenever I found new information that was not part of any codes I had created. After this process, I constantly compared all segments to ensure they were correctly coded. I also double checked the codes I created so that they were not repeated or synonymous. Only after this process did I manage to reduce the number of codes I had (from 83 to 70 codes) (see some of the codes in Appendix 8). After that, again, I sent the coding report to each participant for confirmation. It took about three weeks to hear from them all. This was understandable, though, for many of them were busy with examinations and paper marking. After receiving feedback, I started to work with the data that I had coded in *Atlas.ti*. I first grouped the codes into different *families* (themes) so that it would be easier for me to analyse. For example, I grouped 'highest education level', 'work experience', 'job title', 'job scope', and 'the workplace' in the 'background' *family* (see Appendix 8). Then, I managed all *families* according to the research questions and started analysing them.

From the analysis, it was clear to me that some people saw MOOCs differently. I believed they saw different opportunities and constraints in MOOCs, depending on the experiences they had from participating in the course. To describe this better, I divided the findings into two categories: participants' background; and participants' experiences in MOOCs.

## **Participants' Background**

As I mentioned earlier, interviews were conducted with each participant twice (only once with those who completed the GF). For the first-time interview, I covered questions related to the participants' background, which included name, location, education level, and occupation. These findings are summarised in Table 5.

There were 14 participants in total. Only one was male, while others were females. I carried out interviews with three of the participants solely via Skype (P1, P2 and P3). Participants 4 to 11 had their first interview via Skype and were only interested in doing the follow-up interview offline. Participants 12, 13 and 14, on the other hand, were those who completed the online GF and agreed to be contacted for the follow-up interview. Only one of them was interviewed via Skype, while the other two were through an offline face-to-face interview. In terms of their highest achieved education level, two participants had PhDs (P2 and P13), five had Masters (P1, P4, P7, P11 and P12), six had Bachelor degrees (P3, P5, P6, P9, P10 and P14) and one had a Diploma (P8). All but two participants had teaching qualifications: P1 was in tourism management; and P13 in resource management (Reasons for participating in MOOCs will be discussed later).

In terms of location, six participants were from Terengganu, three from Selangor, two from Johor, two from Kedah and one from Negeri Sembilan. All participants lived near their workplace. Most of the participants were educators who worked in educational institutions. Two were teachers in primary schools (P6 and P8), five were teachers in secondary schools (P2, P4, P5, P7, and P14) and two were language teachers in a public university (P9 and P10). Two others

were lecturers in universities: one in a public university (P11); one in a private university (P12). As for three other participants, P1 was a businesswoman who owned a spa and a boutique, P3 worked as a casual receptionist and part-time tuition teacher at a communication service and tuition centre, and P13 was a librarian in a public university library.

Table 5: Participants' interview and background information

Participant	Gender	Medium of Interview	Highest Education	Workplace/ Location	Occupation
1	F	Skype	Masters in Tourism Management	Owner of a spa and a boutique in Kuala Terengganu, Terengganu	Businesswoman
2	F	Skype	PhD in Education TESL	Secondary School in Dungun, Terengganu	Teacher
3	M	Skype	BA in TESL	Communication Service and Tuition Centres in Shah Alam, Selangor	Casual Receptionist and part-time tuition teacher
4	F	Skype, F2F	Masters in TESL	Secondary School in Bahau, Negeri Sembilan	Teacher
5	F	Skype, F2F	BA in TESL	Secondary School in Segamat, Johor	Teacher
6	F	Skype, F2F	BA in TESL	Primary School in Segamat, Johor	Teacher
7	F	Skype, F2F	Masters in ESL	Secondary School in Sik, Kedah	Teacher
8	F	Skype, F2F	Diploma in	Primary School in	Teacher

			TESL	Sik, Kedah	
9	F	Skype, F2F	BA in TESL	Public University in Kuala Terengganu, Terengganu	Language Teacher
10	F	Skype, F2F	BA in TESL	Public University in Kuala Terengganu	Language Teacher
11	F	Skype, F2F	Masters in TESL	Public University in Kuala Terengganu	Lecturer
12	F	GF, F2F	Masters in TESL	Private University in Rawang, Selangor	Lecturer
13	F	GF, Skype	PhD in Resource Management	Library of a Public University in Puncak Alam, Selangor	Librarian
14	F	GF, F2F	BA in TESOL	Secondary School in Marang, Terengganu	Teacher

Apart from the information above, I also asked participants about the course(s) in which they participated, the reasons behind their participation and what they aimed to do on completion of the course. These findings are summarised in Table 6.

Three of the participants (P1, P2 and P3) chose to participate in *Teach English Now: Foundational Principles* (Course 5), three others (P4, P8 and P10) in *Integrating English Language Development and Content Area Learning: Communication Based Approach* (Course 1), two (P9 and P12) in *Teach English Now: Lesson Design and Assessment* (Course 7), and another two (P6 and P11) in *Creating Engaging Environment for English Language Classrooms* (Course 2). There was only one participant (P5) chose *English for teaching purposes* (Course 8), and (P7) *Lesson Planning with the ELL in Mind* (Course 4) (all these courses have been

described in Chapter Three). The final two participants (P13 and P14) were interested in *English for Teaching Purposes* and *Exploring the World of English Language Teaching* respectively but ended not participating. P13 said that she initially wanted to find out what the course could offer her. Her interest was “reading skills” but from her point of view, there was nothing related to reading skills on offer. She added that she would have taken part if she had found something she wanted to learn in the course. P14 did not sign up as she knew she “could not allocate time for [participation]”. When I asked her further, I found out that she had just ended her maternity leave and was busy catching up on things at school.

Even though P13 and P14 did not take part in the course they were interested in, other participants signed up for the course they chose. When I asked their reasons for participating, everyone had their own personal goal that was particular for them. I realised then that there were some common sets of motivation these participants shared: to gain new knowledge in particular areas; to apply new skills as part of professional development; and to satisfy general professional interest. It was obvious to me that these reasons for participating were inter-related. However, I had to state that not everyone mentioned all three reasons together. For example, only ten of the participants foregrounded the goal of gaining new knowledge (P1, P2, P3, P4, P6, P7, P8, P10, P11, and P12). New knowledge in this context included new “tips” (P2), “techniques” (P1, P3, and P4), “principles” (P6), “approaches” (P7), “methods” (P12), “strategies and skills” (P8, P10 and P11). With regard to professional development, five participants (P2, P3, P4, P5 and P9) wanted to vary their teaching skills, ones which would be beneficial to their career development. Finally, only two participants (P9 and P10) participated in MOOCs to satisfy their general interest.

Before I ended the first-time interviews, I also asked the participants what they wanted to do after having carried out the course. In this case, there was a consistent pattern across all 12 participants; their aim after participation was to develop themselves into becoming better teachers. Eight of them (P3, P4, P5, P6, P8, P10, P11, P12) wanted to apply something that they had learned from the course. Verbs like “apply” and “try out” were frequently used by these participants. At the same time, participants wanted to bring about some changes to their classroom and offer new experiences to their students. For example, P6 said that she wanted to “help her Year Five and Six students to learn English better” and P11 wanted to engage students by applying new methods she had learned. P12 also aimed to “share the knowledge” she learned with her trainee teachers by showing them how some strategies worked in classrooms. Three other participants (P2, P7 and P9) aimed to “improve [their] teaching skills”. For example, P2 wanted to “use flipped learning principles [she] learned in [her] classroom” and P7 wanted to construct better lesson plans by applying the tips she was given in the course.

As for P1, she was not a teacher. However, since her plan was to teach English in the future, she aimed to be able to teach English to her future students who wanted to master English:

“I want to gain knowledge because I plan to teach in the future. I aim to teach English to students who need to master English. I hope that I will get as many strategies as I need to teach English.”

Finally, P2 knew that the course she participated in offered a capstone project for TESOL certification. Therefore, after the participation, she aimed to continue participating in two other

courses and complete the capstone project. She hoped she would gain qualifications in a new field, TESOL.

Table 6: Courses joined and participants' motivation for participating

Participants	Course Participated	Reasons for Participating	Aims after Participation
1	Course 5	To gain knowledge to teach in the future.	To teach English to students who need to master English.
2	Course 5	Relevant to the profession, and to gain new insights on current teaching pedagogy or principles - flipped learning.	To improve teaching using the flipped classroom. To gain a new qualification - TESOL.
3	Course 5	To learn new teaching skills for self-improvement and career development.	To apply new knowledge in teaching.
4	Course 1	To further knowledge for professional development.	To apply new knowledge in teaching.
5	Course 8	To gain new strategies to learn English for teaching purposes.	To apply new strategies in learning English for teaching purposes.
6	Course 2	To learn new methods to encourage students to engage in and 'love' learning English.	To apply new strategies to help students, especially in Year 5 and 6.
7	Course 4	To gain new knowledge particularly about lesson planning.	To improve teaching skills and construct better lesson plans.
8	Course 1	To learn new strategies for teaching.	To apply new strategies for teaching.



9	Course 7	General interest in designing assessment and upgrading the knowledge and skills of lesson planning.	To improve teaching skills and to expose students to new methods.
10	Course 1	General interest and to learn a new approach.	To apply a new approach in teaching.
11	Course 2	To further explore tips and techniques for engaging students in learning.	To apply new methods to engage students.
12	Course 7	To learn more about language teaching.	To share new knowledge with trainee teachers so that they could apply it in the future.
13	None	Had possible interest in <i>English for Teaching Purposes</i> but did not sign up because she was more interested in 'reading skills'.	N/A
14	None	Had a possible interest <i>Exploring the World of English Language Teaching</i> but did not sign up due to work commitment.	N/A

Looking at the findings above, I believed that the participants would be able to achieve what they had aimed for because I, myself, had taken part in each course and knew what it could offer. However, I had to be realistic too. Not everyone participating in a MOOC would complete it. Some might not even start. Thus, I needed an open mind on their experiences.

## Participants' Experiences in MOOCs

I first asked the participants about the course provider, instructors and learning objectives (see questions in Section Two, Appendix 6). All participants (except P13 and P14 who did not sign up) described the course in the way that matched my understanding (see what has been described in Chapter Three). For example, P1 said she had participated in *Teach English Now: Foundational Principles* (Course 5) and she had noted that the aim of the course was to provide teachers with guidance on foundational principles and basic techniques of teaching English. In addition, she knew that the course was provided by Arizona State University and was taught by a team of instructors.

I also asked them about the course length and how this might have affected their choice of course. All of them were aware of how long the course ran, but the length did not seem to affect their choices. P1, P3, P4, P5, P10 and P12 explicitly said that the course length had no effect, though P3 and P4 said they would have preferred a shorter course if they were asked to choose between a four- and a twenty-week course which had similar content. Other participants did not discuss this. P2 and P6 mentioned that once underway, the course length could affect their motivation to continue; the shorter the course, the more motivated they would be. P7, P8 and P9 felt that the length of the courses they took part in (ranging from six to twenty weeks) was suitable for the content delivered, but P11 felt that the course she chose was too short (four weeks). She believed “eight to twelve weeks [was] the ideal length”. As for P13 and P14, they could not tell the length of the course because they did not participate in any course.

I next asked the participants about course structure, content and assessment. The questions helped me to find out if the participants had gone through all stages of the course. In the cases of P13 and P14, I decided to ask for their opinions about certain aspects of a course. I summarised all their responses in three separate tables: Tables 7; 8; and 9.

In Table 7, I summarised responses about course structure. In terms of accessibility, all participants found the course accessible (in terms of signing up and the Internet connection), although three (P7, P8 and P9) said that their Internet connection was at times unreliable. In terms of course structure, all 12 participants said that the structure was clear and helpful for their learning. It allowed them to organise their own learning (P2) and increased their motivation to continue participating (P3). P13 agreed it was important for the course structure to be clear so that participants would know what to expect. According to P14, the more predictable the structure, the easier it would be to follow through the course.

With regard to course interactivity, nine participants (P1, P2, P3, P6, P8, P9, P10, P11 and P12) believed that the course was interactive because there was a two-way communication involved via polls in the videos, discussion, auto-generated quizzes and peer grading assessment. P2 also added that the user-friendly navigation system had made the course more interactive than others. Three other participants, P4, P5 and P7, believed that the course they took part in was not interactive because there was no discussion and peer grading provided. P13 and P14 believed that it was important to encourage active engagement in learning.

Next, all participants had positive responses about the idea of certification. For them, certification was a good motivator. It could be a sign that they had “achieved a certain level of understanding” (P1), “a symbol of knowledge” they had gained (P4 and P9), and proof of “attendance” (P9), “participation” (P3 and P8) and “course completion” (P6, P10, P11 and P12). A certificate could also prove that a person had participated in a career development activity (P2 and P3). P7 and P11 said they gained the certificate for their own “self-satisfaction”, while P6 used it to “show off” that she had already participated in a course. Five participants (P1, P4, P5, P10 and P11) believed that the certificate could prove they had a qualification; thus gave them the confidence to teach (P1, P4, P5 and P10). I doubted that certificate could be used as a proof of qualification because only accredited courses could qualify participants. However, thinking about it again, this might work in some cases. Courses 5, 6 and 7 could be the best examples of this. Even though they were not accredited, they were created similar to that of accredited courses, where participants needed to achieve certain hours of participation and had to complete a Capstone Project which required participants to do a teaching practical. This could be a starting point to a new paradigm shift within the education field.

Table 7: Course structure and organisation

Participant	Accessibility	Course structure	Course interactivity	Certification
1	Easily accessed.	Clear and helpful for learning.	Interactive - poll in the videos and peer grading assessment.	- Helped in identifying the level of understanding. - For qualification and increased confidence.

2	Easily accessed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Clear and helpful for learning.</li> <li>- Allowed to become organised in learning.</li> </ul>	<p>Interactive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- videos, quizzes and the navigation system.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The biggest motivation to complete the course as it came from a university from the USA.</li> <li>- A proof of career development.</li> </ul>
3	Easily accessed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Clear and helpful for learning.</li> <li>- Increased motivation.</li> </ul>	<p>Interactive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- peer grading.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- As a proof of participation and attendance of a career development activity.</li> </ul>
4	Easily accessed.	Clear and helpful for learning.	Not interactive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A symbol of knowledge gained.</li> <li>- For qualification and increased confidence.</li> </ul>
5	Easily accessed.	Clear and helpful for learning.	Not interactive	For qualification and increased confidence.
6	Easily accessed.	Clear and helpful for learning.	<p>Interactive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- discussion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A proof of completion.</li> <li>- To show off.</li> </ul>
7	Accessible, sometimes had an Internet connection problem.	Clear and helpful for learning.	Not interactive	For self-satisfaction.
8	Accessible, sometimes had an Internet connection problem.	Clear and helpful for learning.	<p>Interactive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- discussion</li> </ul>	As a proof of participation.

9	Accessible, sometimes had an Internet connection problem.	Clear and helpful for learning.	Interactive - peer grading	- A proof of attendance. - A symbol of knowledge gained. - For motivation
10	Easily accessed.	Clear and helpful for learning.	Interactive - poll in the videos.	- A proof of completion - For qualification and increased confidence.
11	Easily accessed.	Clear and helpful for learning.	Interactive - discussion	- A proof of completion. - For qualification and self-satisfaction.
12	Easily Accessed.	Clear and helpful for learning.	Interactive - poll in the videos and discussion.	A proof of completion.
13	Important, so that participants would not be demotivated.	Important to be clear so that participant knew what to expect in a course.	Important to encourage engagement in learning.	Could be a motivation to complete the course.
14	Important, so that learning would be smooth.	The more predictable the structure was, the easier to follow through the course.	Important to encourage active engagement	Could be a motivation.

In Table 8, I summarised participants' responses related to course content which covered the learning materials, discussion spaces, badges, and social media. All except P1 found the materials were relevant (P2), matched learning objectives (P3), helpful (P4, P5, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11 and P12) and informative (P6). P9 and P12 thought the videos were "interesting" too. However, P5 disagreed, though recognised they could be effective. Even though the majority of the participants gave positive responses, a few had some ideas for improvement. For example, P1 said the materials lacked classroom examples to illustrate teaching skills. P2 commented that content delivery was uneven. There was too much to be covered in the first two weeks, but less towards the end. Thus, she felt that the course provider "should distribute the content equally".

In relation to discussion, P2, P3, P6, P7, P9, P11 and P12 took part in discussion forums but P1 did not. P4, P5, P8 and P10 had not had the opportunity to do so because the courses lacked discussion space. All participants, except P1 (who did not mention anything), believed that discussion forums could be beneficial. For example, everyone (including P13 and P14, when discussing a hypothetical scenario) said that discussion forums gave them the space to share ideas, opinions, knowledge, problems and experiences. In other words, discussion forums could be a platform for clarification about difficult topics (P4), discussion about solutions to problems (P6), and opportunities to learn from others (P9). Discussion forums could also encourage more engaged participation (P11). Despite the benefits, P2 added that people could sometimes overlook important messages because there were too many of them posted at the same time. In addition, some messages could also be misunderstood due to participants' different backgrounds

and culture. As P4 said, “people can sometimes understand things differently due to their diverse cultures and backgrounds”.

In terms of social media, none of the participants said the courses they took part in used social media. However, seven of them (P1, P3, P6, P9, P10, P11, P12) said that social media could help participants create new networks and encourage them to discuss outside the course platform. Social media could also help participants to share more documents, videos and photos (P10). However, P2, P4, P5, P7, P8, P13 and P14 did not see any advantage in using social media. For them, social media could be a “distraction”.

Finally, in terms of badges, only P6 and P11 had attended courses which offered badges. For both P6 and 11, the idea of badging was good to encourage active participation and “motivation”. Even though other participants did not get to experience the idea of badging, I explained to them the concept and they all agreed that the idea of badging would be motivating.

Table 8: Course content

Participant	Learning Materials	Discussion Space	Social Media	Badges
1	- Needed more examples on teaching skills rather than theory.	Had not participated in any discussion.	- None - Could create network outside the platform.	- None - Could be motivating.
2	- Relevant activities. - Content should be well distributed.	- Could share different opinions, experiences and knowledge. - Could ask for	- None - Could become a distraction.	- None - A bonus, but had no effect on



	Too many lessons to be covered in the first two weeks, but less towards the end.	clarification regarding difficult subjects. - People overlooked comment.		motivation.
3	- Content matched the learning objectives. - videos were more helpful than the notes.	Could share ideas, experiences, and knowledge.	- None - Could be helpful to create network outside the platform.	- None. - Good for motivation.
4	- Helpful articles and videos were provided.	- No discussion - Could ask for clarification regarding difficult subjects. - Could share ideas, experiences, and knowledge. - Meaning might be misunderstood.	- None - Could become a distraction.	- None - Could be motivating.
5	- Helpful and effective videos, websites and articles. - Videos were not interesting.	- No discussion. - Could share opinions.	- None - Could become a distraction.	- None - Could be motivating.
6	- Mostly informative articles and documents.	- Could voice out opinions openly, share new ideas and solve problems by discussing solutions	- None - Could be helpful to create network outside the platform.	- Seven badges - A good way to encourage

		with others. - Helpful in learning teaching skills.		active participation.
7	- Lesson plan template was helpful.	Could be good for sharing problems and experiences.	- None - Could become a distraction.	- None - Could be motivating.
8	- Helpful articles and videos were provided.	- No discussion. - Could share ideas, experiences, and knowledge.	- None - Could become a distraction.	- None - Could be motivating.
9	- Interesting videos and helpful lesson plan template.	Could learn from and share new teaching skills with others.	- None - Could be helpful to create network outside the platform.	- None - Could be motivating.
10	- Simple videos and helpful articles.	- No discussion. - Could share new ideas, methods, approaches, experiences, and knowledge.	- None - Could be helpful to share information in the forms of documents, videos or graphics.	- None - Could be motivating to some people.
11	- Helpful materials.	- Discussion encouraged more engaging participation. - Could sometimes lead to different topics, but relevant. - Could share new	- None - <i>WhatsApp</i> and <i>Facebook</i> could be useful additional tools for learning. - Could create network outside	- Seven badges. - A good motivation.

		experiences.	the platform.	
12	- Interesting videos and helpful lesson plan template.	Could share ideas, experiences, and knowledge.	- None - Could be helpful to further discuss things outside the platform.	- None - Could be motivating.
13	Good materials should be able to help participants achieved the learning objectives.	Could share ideas, experiences, and knowledge.	Could become a distraction.	Could be motivating.
14	Different learning materials could avoid learners from getting bored.	Could share ideas, experiences, and knowledge.	Could become a distraction.	Could be motivating.

Table 9 shows a summary of participants’ responses regarding assessment. Overall, all participants except P3 had attempted the quizzes, and seven attempted peer grading assessment (P4, P5, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11). Three participants (P1, P2 and P3) decided to skip peer grading, while two others (P6 and P11) did not have the opportunity to do so because their courses did not provide this. I asked them the advantages of the assessment provided. All except P2 believed that the quizzes helped to test their understanding of the topics. Apart from that, quizzes encouraged them to “read more” (P4), self-reflect and “identify [their] weaknesses” in particular areas (P6, P11), and “guide [their] learning” to achieve specific aims (P5). P2 felt that multi-attempt quizzes “increased [her] motivation” because she could repeat them and attempt a better score. When I asked if they had any problems attempting the quizzes, all except P3 said they had no

problem in completing the quizzes. However, P2 and P4 said it would be more helpful if they were given answers with detailed explanation rather than just a “well done” or “it’s incorrect” phrases. P5 said that “the questions [were] too simple” that all she did was “recall information”. She added, “I prefer more difficult questions so that I could apply higher order thinking skills while attempting the tasks”.

Regarding peer grading, all seven who attempted the task agreed that the rubrics were straightforward, clear and easily understood (P4, P7, P8, P9, and P10) even if the descriptors were too general (P5 and P12). Others could not give any comment as they did not attempt this. All participants thought peer grading had both advantages and disadvantages. It could be beneficial because it could help participants to learn new things either by assessing others' work or reading others' feedback (P1, P3, P4, P6, P8, P9, P10, P11 and P12). They would learn by looking at each other's strengths and weaknesses (P7). Peer grading could encourage the sharing of opinions and experiences (P2 and P5), and increase motivation (P2). It also helped participants to access solutions to problems in teaching (P4), improve their teaching skills (P5, P10) and become better graders (P12). Despite these positive responses, participants believed that peer grading might not be reliable. The peer graders might not be an expert in the subject assessed (P1, P3, P4, P5, P6, P8, P10, P11, and P12), or they could be grading emotionally, or “following their instinct” (P6). The grading could also be “superficial” (P12). Finally, the participants thought peer grading could be demotivating when feedbacks were delayed (P2) or negative (P7 and P9).

Table 9: Assessment

Participant	Quizzes		Peer Grading		
	Advantages	Problems	Rubrics	Advantages	Disadvantages
1	Helped to test understanding of the topics learned.	Had no problem.	Did not attempt	Could see and learn new things from others' work.	Peers might not be an expert in the subject assessed.
2	- Multiple attempts, giving opportunities to score better. - Increased motivation.	No explanation given in auto-generated answers.	Did not attempt	- Could share opinion and comment on each other's work. - Increased motivation to do better.	Delayed response, thus demotivating.
3	Helped to test understanding of the topics learned.	Did not attempt any quizzes.	Did not attempt	Could learn new things from the feedback given.	Peers might not be an expert in the subject assessed.
4	- Helped to test understanding of the topics learned. - Encouraged to read more.	No explanation given in auto-generated answers.	Clear and self-explanatory.	- Could learn new things from others' work. - Could get feedback from others' too. - Could gain solutions to problems in teaching.	Peers might not be an expert in the subject assessed.
5	- Guided	The	Descriptors	- Could share	Peers might not

	learning. - Helped to understand the subject better.	questions were mostly simple questions, required recalling of information	were too general; thus only some sections were clear.	thoughts and experiences. - Could improve teaching skills.	be an expert in the subject assessed.
6	- Helped to understand the subject better. - Could identify weaknesses in particular areas.	Had no problem.	Not provided	- Could learn new things from others' work. - Could get feedback from others too.	- Peers might not be an expert in the subject assessed. - Non-expert could be grading emotionally.
7	Helped to understand the subject better.	Had no problem.	Clear and self-explanatory.	Could learn from each other's strengths and weaknesses.	Could be demotivating when getting negative feedback.
8	Helped to test understanding of the topics learned.	Had no problem.	Clear and self-explanatory.	- Could learn new things from others' work. - Could get feedback from others too.	Peers might not be an expert in the subject assessed.
9	Helped to test understanding of the topics	Had no problem.	Straightforward, clear and easy to	Could learn new things from others'	Could be demotivating when getting

	learned.		understand.	feedback.	negative feedback.
10	Helped to understand the subject better.	Had no problem.	Clear, easy to understand.	- Could learn new things from each other's feedback. - Could improve teaching skills.	Not 100 per cent reliable as peers might not be an expert in the subject assessed.
11	- Good for self-reflection. - Helped to test understanding of the topics learned.	Had no problem.	Not provided	Constructive feedback could be helpful for self-improvement.	Peers might not be an expert in the subject assessed.
12	- Helped to test understanding of the topics learned.	Had no problem.	Easy to understand, but too general.	- Could learn how to grade better. - Could learn new things from others' feedback.	- Peers might not be an expert in the subject assessed. - General grading could be superficial.
13	- Helped to understand the subject better. - Encouraged to read more.	N/A	N/A	- Could learn how to grade. - Could learn new things from others' feedback.	Peers might not be an expert in the subject assessed.
14	- Helped to	N/A	N/A	Could learn	Peers might not

	test understanding of the topics learned.			new things from others' feedback.	be an expert in the subject assessed.
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From the findings above, it was clear that some of the participants did not take part in every activity provided in the course. To understand this situation better, I asked them to describe their participation. I categorised their responses into four groups as in Table 10: complete; incomplete; dropout; and not participating. Altogether, there were only three completers (P5, P6, P12), three incompletes (P1, P2, P3), six leavers (P4, P7, P8, P9, P10 and P11) and two non-participants (P13 and P14).

Those who completed tended to spend three to four hours a week on the course. They took part in discussion forums, quizzes and the assessments provided to them. As for those who did not complete, their participation was provisional. They tended to decide what they wanted to do, based on whether activities appealed to them, or they could see the use of the content. For example, P1 attempted quizzes but did not engage in discussion and did not attempt peer grading assessment as she preferred to learn independently and “did not see the point of getting involved with other participants”. P2 aimed to learn the principles of Flipped learning. Therefore, she only “[watched] relevant videos and [completed] assessments that [were] related to Flipped learning”. P3 only attempted polls embedded in the videos he watched. He did not attempt quizzes and peer grading because he thought the assessment would take too much of his time. P1, P2 and P3 spent less time on the course compared to those who completed. The amount of time they spent varied



depending on whether content appealed to them (P3) or the level of difficulty of the content (P1 and P2).

The dropouts (P4, P7, P8, P9, P10 and P11) tended to engage in discussions and attempted assessment often, regardless of the preferences they had for a particular topic or activity. Time spent was very much dependent on the workload they had at their workplaces. The less work they had to do, the more time they spent on the course. However, if they had too much to cope in a day, they would “participate in the course at night”, before going to sleep (P4 and P9). Their participation decreased as the course progressed and they eventually stopped taking part. When I asked them why, the most frequent reasons I received were "no time to do", "too busy" and "had other things to do".

