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Naima Sahli¹, University of Ibn Khaldoun, Tiaret, Algeria Fawzia Bouhass Benaissi, Profesor² University of Djillali Liabes, Sidi Bel Abbès

EDUCATION FOR ALL: PROMOTING INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY THROUGH MOOCS TO ADVANCE RESEARCH SKILLS

Abstract

In the 21st century digital age, the major undertaking of the Algerian university is to engage its students, with cultural, linguistic and developmental diversity in enhancing their participation and achievement. This underlined objective can be met through Massive Open Online Courses. MOOCs have the ability to include all learners with different levels. Therefore, the present study aims at supporting Master 1 students by allowing in-class less interactive students to assume an active role in their learning. Also, it looks at consolidating their research and writing skills. To conduct this research, thirty Master 1 students are selected. In this context, the practitioner researcher participated as a mentor and an assessor of the degree of the students' engagement in interaction and level of progress. A questionnaire was administered to the students to obtain their perspectives about the adequacy of MOOCs and whether they maintained a high level of engagement. The results reveal that the majority of the students could complete the course and extend their repertoire of research and writing skills. Furthermore, the students exhibited positive attitudes towards MOOCs because they have challenged traditional non-inclusive methods of teaching and helped them discover their potential in a virtual world. Finally, MOOCs aided the students by connecting them to a wider community of students and scholars.

Keywords: inclusive pedagogy; MOOCs; participation; supportive environment; the practitioner researcher

1. Introduction

There are calls for the promotion of inclusion and equity throughout the world. Hence, it is necessary to cater for the students' needs based on differences and celeberate them to advance quality teaching and learning. In the Algerian context, inclusion seems to be an appropriate choice to address the issue of integrating holders of a B. A in the Algerian classical system and Teacher Education Certaficate (ENS) since both of them did not study research methodology, which is of a paramount importance in improving their writing techniques and research tools. In addition, LMD students face difficulties in practising the theoretical notions of this module. Therefore, this study suggested the use of a Massive Open Online Course to advance their participation and engagement in these fundamental modules. The research questions investigate the benefits of MOOCs in addition to the way Master students can develop their research and writing repertoire, as a first preparatory step towards their Master's dissertation writing. We hypothesize that MOOCs would constitute a new engaging environment that fosters inclusion of all the students with different levels of proficiency in research skills and writing skills. Besides, MOOCs would pave the ways for them to have a clear path to autonomous learning.

¹ Email: naima. sahli@univ-tiaret. dz

² fbouhass@gmail. com

2. Review of Literature

Today, Schools are no longer homogeneous entities regarding the growing diversity at many levels, namely; the learners' developmental abilities and their cultural and linguistic differences (Florian, 2016, p. 2). To ensure fair educational opportunities for all the students with various profiles, inclusive pedagogy stands as an essential component that can address these concerns.

There is no conclusive definition of the notion of inclusive pedagogy (Göransson & Nilholm, 2014, as cited in Florian, 2015, p. 6; Loreman, 2017, p. 1). However, the concept can be applied to miscellaneous contexts and situations. According to Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009, p. 23), inclusive pedagogy is an approach that has the potential to bring all the learners into an environment that recognises differences and promotes respect among its members, governed by teaching methods that transcend one exclusive culture and embrace other practices as long as they contribute to a culture of inclusion.

Recognizing differences among the students is at the heart of inclusive pedagogy. In this prospect, diversity is not regarded as an impediment to ordinary classrooms, or as a stigmatized notion in which different students are in need of a special or an additional assistance (Florian, 2015, p. 10). Thus, it is seen as a strength in which there is a provision of diverse practices that ensure effective learning opportunities for all the learners with different abilities (Spratt & Florian, 2013, p. 135).

There is another concept of inclusive pedagogy that goes beyond