Table 10: Type of Participants

Completion	Participants	Descriptions of participation	
		Time spent	Involvement
Complete	P5, P6, P12	Average three to four hours every week, consistently.	Participated in discussion forums and attempted all assessments.
Incomplete	P1	Time eventually became longer as the content became harder to understand.	Did not engage in discussion and preferred to learn independently.
	P2	Unpredictable, depending on the level of difficulty of the content.	Watched videos and completed the assessments, but infrequently.
	P3	Average one to two hours a week, but sometimes less or	Watched videos and only attempted polls embedded in

		more, depending on how relevant the content was.	them.
Dropout	P4, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11	Very much depending on the workload at the workplace.	Engaged in discussions and attempted assessment at the beginning of the course.
Not participating	P13, P14	N/A	N/A

It was clear to me that the participants had different levels of participation, and not everyone ended completing it. This would have impacted on whether they would achieve their initial aims to apply what they had learned and become better at teaching (see their specific aims in Table 6, p.126). To get a better idea to what extent participation had affected their achievement, I asked them what they had learned from the course and if they were able to apply this in their classrooms. Table 11 shows the summary I made from the responses.

I summarised what the participants had learned into two categories, formal and informal. The formal covered the stated aims of the course and the informal covered the participants' experiences of engaging with the activities. For example, peer discussion was something that many participants had not done before. Therefore, they had broadened their horizons about what was possible in their classrooms, even if peer discussion was not a stated aim in the course.

In respect to formal learning, the participants had adopted ideas concerning new approaches to teaching (P2, P4, P6, P8, and P10), classroom skills (P1, P3, P7, P9, P11 and P12), and subject knowledge (P5). For example, P2 specifically mentioned that she had learned "Flipped learning principles" while P6 said she had learned how to engage her students through "project-based learning". P4, P8 and P10 understood how communication-based approach could help them in

developing their students' language skills. P1 and P3 gained knowledge on language learning strategies while P7, P9 and P12 now knew how to develop a good lesson plan based on learning objectives, assessment plans, methods, materials, and learning activities. P11 said she understood how to engage her students using "differentiated instruction". Finally, P5 said "I learned grammar explicitly for English teaching purposes".

The participants also learned informally. All of them seemed to agree that what they experienced had changed their perspectives on teaching and learning. For example, P1, P4 and P5 said they had discovered that people could learn independently without the presence of a teacher. As someone who had never been in a teaching field, this was new to P1. However, for P4 and P5 who had been teaching for a few years, this changed their perspectives about independent learning, and they believed this would be a turning point in their career.

P2, P3, P6, P7, P9, P10 and P12 realised that learning could happen through "the sharing of opinions, ideas, and experiences". Sometimes, they could "gain more knowledge from others than the instructors themselves". P3, for instance, said that he had "learned about others' cultures not from the instructors, but the participants in the discussion forums" he had joined. P6 mentioned that she could gain knowledge and find solutions to her problems by asking others rather than waiting to be "spoon-fed" by the instructors. She also experienced the effectiveness of collaborative activities in encouraging engagement. P7 learned that "content presentation [could] affect learning". She said,

"I realised now that the simpler the content is, the easier it is be for them (the students) to follow the lesson. Last time, I covered too many topics in one lesson."

P8 discovered that videos could be effective for teaching because students would become more engaged and focused. She said:

“As a teacher who is not tech-savvy, I never thought that videos could be so appealing for students. I mean...I had 30 years of teaching experience, and yet I know less about this”.

P9 learned that she could become a more “independent learner”, and she could find information without anyone’s help. She realised that this was not that difficult. In the past, she had tended to “rely on friends”, but now she realised she did not need to. To learn better also meant that she should “accept criticism and comments” openly, and take this positively. P11 said that during discussions, her name was used by other participants when they wanted to ask her questions or give her feedback:

“I realised how motivating it was to have strangers calling me by my name and acknowledge my existence. Having that feeling made me realise that I could do the same to my students. I should acknowledge them more.”

In addition, she had appreciated the collaborative activities in which she participated, as they had led her to be more confident, especially in sharing her thoughts. She believed she had become more receptive to collaborative learning in her classroom.

Table 11: Knowledge gained by participants and what they had applied in the classrooms

Participants (Course participated)	Knowledge Gained		Knowledge applied
	Formal	Informal	
1 (Course 5)	Principles and theories about English teaching,	Could work independently without	Had not started teaching, but planning to implement

	and language learning strategies.	the presence of instructors.	language learning strategies to teach English.
2 (Course 5)	Foundational principles of Flipped learning.	Being collaborative - could share feedback with peers.	- Used flipped learning in the classroom. - Made students practice collaborative learning through peer review activities.
3 (Course 5)	Basic techniques to teaching English using language learning strategies.	Being collaborative - could share opinions, ideas, and experiences with others. Others' culture from different countries.	Tried using the new techniques learned in teaching English.
4 (Course 1)	New methods to teach English - through conversations.	How to learn independently, using the materials provided.	- Implemented activities to encourage conversations. - Tried a student-centered approach.
5 (Course 8)	Methods to teach grammar for English teaching purposes.	Could work independently without the presence of instructors.	Applied the methods learned to trigger students' interests in learning grammar.
6 (Course 2)	Key methods to students' engagement in learning.	Engagement could be encouraged through collaborative activities. Sought for others' opinions rather than waited to be "spoon-fed".	- Applied different methods to engage students. - Collaborated with colleagues to complete school tasks.
7 (Course 4)	Strategies to plan lessons with ELLs in	Being collaborative - could share opinions,	- Applied strategies to design a lesson.

	mind.	ideas, and experiences with others. Simple content would be easier to understand, thus would learn better.	- Applied collaborative approach too.
8 (Course 1)	Ways to develop students' language skills through conversations	Videos could be effective for teaching.	Tried out activities that required students to converse throughout the lesson.
9 (Course 7)	Designing lesson plans based on learning objectives, assessment plans, methods, materials, and learning activities.	Became more independent in finding information without others' help. Being collaborative – could learn better by sharing the information gained with others. Learned accepting criticism and comments openly.	- Applied strategies to design a lesson. - Implemented collaborative activities such as peer reviews.
10 (Course 1)	New conversational activities to develop students' language and thinking skills.	Being collaborative - could share opinions, ideas, and experiences with others. New perspective - could learn better through others' comments.	- Implemented activities that encouraged students to converse and engage in a conversation. - Applied a collaborative approach.
11 (Course 2)	Classroom management techniques to	How initiating conversations could	- Applied the techniques learned to create a

	encourage students' engagement in learning.	change the way students reacted. Being collaborative – increase confidence level to converse with others.	supportive learning environment. - Collaborated with people in daily activity.
12 (Course 7)	Strategies to design lesson plans using basic principles.	Being collaborative - could share feedback with peers to learn better.	- Applied strategies to design a lesson. - Shared the strategies with trainee teachers.
13 (None)	N/A	N/A	N/A
14 (None)	N/A	N/A	N/A

I was surprised by how much the participants had learned. However, I did not know whether knowledge transfer was possible in practice. Thus, I asked the participants if they could apply the knowledge they had gained in their classrooms. As summarised in Table 11, all except P1 said they had used some of what they had learned in their classrooms. For example, P2 tried to implement the principles of Flipped learning in her teaching, while P3 tried using language learning strategies to vary his teaching activities. P4, P8 and P10 experimented with conversation focused activities in small groups. For example, P8 instructed her students to watch a short film and then discuss it in a group of three to five. P10, too, had carried out almost similar activities. In the meantime, P5 and P6 also focused on engagement. P5, for instance, carried out a “chain-story” activity to encourage her students to share input and create a short story with correct grammar. P11, who wanted to encourage students' engagement, applied differentiated instructions in her classrooms. P7, P9 and P12 worked on lesson design and used the strategies

they had learned when planning their lessons. P12 added that she also shared the strategies she learned with her trainee teachers. As for P1, she did not have the opportunity to apply what she had known because she had not started teaching at the time. If she had the opportunity, however, she would apply the language learning strategies she had learned.

I was a little surprised that those who did not complete the course could still achieve their aims by applying what they had learned in their classrooms. This somehow showed me that the level of participation among participants did not have much impact on what they could achieve in the end. However, to what extent the changes they brought into classrooms were successful remained questionable because I did not know exactly how the students had benefited (I would come back to this later).

Implementing new approaches or activities was satisfying, but not easy. In applying what they had learned in the classrooms, the participants faced challenges which I associated with innovation (P2, P3, P4, P7 and P8), classroom management (P2, P4, P6, P7, P9, P10 and P12), and students' readiness (P3, P4, P5, P6, P9, P10, and P11) (see Table 12).

With regards to innovation, P2, P3, P4, P7 and P8 discussed the challenges they faced in planning something new. Three of them (P2, P7 and P8) felt that preparation of new activities was time consuming. Based on her experiences within the MOOC, P8, for example, mentioned that she wanted to use videos in her teaching. However, she had to "learn how to create a video" before she could even come up with classroom applications for she was "not used to the technology". Making her own video was too time consuming; therefore she tried to search for



“ready-made videos” instead. However, she felt this was also time consuming and finding time had been the most challenging part in applying what she had learned. P2, who planned to implement Flipped learning, also found that it was time consuming to prepare for the activities. As she said,

“I was not sure how I should implement it at first. All I knew was the theory and principles behind it. So, I had to spend time for days looking at others’ flipped classrooms (these were clips from other websites) and how they carried out [the approach] in their classrooms”.

P3 and P4 felt they had relative autonomy in trying new things out but were constrained when they had to meet the students’ needs and be aligned with the curriculum. Thus, they found innovation challenging. P3, for instance, found it difficult to implement the language learning strategies he had learned into his classrooms because he had to consider students’ different needs and had to come up with differentiated activities. P4, who implemented conversation activities, found it challenging because he had to align the activities with the curriculum stated in the textbook. Both P3 and P4 thought the planning and preparation process was time consuming and complicated.

In terms of classroom management, P2, P4, P6, P7, P9, P10 and P12 found it challenging to implement new approaches because the students were already used to a certain way of learning and participating. P2, P4, P9 and P10 found it very challenging to introduce what they wanted to do in the classrooms because they had to spend time explaining expectations to students. Consequently, activities that were to be carried out in 40 minutes (one period) could not be executed completely and had to continue in the next lesson. P2 had to repeat the same activity

many times so that the students could get used to the new approach. She also made sure she carried out the Flipped learning activity in groups first because she realised “some of them would not do it if left to themselves. If it was done in groups, they would remind each other to do it”. She would only ask the students to complete the activity individually when she saw improvement in their participation. For her, “this took time, but it worked in the end”. P6 had to find ways to motivate the students to participate in the new activities. Therefore, whenever she planned to implement different methods to engage her students, she would first remind them how important it was to learn English and participate in the activities.

In relation to students’ readiness to take part, P3, P4, P5, P6, P9, P10, and P11 said that some students welcomed new ways of learning, but a fair number were resistant. Most of the students who welcomed the new approaches in classrooms had intermediate to high level of proficiency, and they had positive attitudes towards learning English. According to P3, P5, P9 and P10, these students had no problem adopting the new approaches. However, those who were resistant had low levels of proficiency and confidence, and they had negative perceptions towards the use of English for communication. For example, P4 and P10 tried to carry out conversational activities with students. It became challenging for them because some of the students did not want to cooperate and some were very shy to speak in the target language. In addition, there were students who felt that "there was no point in learning to speak English". According to P6, these students told her that "as Malay native speakers, [they] should use Malay language all the time". For these students, English was not important; therefore they did not need to learn and master it.

P3 and P4 had similar experiences to P6, where some of their students refused to adopt the new approaches and were very negative about learning English. P3 felt that it was more challenging to teach students with negative attitudes than those with low level of proficiency. He said that “talking to students with negative attitudes was like talking to a ‘wall’, because they refused to listen and cooperate”. P4, too, felt that her patience had been tested as she had to spend time “entertaining” those with negative attitudes so that they would not interrupt others who wanted to learn. It seemed that teaching had been very challenging for P3 and P4 because they lacked experience. They had to motivate themselves before they went into the classrooms. P11, on the other hand, found teaching less challenging because in her words, she had greater experience. She said she would be “happy to have problematic students” because the experience dealing with them could make her a better teacher. However, she confessed that dealing with these students would affect her focus on other students who were more eager to learn.

Table 12: Challenges faced by participants while applying what they had learned

Categories	Participants	Challenges
	1	N/A
Innovation	2, 3, 4, 7 and 8	- The preparation of activities was time consuming. - Creating activities for students with different needs.
Classroom management	2, 4,6,7,9,10 and 12	- Students were not used to flipped and collaborative learning - Students were not familiar with the new approach. - Motivating students to learn language. - Students were new to the strategies, thus required more help to get used to it.
Students’ readiness	3, 4, 5,6, 9, 10, and 11	- Managing students with different attitudes. - Managing students with different level of confidence and proficiency.

		- Managing students with different background and abilities. - Managing students with negative attitudes towards language learning.
Not applicable	1, 13 and 14	-

Even though the challenges discussed above seemed daunting, I found the participants did not give up and tried to overcome the difficulties. It seemed they were motivated as they, themselves, had identified things they could do in the classroom. Perhaps one reason for this was that their innovations better fitted their ideas about teaching and learning. For example, P2 believed that as a teacher, she should be facilitating the students more than ‘teaching’ them. She felt that the more autonomy given to students, the more independent they could be in their learning. She found a Flipped classroom could help her put into practice the idea she had about teaching. Therefore, she wanted to sustain the changes she had made. Another example would be P11. She seemed motivated to continue implementing differentiated activities because she realised how effective they had been in encouraging engagement among her students.

Reflecting on the experiences of what they had learned from the MOOCs and taken into the classrooms, all participants, to varying degrees, felt some success and satisfaction in carrying out changes. The satisfaction was quite marked, but only two (P2 and P11) were confident that they could sustain the changes in the future. Other participants were inclined to try again, but this was provisional upon time and the curriculum. Nobody spoke negatively about the effort required to apply what they had learned, even if the process created challenges. I found most of the participants felt that the innovations had been worth it because they had learned more about their students’ readiness in accepting changes (P3, P4, P5, P6, P9, P10, and P11). They could also see

how some disappointing aspects of their innovations affected their students' willingness to learn (P2, P3, P4, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10 and P12). For example, P3 realised there were students who refused to participate actively because "they thought the activities were not enjoyable enough". This made him realise that he could create more changes, but he had to learn what the students liked or disliked.

### **What had I Learned about Participants' Experiences in MOOCs?**

Earlier in the chapter, I expressed my interest in finding out other people's experiences participating in MOOCs. I wanted to know if they felt the same way I felt and whether they completed the course the way I did. I believed an interview was the most appropriate method I could use to find the answers to my questions. However, it was not as straightforward as it seemed. The process, from initial contact with MOOC participants to data analysis of completed interviews was much more complicated, time consuming, and frustrating than I had envisaged. Nonetheless, I successfully recruited 55 volunteers from Malaysia via Facebook groups, of which 14 finally agreed to be interviewed. This number was far from my expectation, but I was happy that there were people willing to become part of my research. It took me about one year and three months to complete the data collection and analysis. It was a tough journey, but I was satisfied that I could access a sufficient range of experience in this way. Most importantly, I was pleased that I could finally gain the answers to my questions earlier.

Overall, all participants were currently teaching or planning to teach ESL in different parts of Malaysia. They were educated and had achieved at least a Diploma. The participants were only interested in six out of ten courses in which I had taken part (Course 1, Course 2, Course 4,

Course 5, Course 7, and Course 8). When I asked them the reasons for participating in the courses they had chosen, I found some common sets of motivation: to gain new knowledge in particular areas; to apply new skills as part of professional development; and to satisfy general professional interest. In addition, all of them, including P1 who was not a teacher, aimed to develop themselves into being better teachers and bring about changes to their classrooms by applying what they had learned from the course.

Reflecting on the participants' experiences of taking part in MOOCs, I realised they all had their own preferences; starting from choosing the course to attempting the activities provided. The majority of them preferred a shorter course, even though they felt that length was not very significant. They also felt that the course structure was clear and helpful and the courses were interactive. However, depending on their preferences, again, participation was provisional because some tended to attempt activities that only appealed to them and relevant to what they wanted to achieve.

All participants had been positive about the idea of certification and the majority thought it was a good motivator. Some believed that certification could be a proof of their qualification and that a person had participated in a career development activity. In terms of the course content, participants' responses varied. For example, the majority found the materials were relevant and informative, and that the discussion forums were beneficial. However, some others believed that the materials lacked examples and the discussion forums could sometimes invite miscommunication due to cultural and background differences. None of the participants

experienced using social media in the courses but the majority agreed that social media could, in principle, help them create new networks and encourage discussion outside the course platform.

As regards assessment, all who participated in quizzes felt that these had helped them to test their understanding of the topics. The idea of multi-attempts was motivating, but some questions were too easy, and they did not test higher order thinking skills. Peer grading, however, could cover for this weakness in quizzes. Not all courses provided such peer activity, though. Those who had the opportunity to attempt peer grading said they learned new things, either by assessing others' work or reading others' feedback. The rubrics were also straightforward, clear and easily understood. However, the participants believed that peer grading might not be reliable.

Not all participants completed the courses. Out of 14 participants, only three completed. Others did not complete, left the course or did not participate at all. Descriptions of completers, dropouts and non-participants were clear to me. As for the others (incompletes), they showed a provisionality of engagement. They tended to decide what they wanted to do, based on whether activities appealed to them, or they could see the use of the content. I also found that the amount of time they spent varied depending on the level of difficulty of the content or whether content appealed to them.

I believed the level of participation would impact on learning. I was surprised, though, that those who did not complete and had left the course early still had learned a great deal. Not only had they formed ideas concerning new approaches to teaching, classroom skills, and subject knowledge, but they experienced engagement within the activities, which had changed their

perspectives on teaching and learning. I was also impressed that the participants had achieved their aims to use some of what they had learned in their classrooms. It was an eye-opener for me that the level of participation did not translate directly into learning outcomes.

In applying what they had learned in the classrooms, most of the participants were optimistic about using what they had learned. However, in reality, they realised transferability of ideas required planning and adaption, which in some cases, they had to scale down, and this took a great deal of time and motivation. To come up with new ideas and changes, participants needed to think through their students' readiness and their needs and interests. I believed the challenge of transferability was always one of innovation, classroom management, and students' readiness. It was clear that participants were largely satisfied with what they had learned and what they had applied. However, the sustainability of these changes was in doubt. Even though two participants felt sure they would continue, it was provisional for others.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In the previous two chapters, I described my observation of MOOCs (Chapter Three) and how participants experienced MOOCs (Chapter Four). I discovered issues of presentation, interaction, assessment, authentication, and quality needed to be explored to understand the value of MOOCs. Despite difficulties, I found all participants gained positive outcomes from their participation, especially for their professional development. However, until this point, I realised that I had not discussed CPD itself. If I were to understand the potential of MOOCs for teachers' CPD, I needed to know more about CPD in education. Thus, I set out a literature search on CPD.

The process I took to search for relevant literature was similar to when I was finding out about MOOCs (see Chapter Two). Some of the articles were identified from the snowballing technique too. The keywords I used to search for relevant articles were 'continuing professional development', 'professional development', and 'teachers' development'. I also limit my search to the educational discipline only. It did not take long to explore some key themes that appeared in earlier researches, such as the different definition of CPD, models and frameworks of CPD, effective CPD programmes, and the evaluation of CPD programmes. All these themes will be elaborated in sub-sections that follow:

## **Definition of CPD**

Before reviewing the literature, I tended to associate CPD with attending courses and formal training events. However, from the literature, I found CPD did not have a single definition, and quite a number of definitions were broader than I thought. To make it easier for me, I grouped the definition of CPD into two perspectives: CPD as a term; and a process. From the first perspective, CPD as a term, some argued that professional development was a synonym for in-service training and staff development training (Dean 1991; Shaw 1995). For Craft (2002) and Villegas-Reimers (2003), CPD was often used interchangeably with the term professional development and in-service training to describe activities that contributed to teachers' learning after their early training.

From the second perspective, Day (1999, p.4) described professional development as “all the natural learning experience and those conscious and planned activities which were intended to be of direct or indirect benefit to the individual, group or school, which contribute, through these, to the quality of education in the classroom”. As for Guskey (2000, p.16), CPD was defined as “processes and activities designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of educators so that they might, in turn, improve the learning of students”. Villegas-Reimers (2003, p.12) stated that CPD was understood as extended and continuous improvement in which teachers should engage as they advance in their career. It was not a one-day, one-time learning unrelated experience, but the combination of progressive, diversified, and relevant learning that teachers gathered throughout their work in teaching contexts. In short, it was a long-term process that included regular opportunities and experiences planned to promote growth and development in the profession. Somewhat taken by this, Friedman and Phillips (2004) also

believed that CPD was no longer a practice of attending courses and training, but a lifelong learning process.

Despite the different definitions, I noticed that the cornerstone for most of them was that CPD was viewed as an opportunity for teachers to continuously refresh and enhance their skills throughout their professional lives, while also leading to the improvement and success in the achievement of student learning outcomes (Loucks-Horsley, Stiles, Mundry, Love and Hewson 2009; Padwad and Dixit 2011). Thus, for my study, CPD had to be seen as involving the development of an individual's knowledge and practice skills after their initial training until their retirement. This development included the process where teachers acquired new knowledge and skills, continuously developed themselves, and reflected on their practice through a set of activities to promote teaching outcomes that could benefit students in desirable ways. It was something that they were expected to do rather than be told how to do.

### **Models and Frameworks of CPD**

Based on the definitions, scholars had come up with a number of CPD models or frameworks to guide institutions, policymakers, and teachers to implement and/or undertake CPD programmes so that teachers could improve their pedagogical foundations and practices and, therefore, improve students' learning in a broader sense. However, reviews of professional development research consistently pointed out the ineffectiveness of most programmes (e.g. Cohen and Hill 2000; Kennedy 1998; Wang, Frechtling and Sanders 1999). It had been suggested that the majority of programs failed because they did not take into account two crucial factors: (1) what motivated teachers to engage in professional development; and (2) the process by which teachers

change typically occurred (Guskey 2002). Thus, alternative models that re-examined these two factors were needed to guide the creation of more effective CPD programmes.

Of the many models proposed, I thought Guskey's Model of Teacher Change (2002, p. 383), Diaz-Maggioli's Four Quadrants of the Teacher's Choice Framework (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004, p. 15), Kennedy's Spectrum of CPD Models (Kennedy 2005, p. 248), and Sachs' (2007) Retooling, Remodelling, Revitalising and Re-imagining Framework were appropriate as they took into account the two factors mentioned above. Even though these models and framework were dated, I found many recent scholars had been using them in their studies, especially those related to the creation and evaluation of effective CPD programmes.

According to Guskey (2002), there were three purposes of professional development: changes in teachers' practice; changes in teachers' attitudes and beliefs; and changes in learners' outcomes. Thus, he proposed the "Model of Teacher Change" (Figure 1) that revolved around the principle in which teachers would change attitudes and beliefs after they had observed the impact of changes in teaching on students' learning. Without observation of the changes, teachers would not commit to change. He placed 'changes in students' learning' at the center of the model because he felt observation of learning outcomes was at the core of successful CPD. The change was not a direct result of professional development but rather it was an experientially based learning process for teachers (Guskey, 2002).

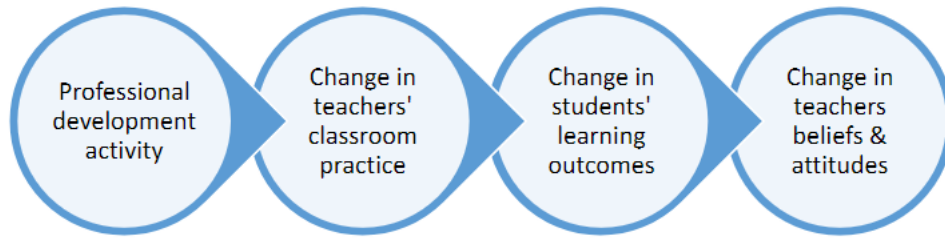


Figure 1: Guskey's Model of Teacher Change (2002, p. 383)

A framework proposed by Diaz-Maggioli (2004), “the Four Quadrants of the Teacher’s Choice Framework” helped in designing a teacher development plan. Based on his framework, teachers’ development was understood as a collaborative and continuous process in which teachers were expected to enrich and strengthen their practices by analysing students’ needs and adjusting their teaching styles accordingly. What made this framework different from others was the conscious identification of teacher’s awareness of needs and level of knowledge in establishing a teacher development plan. In other words, the more aware teachers were about their knowledge and needs in improving teaching effectiveness, the more defined the professional development plan could be met.

In Diaz-Maggioli’s (2004) framework (Figure 2), there were four levels at which teachers could be placed, depending on their own analysis and reflections on their strengths and areas of improvement. For instance, more experienced teachers who were aware of their teaching foundations and context, could mentor less experienced colleagues, prepare in-house training workshops, or document their successful experiences as a point of reference for other teachers. The experienced teachers would be classified at level one, while less experienced teachers, unaware of their weaknesses and needs, would be placed at level four.

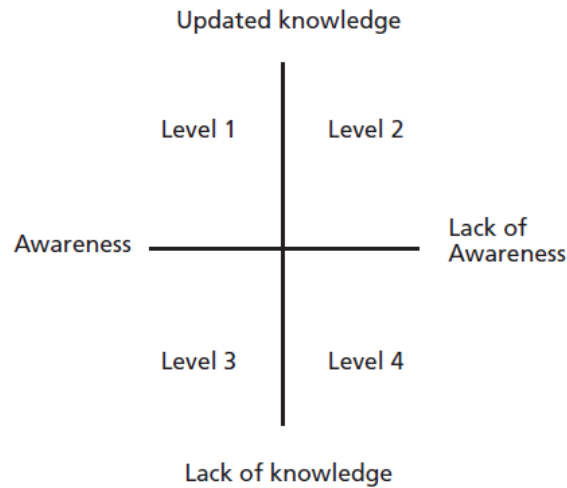


Figure 2: The Four Quadrants of the Teachers' Choice Framework (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004, p. 15)

Even though Diaz-Maggioli's (2004) framework might be useful in planning a more effective CPD programme, I believed it would only be successful if teachers were willing to give an intrinsic commitment in engaging in development activities and collaborating with peers in their context. Likewise, Kennedy (2005) stated that teachers should be willing to become critical individuals who shaped their own practice and made informed decisions in the classroom. Thus, she proposed that the models for teachers' CPD should be progressively selected and implemented depending on the needs and characteristics of the context. In her CPD models, the emphasis was on teachers, whom she believed, should be given the opportunity to increase their professional autonomy, moving from controlling models to more constructive-creative ones (Figure 3).

<b>Model of CPD</b>	<b>Purpose of Model</b>
The training model	Transmission
The award-bearing model	
The deficit model	
The cascade model	
The standards-based model	Transitional
The coaching/mentoring model	
The community of practice model	
The action research model	Transformative
The transformative model	

Figure 3: Spectrum of CPD Models (Kennedy, 2005, p. 248)

In her ‘Spectrum of CPD Models’, Kennedy (2005) identified nine models of CPD and proposed a continuum that characterises the professional learning opportunities based on a precise purpose: transmission, transitional, and transformative.

**Transmission:** The first two models in this category emphasised teachers as being passive receivers of information whether through training carried out by an expert (training model) or the completion of a course offered by an external institution (award-bearing model). The last two models placed more responsibility on teachers. The deficit model required teachers to work on particular identified weaknesses in their performance. The cascade model, on the other hand, involved teachers in attending CPD programmes and sharing what was learned with fellow colleagues.

**Transitional:** Models that came under this category were moving away from focusing only on teachers to involving students and teaching community. The standards-based model placed the

importance of making empirical connections between teachers' professional development and students' achievement. Meanwhile, both the coaching/mentoring model and the community of practice model emphasised teachers' roles in their professional community. The former model considered more experienced teachers as mentors, and less-experienced teachers were placed with them. It relied on a one-to-one relationship between them. In contrast, the latter model involved a relationship between more than two people, putting the entire teaching community together to work on and achieve a common professional development goal set by the community or institution.

Transformational: The action research model required teachers to investigate their own actions by carrying out implementations and evaluations aimed at improving the quality of their actions. The quality of action here could be perceived as the participants' understanding of the situation, as well as the practice within the situation. In the meantime, the transformative model involved the combination of a number of processes and conditions from the previously mentioned models. In short, both models in this category pushed teachers to become researchers in their contexts (action-research model) and transform themselves into teachers who were aware of their practices and the conditions of their teaching-learning contexts (transformative model).

A framework proposed by Sachs (2007) was inspired by Grundy and Robinson's (2004) three interconnected purposes of CPD: extension, growth and renewal. Extension referred to new knowledge or skills added to teachers' repertoire, growth referred to the development of greater levels of expertise and renewal referred to transformation and change of knowledge and practice.



Based on these purposes, Sachs (2007) came up with three metaphors to describe current approaches to CPD: retooling, remodelling and revitalising.

‘Retooling’ was described as old-style professional development. It positioned teachers as part of a larger organisation in which they needed to be accountable and adhere to standards prescribed in education policies. The opportunity was generally ‘delivered’ to the teacher by an ‘expert’, with an agenda determined by the deliverer, and the participant was placed in a passive role. This developed a type of “controlled professionalism” (p. 237).

‘Remodelling’, viewed teachers as the uncritical consumers of expert knowledge whose roles were to engage with students and ensure that classroom practices conformed to agendas for change proposed by authorities. In other words, teachers had to return to classrooms after attending CPD programmes to carry out tasks for which they had been trained. Remodelling reinforced a practical approach to teaching, where teaching was sometimes seen as a performance, and the role of the teacher was to engage/entertain students. This approach was very much focussed on the enhancement of teachers' content and pedagogical knowledge.

‘Revitalising’ focused on teacher learning based on the practice of rethinking and reviewing existing practices. This approach proposed that members of a community worked together and maintained control over a commonly agreed upon agenda. The difference between this approach and the former two was that its' focus was primarily on teacher learning, in particular, professional renewal through opportunities to rethink and review practices and in doing so, teachers became reflective practitioners.

Sachs (2007) added a fourth metaphor, 're-imagining', which positioned teachers as active participants in CPD programmes where they engaged in dialogue and were part of the thinking and planning process before strategies were implemented in classrooms. This approach, according to Sachs (2007), was highly political and served to advocate and support change from a variety of perspectives and approaches. At its core, it was a transformative view of teacher professionalism, which sought to develop teachers who were creative developers of curriculum and innovative pedagogues (Mockler 2005). It demanded teachers regularly examine all forms of evidence on student learning in order to identify potential weaknesses in the curriculum or instructional programme (Guskey 1999). This approach also reflected what Richardson (2003, p. 401) described as an inquiry approach where teachers determined their individual and collective goals, experiment with practices, and engage in open and trusting dialogue about teaching and learning with colleagues and outside facilitators.

Sachs (2007) argued that CPD programmes needed to incorporate all four metaphors to ensure that not only the goal of improving student learning could be achieved, but a strong and autonomous teaching profession could be supported.

The four models and frameworks I presented above focused on changes in teachers' beliefs and attitudes, encouragement for development, and reflection on practices to promote teaching outcomes that could benefit them and the students. I believed a CPD programme could be effective and successful if teachers were placed at the center of their own professional development, perceived as life-long learners who involved in activities that emphasised growth

that would impact both their short and long-term teaching in the classroom. Thus, an effective CPD programme should not only aim to develop a specific set of teaching strategies but also to change the underlying beliefs that regulate these strategies. However, CPD programmes commonly available to teachers were workshops or short-term courses. These forms of CPD had been widely criticised because they lasted only for one or several days, with insufficient activities and content necessary for increasing teachers' knowledge and fostering meaningful changes in their classroom practice (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman and Yoon 2001). Thus, many researchers suggested new ways in which CPD could be delivered (see Garet *et al.* 2001; Kanaya, Light and Culp 2005; Lessing and de Witt 2007; Rose and Reynolds 2007).

Among the new trends suggested for CPD were study groups, teacher networks, observing other teachers, and peer support (Garet *et al.* 2001; Rose and Reynolds 2007). Lessing and de Witt (2007) also suggested that formative assessment must be integrated into CPD. All these activities were suggested to be carried out in school, within the teachers' own building, during the school day and with colleagues, so that greater results could be achieved in terms of teacher productivity and satisfaction (Garet *et al.* 2001; Guskey 2000; Sparks 2002; Stephens and Boldt 2004).

Online training was another new option suggested for CPD programmes. It could save time, allow for possible cost savings (travel and paper) and offer exposure to technology learning. According to Duncan-Howell (2010), online CPD training might give teachers the opportunity to interact, communicate and reflect with others outside their own schools. This collaboration could take place over substantial periods of time, allowing for learning and reflection. The networking could

also expose teachers to new ideas and promote a community of online learners. Besides, teachers would have a strong degree of professional autonomy, giving teachers the power to determine what they wanted to learn and fit learning around their daily schedule (Kennedy 2005; Smith, Chapman, Pedulla and Meeks 2009). These general features had made online CPD stand out from different types of CPD. However, many teachers still favoured the face-to-face, personal interaction that came with many CPD courses. This was because many of them had problems with technological competence and motivation. Sometimes, the problem stemmed from procrastination, and loss of interest (Al Ghamdi 2015).

To encourage more participation among teachers and increase the rate of its effectiveness, Duncan-Howell (2010) suggested that online CPD should attend to teachers' needs, and the delivery of content should suit teachers' conditions. Dede (2008) and Garrison and Vaughan (2008), however, had a different view on how to encourage more participation among teachers in online CPD. They recommended that delivery of instruction could be a blend which included face-to-face contact. The 'hybridising' of practices might offer the best of both online and face-to-face environments for professional development purposes. It could create a flexible and accessible environment for teachers to 'engage in sustained critical reflection and discourse about their teaching practice' (Vaughan and Garrison 2008, p. 150). This, for me, seemed reasonable. However, in the case of MOOCs, hybridising of practices might be problematic because participation in MOOCs could reach hundreds of thousands. Unless MOOCs were to be given a new touch, as in the structure, organisation and delivery, hybridisation would be a better option.

## **Characteristics of Effective CPD Programmes**

Even though there were many options of CPD programmes available for providers to choose from, they would still have to consider the characteristics needed in a programme for it to be effective for teachers' professional development. Many scholars suggested that effective CPD programmes should include active learning, a strong content focus, coherence, a reasonable timeframe, and collective participation (Desimone 2009; Garet *et al.* 2001; Luft and Hewson 2014).

As regards active learning, CPD programmes were said to be effective if they could support teachers in a variety of ways including observing other teachers, practising what had been learned and receiving feedback, reviewing and analysing students work, leading and participating in discussions, applying new knowledge to lesson plans, or participating in activities as students (Garet *et al.* 2001; Heller, Daehler, Wong, Shinohara and Miratrix 2012). CPD programmes should also be characterised by a content focus that would not only lead to increased teacher knowledge but also lead to changes in teacher practices (Desimone 2009; Garet *et al.* 2001; Kennedy 2005). As Darling-Hammond (1999) highlighted, teachers' content knowledge played a vital role in both the quality of instruction and student performance.

Coherence, according to Porter, Garet, Desimone, Yoon and Birman (2000), referred to how CPD programmes could be integrated into teacher learning. Ottoson (1997) suggested the activities carried out should help teachers plan to implement changes in their classrooms, identify and strategise the challenges they would encounter once they were back in schools. In implementing new practices, teachers could participate in mentoring and coaching sessions (Grierson and

Woloshyn 2013; Luft, Firestone, Wong, Ortega, Adams and Bang 2011; Smith and Ingersoll 2004), which would provide them with individualised feedback, tailored to their needs and classrooms. Mentoring and coaching also could support teachers to make substantial changes to their existing practices (Grierson and Woloshyn 2013).

In terms of duration, Desimone (2009) emphasised that CPD programmes with a longer duration were more effective in changing teacher practices (see also Banilower, Heck and Weiss 2007; Boyle, Lamprianou and Boyle 2005; Cohen and Hill 2000; Gerard, Varma, Corliss and Linn 2011; Porter *et al.* 2000). Longer programmes could provide more active learning, content focus, and coherence compared to shorter ones (Porter *et al.* 2000). One experimental study revealed that professional development programmes spread over six to 12 months with an average of 30–100 hours showed a positive and significant effect on student learning achievement (Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson and Orphanos 2009). A Short, single programme, however, might have little follow-up and little effect on teachers' professional growth or understanding (Loucks-Horsley and Matsumoto 1999; Pianta 2011; Spillane 2002). Thus, it might show no statistically significant effect on student learning (Wei *et al.* 2009).

Finally, CPD programmes that could involve collective participation were said to be effective because they enabled conversations and discussions among teachers from the same school, department, subject, or grade (Desimone 2009; Porter *et al.* 2000). The opportunity provided to teachers to discuss curricular changes as a group and working toward developing their own professional learning community would increase teacher change (Borko 2004; Porter *et al.* 2000; Loucks-Horsley and Matsumoto 1999).

The characteristics I presented above were some of the design elements and conditions of CPD programmes that were said to be the most successful in promoting teacher change and/or affecting student achievement in learning (Borko 2004; Garet *et al.* 2001; Knapp 2003). However, I felt that there was little direct evidence for the degree to which the five characteristics brought positive outcomes for teachers and students. This was because the school-based evaluations of CPD frequently excluded examination of critical impacts such as teacher learning, changes in classroom practice and student outcomes (McChesney and Aldridge 2018). Most of the time CPD was evaluated on the basis of participant satisfaction (Muijs and Lindsay 2008). Thus, Mcchesney and Aldridge (2018) recommended various stakeholders (researchers, practitioners and policy-makers) work together, and contribute to improving the evaluation of CPD in practice by developing new tools which invite teachers to give an account on many aspects. They suggested that evaluation of CPD should include three categories: features of the CPD activity; contextual and strategic elements associated with professional development; and the impacts of CPD.

The first category covered features of the CPD activity, which included the level of subject-specific content focus, the links between theory and practice, whether the professional development was planned or incidental, formal or informal, one-off or ongoing, active learning or instructional focus, opportunities for participant reflection and feedback, duration, the degree of collaboration, the degree of professional relevance, coherence, participant ownership, and the potential transformative outcomes. The second category involved the contextual and strategic elements associated with professional development. It examined the details of the participants, school context or policy environment, the presence or nature of any goals, plans and targets, the

associated strategic leadership and vision, and the degree and nature of organisational support for new practices. The final category they identified was the impacts of CPD, which included the evaluation of teachers' affective reactions or motivation, teacher learning, teacher attitudes and beliefs, the cascading of new knowledge and practice to other staff, instructional changes, student outcomes, the changes in school processes or culture, and resource impacts such as time or financial costs. Mcchesney and Aldridge (2018) believed that examining all three categories together might produce a fuller picture of professional development rather than examining each category in isolation.

Having discussed the characteristics and evaluation of a CPD programme, I realised the importance of transferability and sustainability, and this led me to a great awareness of community of practice model. As I said earlier (in Chapter Three), agency could not be forced. Course providers could not control how the participants engaged in an activity. However, if providers could create opportunities for participants to use the knowledge they had learned in their working context, they could become more 'deeply' engaged (see Marton and Saljo's (1976). Thus, I believed it was important to promote active learning and the element of transferability in a CPD programme. Transferability, though, required planning and adaption (as I described in Chapter Four), which in some cases, took a great deal of time and effort. This might affect the sustainability of any changes. For this reason, I believed teachers needed support in transferring knowledge. This reminded me of the idea of community of practice (CoP) coined by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger in 1991 and further elaborated in 1998. The idea was to have people who had a common interest in a subject or area collaborate over an extended period of time, sharing ideas and strategies, determining solutions, and building innovations. This idea of



CoP, though, did not simply reflect any community. It had to include three crucial characteristics: the domain; the community; and the practice.

As Wenger (1998) suggested, there needed to be a domain. A CoP should have an identity defined by members sharing the same area of interest (e.g. a community of English teachers, football fans, accountants, etc.); it was not just a network of people or a club of friends. Instead, membership implied a commitment to the domain. There also needed to be a community; members of a specific domain interacted and engaged in shared activities, helped each other, and shared information with each other. They built relationships that enabled them to learn from each other. In short, a CoP could be formed when people interacted and learned together. Having said this, members of a CoP did not necessarily work together daily. Finally, there needed to be a practice; the members of a CoP should be practitioners. A conversation with a random stranger who happened to be an expert on a subject matter did not in itself make a CoP. Instead, informal conversations held by people of the same profession (e.g. office assistants or graduate students) helped people share and develop a set of cases and stories that could become a shared repertoire for their practice, whether they realised it or not. It was through a variety of methods, including: problem solving, requests for information, seeking the experiences of others, reusing assets, coordination and synergy, discussing developments, visiting other members, mapping knowledge and identifying gaps that the communities developed their practice.

In looking at best practice in CPD programmes, much could be usefully learned from the earlier checklist of characteristics and evaluation features. However, it was also important to consider the community in which this knowledge was going to be used. I would say, a weakness in Lave

and Wenger was that there was insufficient discrimination between good communities and not so good communities. The idea of looking at community through three components was a useful one, though. This shows that context needed to be brought in to any discussion of CPD.

### **What had I Learned about CPD?**

Reflecting on the literature, there were two ways to look at CPD; event or process. As an event, CPD provided teachers with a development training that contributed to their learning and teaching practice. As a process, teachers had the opportunity to experience natural learning through a set of activities which could contribute to the quality of education in their classroom. However CPD was viewed, I believed at heart it was about the opportunity for teachers to enhance their skills, leading to improvements in students' learning.

In terms of design and evaluation of CPD, I found CPD could not be successful if it did not have the element of transferability. It could also be ineffective if it was not sustained and teachers were not supported through an appropriate CoP. A CPD programme would become a one-off event which had very little impact on teachers' CPD. Thus, it would be important to frequently evaluate the CPD implemented by considering the impact it had on teachers' learning. Some scholars suggested that motivational aspects were among the critical components needed for knowledge transfer (Gegenfurtner, Veermans, Festner and Gruber 2009; Renkl, Mandl and Gruber 1996; Volet 1999). Therefore, new tools could also be developed to examine teachers' motivation. At the same time, teachers should be given the opportunity to go public with the sheer difficulty they had in adapting something they learned during CPD programmes and using it in their classrooms. Every stakeholder, especially policy-makers and administrators should, therefore, contribute to

improving the implementation of CPD. In the case of Malaysia, I could see how vigorous the stakeholders had been in planning changes in CPD programmes through its Blueprint (this will be discussed in the next Chapter). However, whether the implementation was a success, remained questionable.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **PARTICIPANTS' VIEWS ON MOOCS AND FACE-TO-FACE TRAININGS FOR THEIR CPD**

Now that I had a clear idea of what CPD was and how an ideal CPD programme should be characterised, I felt more confident to discuss participants' experiences and perceptions about attending CPD trainings in Malaysia. In this chapter, I start with the provision of CPD in Malaysian educational institutions. Then, I present findings based on participants' responses about their experiences and perceptions on attending CPD trainings, and what they felt about replacing the work/school-based CPD with MOOCs.

#### **Provision of CPD in Malaysian Educational System**

In terms of provision, Malaysian teachers were expected by the Ministry of Education to carry out CPD at least seven days per year (equal to 42 hours). Training could range from on-site events such as coaching activities, classroom observations and lesson planning, off-site events such as seminars and workshops, and in some cases, self-study. The training would allow teachers to build their skill levels. The aspiration stated in the latest Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 was to raise the percentage of school-based CPD training from its current level of 16%. This was because many Malaysian teachers reported that they found it most useful when their subject head or principal observed them in action and gave direct insight into how they could improve their classroom practices (Ministry of Education 2012). The school-based

CPD training would use a network of peers including teacher coaches, senior teachers, and principals to disseminate best practices.

In January 2013, the Ministry launched two initiatives that were intended to address fundamental competencies expected of all teachers, such as planning a lesson, managing classrooms, and implementing teaching strategies effectively to support the development of students' higher-order thinking. The first was an *e-Guru* video library of exemplary teaching. These videos could enable teachers to visualise good classroom skills and implement these in their own classrooms. These videos could also be used during training and coaching sessions to develop teachers' pedagogical skills. The second initiative was the *School Improvement Specialist Coaches* (SISC+), a teacher coaching programme. In this programme, the SISC+ had to work with greater frequency with more teachers. They had to be responsible for coaching along the three interlinked dimensions of curriculum, assessment, and pedagogy. At the same time, they had to focus on providing school-based coaching to teachers in schools (Ministry of Education 2012).

In the case of teachers of English, there were few other programmes carried out to support their development such as the *English Native Speaker Mentoring*, a programme in which native speaker teachers mentoring Malaysian English language teachers, and the *Professional Upskilling of English Language Teachers* programme, which aimed to raise the proficiency level of primary and secondary school teachers as measured against the CEFR (Ali 2016). In addition, teachers had to attend a CPD training, which provided them with step-by-step instructions on how to carry out classroom activities for the OPS-English programme; an initiative to help students in lower secondary classes gain confidence in speaking English.

I was amazed by how much the system had changed since I moved to the university in 2011. The aspiration to increase the percentage of school-based CPD training and the initiatives introduced by the Ministry seemed promising for teachers' professional development. However, I was not sure if everything printed in the blueprint had been implemented. I was also not sure if the programmes meant for English teachers were implemented in every district in Malaysia. I did not know if teachers could gain the competencies they were expected to acquire from the training. Thus, I became interested to find out what the participants had experienced. I wanted to know what they thought about the nature of the training, opportunities, and challenges these trainings presented. I was hoping the responses would help me to understand better how CPD events could be beneficial for teachers' professional development, as I found in MOOCs.

## **Participants' Experiences in CPD Trainings/Events**

### Nature of the CPD trainings/events

From the interview, I found that twelve of the participants (P2, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13 and P14) had attended CPD events since they started working, while the other two (P1 and P3) had never attended because they were not government employees. According to the interviewees, they usually attended more than the seven days mandated by the Ministry. If the events they attended ran for fewer than six hours, they would attend a different activity to make up the lack of hours so that their attendance could be regarded as a one-day event. In simpler words, a six-hour programme was equal to a one-day event.

All (P2, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8 and P14) who worked at schools agreed that CPD events were now school-based, although some teachers would occasionally be invited to attend off-site training. According to P8, teachers who had attended such off-site events would be requested to lead “an in-house training at school” so that they could disseminate new ideas to other teachers who had not been able to attend. For those who worked in the university (P9, P10, P11, P12 and P13), they said that training was usually carried out in a department or a faculty within the university. Sometimes, they too, would be invited or assigned to attend off-site training arranged by other universities or organisations.

As depicted in the education blueprint, CPD could range from self-study and off-site workshops to school-based coaching activities, providing teachers with opportunities to share best practices. In practice, all the events attended by the participants were teacher-led, presenter-led and not interactive. The participants (P2, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13 and P14) said they did not get the opportunity to share ideas. There were no hands-on activities carried out and they did not participate in group activities, complete practical tasks or share opinions about the topic discussed. All they had to do was listen. To depict the situation better, P6, for example, described the ‘seminar’ she attended as “more like a meeting than a seminar”. Instead of talking about new strategies or skills, “the headmaster or senior assistant teacher would remind teachers about work deadlines”. There were times they talked about some areas that teachers should improve on, such as to “be more communicative, cooperative and hardworking”. However, this remained as a reminder rather than a discussion on ways and techniques for changing teaching. P5 added that even when the officers from the State or District Education Department came and led the sessions, teachers “did nothing else but listen to their speeches”.

P7 mentioned that in her school, the Teachers' Annual Meeting was considered as part of CDP training too. However, for her, this meeting did not provide opportunities for teachers to share ideas because most of the time, discussions revolved around school annual events, teachers' duties, and student activities. Other than the meeting, another activity regarded as CPD training was a "book review". This activity, however, would only be compulsory for teachers who had attended CPD training for less than seven days. P7 explained that "teachers must read a book and write a review of the book they had read". The number of books they must read and review would depend on the number of days of trainings they had attended. For example, if a teacher had attended five days of events, she had to review two books to compensate for the other two days. The review had to be sent to the principal or senior teachers for evaluation. In some schools, teachers were required to present the review to others during the assembly. For P7, however, this might not benefit teachers at all because they could choose to read any books including non-academic books. She added that some of her colleagues sometimes "made up the review without reading any books and the principal usually did not realise this had been the case among some teachers".

I learned that some schools regarded attending school activities during weekends as attending CPD training. P8 said that there were many school activities carried out during weekends, such as "*Hari Kecemerlangan Pelajar* (Students' Excellence Day), "PIBG (Parent Teacher Association) meeting, and School Sports Day". In organising these activities, teachers were assigned to different committees and they usually had to be in charge of preparing and running the activities. Yes, teachers could practice the skills they had in preparing and running the



activities, but they did not usually gain new knowledge or learn new skills. However, P8 agreed that organising the activities gave her more experience in dealing with others and this enhanced her communication skills.

#### Opportunities offered in CPD trainings/events

In trying to understand more about what they had experienced, I asked the participants whether they liked/disliked attending CPD events. Overall, only P4 said she disliked attending. She described her experience as “torturous” for she had to listen to other people talk while looking at “wordy PowerPoint presentations”. When she spoke of this, she had her hands crossing her body and her intonation changed too. She stressed, “I hate LADAP (short form for CPD course in Malay)!” and “I am frustrated that I have to go to school during weekends, sit, and do nothing but listen”. She did not see how attending the courses could be helpful for her CPD because very often, the topics presented were related to what she already knew. As for others, they did not explicitly express whether they liked or disliked attending CPD training though they did talk about how the events were helpful/unhelpful for their CPD.

P2, P6 and P7 said the events were not very helpful for their CPD because they did not learn new teaching strategies or gain new skills. They could not share practice with others because most of the time, they had to listen. P7 added that she did not think the “book review” helpful either because she could choose to read any books, even those that had nothing to do with professional development. P9 and P10, who worked in the university, said training was sometimes beneficial to “administrative staff” (e.g. clerical work, financial management and filing systems) only. P9 added there was not much she could learn about “teaching and designing questions for

assessment”. If she wanted to learn something she was interested in, “[she] had to look for suitable trainings [herself]”. P10 said “[she] did not mind going to such training”, but it frustrated her that she did not get much benefit, especially for her teaching development. In contrast, P11 did not get much immediate benefit from the training, but thought it would be beneficial for her if she were to become “head of the department, deputy dean or dean of [her] faculty”.

In relation to off-site training, P8 said that when her colleagues returned from attending such events, “they would carry out in-house training” to share what they had learned with others. This training, for her, was helpful because she could learn about issues happening outside of the school. One example that she gave was related to “21<sup>st</sup> Century Classrooms”. The State Education Department had mandated that every class in the school must put up classroom presentations on the theme of 21<sup>st</sup> century; for example, by pasting pictures of spaceships on the wall, covering each student desk using wrappers with illustrations of computers, or creating a corner for science project items. As a classroom teacher, P8 needed to be aware and act on this. She claimed that she would not have known if it was not for her colleagues sharing the information. However, she agreed that this did not really count as CPD, even though the school did. For her, it was more of a briefing.

#### Challenges in attending CPD trainings/events

Next, I asked the participants if there were challenges they had to face when they attended the trainings. Of all the twelve participants, half (P4, P5, P7, P8, P9 and P10) could explicitly describe these challenges, while others did not bring forth any specific ideas. P5 said that she did

not often have the opportunity to choose the trainings that she wanted to attend. Most of the time, she would be assigned to attend events that were far from home and school. She assumed this was because she was still single and she could not make the excuse that she had children to look after. However, she said, “travelling could make [her] exhausted and that could affect [her] focus during the course”.

P4 felt that it was challenging for her because she did not like attending the courses at all. She added that she realised it was also challenging for those trying to organise the courses. She said whoever was in charge of organising a CPD course had to ask about teachers’ availability to determine date and time of the course. This process required time and “teachers normally had a lot of other things to do”. P8, who also had experience of organising a CPD course at school, said that the process was a burden. Despite “preparing for [her] lesson plans and teaching materials”, ensuring everything in the classroom was well-organised, and “getting ready all the time” (for officers from the State Education Office could come anytime to monitor her classroom), she had to do extra work in preparing for the course materials and presentation.

In the case of P7, not only she felt burdened organising a school-based CPD course, but she felt it was problematic to carry out the courses because her school was a two-session school. If the courses were to be carried out in the evening during weekdays, morning session teachers had to stay extra hours at school and evening session teachers could not attend the course. The same thing occurred when the courses were to be carried out in the morning. As an alternative, “the principal decided that the trainings should be carried out during weekends so that everyone could attend the course”. There were times, however, the principal asked for events to be carried out

during weekdays. If this was the case, teachers who were in charge of organising had to lead a similar session twice; in the morning and evening. This would not only be time consuming, but frustrating and demotivating.

Another participant who felt CPD training was burdensome was P9. She described that most events were carried out early of the term, when most of the staff were busy with new student registrations. Sometimes, the courses were organised during examination weeks. These situations made it difficult for P9 to attend events, especially when she had to be in charge of the registration and invigilate examinations. Consequently, sometimes, she had to sign up for courses that she did not really want to do. Very often during weekends. As a mother of three young children, she felt troubled because her husband was not always around due to work. To send the children to a nursery was impossible because it closed during weekends.

Finally, P10 mentioned that she had to attend community service programmes such as “*Program Anak Angkat* (Foster Children Programme), *Belajar Bahasa Asing Bersama Komuniti* (Learning Foreign Languages with the Community) and *Program Belajar Bersama Anak-anak Orang Asli* (Learning with the Indigenous Children Programme)”. She described the programmes as beneficial for her professional development because she could apply her teaching, management and leadership skills. However, she was frustrated and could not understand why the programmes she attended were not considered as part of CPD training. Her situation was almost similar to P7 who mentioned that she had to go through coaching activities such as classroom observations and lesson planning. Even though these activities had to do with her CPD and considered as part of the training in the education blueprint, the school management did not think

so. Instead, “they did the classroom observation and lesson planning evaluation in order to complete the LNPT (*Laporan Nilaiian Prestasi Tahunan/Annual Performance Assessment Report*)”. Consequently, both P10 and P7 had to attend other CPD trainings. This was challenging for them and they felt that attending another training was “not helpful but troublesome” because they had to spend extra time to fulfill the seven-day requirement.

Looking back at the responses above, I now realised how frustrating and demotivating it could be for some teachers to attend or organise CPD events. I, myself, felt disappointed to listen to some of the responses about the training. It was clear now that not everything printed in the blueprint had been implemented in schools because there was not a single participant mentioned about *e-Guru* or SISC+. Most of the time, teachers did not gain the new skills they were expected to acquire from the trainings. Thus, the system seemed to be offering a lot in terms of giving a higher profile to CPD, but had several shortcomings with regards to the style of presentations, content, time, and place.

The style of presentations referred to how the training was conducted. Most of the time, the approach used was didactic. Teachers had to listen. There was a lack of interactivity and opportunities for sharing. The content was sometimes relevant, but very often it was not. There were debates about what counted as CPD content, as not every event attended was helpful for teachers’ professional development, but regarded as part of CPD. In terms of time and place, people were concern about the arrangement of CPD events. Either the events took place during weekends or weekdays, on-site or off-site, both would affect teachers’ routines and motivation.

Overall, I believed the participants had instrumental perspectives on CPD. They tended to be driven by the need to complete a certain amount of training. Their attendance to CPD events was not driven by what they needed for self-development. This was why, some of them did what they had to do, despite not wanting to. All they wanted to do was to complete the checklist of what they had done. Having said this, however, I could see that there was a system that could work well if it was interpreted differently.

### **CPD Trainings/Events VS MOOCs**

Based on the findings so far, I could see shortcomings in CPD. I wondered if MOOCs could address them. Thus, I raised the following hypothetical scenario and asked the participants what they thought about it:

“Imagine that teachers are asked to participate in any seven MOOCs (CPD-related) that they are interested in and they have to gain a certificate of completion from each MOOC in a year. What do you think about this?”

I found seven of the participants (P5, P4, P7, P8, P9, P10 and P11) were happy about this, while the other three (P2, P6, P12 and P14) were not keen on the idea and preferred the current CPD training. One (P13), however, could not decide.

Generally, those who were happy about the idea preferred to participate in MOOCs for three reasons: convenience (P5, P7, P8 and P11); freedom to choose (P9 and P10); and personal interest (P4). In terms of convenience, P5, who was tired of travelling to events, would much prefer to attend MOOCs as she said, “I can sit in the comfort of my home, and I can do it (participate in MOOCs) anytime. I don’t have to be there (at one place) from 8 to 5, which can

be very tiring”. She also believed that attending MOOCs would be a lot easier because they were accessible via mobile phones too. P7 also thought participating in MOOCs was convenient because she could complete the course “anytime, anywhere. Not only in school”. She added, “no more sitting and listening to talks all the time” and most importantly, she no longer had to go to school during weekends.

P8 also agreed that participating in MOOCs was more convenient than attending CPD training. For her, it was convenient, not only because she could attempt the tasks in MOOCs during her free time, but she could continue from the part where she left. She believed her colleagues would also like the idea because they would not have to attend off-site training events or lead in-house events anymore. In fact, she said, even if participating MOOCs would not be made compulsory like the current CPD training, she would still choose to do it because she could see how beneficial MOOCs could be for her CPD. Having said this, however, she expressed her concern over Internet connections. In addition, P11 also said MOOCs could be completed anytime and anywhere, and she would not need to rearrange the heavy workload she had to do, such as supervising undergraduate students or evaluating trainee teachers’ classroom teaching. Furthermore, she liked the idea that she did not have to leave her five children at home during weekends. She realised that MOOCs would require time, but what was important to her was the time flexibility.

As for P9 and P10, they were happy with the idea of MOOCs replacing CPD events because they could choose the courses they were interested in. This was not surprising, as these two participants, in particular, had talked about being assigned to attend training which had not

benefitted their CPD (see earlier). Finally, P4, who had been very expressive about her negative feelings towards CPD training, embraced the scenario. She was “not comfortable having the LADAP at school”. She was more interested in completing her extra work (other than teaching) at home rather than anywhere else, especially during weekends. Thus, for her, it would be a good idea if MOOCs could replace CPD training events.

As for those who preferred CPD training events over MOOCs, they believed in “human direct contact”. P2 said she could learn better when she had a face-to-face conversation with others. P12 felt the same. For her, discussions would be “more effective when people [sat] together and [looked] into each other's eyes when speaking”. This describes very well Lave and Wenger’s (1991) idea of learning as an outcome of social participation (I explain this further in Chapter Eight). P6, however, was interested to do things in person, including “mingling around with others” who came from various school and places. This was why she preferred CPD training to MOOCs. In addition, P14 thought it was difficult to find time to complete MOOCs, especially when there were piles of work that needed to be done. Although she agreed that MOOCs were “cost saving”, she still preferred to attend CPD training events which were often one-off.

P13, who could not decide what she preferred, said that everything would depend on the content of the course. She claimed, “if the content presented is too general, it will not be helpful. So, there is not much difference from CPD trainings.” However, if the content matched her needs, participating in MOOCs would be better than attending CDP trainings.



To understand participants' preferences, I summarised their responses to the questions in Table 13. I concluded that the participants considered the convenience (P4, P5, P7, P8, P11, and P14), physical presence of others (P2, P6 and P12), freedom to choose (P9 and P10), and content (P13) when making their choices.

As regards convenience, P4 felt that participating in MOOCs was a better choice because she would not have to go to school. P7 and P8, on the other hand, had no complaints about when and where CPD events were carried out. However, after participating in MOOCs, they knew MOOCs could offer them flexibility in terms of time and place. Thus, after weighing up the convenience, they would choose to participate in MOOCs. P5 and P11 also chose on convenience because they had particular difficulties in travelling to CPD events or spending extra time at school during weekends. P11 added that MOOCs could be flexible in terms of time. However, P14 had a different take on time. She recognised how MOOCs were more flexible, but also recognised in ways that others did not, that it was going to be difficult to find time to do MOOCs.

In terms of presence, P2, P6 and P12 chose to attend CPD events by weighing up the presence of others. Based on their experience participating in a MOOC, they realised they were not able to have face-to-face conversations with other participants and this, for them, was a weakness (in actual fact, they could have had face-to-face conversations in MOOCs, but it would have been unlikely to compensate it because these participants definitely wanted physical presence). Thus, they chose CPD events over MOOCs. They thought they would learn more by having face-to-face conversations and being able to socialise offline. This looked like they valued having conversations with people they worked with over people at a distance.

P9 and P10, who had to attend training they were not interested in, placed a high value on self-determination or self-direction in CPD. They opted for MOOCs as they could select what they wanted from the long list. Finally, only P13 made clear that her judgement depended on the content. Her judgement was provisional; thus she could not decide what to choose because there was no further information given about the content of MOOCs or CPD events in the given scenario.

Table 13: Participants' experiences and preferences in CPD events or MOOCs

Participants	Experiences attending CPD events	Preference and reasons for choosing MOOCs or CPD event	How the choice was made?
P1	Not available	Not available	Not available
P2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Did not have the opportunity to share ideas with others.</li> <li>- Felt that CPD events were not helpful for CPD because she did not learn new knowledge or skills.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Preferred CPD events.</li> <li>- Could learn better through face-to-face conversations with others.</li> </ul>	Presence of others
P3	Not available	Not available	Not available
P4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Did not have the opportunity to share ideas with others.</li> <li>- Disliked CPD events because she felt they were not helpful for her CPD. Thus, it was challenging for her.</li> <li>- Realised it was also challenging for those trying to organise the</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Preferred MOOCs.</li> <li>- Disliked attending CPD events because had to go to school during weekends.</li> </ul>	Convenience

	training.		
P5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Did not have the opportunity to share ideas with others.</li> <li>- Assigned to attend events that were far from home and school.</li> <li>- Exhausted and lost focus during the training.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Preferred MOOCs.</li> <li>- Felt convenient because no longer needed to travel and MOOCs were accessible via mobile phones.</li> </ul>	Convenience
P6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Did not have the opportunity to share ideas with others.</li> <li>- Felt that CPD events were not helpful for CPD because she did not learn new knowledge or skills.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Preferred CPD events.</li> <li>- Believed socialising could happen through people's presence.</li> </ul>	Presence of others
P7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Did not have the opportunity to share ideas with others.</li> <li>- Did not learn new knowledge or skills from Teachers Annual Meeting and a book review activity.</li> <li>- Organising CPD training was burdensome and problematic because her school was a two-session school.</li> <li>- Coaching activities, such as classroom observations and lesson planning were not considered CPD events.</li> <li>- Had to find other events, and this required extra work and time.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Preferred MOOCs.</li> <li>- Felt convenient because MOOCs could be completed anytime, anywhere.</li> </ul>	Convenience
P8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Did not have the opportunity to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Preferred MOOCs.</li> </ul>	Convenience

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>share ideas with others.</li> <li>- Did not gain new knowledge or skills from school activities that were carried out during weekends.</li> <li>- Learned about issues happening outside of the school during in-house training. However, the training was more of a briefing, thus did not help her CPD.</li> <li>- Organising CPD training was a burden because its preparation required extra work and time.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Could attempt tasks in MOOCs during free time and continue at the part where she left.</li> </ul>	
P9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Did not have the opportunity to share ideas with others.</li> <li>- Felt that CPD training was sometimes beneficial to “administrative staff” only.</li> <li>- Felt that CPD training was burdensome because she had to sign up for courses she did not want to attend, and they were carried out during weekends.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Preferred MOOCs.</li> <li>- Had the freedom to choose the course she was interested in and wanted to attend.</li> </ul>	Self-directed
P10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Did not have the opportunity to share ideas with others.</li> <li>- Felt that CPD training was sometimes beneficial to “administrative staff” only and did not benefit her.</li> <li>- Frustrated that the activities beneficial for her CPD were not</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Preferred MOOCs.</li> <li>- Had the freedom to choose the course she was interested in and wanted to attend.</li> </ul>	Self-directed

	<p>considered CPD events.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Had to find other events and this required extra work and time.</li> </ul>		
P11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Did not have the opportunity to share ideas with others.</li> <li>- Did not get much immediate benefit from the training, but thought it would be beneficial in the future if she progressed to a new level.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Preferred MOOCs.</li> <li>- Felt convenient because she could complete MOOCs anytime, anywhere and did not have to rearrange her heavy workload. Felt MOOCs had the ability to be flexible in terms of time.</li> </ul>	Convenience
P12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Did not have the opportunity to share ideas with others.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Preferred CPD events.</li> <li>- Felt that discussions would be more effective if people could speak face-to-face with each other.</li> </ul>	Presence of others
P13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Did not have the opportunity to share ideas with others.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Could not decide, but said her choice would depend on the content of the course.</li> </ul>	Content
P14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Did not have the opportunity to share ideas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Preferred CPD events.</li> <li>- Felt that it was difficult to find time to do MOOCs, especially when there were so much to do at work.</li> </ul>	Convenience

Based on the analysis of participants' responses above, I can say that the majority (7 participants) opted for MOOCs. However, I noticed that some participants were not pulled by the power of MOOCs, but they were pushed by the failings of CPD that they had experienced. For example, P4 and P5 preferred MOOCs because they did not want to go to school during weekends and travel far from home. In addition, participants had negative criticisms on the content of CPD events. This made me realise that CPD events were not being fully utilised to develop teachers' CPD. Thus MOOCs, under present circumstance, seemed like an attractive alternative. Part of the attraction was the sheer quality of MOOCs as reported earlier; that they could provide teachers with the knowledge and skills needed. However, until now, I was not sure if the idea of MOOCs could succeed in the context of the Malaysian education institution. Thus, I decided to look at the context. I describe this in the next chapter.

### **What had I Learned from Participants' Experiences and Views?**

Earlier in the chapter, I decided to find out the provision of CPD in Malaysian educational institutions, the participants' experiences and perceptions about attending CPD training events, and how they felt about replacing the work-based CPD with participating in MOOCs.

From the interviews, I found that all participants who worked in school agreed that CPD events were now school-based, although some teachers would occasionally be invited to attend off-site training. For those who worked in the university, training was usually carried out in a department or a faculty within the university. Sometimes, they too, would be invited or assigned to attend off-site training arranged by other universities or organisations. Everyone who had to attend off-site events would often be asked to lead an in-house training so that they could disseminate new

ideas to others who had not been able to attend. While in principle there were ambitious policies on CPD, in practice, these were not always relevant or well-received. All the events attended by the participants were teacher-led, presenter-led and not interactive. Most of the time, teachers did not gain the new skills they were expected to acquire from the trainings.

In trying to understand more about what participants had experienced, I asked them whether they liked/disliked attending CPD events. Overall, only P4 said she disliked attending. The others did not explicitly express a view but they talked about how the training was helpful/unhelpful. Many of them did not see how CPD was helpful because they felt they did not learn new teaching strategies or gain new skills. Next, I asked the participants if there were challenges they had to face when they attended the trainings. Of the twelve participants, half (P4, P5, P7, P8, P9 and P10) could explicitly describe these challenges. For example, P4 and P8 felt that it was challenging to organise CPD events because they had to do extra work in preparing for the materials and presentation. In the case of P7, she felt burdened organising a school-based CPD course because her school was a two-session school. P9 had to attend events, especially when she had to be in charge of the registration and invigilate examinations. Consequently, sometimes, she had to sign up for courses that she did not really want to do.

Based on the participants' responses, I could see several shortcomings of CPD with regards to the style of presentations, content, time, and place. Most of the time, the approach used was didactic. Teachers had to listen. There was a lack of interactivity and sharing. The content was sometimes relevant, but very often it was not. There were debates about what counted as CPD content. In terms of time and place, people were concerned about the arrangement of CPD

events. Either the events were carried out during weekends or weekdays, on-site or off-site, both would affect teachers' routine and motivation.

Based on the hypothetical scenario given to participants, I concluded that the participants considered the convenience (P4, P5, P7, P8, P11 and P14), presence of others (P2, P6 and P12), self-sufficiency (P9 and P10), and content (P13) when making a choice between participating in MOOCs and attending a CPD event. The majority (7 participants) opted for MOOCs. However, I noticed that some participants were not pulled by what was attractive about MOOCs but pushed away by the failings of CPD that they had experienced. However, I was not sure if the idea of MOOCs could succeed in the context of Malaysian educational institutions. Thus, I believed it would be significant to look at the context.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE CONTEXT: OBSERVATION OF PARTICIPANTS' DAILY ACTIVITY

I had an opportunity to stay with three of the participants (P5, P7 and P8) whom I had interviewed. This is unusual in much research on MOOCs. However, it was common in Malaysia that some educationists knew each other from events they had attended. In fact, P5 and P7 attended my college when I was in teacher training. Therefore, they knew me in person, even though we were not close friends. I did not know P8 that well. However, I happened to have family links with her and she invited me to stay over. This kind of hospitality was not unusual in Malaysia.

As I described in the previous sections (Chapter Four), P5 had completed the MOOC in which she had participated, while P7 and P8 had stopped participating because they were occupied with other things. When I gave them the hypothetical scenario and asked their preference between MOOCs and CPD events, all three of them said they preferred participating in MOOCs over attending CPD events because of convenience. They spoke about the workload they had at school and why they felt MOOCs would be the best alternative for them. When I heard about this, I became very interested to know more about what they had to do in school. Thus, I asked to follow them to school and observe their activities. It was very fortunate that all three of them agreed to be observed.

The decision to observe the participants was not planned in advance. It was an opportunist decision and I had to admit I did not have a proper observation schedule to refer to. However, I came up with a set of questions (see Appendix 8) to help me note what people were doing, what they were trying to accomplish, and why they were doing things that they did. The questions also served as a reminder to what I should be looking for throughout the observations. Most of the time, I took notes in my notebook. I could not record any videos or capture any images during the observations because the participants did not give their consent. I tried to write as much as I could. I had to admit, however, that it was difficult to jot everything down, especially when I had to get involved in the conversation with people. Thus, whenever I had the chance, I would take out my notebook and recall events that I had with the participants. I would write everything I could remember.

I managed to observe P5 for three days, and P7 and P8 for one day. The time I had with these participants was not long. In telling their stories, I realised how valuable the observation was, and I wished I could have done more work on it, including observing other participants too. However, what I had was what was possible under the circumstances.

In analysing the observation data, I first describe the lives of the participants in a Microsoft Word document and saved it in the same folder I had for other data. After that, I exported the document to *Atlas.ti* for thematic coding. Eight themes arose from the observation and they were controlled work, intensity, curriculum, demanding, daily routine, affective, professionalism, and interest. Based on these themes, I reached to a conclusion that helped me to answer the questions I had. Below are stories of the three participants:

## **Participant 5**

P5 was originally from Negeri Sembilan. In 2012, she was posted to a secondary school in Segamat, Johor. She lived on her own in a house she bought about two years ago (2016). She was 30 years old and still single when this data was collected. I was at her place for about five days. However, I only observed and followed her to school for three consecutive days.

Her routine before going to school was the same. Every day, she would wake up at around 6.20 a.m. to perform her prayers and prepare herself. She did not have her breakfast at home. Her house was about 15-minute drive to school. At 7 a.m., she would leave her house and reached school about 15 minutes before the school bell rang.

On the first day of my observation, I found out that P5 had been told to escort her two netball teams to a district level tournament. Therefore, when she arrived at school, she punched her card in for attendance and quickly met the players who were already waiting for her at the school canteen. She made sure all the players had had their breakfast. When the school bell rang, other students had to enter the class, and those going to the tournament were assigned to five teachers who would drive them to the tournament venue. The teachers had to use their own cars because there was no transport provided by the school. Of the five teachers, four were assigned to be with players throughout the day (two with under 15-year-old players, and two others with under 18-year-old players). The fifth teacher had to return to school and teach as usual.

The netball tournament took place in another school, about 20-minute drive from P5's school. It was held from 8.30 a.m. until 3.30 p.m. Throughout the tournament, I could see P5 and her other colleagues discussed techniques and strategies with the players. I found out their teams had won medals a year before. This explained why they were trying so hard to win. I could see P5 was very passionate about what she was doing, especially when sharing techniques and strategies with her players. I noticed she demonstrated how to pass the ball and defend the opponents to the players. It paid off because the under-18 team became the champions, while the under-15 team managed to get a bronze medal. About ten from the players were chosen to play for Segamat District at State level and P5 was again, given the responsibility to accompany these players to the next tournament.

After the tournament, I followed P5 and the others to *AFC*, a fast food restaurant in Segamat. There, all five teachers (the fifth teacher came back in the afternoon) decided to use their own money to buy food for the players. They wanted to show appreciation to the players for working so hard in winning the games. I could see how happy the students were. After enjoying the meal, the teachers sent the players straight to their houses. On our way back, I could see how close P5 was to her students. They recalled the games they had and laughed together. After sending off all her players, we went back home. According to P5, she did not have to punch her card out because the school knew the tournament would end in the evening.

Once we reached home at about 4.45 p.m., P5 washed herself and performed her evening prayer. She then told me that she would go to a volleyball training at 5.30 p.m. and asked me if I wanted to join her. I found out that P5 would be taking part in a volleyball tournament, organised for

teachers in the State of Johor. The tournament would be held in four days (I could not join her in the tournament because I would be in Kedah, meeting other participants). I agreed to follow her to the training session. That evening, I did not only observe, but I joined the training too. Luckily, I knew how to play volleyball. It was easier to build a rapport with others when I blended in with them during the training. There were a few late comers who were late because they had extra classes, and some had just returned from a course. Before the training ended, everyone discussed the date for their next training. However, they could not decide because everyone had other commitments at school (e.g. extra classes, chaperoning students to a storytelling competition, and meetings) or at home (e.g. sending children to school hostel, and husband was not around to look after children). Finally, they all agreed that there would be no more training. They agreed, however, to sort things related to their attire, pocket money, accommodation, and transportation via a WhatsApp group.

On our way back from the training, I asked P5 the reasons she decided to take part in the tournament, even though it was not an obligation. She mentioned that she loved doing sports. She also said it was her only way to release the stress that she had to face at work. She did not feel going to the tournament was a waste of time, energy or money. Instead, she felt it was a good way for her to stop thinking about work for a few days. As we arrived home, it was already dark. P5 cleaned herself and then performed her night prayers. We had dinner and after that we watched television. At about 11 p.m., she went to sleep.

On the second day of the observation, P5 was in school from 7.30 a.m. until 2.30 p.m. As soon as we arrived at school, she went to the main office to punch her card in and check if there was any

relief class she had to enter. After that, she went to the Teachers' Room. She introduced me to her colleagues who were there at the time. Everyone seemed busy preparing for their classes, including P5. Therefore, I did not disturb any of them. I only replied to those who greeted me.

At 7.30 a.m., P5 headed to her first class of the day. This class was a Form Two class. It was a single period (40 minutes). P5 taught Literature (I found out from her later that she chose to teach literature in a single period class and other four skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing – in a double period class). That day, she discussed the character traits in a short story with students and set some homework. The short story she used was the one mandated in the curriculum, and according to P5, the set of questions she used to ask the students were similar questions to those asked during the examination. The lesson was short, and I could see the students followed her explanation (in my notes, I noted the students nodded, smiled, and responded positively to her questions). After the lesson, P5 told me that the students were good students (they had positive attitudes with intermediate levels of proficiency). This, for her, was why it was not difficult to teach them and gain their attention.

While waiting for the next class, P5 and I went to the canteen for breakfast. There, I was introduced to a few more teachers. We talked about current issues and things unrelated to school. I had to follow along and tried to build a good rapport with them all. After almost an hour at the canteen, P5 decided to return to the Teachers' Room and I went with her. In the Teachers Room, P5 continued her work while I sat at the common area, trying to jot down any missing notes in my notebook. For the next two hours, I sat in the common area in the Teachers' Room. There were times when P5 and her colleagues came and talked to me. That was when I found out about

teachers' side businesses. Some of the teachers sold shawls and cloths, and pastries for the coming Eid celebration. Some of them did this to earn extra income, while others were trying to help their neighbours or family members. I was not shocked about this because there were teachers who did this when I was a teacher at school. It was common, I thought.

At 11.10 a.m., P5 and I went to a Form Four class. It was a double period and P5 carried out a writing activity with the students. Before we entered the class, P5 informed me that half of the students had a low level of proficiency. Writing was their main weakness and some of them were not interested in learning English at all. I could see why P5 thought this. Some of the students were talking to each other while P5 was giving instructions. They treated her as if she was not there. These students also did not complete the work P5 asked them to do. I could see now why P5 said it was challenging to apply a new approach in her class. The students were walking around class during the lesson and they had less respect for P5. Even so, P5 tried to help students who wanted to learn by giving them a one-to-one explanation. When the class ended, P5 told me how embarrassed she felt to have me observed her in the Form Four class. I reassured her that I would not judge her lesson, and all I wanted to look at was what she did and faced throughout the day.

Immediately after the class, I followed P5 to a relief class she was expected to supervise. It was a Form Three class. P5 sat at the teacher's table and marked her students' books. At the same time, she monitored the students' activity. I could see some students were discussing their work, while others were doing their own work individually. The environment was quite dull because there was no lesson going on. When the period ended, I asked P5 if that was always the case for a

relief class. P5 said that she would teach a lesson if the relief class involved students that she had to teach. However, in this case, the Form Three students were not her students. She did not teach because she did not know what the students had learned from their English teacher. She added that she “did not want to interfere”.

The school ended at 1.30 p.m. However, all teachers were only allowed to leave school at 2.30 p.m. P5 decided to take away some food from the school canteen. I could see some teachers were having lunch there. I would smile and talk to anyone who greeted me. After that, P5 and I went back to the Teachers’ Room. There, I could see teachers were busy doing their work. Some were marking papers and books, and a few others were having their lunch or on their laptops. P5 continued marking her students’ books. Outside the Teachers’ Room, the environment became quieter than before. I could no longer see students walking or running around. Everyone had gone home. While I was looking around, I was introduced to three teachers. I tried to break the ice by asking questions such as ‘where they came from, how long had they been living in Segamat, how long had they been teaching in school, and whether they liked to be teaching in the current school.’ I found out they were not originally from Segamat. They had been living in Segamat since they were first posted to one of the schools there (ranging from five to 11 years). They liked to be in this school for different reasons: could follow their husband; the school was near the house; and there were fewer responsibilities compared to previous school. The teachers were very friendly and they seemed to want to know about my research. Thus, I told them about MOOCs and the potential I thought MOOCs could provide for teachers’ CPD. I was quite shocked when all three of them said they had never heard of MOOCs before. They thought I was talking about e-learning or blended learning.



At about 2.30 p.m., everyone started leaving the Teachers' Room. After P5 punched her card out at the main office, we left the room too and headed to the car. We went straight home after that. As we arrived home, as usual, P5 would clean herself and perform her prayer. Since there was no volleyball training on that day, she watched television. However, less than 20 minutes later, I saw her fall asleep in front of the television. She only woke up about an hour later, rushing to her room to perform the evening prayer. After that, she continued watching television, only this time, she did not fall asleep. As to appreciate my visit, P5 told me that she would take me out for dinner that day.

At 8 p.m., after the prayer, P5 and I went out. On our way to a restaurant, P5 stopped at her friend's house, which was about 15 minutes away. She told me that she invited her friend, Zana (not a real name), to join us. It was the same person whom I met on the first day at the tournament. Zana was one of the accompanying teachers who was in charge of the under-15 netball team. At the restaurant, while enjoying our food, we had light conversations. We talked about our lives, and we shared our feelings of going through everyday life as a teacher. It was then I realised that P5 and Zana loved doing what they did as teachers. They were reminiscing about the 'good old days' when they attended school activities and programmes. They laughed out loud, talking about incidents they had with students (I could not remember what exactly the incidents were). However, there were things that they were dissatisfied with, especially the meetings they had to attend, the sport training sessions they had to lead every day for months, the clerical work they had to do for the school clerk, and the money they had to use for students in

advance (they did not usually get full payment from the claim they made). At about 10 p.m., we decided to leave and when we arrived home P5 went straight to bed.

On the final day of my observation, I could not see any difference in P5's routine. Everything was the same until she arrived school. On that day, she only had one class with the Form Four students (it was a different class this time). There was also no relief class assigned to her. That morning, I sat in the Teachers' Room for two hours. There were not much I could say about the teachers because many of them were not in the room. Whenever teachers came into the room, I would greet them. I knew almost all of them by now. However, there was not much conversation going on because some teachers were rushing to go to their next class, and some were just occupied with their work at the table. At 9.30 a.m., P5 asked me whether I would like to have breakfast with her at the school canteen. I was not that hungry, but I went with her anyway. At the canteen, I met teachers whom I never met before because they were placed in a different Teachers' Room. We discussed the reason I was there. As before, I talked about MOOCs and what I felt about the benefits MOOCs could offer for teachers' CPD. The teachers listened, but did not say much after that. All they said was "good luck" and they wished that I could complete my PhD soon. After almost an hour at the canteen, P5 and I went back to the Teachers' Room.

At about 11 a.m., I followed P5 to her class. P5 promised me that she would carry out the same activity she had had before. It was the 'chain-story' activity. The main focus of this activity was on engagement, something she had learned from her participation in MOOCs. It encouraged her students to share input and create a short story with the focus on grammar. In my notebook, I noted P5 appeared much more confident than the day before. She did not seem to be nervous at

all and she was more fluent than before. However, in my view, watching and comparing this class with another Form Four class that she had taught before, I felt the students in this class were better in many ways. For example, I noticed many of the students were trying to participate in the activity. They tried to play along and contribute ideas. However, I could not ignore the fact that there were a few who did not engage in the lesson. They did not seem to bother about participating in the activity. I was not sure if they were struggling to attempt the activity, or they were just simply not bothered. Again, I could see why it had been a challenge for P5 to apply the knowledge she learned from MOOCs in her class. She said that some of her students were not interested in learning English and this was related to their levels of proficiency.

Later that day, P5 and I went home at 2.40 p.m. P5 and I had a chat while watching television. After evening prayer, we cooked dinner. That night, P5 told me that she would take me to the train station right after she came back from school the next day. She insisted on taking me herself and told me not to take a taxi.

### **Participant 7**

P7 was the second participant who agreed to be observed. I stayed at her house for three days. P7 gained her Masters in ESL about a year before I interviewed her. She was currently teaching in the same location where she was born - Sik, Kedah. Her parents were still around and she had decided her family would live with them even though she had a husband and two-year-old daughter. For her, there was nothing more satisfying than being able to live with and look after her parents.

On the day of the observation, I noted that P7 woke up early, at about 5.30 a.m. After performing the morning prayer, I went out of the room and went straight to the kitchen. I saw P7 just came out of the bathroom with her daughter. She got her daughter ready and put her into dress. At about 6.30 a.m., we left the house and P7 drove straight to school. On our way, P7 told me that her mother would take her daughter to a nursery at 8 a.m. She got her daughter ready so that her mother did not have to do so. She was grateful that she had her mother who could help her out. Her husband could not always take her daughter to the nursery because he worked in shifts. On that day, the husband had to work from 12 to 8 a.m. Therefore, he could only fetch her daughter in the evening.

P7 also talked to me about her school. The school was in a rural area, about 40-minute drive from her parents' house. According to her, the school had about 900 students and 70 teachers. Due to a shortage of classrooms, the school had to carry out two shifts; morning and afternoon. The morning session was attended by Form Three to Five students, while the afternoon session was attended by Form One and Two students. According to P7, many of her students had gained 4Ds in the UPSR examination (I explained about this examination in Chapter One) and were low attainers. P7 mentioned that teachers in her school had to work hard because many of the students were not interested in learning. She added that the parents were also 'uneducated', and most of them were rubber tappers. As for P7, she had to help the students obtain at least a B or C for their PT3 and SPM examinations (I mentioned these exams in Chapter One). She added that without the parents' support, it was difficult to help these students to achieve the results they wanted.

At about 7.10 a.m., we arrived at the school. P7 brought me to the Teachers' Room. Inside the room, I could see other teachers were busy preparing for lessons. P7 did the same. That day, she had three classes to teach: two in the morning; and one in the evening. I was quite shocked to find she had to teach in both shifts. According to her, the school was lacked of English teachers. Therefore, she had to teach the afternoon shift three days in a week, and this was done without extra pay. She had to teach in the afternoon that day. It was fortunate for me because I could stay at school until evening and learn about what she did in the afternoon session.

As soon as the bell rang, I went with P7 to her class. She had to teach Form Three students that morning. It was a single period (40 minutes) and she decided to teach literature. I found that the class had mixed levels of proficiency. Throughout the lesson, I could see P7 was very focused. She showed how comfortable she was in the class. For example, I noted that she made jokes the students liked and very often she would ask questions to students to attract their attention. I could see the students answered the questions confidently. They also listened to P7 with attention. Sometimes, one or two students would volunteer questions about the topic. At 8.10 a.m., the class ended. P7 and I went back to the Teachers' Room. P7 brought me to the common area so that we could have our breakfast together. She told me that she normally brought the meals her mother prepared for breakfast. She was not comfortable going to the canteen early in the morning because she was a bit "fussy about her dress getting smelly". She said she would usually go to the canteen for lunch in the afternoon.

While having breakfast with P7, we talked about her daily responsibilities. That was when I found out that she was given the responsibility to lead an English Club. Every month, P7 had to

lead an extra-curricular activity by bringing her English Club students outside of school. For example, she had to bring her students to the museum or organise a picnic trip. She also had a Form Five class for which she was a tutor; being there to register them and deal with their personal problems. As she taught Form Five students, she had to teach in the extra classes organised by the school. This was a project to prepare Form Five students for the SPM examination. She would usually teach at around 3 p.m. if she did not have to teach in the afternoon shift. However, if she had classes to teach in the afternoon session, she would teach the extra class earlier, at about 2 p.m. In addition to her responsibilities as a class tutor and Form Five English teacher, she was also a leader for English subject teachers. As a leader, she had to record students' performance in English papers. It was a tiring job because it involved collecting a lot of data. She added that during the 'achievement dialogue session' with the school senior management, she had to provide explanations if the outcomes had dropped. If this happened, she had to gather all the English teachers in the school and come up with activities or programmes that could help students to achieve better results. She also told me about events that she had to occasionally attend off-site. The most current event she was about to attend in a few days was a political talk. According to her, the event would be attended by all teachers from the same district and for her school, the attendance was compulsory.

At about 10.30 a.m., I went with P7 to her second class. It was Form Five class. This class was an upper set and most of the students gained A in Malay Language paper during the PT3 examination. It was a double period. P7 brought with her a set of past examination papers and distributed one to each of the students. She instructed her students to complete the tasks in the paper. I heard no complaints from students. They all followed her instructions and started to

attempt the tasks. P7, in the meantime, opened the books that she brought with her and started marking them. For about 40 minutes, I could not see any students talking to each other. They were all focusing on what they were doing. I was not sure if that had always been the case, or it was because I was there (I found out from P7 later that whenever they had to do that kind of activity, they would be quiet and focused).

The first period was over. During the second period, P7 stood up and started to ask her students to take turn reading the text. She asked the students if they had problems understanding the text and discussed this with them. Then, they continued discussing the answers to the comprehension questions. The process was smooth. I could see P7 had no problem managing the students.

After the class, I went with P7 to the Teachers' Room. On our way, I asked her how she felt about her class today. She smiled and told me she was happy that everything went well. Even though there was not much active teaching going on in the first period, she believed her students had gained something in the second period. At this time of year (May), the students should already know how to tackle tricky comprehension questions so that they would not have problems during SPM examination. She added that she no longer taught new content to her students because everything had been covered in the first four months of the year.

At about 12.30 p.m., P7 and I went to the canteen for lunch. A few teachers came in. They were afternoon shift teachers who had come in early. They wanted to have lunch before they went to class at 1.10 p.m. P7 introduced them to me and we had light conversations over lunch. They were very friendly. They also asked me about the research that I was doing. I explained to them

about MOOCs and the potential I thought MOOCs could offer for teachers' CPD. They seemed interested to listen, but I doubted that they knew what MOOCs were. They looked shocked when I said MOOC participants could create network with other participants from different countries. They also could not believe when I said that MOOCs could reach over thousands of participants at one time. I believed they were impressed by the information I gave them about MOOCs.

At 2.30 p.m., P7 entered a Form Two class. According to P7, the class consisted of students with mixed levels of proficiency. Therefore, whenever she entered the class, she would try to come up with activities that could cater for all students' needs. That day, she decided to carry out a speaking and listening activity. She brought a CD player with her. As soon as we entered the class, P7 introduced me to the students and she told them the reason I was there. After that, I went to the back of the class and P7 started her lesson by asking students to recall the lesson they had learned in the previous class. Then, P7 told her students the activities they would do for the next two periods.

She started the activity by distributing a worksheet to each student. After making sure that students had understood her instructions, P7 played a song called "I Learn from You". The students were focused on the worksheet and tried to complete the blanks in the lyrics while listening to the song. P7 played the song twice: the first time was for students to fill in the blanks; the second time was for students to check their answers. After that, P7 discussed the answers with her students. In my notes, I noted all students were paying attention to the activity. No one seemed to be 'lost'. After the discussion, P7 played the song again and all students were asked to sing along. This time, however, I could see some students refused to sing along. I



assumed they were shy. They tried to close their mouths with their hands. Some of them lowered their heads down so that P7 could not see they were not singing along. However, P7 had experienced this before. Thus, she asked everyone to stand up. She played the song once again and asked everyone to sing along. The students felt obliged to sing along, but I realised a few of them were miming.

After the sing-along activity, P7 asked students to split into groups of five and discuss the values they could see in the lyrics. The discussion among students caught my attention. I could hear students were using their mother tongue during the discussion. The students were quite loud during the discussion. However, I was not sure if P7 heard what I had heard because she was occupied with other students who needed her at the time. About twenty minutes later, she discussed the values with students and finally recapped the lesson of the day before she ended the class. For me, her lesson was smooth and well structured. I believe what she told me during the interview was true, that she had learned how to develop a good lesson plan and realised content presentation could affect learning. It was evident that in this lesson, that she did not cover too many topics in one lesson. This was why, I thought, it was easy for her students to follow her lesson.

After the class, P7 and I left school right away. On our way, P7 stopped at *Pasar Malam* (Night Market). She knew that I had been abroad for almost two years at the time. Therefore, she purposely stopped at the *Pasar Malam* to entertain me as her guest. We bought a variety of food and local fruits. After that, we went back home. As we were approaching her home, I saw her husband playing with her daughter outside of the house. At the same time, her father was

sweeping the floor. Her mother came out a few minutes after, bringing out a tray of biscuits and tea. It was soothing looking at this family. P7 went inside to perform her evening prayer. After that, she came out and joined her family. She played with her daughter and I joined them minutes later. At about 7 p.m., when it was getting dark, everyone went inside home and prepared for night prayer. After the prayer, we ate the food that we bought from the *Pasar Malam*. After dinner, everyone gathered at the living hall to watch television. At about 9 p.m., P7 put her daughter to bed and came back to the living hall to join me and the others. At about 10.30 p.m., her parents went to bed. P7 also seemed sleepy, but I guessed she did not say anything because she knew I was still awake. I could not just ignore it; therefore I told her that I would go to bed too.

The next day, I had another interview with another participant who happened to be in Sik, Kedah too. P7 volunteered to take me to the town and meet with my next participant. It was then I found out that they knew each other because they used to attend the same off-site CPD programme carried out by the District Education Department. I thanked P7 for her cooperation, and she left me with P8.

### **Participant 8**

P8 was a teacher at a primary school in Sik, Kedah. She had been teaching for 30 years and would retire in another five years. She was originally from Kedah, and had been living there since she was a child. Her first posting was in Alor Setar, Kedah. Since then, she had moved to several schools in Kedah. She hoped her current school would be her last.

On the first day I met her, I found her very open and kind. She first brought me to a restaurant for lunch. After lunch, we went to her house. She was living with her husband and two daughters: one was in secondary school, another one was a third-year university student. The first daughter she had was already married and no longer lived with her. Soon after we arrived, she took me to the guest room. After I settled down, I sat with her at the dining table and started to interview her. During the interview, I found out that she did not complete the MOOC she participated in because she said she was too occupied with the workload she had at school. When she mentioned this, I asked her if I could go to school with her the next day so that I could see for myself what she did at school and how she coped. She agreed and did not mind I went with her.

The next day, I woke up at around 6 a.m. to pray. After the prayer, I heard a noise in the kitchen. I went to the kitchen and I saw P8 was preparing breakfast. I greeted and helped her. About half an hour later, she went to her room to change her clothes. After that, we had our breakfast together. Her husband and her youngest daughter also joined us. At 7.10 a.m., the husband took her daughter to the school, while P8 and I walked to school. Her school was about 15-minute walk. On our way to school, I asked P8 about her school. She told me that her school was not big. There were only 46 teachers and about 490 students. There were only three buildings in the school. The school was considered a rural school because it was secluded and located in the middle of a village.

When we arrived at school, I followed P8 to the main office. She had to sign her attendance in a log book provided. Then, she took students attendance book with her. She was a class tutor for

one of the Standard Three classes. After that, I followed her to the Teachers' Room. On our way, I could see other teachers were rushing to the main office. I assumed they were in hurry because they wanted to sign their attendance before the school bell rang. According to P8, those who were late would be called out by the headmaster and they would get a warning letter. She added that a bad record of punctuality would affect their annual evaluation and ultimately end the salary increment in the coming year. P8 also stopped at the Subject Headteachers' Room and found she had one relief class to take.

Once we were in the Teachers' Room, P8 introduced me to some colleagues. The room was the biggest I had seen of all the three schools I had visited. All female teachers were allocated a space there. A few minutes later the school bell rang. I could see a few teachers left the room and headed to their classes. Others who remained did their own preparation work and some of them were chatting to each other while having their breakfast. P8 joined those who were having breakfast and called me to join them too. For the next 30 minutes, they were talking about things that I was not familiar with. Therefore, I just listened and did not interrupt them.

At 8.30 a.m., P8 was getting ready to go to her first class. It was a double period and she told me that she would teach her students reading comprehension. We headed to Standard Six class. It had students with intermediate levels of proficiency and they were among the best achievers in school. Once we entered the class, all students stood up and greeted us. There were about 30 students in the class. P8 introduced me to them and told them why I was there. I greeted them and went straight to the back of the class.

P8 carried out the lesson for an hour. She used past examination papers as her teaching materials. I could see P8 was very engaged with the class. I noted in my notebook that she interacted with her students throughout the lesson, especially with those who seemed very quiet. She kept on asking questions to students to check their understanding. She circulated the room so that she could observe individuals more closely. I also noticed that students were focused throughout the lesson. They seemed to pay full attention to what P8 said, and whenever she asked them to attempt the tasks given, they would do it immediately. The students seemed confident. Whenever P8 asked them questions, they would try to answer them. Even when they got the answers wrong sometimes, they did not give up. One final thing that I noted in my notebook was the students helped each other. For example, when one person volunteered to give an answer to the question asked and he/she got it wrong, other students would step in. When this happened, P8 played the role of facilitator. According to her, she wanted to encourage her students in developing their language skills through communication. Therefore, whenever she saw her students trying to communicate with each other, she would observe them and only interrupt when communication broke down. She told me that she learned this approach through the MOOC she participated in.

After the class ended, P8 and I walked back to the Teachers' Room. We stopped at one of the classes. It was P8's Standard Three class. She stopped there to ask if there were students absent on that day. She needed to know because she had to record the attendance in the log book. After finding out that everyone was present, we continued to the Teachers' Room. On our way, I praised P8 for having a beautiful classroom. That was when she reminded me of the '21<sup>st</sup> Century Classroom' project (see Chapter Four). She said, "it would not be that nice if I only used the RM100 (about £18) given by the school. What you see is worth more than that." Only then I

found out that she had used her own money to cover the expenses of the class decoration. Even though she said she did not mind doing this, she felt the project required her time and energy; she had painted the walls and provided covers for the desks. She explained she had no choice, though, because the project was mandated by the State Education Department and the officers could come anytime to view the classroom.

When we arrived at the Teachers' Room, I asked her about her workload at school and whether the talk she had to go to in the afternoon was part of her job as a teacher. It was then I found out that P8 had been given responsibility to take charge of the school badminton players and netball team. She had no skills in netball; therefore the school assigned an assistant teacher to help her with the training. She was also one of the Teachers Club committee members. The club was established so that teachers could carry out annual events among themselves such as *Family Day*, *Annual Dinner*, *Eid Celebration*, and *Local Fruit Carnival*. These events were part of the headmaster's ideas to get teachers together in a less formal environment. Even though this was interesting, P8 said that it could sometimes be a burden because they had to do weeks of preparation and this would add on to their workload.

P8 also mentioned that as a class tutor, she had to record the students' performance in every subject. What demotivated her was that she had to fill the data in an online database. Sometimes, the server lost Internet connection and she had to key in the data again. This wasted a lot of her time. There were times when she brought the data home so that she could try filling in the database using the Internet connection at home. However, the server stopped running and she could not save what she had keyed in. This happened many times, especially when she tried to

do the job during daytime. Thus, she thought of doing the job at night. According to her, sometimes it worked, but many times it did not work. For her, filling in the data was “the worst job” she had ever done in her entire career. Furthermore, she was not a tech-savvy person.

With regards to the talk she had to attend in the afternoon, P8 mentioned that it was made compulsory to all teachers in the school. I believed this was the same event mentioned by P7 because they both came from the same district. According to P8, a politician would be there to give a speech and she guessed he would be speaking of his manifesto for the next election. She said there was a similar event carried out before and for her, it was just a waste of time because she was not interested in politics. She added that if teachers did not attend the event, they had to write a letter to the headmaster and explain their reasons for not attending. The reasons, according to P8, had to be valid, or their absence would be recorded in the annual evaluation form (this would affect the score of their performance).

At 11 a.m., I followed P8 to the Standard Two class; a relief class she had to monitor. After the students greeted her, P8 first asked them if they had homework they needed to do. A few students responded with a yes. P8 asked them to do their homework and told them that they could ask her questions if they had any problems, especially those related to English. While supervising the class, P8 marked her students’ books and I could see the students were doing their homework. Some students discussed the homework among themselves. After 30 minutes, P8 left the class and we went to the canteen straight away. We had our lunch early because we were going to attend the event in the afternoon. P8 mentioned that the event would be carried out in town, so we might not have enough time to have lunch later. While we had our lunch, P8 told

me that the event we were going to attend would be considered a CPD event and she could record it in her blue card (a card used to record her attendance to CPD event). Hearing that, I got excited and could not wait to be there. It was very fortunate that I could witness an event that many of the participants claimed as 'wasted'.

At 1 p.m., the school ended. I could see all teachers were leaving school. P8 and I did the same. Once we arrived home, P8 dropped all her things in the car and we left for the event. It took us about 30 minutes to arrive at the venue. I could see many people were gathering in a town hall. According to P8, they were all teachers from the same district. Some of them greeted P8 while we were looking for a place to sit (I assumed many teachers knew P8 because of her seniority). The event started at 2 p.m. It was true what P8 had said. The politician's speech was mainly about his manifesto for the next election. Some of the content was related to education and he also mentioned his ambition to help schools with the lack of facilities. The speech ended about one and a half hours later. Teachers were invited to have tea. However, I could see many teachers went straight to their cars. P8 also wanted to go back immediately because she was already tired. I smiled and followed her.

At home, P8 went straight to her room. She said she wanted to pray. I did the same. After that, I came out and sat in the living room. I saw P8 came out of her room and she asked me if I wanted anything to drink. I said no and she came to me. She asked me if I would like to go out or do something else. I did not want to trouble her, so I said no. Her house was very quiet in the evening. She told me that her elder daughter was usually in the room at that hour, and her husband would only arrive home at 6 p.m., after fetching her other daughter from school. She



added that the house was often livelier at night, when everyone was home. P8 said she wanted to rest in her room. I understood and could see how tired she looked. While P8 was resting, I went to the room and checked my notebook.

That night, after the prayer, P8 and her daughters were preparing dinner in the kitchen. I joined and helped them. I could see how close P8 was to her daughters. I noted that her daughters openly shared what they had been doing the whole day. There were times P8 laughed at them because they made jokes. I enjoyed their company. After preparing the food, we had dinner together. Then, we all watched television. At about 11 p.m., everyone was ready to go to bed. I told P8 that I would be leaving her house in the morning because I had a train to catch. She told me that her husband would take me to the train station after he sent her daughter to school. I thanked P8 for her hospitality and went straight to bed. The next morning, P8 packed a lunch box for me before she left for school. I was so grateful and thanked her again.

### **The Context**

Based on my observations, I concluded that all three participants had at least two lives: working and personal (see Table 14).

In their working lives, the participants were often controlled by the school, State or District Education Department and the Ministry of Education. For example, the school demanded teachers punched in and out their attendance card, monitored relief classes, taught in two shifts (P7), became the students' chaperone (P5), a leader for English subject teachers (P7), a member of the Teachers Club (P8), the class tutor (P7 and P8), and the sports teacher (P5 and P8). At a

different level, teachers were also controlled by duties mandated by the State or District Education Department. For example, P5 had to chaperone students to the State Level Netball Tournament. P8 had to attend a political talk and spend her time and energy working on the '21<sup>st</sup> Century Classroom' project even though she was not keen on the ideas.

Teachers were also controlled in their teaching activities. They had to use materials mandated by the Ministry of Education. For example, P5 had to teach her students using a short story that was listed in the curriculum. P7 and P8 used past examination papers as their teaching materials because they believed similar questions would be used in the future examination. This kind of control disclosed that teachers were not part of an inquiry culture into teaching and learning. I believed the duties and responsibilities given to them had contributed to their heavy workload. I guessed this was why the participants mentioned during the interview that they were busy and could not cope with the workload sometimes.

When it came to the details of teaching, the professional context was one of having to cope with the varying levels of students' proficiency. This was out of the participants' control, and for them, it made their work very demanding. Even so, they seemed passionate about what they were doing and professional in their behaviour. For example, P5 used her teaching skills to give a one-to-one explanation to her students so that they could understand the topics better. P8, instead of sitting at the teacher's table, circulated the room so that she could observe individuals more closely. On different occasions, P5 gave tips to her netball players by demonstrating the techniques and strategies to win the game. The support and encouragement she gave to the players made me believe that she was committed to the work she had to do.

I also saw how the participants showed their commitment by investing their own time and resources in their students. For example, P5 and her colleagues used their own money to buy food for the students as a token of appreciation for their hard work during the tournament. P8 used her own money, time and energy to fulfill the requirement of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Classroom project. I believed that the participants were willing to do all these because they were passionate about what they were doing, and their personal relationships with students were very important to them. I felt that the better this relationship, the more satisfied they seemed to be. In contrast, when a lesson did not go so well and they felt a friction with students, to different degrees, they felt a level of distress.

With regards to their personal lives, I found all three participants had almost similar daily routines. There were three themes arising from the routines that I observed: being religion; meeting daily needs; and relaxation. In terms of religion, all three participants started their daily routines by praying. They would pray a total of five times every day. As regards their daily and family needs, the participants began the day by preparing for breakfast (P7 and P8), getting the child ready (P7), and getting ready for work. In the evening, they would have shower and rest. At night, they would have dinner, rest and finally go to bed. With regards to relaxation, every participant had their own activity. For example, P5 relaxed after her long day at work by going to volleyball training, sleeping or watching television, and P7 and P8 preferred to relax by spending time with their families.

Table 14: Participants' lives

Lives	Themes	Sub-themes	Examples
Working	Controlled	Duties to school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Punched in and out attendance card.</li> <li>- Monitored relief classes.</li> <li>- Taught in two shifts (P7).</li> <li>- Became the students' chaperone (P5), a leader for English subject teachers (P7), the Teachers Club committee member (P8), the class tutor (P7 and P8), and the sports teacher (P5 and P8).</li> </ul>
		Duties to State or District Education Department	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Chaperoned students to the State Level Netball Tournament (P5).</li> <li>- Attended political talk (P7, P8).</li> <li>- worked on the '21<sup>st</sup> Century Classroom' project (P8).</li> </ul>
		Duties to the Ministry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Used a short story that was listed in the curriculum (P5).</li> <li>- Used past examination papers (P7, P8).</li> </ul>
	Professionalism	The context in which they expressed their professionalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Different levels of proficiency.</li> <li>- Different interests.</li> </ul>
		Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Gave a one-to-one explanation for better understanding (P5).</li> <li>- Circulated the room to observe individuals more closely (P8).</li> <li>- Demonstrated the techniques and strategies to players (P5).</li> </ul>
		Investment in time and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Used own money to buy food as a token of appreciation (P5).</li> </ul>

		resources	- Used own money, time and energy to fulfill the requirement of the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century Classroom project (P8).
Personal	Daily routine	Religion	- Started praying early in the morning. - Prayed five times a day.
		Daily needs	- Had breakfast. - Prepared to go to work. - Organised family needs. - Had shower. - Rested. - Had dinner. - Went to bed.
		Relaxation	- Played volleyball, slept or watched television (P5). - Spent time with family (P7, P8).

Based on the summary of observations above, I realised that the participants were not only committed to teaching in the abstract, but to the people immediately in front of them; students and family. I was also left with questions about time and how time was used. All of the participants were busy and there were objective reasons why they were busy. However, there were also subjective dimensions to it. I could see that they might have been able to make time during the day to commit to CPD. I believed they were committed as professionals to make such time. However, they were in a context where they were not expected to show much initiative, and hence they did not. They had not developed routines for professional reflections in the same way they had developed routines for everyday teaching or for managing their lives or families. I believed the way they were controlled affected the way they used their time.

Now that I had seen the context for myself, I could see why participating in MOOCs could be a challenge. MOOCs usually offered generalisations about teaching. These, I believed, could not directly address the problems seen in each teacher's classroom. I also found that the discourse around MOOCs was based on the notion that participants were committed to professional learning and reflection on practice. They were expected to learn about and apply what they had learned to their work. However, such application was problematic in the context in which the participants worked due to the control exercised over them and the lack of a tradition of inquiry culture in school; they had to follow the curriculum and fit to its demands. In addition, teachers had a strong interest in the local context. Having said this, though, transference was not impossible because I saw an example where it had happened.

Understanding the context had made me realise that there were other things more important to the participants, such as their interests or family. They were willing to spend their leisure time doing what they liked with whom they loved, even if it meant they had little free time. However, the idea of doing self-study in MOOCs would disrupt this situation. Therefore, even if MOOCs could find a place in the participants' lives, they would still have to compete against other demands on their time and other interests. Having said this, however, I believed there could be ways for MOOCs to become part of the context. During the observation, I could see how committed the participants were towards their professionalism. They were interested in MOOCs because MOOCs could give them ideas and knowledge which would feed to their professionalism. Under different circumstances, I believed participants could learn to embrace the MOOCs as promoting their professionalism.

### **What had I Learned from Participants' Lives?**

Based on the observations of three participants, I concluded all of them had both working and personal lives. They were committed to the people in front of them: students and family. In a controlled situation, as in the workplace, I did not see how MOOCs could fit into the work context because they needed to follow a curriculum and were often very busy. There were other things more important to the participants than CPD. This showed me that there would be a lot of issues within the take up of MOOCs, and this will be discussed in Chapter Eight.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **DISCUSSION: THE LESSONS I LEARNED**

When I started this PhD project, I described my interest in MOOCs and how I had been excited by MOOCs, for I thought they offered a revolutionary idea of pedagogy. I could see how they might change the whole shape of education by offering flexibility for people to do what they wanted to do, anywhere, anytime, as long as they had the interest and access. This gave me the idea of building a MOOC and investigating its effectiveness for trainee teachers who were going to teach English as a second language. However, I had a limited timeframe and lack of financial support. Thus, I had to redirect my idea to something that was more viable. That was when I discovered that MOOCs were relatively new in Malaysia and very few studies had been conducted in the Malaysian context. This gave me an opportunity to do something that had not been done before by Malaysian scholars. With the limitation that I had, I knew I had to choose a field that I was familiar with and interested in. That was when the idea of using a MOOC for in-service teachers' CPD came to mind.

I decided that having had the experience as a teacher in school and university, I knew how teachers were expected to develop professional careers across different disciplines. In the case of Malaysia, all teachers were tasked to complete a seven-day training in a year. However, I knew how difficult this was, on top of teaching responsibilities and other duties (see Chapter One). Thus, offering CPD using MOOCs, for me, seemed to be a possible solution to the problem of workload because teachers would not have to be physically present and they would have greater



flexibility over when they carried out the training. However, I was not sure whether this idea would work in practice the way I imagined. That was when I realised there was more to find out about MOOCs. I kept asking myself about the organisation of MOOCs, the way they were structured and whether they could be distinguished from each other. I also wondered whether MOOCs could benefit teachers' CPD the way I thought they would. This made me question myself about what teachers would experience and gain from participating in MOOCs. Understanding their experiences would also allow me to ascertain if MOOCs could fit into teachers' lives. From these questions, I eventually saw three key questions that I wanted to address in this study:

1. How are MOOCs Organised and Structured?
2. What could MOOCs offer for teachers' CPD?
3. Where did MOOCs fit in teachers' lives?

I discuss these research questions in the following sections:

### **RQ1: How are MOOCs Organised and Structured?**

In addressing this question, I first gained experience by participating in MOOCs. Reflecting my interest in English language teaching and learning, I identified ten courses to be observed (see Chapter Three for a full description of the observation). Generally, my observation of MOOCs revealed that all ten courses were organised and structured differently, depending on the course provider. Overall, though, all of them were well-organised, materials provided were clear, learning was assessed, interaction and social networks were encouraged, certification was obtainable, and most importantly, knowledge transfer was promoted. However, apart from these,

I found two key points arising for discussion: the value of the distinction between cMOOCs and xMOOCs; and the wide variation within xMOOCs.

As regards the first point, I presented earlier that MOOCs had been classified using the core distinction of cMOOCs and xMOOCs (Chapter Two). However, based on the observation, I could see that the distinction between the two was not very helpful, at least in the domain of teacher education. This was because all the ten courses turned out to be xMOOCs, which ran on a model of instructional design within a single platform (see Table 1, p. 100). These courses relied on the transmission of structured, centralised content mainly generated by designers. I believed this appeared to be the pattern adopted within the broad template offered within platforms such as Coursera, Udacity, EdX and FutureLearn. Looking at this, it was not surprising that xMOOCs overshadowed cMOOCs (Marcinkowski and Fonseca 2015; Van Dijck and Poell 2015). What might have started out as a new, even disruptive approach to teaching and learning (cMOOC), appeared to have been gathered within a more traditional approach based on instructional learning (xMOOC). This arguably reflected a recurring pattern in the history of ICT; an assimilation of technology rather than the adaption to the technology. Assimilation might not, of course, be a negative thing. However, the domination of xMOOCs might suggest that opportunities had been lost for alternative approaches. One logical explanation for this dominance, I would say, was because xMOOCs represented the approach that both designers and learners were more comfortable with. As stated by Marcinkowski and Fonseca (2015, p. 7), they were ‘reproduced from established material forms through a kind of habituation practice’.

The second key point arising from the observation was that not all xMOOCs I observed were the same. When I compared them in terms of pedagogy, materials and assessment, I found they differed from each other. As regards pedagogy, for example, I could see that not all courses offered a mix of media and spaces where learners could create, share and transmit knowledge. I also found only one course that focused primarily on language while others emphasised pedagogy, where teaching techniques and strategies in English language classrooms were the key content (see Table 2, p. 101). In assessing understanding, only some courses gave extended opportunities for learners to use the knowledge they gained from the course to their real-life work and allowed them to play the role of educators during peer grading assessment.

Reflecting on the materials, different courses had different presentations and materials, depending on their learning objectives and outcomes (see Table 3, p. 103). For example, some courses used videos and some used lesson plan templates. There was one course provided badges to participants. In addition, only two courses provided opportunities for participants to discuss and share knowledge among themselves through discussion forums and one of these courses offered opportunities to extend communication outside the formal learning space.

Regarding the assessment, I found each course provided participants with formative and summative assessments (see Table 4, p. 104). However, the organisation differed. For example, the timing of assessments in most of the courses was organised in a predictable pattern, while one course did not seem to follow a clear pattern. Some courses also offered multi-attempt assessment, but they differed from each other in terms of the number of opportunities provided.

Courses with written assignments allowed no further attempts and participants were required to do peer grading.

XMOOCs have often been described as closed and contained within only a single platform (Jacoby 2014; Kennedy 2014). However, the differences I found in the xMOOCs above convinces me that this is not necessarily the case. If openness covers transparency, course delivery, access to courses, course content, the manner of instruction, and the way assessment is conducted (Jacoby, 2014), some of the xMOOCs can be described as more open than others. Thus, I feel not all xMOOCs should be caricatured as purely closed. They can be more or less open or simply contained, depending on how they are pedagogically organised, the materials provided, and the way assessment is conducted. Based on this assumption, I have come up with some key questions that may be useful when attempting to describe or design an xMOOC (see Table 15).

Pedagogically, a more open course will provide opportunities for communication and knowledge transfer, either within the course platform or beyond it. These opportunities are limited in the less open course and absent in a contained course. In terms of content materials, a range of media used may allow greater personalisation and openness. The more materials are expected to be created by or between learners, the more open the course. A level of knowledge sharing is expected, and assessed, in a more open course. In a contained course, knowledge sharing is not expected at all. With regards to assessment, a more open course will cover peer grading. However, this is made optional in a less open course and not present at all in a contained course.

Table 15: Degree of openness within xMOOCs

Focus	Key Questions	Degree of Openness		
		More Open	Less Open	Contained
Pedagogy	Is knowledge transfer planned?	Planned	Planned, but optional	Unplanned
	Is there any communication involved?	Yes	Yes, but within the assessment only	No
	Is everything contained within the course platform or are other platforms available?	Other platforms available	Open for other platforms, optional	No other platform
Content Materials	Is there a range of media used?	Yes	Yes, but limited	No
	Are learners expected to generate additional materials?	Yes	Yes, but optional	No
	How much sharing knowledge and ideas is expected from learners?	Frequent	Occasional	None
Assessment	Is there any peer grading assessment?	Yes	Yes, but optional	No
	Is knowledge transferability assessed?	Yes	Yes, but optional	No

Returning to the research question, I believe MOOCs may now be described based on the degree of openness: more open; less open; and contained. In the context of this study, I believe these

categories are important because people often discuss MOOCs without being specific about the types of MOOC. More extended categorisation would help in selecting MOOCs for CPD if they covered opportunities for communication, knowledge sharing, peer grading, and most importantly knowledge transfer, which may promote changes in teachers' performance. This will be discussed further in the next section.

### **RQ2: What can MOOCs Offer for Teachers' CPD?**

In addressing the second key question, I gathered responses from MOOC participants regarding their experiences of participating in MOOCs for professional development (see Chapter Four). From their responses, I found two key points arising for discussion: characteristics of effective CPD in MOOCs; and flexibility in participation.

As regards the first key point, I believed a CPD programme for teachers could be effective and successful if it aimed at the development of teaching strategies, and provided teachers with activities that emphasised professional growth, which would impact on their short and long-term teaching in the classroom. To create such a programme, it was essential that providers included the five characteristics of an effective CPD programme suggested by some scholars (Desimone 2009; Garet *et al.* 2001; Luft and Hewson 2014; Porter *et al.* 2000): active learning, a strong content focus, coherence, a reasonable timeframe, and collective participation.

As shown in Table 16, I made a comparison between a desirable CPD programme with the MOOCs as experienced by the interview participants. Overall, the experience of the MOOCs described by the participants had all the characteristics of an effective CPD programme. In terms

of active learning, a CPD programme could support teachers in a variety of ways including observing other teachers, practising what had been learned and receiving feedback, reviewing and analysing students' work, leading and participating in discussions, applying new knowledge to lesson plans, or participating in activities as students (Garet *et al.* 2001; Heller *et al.* 2012; Porter *et al.* 2000). Reflecting on participants' experiences of doing activities in MOOCs, it was clear to me that the courses provided active learning for teachers including completing polls while watching videos, participating in discussion forums, attempting auto-generated quizzes, completing written assignment by reflecting on experiences in applying new knowledge to classrooms, grading peers' assignments, and receiving feedback from peers. These activities have been suggested as effective for CPD by some researchers (e.g. Garet *et al.* 2001; Lessing and de Witt 2007; Rose and Reynolds 2007).

A CPD programme was also characterised by a content focus that would not only lead to increased teacher knowledge but also lead to changes in teacher practices (Porter *et al.* 2000; Garet *et al.* 2001; Kennedy 1999). In the MOOCs, participants stated that the content was relevant, helpful and informative, providing them with ideas concerning new approaches to teaching, classroom skills, and subject knowledge. What they learned from the course had in different ways changed the way they carried out their teaching.

As regards coherence, a CPD programme should be integrated into teacher learning and the activities carried out should help teachers in planning changes in their classrooms. This would mean identifying the challenges they would encounter once they were back in schools (Porter *et al.* 2000; Ottoson 1997). MOOCs, as mentioned by the participants, provided activities (e.g.

quizzes and peer grading) that encouraged them to read more, self-reflect and identify their weaknesses in particular areas. The fact that they had to try out the knowledge they gained from the course to the classrooms helped them in accessing solutions to problems in teaching, improving their teaching skills and becoming better graders.

In terms of duration, an effective programme should be spread over six to 12 months, with around 30–100 hours of commitment to attending sessions and creating innovation in the classrooms. The MOOCs described by the participants varied in length, ranging from four to twenty weeks. In comparison to an ideal CPD programme, the duration was considered shorter by the majority of participants. Having said this, however, they agreed that the length did not affect their participation and that the length was suitable for the content delivered. The fact that they felt MOOCs were helpful for their development showed that a shorter course might still be effective for teachers' CPD. The participants felt that their participation in the MOOCs had an impact on their motivation, learning, attitudes and beliefs. They were able to share new knowledge within the MOOCs, at the same time make instructional changes in their classrooms. This shows a shorter programme can have an impact, although it would have been better to have a longer programme.

Finally, an effective CPD programme should involve collective participation to allow teachers from the same school, department, subject, or grade to have conversations and discussions among themselves (Desimone 2009; Porter *et al.* 2000). This might help them in working toward developing their own professional learning community that would increase teacher change (Porter *et al.* 2000; Borko 2004; Loucks-Horsley and Matsumoto 1999). As in the programme, MOOCs



also provided the opportunity for collective involvement. There were activities (e.g. forum discussion and peer grading) that gave participants the freedom to share ideas, opinions, knowledge, problems and experiences. The participants thought these activities were helpful for their development. However, these activities were outside of school. Perhaps they would be more effective if carried out within the school.

Table 16: A comparison between an ideal CPD programme with participants' experiences of MOOCs

Characteristics	An ideal CPD programme described by scholars	Participants' experiences of MOOCs
Active learning	Activities should include: observing other teachers, practising what had been learned and receiving feedback, reviewing and analysing students' work, leading and participating in discussions, applying new knowledge to lesson plans, and participating in activities as students.	Activities included: attempting polls while watching the videos, participating in discussion forums, attempting auto-generated quizzes, completing written assignments by applying new knowledge in classrooms, grading peers' assignments, and receiving feedback from peers.
Strong content focus	The content delivered should develop teachers' knowledge and lead to changes in teacher practices.	The content was relevant, helpful and informative, giving participants ideas concerning new approaches to teaching, classroom skills, and subject knowledge.
Coherence	The activities included should help teachers plan to implement changes in their classrooms, identify and strategise the challenges they	The activities (quizzes and peer grading) encouraged participants to read more, self-reflect and identify their weaknesses in particular areas, and

	would encounter.	guide their learning to achieve specific goals, such as improving teaching skills and becoming better graders.
Duration	The programme should be spread over six to 12 months with 30–100 hours of face-to-face activities and classroom practice.	Four to 20 weeks
Collective participation	Activities provided should enable conversations and discussions among teachers from the same school, department, subject, or grade, working toward developing their own professional learning community.	Activities provided (discussion forums and peer grading) gave participants the space to share ideas, opinions, knowledge, problems and experiences, at the same time engaged participation and increase motivation. The professional community was outside of the school.

As regards the second point arising from participants’ responses about their experiences, I found MOOCs were flexible in many ways. For example, MOOCs were described as convenient by the participants because they could attend the course anywhere, anytime, as long as the Internet connection was available. This allowed participants to manage their time and prioritise their work, giving them more opportunities to be productive in what they were doing. MOOCs also gave participants the opportunity to interact, communicate and reflect with others outside their own schools, allowing for learning and reflection (Duncan-Howell 2010). This, at the same time, would save their time and allow for possible cost-saving (which was usually caused by travelling).

I also found that MOOCs offered flexibility in terms of participation. All participants I interviewed had their own preferences. This meant that participation was provisional because

some tended to attempt activities that only appealed to them and relevant to what they wanted to achieve. The amount of time they spent attending the course also varied, depending on relevance and familiarity of the materials. Even though the designers had made MOOCs attractive and accessible to the participants, relevance and familiarity led to dropout and low completion rates. Flexibility then came with a downside. For example, since participants could attend the course anytime, they tended to procrastinate, and this consequently decreased their motivation. The participants could also stop attending the course when they realised the activities no longer appealed to them.

Looking back at the discussion above, I can say that MOOCs have the potential to be an effective medium for teachers' CPD. Not only they have all the characteristic of an ideal CPD programme, but they also offer teachers certification, and there are rooms for informal learning. They can provide relevant and stimulating activities, and sustain engagement with content that can lead to teachers' change in perspectives and beliefs on teaching and learning, and thus impact on student learning. Most importantly, MOOCs can provide the flexibility that a CPD programme cannot offer, giving participants the power to determine what they wanted to learn and fit learning around their daily schedule (Kennedy 2005; Smith *et al.* 2009). However, the flexibility in MOOCs can be challenging because it can lead to procrastination and dropout. I also realise that the CoP developed within MOOCs lies outside the school (unless undertaken by several teachers in the same school). Therefore, the CoP may not necessarily address the context of the school and this may make transferability difficult.

### **RQ3: Where do MOOCs Fit into Teachers' Lives?**

In addressing the third key question, I first gathered information regarding the provision of CPD in the Malaysian educational institutions (see Chapter Six). Then I gathered responses from MOOC participants about their experiences participating in CPD events (Chapter Six) and observed the context in which they worked and lived (Chapter Seven). Based on the findings, I found two key points arising for discussion: CPD programmes in Malaysia; and teachers' motivation in attending a course/programme for CPD.

As regards the first, it is clear to me now that Malaysia has ambitious policies for teachers' CPD and all the programmes proposed in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 have strengths. However, in practice, the programmes do not seem to have been implemented across the country and the CPD programmes on offer are lacking in several ways, including the style of presentation and content.

As I described in Chapter Six, the *English Native Speaker Mentoring* programme and the *Professional Upskilling of English Language Teachers* programme were introduced to help teachers develop teaching skills, including their proficiency level. These programmes, in my opinion, drew on Sachs' (2007) retooling approach to ensure that teachers were equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to adhere to standards prescribed in education policies. For the OPS-English programme, teachers had to understand what was required of them, then return to classrooms and carry out lessons as instructed. I believed this programme followed a remodelling approach, designed to ensure that teachers were trained to conform to agendas for change proposed by authorities (Sachs 2007). A more open programme, perhaps matching Sachs' (2007)

revitalising and re-imagining approaches (at least from my point of view), involved appointing experienced and qualified Malaysian English teachers as *School Improvement Specialist Coaches* (SISC+), to be placed in the district education offices. These teachers were assigned to set up communities of practice within and across schools in their districts and support other teachers through mentoring programmes. I believed the setting up of these communities of practice called for teachers to be empowered and in control of their CPD, thus contributing towards teacher development (Ansawi and Pang 2017).

All four programmes mentioned above show how the Ministry of Education has been focusing on providing effective CPD for teachers' development. However, those programmes had not been implemented, at least, in the schools or districts in which my research participants worked (see Chapter Six). Instead, the participants said they had to attend programmes that were mostly teacher-led, presenter-led and not interactive. They also claimed they did not gain the new skills they had expected from most of the events they attended. Very often, the content related to general issues rather than specific ideas concerning new approaches to teaching, classroom skills and subject knowledge. The activities carried out during the events also did not encourage self-reflection and collective participation. The events were also one-off and short. This had little or no effect on participants' professional development (as to be expected from literature, e.g. Loucks-Horsley and Matsumoto 1999; Pianta 2011; Spillane 2002). From these responses, I feel the CPD programmes experienced by the participants were not ideal in the way I presented them in the previous section.

For the second key point, I believed the success of a CPD programme relied on teachers' motivation to engage in professional development (see Guskey 2002). Teachers may have a variety of motivations for attending CPD programmes including salary increment, career mobility, and gaining new skills or knowledge. In the case of my participants, not only did they want to gain new knowledge and skills in particular areas, but they wanted to apply them in the real classroom context and satisfy their general professional interest (see Chapter Four). When they were given the option to choose between a MOOC or a face-to-face CPD programme, their decisions were dependent on four aspects: convenience; freedom to choose; content; and physical presence of others. I found that those who chose to participate in MOOCs were motivated by the convenience MOOCs could offer (flexibility to participate anywhere, anytime, and for free), the freedom to select what and when they wanted to learn and the content that could meet their professional and personal needs. Those who chose to attend face-to-face CPD programmes, on the other hand, were mostly motivated by the physical presence of others and had the opportunity to get involved in face-to-face conversations and networking.

During my observation of three participants, I also found that their motivation was affected by their commitments to teaching and the people immediately in front of them; students and family (see Chapter Seven). I saw how important relationships with students and family were for these participants. For this reason, I believed that participating and doing self-study in MOOCs would be challenging and disruptive. This made me understand why three of my participants still favoured the face-to-face CPD programmes even though they agreed MOOCs had much to offer. Even those who opted for MOOCs (five out of seven) were not pulled by what was attractive about MOOCs but pushed away by the failings of CPD that they had experienced.

The discussion above helps me reach a view as to where MOOCs fit in to teachers' lives; they do not fit easily. At work, the participants were controlled by the school, the State or District Education Department and the Ministry of Education. MOOCs, which usually offered generalisations about teaching, might not be applicable in the particular Malaysian context. At home, there were other things more important to the participants, such as their interests or family. Thus, participating in MOOCs may be challenging. Even if the participants are interested in improving themselves as teachers, MOOCs must find a space within a list of other priorities.

### **Can MOOCs be a Solution to Malaysian Teachers' CPD?**

The interpretation and discussion of three key questions above have led me to examine the overarching question that I believe the most significant part of this study: can MOOCs be a solution to Malaysian teachers' CPD?

As described in the previous section, I think MOOCs do not fit easily in the Malaysian ESL teachers' context because the participants have other things going on in their lives, which are more important than signing up for MOOCs or completing them. Even so, I see many reasons why MOOCs can contribute to a solution to Malaysian teachers' CPD. In Chapter Three, for example, I found the MOOCs I observed were well-organised, materials provided were straightforward and clear, learning was assessed, interactions and social networks were encouraged, certification was obtainable, and most importantly, knowledge transfer was promoted, giving the participants an opportunity to apply what they had learned in a real-life classroom context. Even the MOOC that I least liked, offered this opportunity. The participants

also agreed that MOOCs could offer them informal learning and flexibility that a face-to-face CPD programme could not offer (see Chapters Four and Six). I also presented earlier in this chapter that MOOCs have the characteristics of an ideal CPD programme (active learning, a strong content focus, coherence, a reasonable timeframe, and collective participation).

However, this is not to say there is no room for improvement. When I compared the MOOCs I observed (Chapter Three), I found that not all courses offered a mix of media and spaces where learners could create, share and transmit knowledge. I also found a course that focused primarily on language, but not the pedagogy that would enhance teaching skills and strategies. In assessing understanding, only some courses provided extended opportunities for participants to use the knowledge they gained from the course to their real-life work. While good assessment is important in a course, so is the authentication of accreditation. I found some courses developed reliable authentication and gained academic credibility. However, this was not general.

Reflecting on the above, I believe course providers should address weaknesses so that participants can experience better quality courses. For example, course providers need to provide materials which are presented in interesting and imaginative ways, building on examples that are generated from classroom experience (e.g. Courses 5, 6 and 7). The literature shows how presence is important in online learning and this has been discussed by many scholars (e.g. Baker 2010; Cobb 2009; Lowenthal 2010). Thus, course providers may want to assign participants into smaller sets in discussion forums so that these participants can have a greater sense of presence, feel a greater level of trust, and experience more opportunities for critical dialogue (e.g. Course 2). Course providers can also consider replacing auto-generated and multi-attempt quizzes to



more open-question assignments so that participants have the opportunity to be more critical in their thinking (Suen 2014), construct their own personal learning experience (Akyol and Garrison 2011), and most importantly report on the application of the knowledge in real contexts (e.g. Courses 1, 5, 6, 7 and 9). In addition, if course developers can build a system that can detect plagiarism, people will not be able to cheat, and academic credibility can be achieved.

Apart from the technical improvements above, I believe it is relevance that should be given greater focus in developing a better course. A MOOC does not have to be visually stunning, but the ideas and the content need to be useful. Thus, course providers should look at the relevance of the materials and how participants can apply what they learn and gain from the course. As I suggested in this chapter earlier, a more open course could provide participants with more opportunities for communication and knowledge transfer, either within the course platform or beyond it. Thus, course providers should create a more open course by considering how well the content is pedagogically organised, the relevance of the materials provided, and the way assessment is conducted.

No matter how much effort is put into improving MOOCs, some teachers may still favour face-to-face CPD programmes, perhaps because they have problems with technological competence, motivation, and sometimes suffer from procrastination and loss of interest (Al Ghamdi 2015). In the case of my research participants, a few preferred CPD programmes because they liked the physical presence of others and thought they would learn more by having face-to-face conversations and being able to socialise offline (as presented in Chapter Six). This is very consistent with what Lave and Wenger (1991) suggest about the idea of social learning; that

learning occurred through social participation. They believe that people who continuously create their shared identity through engaging in and contributing to the practices of their communities will learn things, very often, unintentionally. Even though it is not clearly stated, I believe social learning requires active participation among members, and this brings back the idea of agency that I introduced earlier (Chapter Four). Members must be active and motivated to initiate the social process, and this may lead to learning.

Reflecting on the points above, I feel that a hybrid of MOOCs and face-to-face interaction can be a logical solution to those participants who considered MOOCs effective, but preferred socialising offline. This hybridisation may offer the best of both online and face-to-face environments. It can attend to teachers' needs and conditions, encourage greater participation and increase the rate of effectiveness (Duncan-Howell 2010). It can also create a flexible and accessible environment for teachers to 'engage in sustained critical reflection and discourse about their teaching practice' (Garrison and Vaughan 2008, p. 150).

However, in the case of MOOCs, hybridisation might be problematic because participation in MOOCs can involve thousands of participants. Having even one per cent of the participants to meet up seems physically impossible. However, I found one example that showed this was indeed possible. It was the 'Coursera meet up' in Menlo Park in 2012. The meeting allowed 'Courserans' living in the same location to meet and discuss the course or any other subject (Harish 2013). More than 600 participants arrived (about 500 more than the expected turnout), demonstrating that a physical meet up among MOOC participants was successful.

Looking at the success of the Menlo Park initiative, I become more confident that hybridisation is possible and can be implemented in the Malaysian context. However, the Ministry of Education (MoE) should be the one encouraging this by publicising what MOOCs are available, and counting MOOC experience as a form of CPD. I see three types of hybrids that can be developed for teachers' CPD (see Table 17). The first type involves teachers participating in the existing MOOCs. While participating in, or after completing the MOOCs, teachers can be encouraged to create a CoP (the concept has been discussed in Chapter Five) with anyone who takes part in the same course. They can then meet up and discuss the relevancy of the MOOC and the transferability of the ideas in relation to their own professional development. The advantage of this type of hybrid is teachers are given the freedom to choose the course they are interested in, and most relevant to their professional needs. However, the disadvantage that I see is teachers may not be able to obtain the peer support that they need because the people they meet may not come from the same location or context.

The second type of hybrid would involve teachers who are encouraged by the MoE to take part in existing MOOCs. Again, teachers will have the opportunity to choose what they are interested in and what is most relevant to them. However, the MoE could offer a limited number of MOOCs, ones which pass the quality criteria, relevant to Malaysian context, and offer variety, such as covering both subject knowledge and teaching techniques and strategies. This type of hybrid will increase the probability of teachers taking the same MOOCs; therefore teachers will have the opportunity to physically meet their colleagues or other teachers from the same locality. Being in the same field of work and context, it will be easier for them to discuss how the knowledge they gained from the course can be applied and adapted according to their specific

needs and interests. At the same time, teachers will receive the support they need as they try things out.

The final type of hybrid involves teachers participating in a course created by or sponsored by the MoE and develop with the help of the teaching association. This course, which I prefer to call a localised massive open online course (LMOOC), is a course built around CPD and created for teachers in the Malaysian context. Here, materials would be related to teachers' needs and cover the Malaysian curriculum. This course will help teachers to increase their understanding of their teaching roles and maintain relevance to curriculum implementation. At the same time, teachers can create a sense of community with other teachers, both in online and face-to-face environments. The advantages of this type of hybrid are teachers get to participate in a localised and context-rich course, and create their own CoP, allowing them to give and receive support from their colleagues (Gibson and Brooks 2012). However, who will produce the course, and whether the course can be designed in an attractive and engaging way for effective outcomes remain questionable.

Table 17: Three types of hybridisation

	Type I	Type II	Type III
Role(s) of MoE	Publicising MOOCs as part of CPD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Publicising MOOCs as part of CPD</li> <li>- Choosing MOOCs relevant to Malaysian context</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Publicising MOOCs as part of CPD</li> <li>- Creating/providing localised MOOCs</li> </ul>
Roles of participants	Take part in MOOCs and create a CoP	Take part in MOOCs and create a CoP	Take part in MOOCs and create a CoP
MOOCs chosen for participation	Any existing MOOCs	Filtered, existing MOOCs	Localised MOOCs
Members of CoP	Anyone taking the same course, regardless who or where they come from.	Colleagues or other teachers taking the same course and from the same locality.	Malaysian teachers from the same location and context.
Advantage(s)	Freedom to choose any MOOCs relevant to professional needs and interest.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Freedom to choose any filtered MOOCs relevant to professional needs and interest.</li> <li>- Gain the support needed from colleagues or other teachers from the same location and context.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The courses provide materials that cover the Malaysian curriculum, thus maintain relevance to curriculum implementation.</li> <li>- Gain the support needed from colleagues or other teachers from the same location and context.</li> </ul>

Disadvantage(s)	Lack of support from people of the same location and context.	The knowledge gained may be relevant to Malaysian context, but not in the curriculum implementation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Less freedom in choosing the MOOCs, as the courses are created to fit into the context, instead of individual's interest.</li> <li>- The courses' effectiveness is questionable.</li> </ul>
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Returning to the overarching question, I conclude MOOCs can provide a solution to Malaysian teachers' CPD if they are integrated into the Malaysian CPD offer and address the importance of relevance. While no course is perfect, through a careful consideration of the key characteristics of an ideal CPD programme, along with an opportunity for creating a CoP online and offline, a hybrid MOOC can be designed and implemented to best meet teachers' local and contextual needs. Such an approach could generate positive change among schools, students, and even the education system at large.

For this new hybrid to become a legitimate choice of teachers' CPD, though, everyone needs to work hand in hand to support the transformation. For example, academics need to understand the context in which technology is used. To do so, they have to find research methods that give them access to the context. Researchers should avoid being overoptimistic or pessimistic, for there is always a problem with adaption. MOOC designers should play their part too. For example, they can work on accreditation and transferability. They have to understand the pedagogical needs among teachers and provide opportunities for them to set up a community of practice. In the

meantime, the MoE should encourage people to take part in MOOCs and be part of the CPD offer. By doing this, they do not only encourage teachers to be part of the change, but also allow them to be more reflective of their own development.

Setting up a CoP within the schools is required so that teachers are able to help each other, at the same time translate what MOOCs are giving to local circumstances. To ensure this happens, school leaders must take the first step. They, themselves, have to take part in MOOCs before encouraging others to do the same. I believe many teachers will find this motivating. This will encourage them to find the time to be part of the change. Having said this, however, teachers should not be dependent on their school leaders. They, themselves, have to take their own initiatives to find out about MOOCs, try them out, see if they work for them, discuss ideas with colleagues, and take some ideas for their own professional development. After all, as people used to say, “it’s never the tool, but the user that makes the difference”.

## CHAPTER NINE

### MY STANCE AS A RESEARCHER: A REFLECTION

In this thesis, I have described my research journey aimed at finding out about MOOCs and their uses for teachers' professional development. In terms of methodology, I have described and justified particular methods: course observation, participant interview, and participant observation, and explained how they were used. However, I realised there was a gap in terms of explaining my stance as a researcher. In fact, this gap was noticed and commented upon by readers who asked for a clarification. Therefore, this chapter discusses research paradigms and where my work fits into these paradigms.

#### **Research Paradigm**

In explaining the process of my research, I feel it is important that I first introduce what a research paradigm is something which I, myself, struggled to understand during the early days of my academic life. I read everything I could find on paradigms but this only gave me a theoretical level of understanding. It was only after I worked within different research paradigms, and their methodological applications, in my earlier studies that I started to understand the concept. Based on my understanding, a research paradigm is, in short, a framework that guides which research questions are prioritised, and how research should be conducted based on people's philosophies and their assumptions about the world and nature of knowledge (Christensen et al 2014; Creswell 2014).



There are many paradigms discussed in the literature, but I found two that were repeatedly offered; Positivism and Interpretivism.

The term positivism was first coined by a French philosopher, Auguste Comte (1798 – 1857). For positivists, the world is external and that there is a single objective reality to any social phenomenon or event regardless of the researcher's perspective or belief (e.g. Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). For Comte, the only legitimate means of extending knowledge of human behaviour is through experimentation, observation and reasoning based on experience. Thus, he proposed the paradigm grounded in what is known as the scientific method of investigation. Researchers within this paradigm conduct their studies using a structured approach by identifying a clear research topic, constructing appropriate hypotheses and by testing those hypotheses either through direct primary data collection or secondary data analysis (Bernard 2017; Keat and Urry 2011). Throughout the process, they remain detached from the research participants so they can remain emotionally neutral to make clear distinctions between reason and feeling (Keat and Urry 2011). They also maintain a clear distinction between science and personal experience, and fact and value judgement.

Generally, researchers working within a positivist paradigm use structured quantitative approaches such as questionnaires and experiments. They rely on “deductive logic”, formulation of hypotheses, testing those hypotheses, offering operational definitions, mathematical equations, and calculations to derive conclusions (Kivunja and Kuyini 2017, p. 30). Their aims are usually to prove or disprove a hypothesis, and to make predictions based on measurable outcomes. The

findings gained from this research are usually claimed to be generalizable (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2007).

Studies within the positivist paradigm have strengths. They can help researchers to develop their knowledge of human behaviours based on apparently 'objective' evidence. They also draw attention to relationships between data which might not be obvious. However, some scholars reject this 'scientific' approach. They believe that there are no absolute truths; especially in relation to human affairs (e.g Ernest 1994; Hammersley 2006). Human behaviour, either individual or at group level is unpredictable. Each human being has had different experiences and will respond in different ways to the same environment. They also make choices and, at some level, exercise some elements of free will. This makes social science a different category of research to natural sciences. Human intentions, attitudes, and thoughts cannot be measured through statistical evidence because these concepts are abstract (Hammersley 2006). I agree with this and I believe "what might be the truth for one person or cultural group may not be the 'truth' for another" (O'Leary 2004, p. 6). This is probably why Ernest (1994) says that scientific theories cannot be confirmed, but only falsified and theories can never offer the real truth, but they can get closer to the truth. Thus, the scientific findings gain from positivist research cannot simply be applied in any particular local context where humans are involved (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). With this understanding, there was a strong backlash against positivism and the new paradigm; interpretivism.

The interpretivist paradigm can also be called the "anti-positivist" paradigm because it was developed as a reaction to positivism. It is also sometimes referred to as constructivism because

it emphasizes the ability of the individual to construct meaning. The interpretivist paradigm grew out of Edmund Husserl and Wilhelm Dilthey's philosophy of phenomenology and other German philosophers' study of interpretive understanding called hermeneutics (Mertens 2005). They believed that social reality was multidimensional and individuals interpret events differently, meaning there were multiple perspectives of any incident or event. Therefore, researchers within this paradigm tend to rely upon the "participants' views of the situation being studied" (Creswell, 2003, p.8). Furthermore, they realised their perspectives were also subjective and they recognised the impact of their own background and experiences on the research. The main tenet of interpretivism is that research can never be objectively observed from the outside rather it must be observed from inside through the direct experience of the people (Cohen et al 2007; Ernest 1994).

Interpretivists do not generally begin with a theory, rather, they "generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meanings" (Creswell 2003, p.9) throughout the research process. They adopt more personal and flexible research structures which capture meanings in human interaction and make sense of what is perceived as reality (Creswell 2014). Thus, interpretivists are likely to foreground qualitative data collection methods and analysis. They do this because the interpretivist's goal is to understand motives, meanings, reasons and other subjective experiences which are time and context bound (Cohen et al 2007; Creswell 2014; Hudson and Ozanne, 1988).

Based on the discussion above, positivist and interpretivist paradigms appear as mirror images. Table 18 shows this:

Table 18: Differences between Positivism and Interpretivism

Paradigm	Positivism	Interpretivism
Criteria		
Ontology	Claims for objectivity	Claims for trustworthiness or credibility
Epistemology	Deductive	Inductive
Theorising	Concerned with hypotheses testing	Concerned with generating theories
Data	- Uses large data samples - Generates precise quantitative data	- Uses small data samples - Generates rich qualitative data
Application	Claims results can be generalised to a wider population	Claims findings can be relatable in other similar context

Looking at the table above, I realise neither paradigms can be considered complete. Thus, I do not think anyone can be purely positivist or interpretivist if their aim is to gain a complete understanding of any phenomenon. I believe both research paradigms are important; each has a purpose in providing new knowledge, but both cannot be complete.

I now move on to consider that I do not believe that I am a positivist or interpretivist. Instead, I worked to gain the best understanding of the problem I faced by choosing the methods, techniques, and procedures that best met my needs and purposes. Rather than being restricted to any one method, I used three methods: course observation; participant interview; and participant observation. This may suggest I was a mixed-methods researcher. However, mixed-methods is usually evoked to describe an approach which mixes quantitative and qualitative methods (e.g. in

Creswell 2003). I did not do this. This makes a mixed-methods approach a confusing label. Having said this, however, I believe my research interest aligns with a pragmatic paradigm. It places the research problem as central to research and at the same time opens the door to multiple methods, different worldviews, and different assumptions that are most likely to provide insights into the research problem (Creswell 2003).

My philosophical assumptions was that reality had objective and subjective aspects. For example, in explaining the features of MOOCs, I believed I was offering both objective and subjective accounts. I believed objectively that MOOCs were constructed within a physical environment called a platform, which were created by different providers (e.g Coursera, FutureLearn, Canvas, NovoEd and etc), and this platform could only be accessed with the Internet connection. MOOCs could also be perceived as massive by looking at the number of participants taking part. I realised, however, this feature could be perceived subjectively by others. Some people could perceive MOOCs as being massive based on the extent of the activities provided. Here, I was not only trying to understand my perceptions, but other people's subjective perceptions about MOOCs and their experiences of MOOCs. I did this through interviewing and observing them. I was well aware that what I was gaining there was how people saw a reality, not what a reality objectively was.

My research was also pragmatic in another sense. I interpreted meaning through my experiences. In Dewey (2008), the meaning of an event cannot be given in advance of experience. Thus, when I carried out my research, I decided to interview the participants only after I realised the need to do so. The same happened when I decided to observe participants' lives. It was only after I

gained understanding about how they perceived the use of MOOCs for their CPD that I realised I needed more information regarding their context. This iterative approach reflected what a pragmatist researcher has to do. Thus, I see my paradigmatic position as a pragmatist.

### **The Research Process**

Looking back at each stage of my research journey, I believe my actions emerged by asking and addressing questions. These questions were triggered by my overarching practical interest in whether MOOCs could work for teachers' CPD. For example, I began the research with a belief that MOOCs would be highly suitable for teachers' CPD. However, I realised that my prior experience of participating in MOOCs was not enough for me to be able to reach more trustworthy conclusions as to what teachers would get out of their participation in MOOCs and whether MOOCs would benefit them in the same way it benefited me. Thus, I created a research question that could help me gain the answers to these queries; e.g. how are MOOCs organised and structured? Based on this research question, I decided on a method and collected the data. Later, I realised I did not know enough how people perceived MOOCs or how these MOOCs fitted into their lives. This led me to shadow people so that I could understand their perceptions of MOOCs within a larger context and their own personal world. I have to emphasise that my decision-making about the research questions and methods here was not a step-by-step linear process. Instead, my beliefs about MOOCs and interpretations of others' behaviour stayed with me throughout, and potential actions were mentally rehearsed and evaluated. It was a continuous process that involved many cycles between beliefs and actions before I could reach a resolution.

If people were to look at my research process, they might have said what I did resembled an action research. This is because what I have described is a cyclical process - where questions were asked and addressed, and actions were reflected upon – without any final resolution. However, action research usually begins with a question ‘how can I do this better?’ (Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon 2014). My research, in contrast, was more about asking ‘what is going on here?’. Thus, what I did was not an action research in the sense of a practice based inquiry for a local context. I was not directly trying to change things. In some ways, my research might be considered a kind of first stage for an action research (a kind of reconnaissance) which would be picked up when I got back to Malaysia as I would then be in a position to introduce MOOCs into a professional environment. However, this is stretching the points. I feel, instead, my research better captures the idea of reflective practice research. As with action research, a reflective practice research is based on a continuous cycle of experience, observation and reflection in which new ideas are carried out and evaluated. However, in a reflective practice research, reflection is the key (Leitch and Day 2000). This can be seen throughout my research journey; I always reflected on what I did and that was when I had more questions asked, which led me to conducting the methods that I felt could meet the purpose.

## **Methods**

I now want to reflect on the methods I have used. I notice that all of them fit into the ‘qualitative’ group. However, in terms of a research methodology, pragmatism does not exist as a particular method and some scholars came up with a term ‘bricolage’ (conceptualised by Denzin and Lincoln (1999) and further theorised by Kincheloe (2001) and Berry (2004)) to capture the idea of taking what was at hand to produce an engaging product. Bricolage is “a complex, dense,

reflexive collage-like creation that represents...images, understandings and interpretations of the world or phenomenon under analysis” (Denzin and Lincoln 1999, p.3). This term comes from a traditional French expression which denotes crafts-people who creatively use materials left over from other projects to construct new artifacts (Rogers 2012). To fashion their bricolage projects, bricoleurs use only the tools and materials ‘at-hand’ (Levi-Strauss, 1966). For me, what was ‘at-hand’ here was always through looking at what was useful for my purpose. As in my case, I believed an online observation was the best option for data collection I had because all MOOCs were online. I also realised that it would be impossible to gather information about people’s experiences within MOOCs, unless I could converse with them directly. Thus, interviewing them was the best method I could think of. Finally, I decided that I needed to see the context myself. Observing the participants’ lives was seen as the best idea at the time. I realise that the more perspectives I could bring to my analysis, the better grasp of the phenomenon I would have (Kellner 1999).

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical issues may arise at any stage of a research depending on the investigated problem and case. As indicated by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2011), ethics of educational research form an important part of the training and literature in the United Kingdom (BERA, 2011). Thus, universities insist on a researcher receiving ethical approval for their proposed projects (e.g. Hammond, 2011). As a result, I followed the Warwick ethical procedures by filling in an ethics form before the data collection (see the form in Appendix 1). It was to ensure that I followed the correct guidelines. I began my data collection only after the form was approved.



I followed the BERA guidelines in carrying out data collection on MOOCs. I read the guidelines provided by the particular MOOC platform (e.g FutureLearn) that I observed to see if I needed to get any permission to carry out the research online. I was reminded to not interfere into anyone's privacy. Thus, when I asked for volunteers, I was very careful not to ask more than once or try to force the issue if the participants refused to give their email address for further questions. After reading the guidelines also, I understood how the findings should be presented, so that there would be no issues raised in relation to copyright. For example, it was clearly stated that learner created content, which had been published on the platform under a Creative Commons License (Attribution-Non Commercial-NoDerivs; BYNCND), must be attributed to the author. Thus, aside from acknowledging the original author, I also should acknowledge the providers in research publications.

For the participant interview and observation, I followed closely the ethical guidance offered by BERA which states that an educational researcher should “operate within an ethic of respect for any persons involved in the research they are undertaking” (BERA, 2011: 5). Thus, I made sure I obtain the participants' consent to take part in the study before interviewing/observing them. This process was also important to ensure that there would not be any issues raised after the interview, especially in relation to confidentiality and withdrawal. Throughout this research, I made sure all participants remain anonymous and the original fieldwork documents were being kept securely.

There were precautions taken against sources of bias. For example, I reported everything that I saw and did during the course observation. Despite being optimistic about MOOCs, I tried to report the experiences of taking part in the course evenly, even if it meant showing the weaknesses of some of the courses. Besides, whenever I felt the participants started to give answers that made them seem more predictable, or less inclined to give a controversial answer, I asked them indirect questions by asking them to think about what a third party would do in a particular situation. For example, I asked “what did your colleagues think about the CPD event that they attended?” This question, I believed, fostered a more honest response from the participants. I also sent a copy of transcripts to the participants so that they could review their answers and confirm their answers accurately reflect their views. I did the same after the coding process, so that I knew my interpretation was reliable and did not solely depend on my own subjective view.

Overall, I carried out my research in the most ethical way possible and, in accordance with research guidelines (such as BERA), with the purpose ultimately of extending knowledge and understanding. I tried to be open and honest both towards my perceptions and the participants’ perceptions about MOOCs. However, where dilemmas had arisen, I tried to unpick them, resolve them and judge the outcomes on the overall bearing of the research.

### **What had I Learned as a Researcher?**

In summary, what I tried to do was to find something that captured the idea of a pragmatic researcher who was actively researching and trying to come up with ideas, gathered in the form of a bricolage. On one hand, the process was a fairly straightforward because I was led by simply

expressed research questions. However, on the other hand, I was searching for inter-subjectivity which was very complex; I was reaching for an understanding of MOOCs, not just based on my experience but also based on what other people were thinking. I guess this has made my research somewhat untidy, iterative and a constantly shifting process. However, I realise it made me a better researcher. It helped me to see what worked better and what did not. This gave me the opportunity for self-reflection and become more aware of the inquiry culture. This, I believe will be valuable for future research.

## CHAPTER TEN

### CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I present what I have learned from my research journey (a summary of the main findings), the key contributions, and how the experience I have gained through the process of data collection and analysis has developed me into becoming a better teacher and researcher. While presenting these ideas, I describe my awareness of the limitations of the study and how these apparent limitations create new opportunities for future researchers to embark on new journeys of exploration.

#### **The Journey**

I must confess how relieved and happy I am to be at this stage, writing a closure to my research journey. I still remember how tough it was for me when I started. Due to limited timeframe and lack of financial support, I had to redirect my initial idea of research from building a MOOC for trainee teachers to investigating the use of MOOCs for in-service teachers' CPD. Prior to this, I had reviewed hundreds of scholarly reading materials. It was exhausting and demotivating that I had to do this again, after redirecting my research focus. However, it was worthwhile for I learned to become more systematic in searching for and reviewing relevant texts.

After getting a clear idea of what I needed to do for my research, I began looking for suitable courses. The process, I must say, was not easy, for there were hundreds of MOOCs offered to teachers. However, I learned how to narrow down the search by putting a limitation to the search

criteria (see Chapter Three for a full description of the process). I finally identified ten courses to observe. I decided to become a participant-observer and sign up for each course so that I could study at first-hand about what people did and said (see Hammersley 2006). For 16 weeks, I learned about MOOCs and the content they delivered. I also found that majority of the courses emphasised pedagogy, where teaching techniques and strategies were the key content. In addition, there were opportunities provided for participants to transfer what they had learned from the course to a real classroom context. Thus, I became more confident and started to believe that MOOCs could be a medium used to enhance teachers' CPD.

The participation and observation of MOOCs gave me insights into how it felt to take part and offered suggestions as to the ways other people might be experiencing the courses. This, however, remained subjective and I felt interviewing MOOC participants directly was necessary. Thus, I decided to approach participants who participated in the MOOCs I observed. It was frustrating that no one was willing to be interviewed. However, this did not demotivate me. After giving some thought to the problem, I decided to recruit volunteers from Malaysia via Facebook groups (I described the recruitment process in Chapter Four). I believed this was the best thing to do, as the volunteers might know me from the school or university I worked with, or more likely they might know people who knew me. It was then, I successfully recruited 55 volunteers. However, only 14 of them agreed to be interviewed. It took me more than four months to complete the in-depth data collection that I needed.

From the interview responses, I found the participants had some common sets of motivation for participating in the courses they had chosen: to gain new knowledge in particular areas; to apply

new skills as part of their professional development; and to satisfy general professional interest. Even though not everyone mentioned all three aims, it was clear that they were inter-related. In addition, all of the participants aimed to push themselves into becoming better teachers by applying what they had learned from the course to their classrooms.

Reflecting on the participants' experiences taking part in MOOCs, I realised some of them did not feel the same way as I felt when participating in MOOCs. They had their own preferences in choosing particular courses and selecting the activities they wanted to do. The majority of them preferred a shorter course, even though they felt that the length was not very significant. Depending on their preferences too, participation was provisional because some tended to attempt the activities that appealed to them and were relevant to what they wanted to achieve. Thus, not all participants completed the course. Out of 14 participants, only three completed. Others did not complete or left the course, and some did not participate at all.

Knowing that there were only three participants who completed, I was worried in case the participants had a negative view on MOOCs. I was surprised, though, that those who did not complete and had left the course early said that they had learned a lot. Not only had they formed ideas concerning new approaches to teaching, classroom skills, and subject knowledge, but they experienced engagement within the activities which had changed their perspectives on teaching and learning. I was also impressed that the participants were able to apply what they had learned in their classrooms. However, the impact of this intervention could not be assessed first-hand because classroom observations were not possible at the time the interviews were carried out. This has been one of the limitations of my study, which I think future researchers will like to

investigate further. I believe in a longer study, researchers will be more systematic in assessing the impact of participation in MOOCs on students' learning (see Guskey 2002).

The participants saw how MOOCs could help them in continuing their professional development as I had. This was why, when they were given a hypothetical scenario, the majority chose to participate in a MOOC rather than attend a CPD programme. It surprised me, however, that some participants still preferred to attend CPD programmes, even though they knew how much MOOCs could offer. This made me realise that some of the participants who chose MOOCs over CPD programmes were not pulled by what was attractive about MOOCs, but pushed away by several shortcomings of CPD with regards to the style of presentation, content, time and place. For example, most of the time, the approach used during CPD programmes was didactic or teacher-led. There was a lack of interactivity and sharing. The content was sometimes relevant, but very often it was not. There were also debates about what counted as CPD content. In terms of time and place, people were concerned with the arrangement of CPD programmes; either the programmes took place during weekends or weekdays, on-site or off-site, both would affect teachers' routines and motivation.

Looking at the responses above, I began to wonder if MOOCs could address the shortcomings in CPD. Thus, I decided to continue the journey by looking at the context. This was when I took an opportunity to observe three of the participants whom I had interviewed (see the description of my observation in Chapter Seven). This was an unusual step to take, for it was unplanned and spontaneous, but it provided my study with a very rich understanding of the ecological context in way reflected the opportunistic nature of real-world research. Of course, the time I had with

these participants was limited. However, I had to accept that this was something I could have planned better, so I could have carried out more classroom observations, and met more participants. I also wish I could have developed a longitudinal element, so that I could investigate the sustainability of what people had learned through MOOCs. However, I did not have sufficient time. Thus, this can be a direction for future studies.

By staying with participants, I saw how their lives were constrained by their roles at work and at home. At work, I could see the participants were often controlled by the school, State or District Education Department and the Ministry of Education (see Chapter Seven for full description). This kind of control meant they were not part of an inquiry culture into teaching and learning. Even so, they seemed passionate about what they were doing and professional in their behaviour. I saw this through their commitment to the students. With regards to their personal lives at home, I could see there were other things important to the participants, such as their personal interests and relationships with family.

After seeing the context for myself, I began to understand why participating in MOOCs could be a challenge for some teachers. At this point, I started to realise that MOOCs would not fit the context easily. However, recalling my interview with the participants, I remembered how committed they were towards their professionalism. I had seen how interested they were in MOOCs, knowing that MOOCs could provide ideas and knowledge. For these reasons, I believed there was still a chance left for MOOCs to fit in the context I studied. That was when I decided to investigate further and found out that participants who chose to attend CPD events were motivated by the physical presence of others. This prompted me to one logical solution; a



hybrid of MOOCs and face-to-face interaction. I believed this hybrid model could enable teachers to create both online and offline community of practice, and allow them to give and receive support among themselves. After giving some thoughts, I came up with three types of hybrids (see Chapter Eight), which I thought would help policymakers and course providers to work towards providing teachers with a flexible and accessible environment, at the same time addressing their needs and condition. Even though the idea of hybridisation is not new in online learning literature, the three types of hybrid I have introduced, especially the LMOOC, are new. Therefore, if I were to summarise the key contributions of this research, the three types of hybrids would be one of them.

I have also introduced the typology of MOOCs based on three elements: how they could be pedagogically organised; the materials provided; and the way the assessment is conducted. These elements help determine the degree of openness of a MOOC. I have already reported on this in the literature. The reviewers were enthusiastic about the way in which MOOCs have been conceptualised, in particular, the idea that xMOOCs should be defined in more nuance and subtle ways (Mohamed and Hammond 2018). It was also important for me to show that the idea of cMOOCs was no longer mainstream.

Another research contribution is that MOOCs are found to be peripheral in some people's lives. I have read many papers that have assumed learners are self-directed and proactive, but ended surprised to find out that not many people complete or even start the MOOCs. In some of these papers, learners are conceptualised as though they were disembodied. However, I believe that learning is embodied. Learning concerns both mind and body. This relates to another idea I have

introduced earlier; the concept of agency. In order to understand learning either with or without technology, we have to see people as active. I feel that it is an unanswerable question to ask whether ICT can make a difference. Instead, I believe in order to understand the use of ICT, we must understand the participants' lives in a fuller context. In this way, we can uncover what it is that inhibits people from taking part; not just in MOOCs, but also their professional development. This makes a major contribution to the field of ICT.

Last but not least, I have also successfully provided a model of a different kind of thesis. This thesis stays true to the chronology so that readers can follow the steps I have taken and see the authentic nature of the process rather than the edited accounts which are normally given. In my thesis, there is everything one might expect to see in a thesis. However, they are introduced as in when I reach some point at my research exploration. Thus, the methodology comes after the presentation of findings and discussion, and literature review is discussed in two separate chapters. This intuitively follows the original steps taken throughout the research journey. This gives the research a personal feel and makes it relatable to other researchers. I hope this will enable people to see how they can write a thesis differently. This, for me, makes my thesis special and I am proud of it.

Overall, I think this three-year research journey has enriched my experience as a language teacher, a MOOC user and a researcher. It has allowed me to discover many new things about teaching and learning, the similarities and differences within MOOCs, and the uptake of CPD programmes among Malaysian teachers. I have also gained the opportunity to experience first-hand the different phases of research, from identifying suitable courses, trying to contact the

MOOC participants, interviewing and observing them, to data analysis. The process has been much more complicated, time consuming, frustrating at times, than I had thought. However, I feel it was worth the effort because in the end, it has enriched my understanding of how ones' values and beliefs inform their work. This research journey has also helped me uncover new aspects of teachers' context that I did not know before; teachers are committed towards their professionalism, and in enriching the quality of their teaching. I am now looking forward to continuing my research in this area.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1



**Application for Ethical Approval  
for Research Degrees**  
(PhD, EdD, MA by research)

Student number: 1554697  
Student name: Misrah Hamisah Mohamed

PhD       EdD       MA by research

Project title: MOOCs for Teachers' CPD: A Case Study  
Supervisor: Michael Hammond  
Funding body (if relevant):

Please ensure you have read the Guidance for the Ethical Conduct of Research available in the handbook.

**Methodology**  
Please outline the methodology, e.g. observation, individual interviews, focus groups, group testing etc.  
I will carry out online observations and interviews.

**Participants**  
Please specify all participants in the research including ages of children and young people where appropriate. Also specify if any participants are vulnerable e.g. children; as a result of learning disability.  
I will observe ten or more online courses and interview 10 MOOC educators and about 20 learner participants of MOOCs who are also teachers.

Will participants be explicitly informed of the student's status?

Yes, the participants will be informed that I am a student of the University of Warwick and am currently doing a doctoral research.

#### **Competence**

How will you ensure that all methods used are undertaken with the necessary competence?

All instruments have been pilot tested and amendments have been made. I have anticipated problems that may occur and discussed the solutions with my supervisor.

#### **Protection of participants**

How will participants' safety and well-being be safeguarded?

N/A

#### **Child protection**

Will a CRB check be needed? Yes  No  (If yes, please attach a copy.)

#### **Addressing dilemmas**

Even well planned research can produce ethical dilemmas. How will you address any ethical dilemmas that may arise in your research?

I will recruit learner participants of MOOCs by advertising a list of courses on social network and asking if anyone is taking part in one of these courses will allow me to interview them. Participants will join a course or not as they see fit. Participation in the course or my study is purely voluntary. Therefore, I do not expect ethical problems to arise. However, it is possible that the participants will feel they are duty bound to attend the course. I will check and remind them that they can withdraw whenever they want, without any prejudice. If participants want to withdraw, I have to give them a choice either to remove their data from the research or leave the data behind for me to work with. I will also be interviewing the course educators who may want to know more about what learners think of their courses. If this happens, I will have to notify them that I cannot make any specific comment because I am bound to the participants' consent of confidentiality.

### **Respect for participants' rights and dignity**

How will the fundamental rights and dignity of participants be respected, e.g. confidentiality, respect of cultural and religious values?

I will ask all participants to read and sign a consent form before the interview. Aspects of confidentiality, anonymity and rights to withdraw are informed in the form.

### **Privacy and confidentiality**

How will confidentiality be assured? Please address all aspects of research including protection of data records, thesis, reports/papers that might arise from the study.

I will save all data that I collect in a zipped and on-cloud folder. I have the password to open the folder and no one else will know. I will ensure the anonymity of the participants is kept and they will be attributed only if their work that I observe is published on the platform under a Creative Commons Licence (Attribution-Non Commercial-NoDerivs; BY-NC-ND). I will follow all codes of conduct outlined by the course provider, especially in relation to acknowledgement and attribution of the courses and providers for the purpose of publications.

### **Consent**

How will prior informed consent be obtained from the following?

From participants:

I will email all participants the consent form before interviewing them. They will read and sign the form.

From others:

If prior informed consent is not to be obtained, give reason:

As a participant, I am allowed to attempt tasks, ask questions, discuss and observe the course that I join. However, as a researcher, I have to abide to codes of conduct each course provider has outlined for researchers. Thus, unless it is stated in its codes of conduct, I do not have to obtain any consent from the course provider.



**Misuse of research**

How will you seek to ensure that the research and the evidence resulting from it are not misused?

I will report findings without being judgemental or condemnatory. I am the only person who have access to all data and they will be deleted once the research is complete.

**Support for research participants**

What action is proposed if sensitive issues are raised or a participant becomes upset?

All participants will be informed of their rights to withdraw and that they can skip questions they do not want to answer without prejudice.

**Integrity**

How will you ensure that your research and its reporting are honest, fair and respectful to others?

I will seek for the participants' agreement of certain aspects that I am not sure of. I will also show and discuss my report with my supervisor.

What agreement has been made for the attribution of authorship by yourself and your supervisor(s) of any reports or publications?

I will consult my supervisor if I were to send any papers for publication. It is agreed that the research is attributed to who does the work, following the department's guidelines.

**Other issues**

Please specify other issues not discussed above, if any, and how you will address them.

<b>Signed:</b>	
Student: <i>Moral</i>	Date: 20/10/2016
Supervisor: <i>Michelle</i>	Date: 24/10/2016

Please submit this form to the Research Office (Donna Jay, Room B1.43)

## Appendix 2

### Observation Schedule

Week/Date:

Time:

Length of Observation:

<b>Course Name</b>	
<b>Platform</b>	
<b>Content Summary</b>	
<b>Length</b>	
<b>Educators</b>	
<b>Main Medium for Lecture</b>	
<b>Learning Materials</b>	
<b>Certification/Badges</b>	
<b>Types of Assessment(s)</b>	
<b>Frequency of Assessment(s)</b>	
<b>Auto-generated Answers</b>	
<b>Peer Assessments</b>	
<b>Peer Grading</b>	
<b>Arising Issue(s)</b>	

### Appendix 3

#### List of providers and their courses

No.	Providers	Courses
1	Alison Free courses in 10+ Course Categories." ( <a href="https://alison.com/">https://alison.com/</a> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Introduction to Teaching English as a Second Language (self-paced) ✓</li> <li>- Web Applications for Language Teaching (self-paced) ✓</li> </ul>
2	Apnacourse	- course on PMP, ACP, CFP, CFA, FRM, ISTQB
3	Canvas Network by Instructure ( <a href="https://www.canvas.net/?query=teaching">https://www.canvas.net/?query=teaching</a> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Digitally Enhanced Learning &amp; Teaching</li> <li>- Prior Learning Assessment for Educators and Industry</li> <li>- Teachers Without Borders: Educating Girls</li> <li>- Teaching Literacy with and Through Technology</li> <li>- Creating Engaging Environments for English Language Classrooms (May 16, 2016) ✓</li> </ul>
4	Carnegie Mellon University Open Learning Initiative	
5	Class Central - Stanford, Coursera, MIT and Harvard led edX (MITx + Harvardx + BerkeleyX), and Udacity ( <a href="https://www.class-central.com/subject/education?session=recent%2Cupcoming%2Cselfpaced&amp;sort=date-down&amp;lang=english">https://www.class-central.com/subject/education?session=recent%2Cupcoming%2Cselfpaced&amp;sort=date-down&amp;lang=english</a> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Instructional Ideas and Technology Tools for Online Success</li> <li>- iTDI Summer School MOOC For English Teachers (self-paced) ✓</li> <li>- Get Organized: How to be a Together Teacher</li> <li>- Surviving Your Rookie Year of Teaching: 3 Key Ideas &amp; High Leverage Techniques</li> <li>- BlendedX: Blended Learning with edX</li> <li>- Designing an Exemplary Course</li> <li>- Art and Inquiry: Museum Teaching Strategies for Your Classroom</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Blended Learning: Personalizing Education for Students</li> <li>- Creating Effective Online and Blended Courses</li> <li>- Teaching Character and Creating Positive Classrooms</li> <li>- GSE3x: Introduction to Data Wise: A Collaborative Process to Improve Learning &amp; Teaching</li> <li>- Let's Teach Computing</li> <li>- First Year Teaching (Elementary Grades) - Success from the Start</li> <li>- What future for education?</li> <li>- First Year Teaching (Secondary Grades) - Success from the Start</li> <li>- Africa Code Week: Teaching Programming to Young Learners</li> <li>- LearnToMod For Educators</li> <li>- Teaching with Tablets</li> <li>- Instructional Design for Effective Learning</li> <li>- Advanced Instructional Strategies in the Virtual Classroom</li> <li>- Performance Assessment in the Virtual Classroom</li> <li>- Emerging Trends &amp; Technologies in the Virtual K-12 Classroom</li> <li>- Digitally Enhanced Learning &amp; Teaching</li> <li>- Teaching Literacy Through Film</li> <li>- UT.IBL.11.01x: Classroom Strategies for Inquiry-Based Learning</li> <li>- Blended Learning Essentials: Embedding Practice</li> </ul>
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Blended Learning Essentials: Getting Started</li> <li>- 11.133x: Implementation and Evaluation of Educational Technology</li> <li>- Teaching with Moodle</li> <li>- EDSCI1x: The Science of Learning--What Every Teacher Should Know</li> <li>- 11.127x: Design and Development of Games for Learning</li> </ul>
6	<p>Coursera list of courses  <a href="https://www.coursera.org/courses?languages=en&amp;_facet_changed_=true&amp;primaryLanguages=en&amp;availability=selfPaced%2CwithinOneMonth&amp;domains=language-learning%2Cpersonal-development&amp;start=0">https://www.coursera.org/courses?languages=en&amp;_facet_changed_=true&amp;primaryLanguages=en&amp;availability=selfPaced%2CwithinOneMonth&amp;domains=language-learning%2Cpersonal-development&amp;start=0</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Virtual Teacher Specialization</li> <li>- English for Teaching Purposes (May 23, 2016) ✓</li> <li>- Foundations of Teaching for Learning 1: Introduction</li> <li>- Foundations of Teaching for Learning 2: Being a Teacher</li> <li>- Foundations of Teaching for Learning 3: Learners and Learning</li> <li>- Foundations of Teaching for Learning 4: Curriculum</li> <li>- Foundations of Teaching for Learning 5: Planning for Teaching and Learning</li> <li>- Foundations of Teaching for Learning 6: Introduction to Student Assessment</li> <li>- Foundations of Teaching for Learning 7: Being a Professional</li> <li>- Virtual Teacher Final Project</li> <li>- Teach English Now! Theories of Second Language Acquisition (May 16, 2016 Pay) ✓</li> <li>- Teach English Now! Foundational Principles (May 16, 2016 Pay) ✓</li> <li>- Teach English Now! Lesson Design and</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assessment (May 16, 2016 Pay) ✓</li> <li>- Lesson Planning with the ELL in Mind (May 16, 2016 Pay) ✓</li> <li>- Assessing Achievement with the ELL in Mind (May 16, 2016 Pay) ✓</li> </ul>
7	Curricki	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- open curricula</li> </ul>
8	EdX courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Introduction to Game Design</li> <li>- Classroom Strategies for Inquiry-Based Learning</li> <li>- What Now? Emerging Technologies and Their Practical Application in K12 Teaching and Learning</li> <li>- Implementation and Evaluation of Educational Technology</li> <li>- The Science of Learning--What Every Teacher Should Know</li> <li>- Design and Development of Games for Learning</li> <li>- Teaching with Davidson Next</li> <li>- Blended Learning with edX</li> <li>- Enhancing Teacher Education Through OER</li> <li>- Teaching with Technology and Inquiry: An Open Course for Teachers</li> </ul>
9	<p>FutureLearn, the Open University's MOOC branch</p> <p>(<a href="https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/categories/teaching-and-studying">https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/categories/teaching-and-studying</a>)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teaching Literacy Through Film</li> <li>- Blended Learning Essentials: Embedding Practice</li> <li>- Exploring the World of English Language Teaching (June 6, 2016) ✓</li> <li>- Professional Practices for English Language Teaching (mid 2016) ✓</li> <li>- Understanding Language: Learning and</li> </ul>

		Teaching (TBA) ✓
10	iTunesU	- some courses - guide from DIY University (Apple doesn't provide a list of courses, naturally); list of affiliates
11	iversity	- Berlin-based MOOC provider, listing courses in English
12	Janux	- the University of Oklahoma
13	Miríada X	- Spanish / Portuguese courses
14	MIT Open CourseWare	- course materials only
15	MOOC.fr	- dédié à des MOOC francophones (premier MOOC, Internet: Tout Y est Pour Apprendre)
16	NovoEd - a series of online classes from top institutions including Stanford GSB, Babson, and the Kauffman Foundation, with the majority free of charge. ( <a href="https://novoed.com/courses">https://novoed.com/courses</a> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Using Communication-Focused Activities in Designated English as a New Language Lessons (New York) (Sept 1, 2016) ✓</li> <li>- Integrating English Language Development and Content Area Learning: A Conversation-Based Approach (Feb 1 – Jun 16) ✓</li> <li>- Designing for Deeper Learning: How to Develop Performance Tasks</li> <li>- Designing a New Learning Environment</li> <li>- Constructive Classroom Conversations: Mastering Language for the Common Core State Standards ×</li> <li>- Mastering Language for the Common Core State Standards: Focus on Mathematics in Elementary Grades</li> <li>- Learning from Your Students: A Lab Course in Formative Assessment Practice in the Era of the Common Core State Standards</li> <li>- Constructive Classroom Conversations:</li> </ul>

		<p>Mastering Language for College and Career Readiness (Secondary) ×</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Using Complex Texts to Develop Language ×</li> <li>- Learning as Evidence: Improving ELLs' Argumentation Skills through Formative Assessment Practices ×</li> <li>- Problem-Based Learning: Principles and Design</li> <li>- Constructive Classroom Conversations: Mastering Language for College and Career Readiness (Spring 2016) ×</li> </ul>
17	<p>Open2Study (Australia) (<a href="https://www.open2study.com/courses/teaching-adult-learners">https://www.open2study.com/courses/teaching-adult-learners</a>)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teaching Adult Learners (WPTrain)</li> <li>- Education in a Changing World (EduChnge)</li> </ul>
18	<p>Open Education Europa, a Web site that aggregates MOOCs and other free online resources from European universities. (<a href="http://www.openeducationeuropa.eu/">http://www.openeducationeuropa.eu/</a>)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Language learning with technology</li> <li>- How to create e-learning content</li> <li>- Evaluating Teaching</li> <li>- Assessing and Teaching for Learning</li> <li>- Becoming a Better University Teacher</li> <li>- Introduction to computer-assisted language learning tools</li> <li>- Effective communication techniques for teachers</li> </ul>
19	Open HPI	Hasso Plattner Institute
20	OpenHPI	Chinese-language MOOC portal
21	<p>Open Learning courses (<a href="https://www.openlearning.com/courses/categories/Education">https://www.openlearning.com/courses/categories/Education</a>)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- English for TVET: Product Description √</li> <li>- Games in Education: Gamification</li> <li>- Effective Use of Interactive Whiteboards</li> <li>- How to teach an awesome course on OpenLearning</li> <li>- <b>Rethinking Teaching; Redesigning Learning</b></li> </ul>



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Flipped Classroom: Total Classroom Makeover</b></li> <li>- Instructional Design for Effective Learning</li> <li>- Design a World-Class Course on OpenLearning</li> <li>- <b>Into the Future with MOOCs</b></li> <li>- <b>Copyright for educators</b></li> <li>- ICT in English Language Teaching (self-paced) √</li> <li>- <b><u>UMS: English for Occupational Purposes</u></b> <b><u>(maybe self-paced) √</u></b></li> <li>- How to Build Rapport Quickly in The Classroom</li> <li>- <b>With a Mooc Mooc Here and a Mooc Mooc There Here a Mooc There a Mooc Everywhere a Mooc Mooc</b></li> </ul>
22	<p>Open Learn - Open University (UK), see menu at left (<a href="http://www.open.edu/openlearn/education/professional-development-education/teacher-training?level_filter=&amp;duration_filter=&amp;sort_by=date&amp;per_page=10#toggle_filter_options">http://www.open.edu/openlearn/education/professional-development-education/teacher-training?level_filter=&amp;duration_filter=&amp;sort_by=date&amp;per_page=10#toggle_filter_options</a>)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Learning to teach: Making sense of learning to teach</li> <li>- Learning to teach: Mentoring and tutoring student teachers</li> <li>- Learning to teach: becoming a reflective practitioner</li> <li>- Learning to teach: An introduction to classroom research</li> <li>- Supporting professional development in Initial Teacher Training</li> <li>- An introduction to the wider professional role of the teacher in England</li> <li>- Chartered teachers in Scotland</li> <li>- Teachers sharing resources online</li> </ul>
23	<p>P2P University – courses (<a href="https://courses.p2pu.org/">https://courses.p2pu.org/</a>)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More than Just a Document: Redesigning the Syllabus for Digital Environments</li> <li>- How to make educational video tutorial OR</li> </ul>

		<p>teach online?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teaching Learners of English as an Additional Language (LEALs) in Mainstream Classrooms (self-paced) ✓</li> </ul>
24	Qualt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Qualt advertises "Free mobile courses in internationally recognised professional qualifications. Anytime, anywhere." The courses are available for mobile devices only.</li> </ul>
25	SyMynd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- courses from NYU, University of Washington, McGill University</li> </ul>
26	Stanford's Free Online Courses ( <a href="http://online.stanford.edu/courses/allcourses">http://online.stanford.edu/courses/allcourses</a> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Creating Effective Online and Blended Courses</li> </ul>
27	Udacity courses	
28	Udemy list of online courses ( <a href="https://www.udemy.com/courses/teacher-training/all-courses/?price=price-free&amp;ordering=newest&amp;p=6">https://www.udemy.com/courses/teacher-training/all-courses/?price=price-free&amp;ordering=newest&amp;p=6</a> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How to Teach Poetry</li> <li>- Pedagogical Strategies for Development of Critical Thinking</li> <li>- Get Started with Google Apps for Education (GAFE)</li> <li>- Coding for Kids-A Guide for Teachers and Parents</li> <li>- Master Google Classroom</li> <li>- Three steps to use Flipped Learning in your classes</li> <li>- Moodle: From Novice Teacher to Expert Online Educator</li> <li>- Reasonable Teaching: The 13x4 to Master the Art of Teaching</li> <li>- Kick Start Your Coaching Program</li> <li>- The Basics: How to Teach English Abroad (Language Teaching) (self-paced) ✓</li> </ul>

		- How to Use Online Video to Flip the Classroom
29	Universitat Politècnica de València	- Spanish language
30	University of the People	- course catalogue
31	Unow	- MOOCs in French (including this one reviewed here)
32	WikiEducator content	-
33	Wikiversity - 'schools'	-
34	Open Yale courses	-

- Malaysian educators
- Chosen courses
- ✓ registered
- × ongoing or finishing soon so can no longer sign up

## Appendix 4

### My Participation Timetable

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
May			10 R C1-8	11 C1	12	13	14
	15	C2	C3, C4	C1, C5	C6, C7	20	21
	22 C2,	C3, C4	C5, C6	C1, C8	C7	27	28
	29 R C10, C2	C3, C4	C5, C6				
June				1 C1, C8	2 C7	3	4
	5 C2	C3, C4	C5, C6	C1, C8	C7, C10	10	11
	12 C3, C4	C5, C6	C7	C1, C8	C10	17	18
	19 C3, C4	C5, C6	C7	R C9	C10	24	25
	26 C10	C9	28	29	30		
July	3 C10	C9	5	6	7	8	9
	10 C10	C9	12	13	14	15	16
	17 C9	18	19	20	21	22	23
	24 C9	25	26	27	28	29	30
	31 C9						

Notes: R – Registration of Courses C – Course

## Appendix 5

### INFORMATION SHEET AND INFORMED CONSENT FORM

**Researcher:** Misrah Hamisah Mohamed

**Email:** M.Mohamed.1@warwick.ac.uk

**Research Title:** MOOCs for Teachers: Hope vs Reality

I would like to request your cooperation to take part in a research study on MOOCs and what it offers learners as teachers especially those who teach English. I hope to gain some understanding about educators' perspectives on how MOOCs are organised and what learners get out of their participation in MOOCs as practitioners. You are selected as a possible participant in this study because you are part of the teaching team for *Rethinking Teaching Redesigning Learning*. Participation in this study involves a face-to-face online interview (e.g. via Skype, Google Hangout etc.), which will last for approximately one hour. The interview will be conducted by me, myself, recorded and later transcribed for data analysis. There are no anticipated risks or discomforts from your participation in the research.

#### **Confidentiality**

The information gathered during this study will remain confidential. All recordings will be destroyed at the completion of this study.

#### **Withdrawal without Prejudice**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation in this study at any time without prejudice or penalty. You are also free to refuse to answer any question I might ask you.

#### **Further Questions and Follow-Up**

You are welcome to ask any questions that occur to you during the interview. If you have further questions once the interview is completed, you are encouraged to contact me using the email address given above.

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (name; please print clearly), have read the above information. I freely agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to refuse to answer any question and to withdraw from the study at any time. I understand that my responses will be kept anonymous.

---

Participant Signature

---

Date

## Appendix 6

### Interview Schedule

Name of Study: \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Time \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewee \_\_\_\_\_

Course \_\_\_\_\_

Notes to Interviewee:

- Thank you for your participation. Your input will be valuable to this research.
- Confidentiality of responses is guaranteed.
- Approximate length of interview: 60 minutes
- Purpose of research:

To gain some insights from the MOOC learner participants about learning opportunities MOOCs can offer them in continuing their professional development.

The Questions:

#### Section 1: Background

Key Questions	Prompts	Remarks
What do you currently do?		
What is your highest level of education?		
Could you name the course(s) that you participated in?		

Why did you participate in the course(s)?		
Did you have any specific aims after participating in the course?		

### Section 2: Course Information

<b>Key Questions</b>	<b>Prompts</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
What do you know about the course you participated in?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Could you tell me which university provides the course?</li> <li>- Could you tell me who the course instructors were?</li> <li>- What were the learning objectives of the course?</li> </ul>	
Did you find any problem accessing MOOCs?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Could the materials provided in the course be easily accessed?</li> </ul>	
What do you think of the course length?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How did the course length affect your choice of course?</li> </ul>	

### Section 3: Structure & Organisation

<b>Key Questions</b>	<b>Prompts</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
How was the course structured?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Was the structure clear/helpful for your learning?</li> <li>- To what extent did you think the course was interactive?</li> <li>- What were the things that you found problematic and needed improvement?</li> </ul>	
What do you think of the	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What materials did you like the most? Why?</li> </ul>	

<p>learning materials provided?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Did you face any problems with any of the learning materials?</li> <li>- What did you do to overcome the problem(s)?</li> <li>- Was/were the problem(s) solved in the end?</li> </ul>	
<p>Did the course content work for you?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Did the course content meet your expectation?</li> <li>- Were there any gaps?</li> <li>- Was the content presented in ways that suited you?</li> <li>- Were there any gaps in terms of interactivity, multimedia, text, discussion, teacher input, etc.?</li> </ul>	
<p>Were there any social media used in the course?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Could you name the social media used in the course?</li> <li>- What were the benefits that you gained out of it?</li> <li>- In what way did it affect your learning experience?</li> </ul>	
<p>Did the course offer a discussion space among learners?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How often did you participate in the discussion?</li> <li>- Did you read the whole thread of discussion?</li> <li>- What did you like/dislike about the discussion thread?</li> <li>- Did you face any problems participating in the discussion?</li> <li>- Did the discussion help you to be more engaged in the course? Why?</li> <li>- What did you get out of the discussion that you participated in?</li> </ul>	
<p>Did the course award badges?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What do you think of the idea?</li> <li>- What did you need to achieve in order to receive the badge(s)?</li> <li>- Did it help you in the learning</li> </ul>	



	process? Why?	
Did the course offer certificates to learners?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What were the certificates offered for?</li> <li>- What did you need to achieve in order to receive the certificate(s)?</li> <li>- Who signed the certificate(s)?</li> <li>- How did you get the certificate?</li> <li>- Were the certificates free or you needed to purchase it?</li> <li>- Do you think the certificate(s) have value?</li> <li>- In what way did the certification affect your learning experience?</li> </ul>	

Section 4: Assessments

<b>Key Questions</b>	<b>Prompts</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
Were there any assessments provided?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What type of assessments were there? Formative? Summative?</li> <li>- Could you describe the assessments further?</li> <li>- How often did you have to attempt the assessments?</li> <li>- Were there any specific rules of conduct that you had to follow before or after you attempted the assessments?</li> <li>- How did the assessments help you in your learning?</li> <li>- Did the assessments meet your expectations? Why?</li> </ul>	
How do you perceive your involvement in the assessment process?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How often did you attempt the assessments?</li> <li>- Did you encounter any problems while doing the assessments?</li> <li>- What did you do to overcome</li> </ul>	

	<p>the problem?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Was the problem solved in the end? How?</li> <li>- What did you get out of the assessment?</li> </ul>	
How constructive were the rubrics provided for peer grading?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Were the rubrics clear?</li> <li>- Is peer grading effective for your learning?</li> <li>- Based on your experience, are there any advantages/disadvantages of peer grading that you want to talk about?</li> <li>- What kind of peer grading would work better for you?</li> </ul>	
Do you think learners' verification of typing pattern or picture could avoid fraudulent submissions? Why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Did you have any problems to verify your originality of work?</li> <li>- What did you do to overcome the problems?</li> <li>- Were the problems solved in the end?</li> </ul>	

Section 5: Arising Issues (MOOCs & CPD)

<b>Key Questions</b>	<b>Prompts</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
Did you complete the course that you participated in? Why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do you describe your participation in the course? Active? Lurkers? Passive? Observer?</li> <li>- What kept you on the course?</li> </ul>	
Does learning online take much more time and effort? Why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How much time did you spend on the course?</li> <li>- Were you able to spend the same time over the duration of the course? Did it go up/down?</li> <li>- Was it easy/difficult to find</li> </ul>	

	<p>the time to do the course?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What qualities were needed to complete the course?</li> <li>- Did doing the course online make learning more convenient/ more taxing?</li> <li>- If more taxing, what did you do to overcome it?</li> <li>- Did it affect the way you perceive learning?</li> </ul>	
Were you able to apply what you learned?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can you give an example of what prevented you from applying the knowledge?</li> </ul>	
How did you apply the knowledge you gained from the course?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Are there any challenges that you have to face?</li> </ul>	
What were the approaches used in the course you participated in?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What do you think of the approaches implemented in the course?</li> <li>- Were there any collaborative activities offered?</li> <li>- Did it give you opportunities to learn from each other?</li> <li>- What was the approach that you liked/disliked the most? Why?</li> </ul>	
Did the approaches provide you with a space to connect the lesson you learned to your own life in meaningful ways?		
Did you achieve your aims after the participation?		
Do you have anything else		

that you would like to add?		
What kind of challenges do you predict you have to face once now you have completed the course?		

#### Closure

- Thank you to the interviewee
- Reassure confidentiality
- Ask permission to follow-up

## Appendix 7

### Online Questionnaire via Google Form

Please fill in this form so that you no longer need to be interviewed, unless you want to.

Full Name (This is for my reference. Your name will remain confidential)

---

What do you currently do? Do you work/study? Where do you work/study?

---

What is your highest level of education?

PhD

Diploma

Master

Other:

Bachelor

When I first introduced you to the courses, which of the following courses caught your interest?

- Introduction to Teaching English as a Second Language
- Creating Engaging Environments for English Language Classrooms
- Assessing Achievement with the ELL in Mind
- Lesson Planning with the ELL in Mind
- Engaging ELLs and Their Families in the School and Community
- Teach English Now! Foundational Principles
- Teach English Now! Theories of Second Language Acquisition
- Teach English Now! Lesson Design and Assessment
- English for Teaching Purposes
- Exploring the World of English Language Teaching

Which of the following courses have you participated in?

- Introduction to Teaching English as a Second Language
- Creating Engaging Environments for English Language Classrooms
- Assessing Achievement with the ELL in Mind
- Lesson Planning with the ELL in Mind
- Engaging ELLs and Their Families in the School and Community
- Teach English Now! Foundational Principles
- Teach English Now! Theories of Second Language Acquisition
- Teach English Now! Lesson Design and Assessment
- English for Teaching Purposes
- Exploring the World of English Language Teaching
- None of the above

Did you complete the course that you participated in? Why? Write NO if you didn't participate in any of the courses listed.

---

Why did/didn't you participate in the course(s)?

---

Did you have any specific aims after participating in the course? Write NO if you didn't participate in any of the courses listed.

---

Were you able to apply what you learned from the course(s) to your career? If YES, please give an example how you applied the knowledge. If NO, what prevented you from applying the knowledge?

---

Did you achieve your aims after participating in the course? How do you know? Write NO if you didn't participate in any of the courses.

---

Do you think learning online takes much more time than learning in a face-to-face environment? Why?

---

Do you think learning online takes much more effort than learning in a face-to-face environment? Why?

---

Generally, a government teacher/academic has to attend a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses each year. What do you think about attending an online CPD course instead? Will it give you more advantages/disadvantages? What are those advantages and disadvantages?

---

Can I ask you more questions about your participation in online courses? If YES, you will be contacted again. If NO, you will no longer be contacted.

Yes

No

## Appendix 8

Codes and *Families* coded in Atlas.ti

**Code Manager [HU: MOOCs for Teachers CPD]**

Name	Grounded	Created
Description of ...	41	05/21/2018 12:36:04 PM
CPD Courses At...	6	05/21/2018 01:39:00 PM
Disadvantages ...	5	05/22/2018 12:54:16 AM
Disadvantages ...	2	05/21/2018 04:56:24 PM
Disadvantages ...	3	05/14/2018 10:59:27 AM
Course Particip...	14	05/14/2018 10:11:01 AM
Course Length	20	05/21/2018 12:36:27 PM
Course Structure	22	05/21/2018 12:04:40 PM
CPD Course Ac...	14	05/21/2018 01:39:52 PM
CPD Course	33	05/21/2018 01:35:55 PM
Gaps in the Co...	16	05/21/2018 12:14:27 PM
Effects of Workl...	9	05/14/2018 01:15:13 PM
Highest Educati...	15	05/14/2018 10:11:01 AM
How helpful th...	6	05/21/2018 12:08:13 PM
Hope	2	05/14/2018 10:11:01 AM
Does learning o...	1	5/21/2018 12:42:22 PM
Disadvantages ...	13	05/21/2018 12:27:57 PM
Does learning o...	1	5/21/2018 12:41:16 PM
Effects of Cours...	16	05/21/2018 12:37:19 PM
Effects of Certif...	13	05/21/2018 12:03:33 PM
Course interacti...	14	05/21/2018 12:06:29 PM
Advantages of ...	8	05/25/2018 08:25:15 AM
Advantages of ...	3	05/21/2018 04:59:36 PM
Aims after Parti...	13	05/14/2018 10:11:01 AM
Approaches liked	14	05/21/2018 12:10:28 PM

**Code Family Manager [HU: MOOCs for Teachers CPD]**

Name	Size	Created	Modified
Assessment	12	05/27/20...	05/27/20...
Course Informa...	1	05/14/20...	05/27/20...
CPD Course	4	05/27/20...	05/27/20...
Background	5	05/14/20...	03/26/20...
Online CPD	4	05/14/20...	05/27/20...
Online Learning	9	05/27/20...	05/27/20...
Participation	11	05/27/20...	05/27/20...
Pedagogical As...	8	05/27/20...	05/27/20...
Personal Motiva...	3	05/14/20...	05/14/20...
Structure and O...	24	05/27/20...	05/27/20...

**Codes in family (5):**

- Effects of Workload (9-0)
- Highest Education Level (15-0)
- Job Scope/Workloads (49-0)
- Job Title (16-0)
- The Workplace (4-0)

**Codes not in family (78):**

- Accessibility (17-0)
- Achieved Aim(s) (13-0)
- Advantages of Assessment (22-0)
- Advantages of badges (5-0)
- Advantages of Online CPD Cou
- Advantages of online learning
- Advantages of Peer Grading (8-
- Aims after Participating (13-0)
- Approaches disliked (1-0)
- Approaches liked (14-0)
- Approaches Used (27-0)
- Assessment provided (48-0)

10 Families Background

83 Codes



## **Appendix 9**

Questions I used during the observation:

1. What are people doing? What are they trying to accomplish?
2. How exactly do they do this?
3. How do people characterise and understand what is going on?
4. What assumptions do they make?
5. Analytic questions:

What do I see going on here?

What did I learn from these notes?

Why did I include them?

Other things to consider:

What else is happening in this site that is relevant to my research question(s)?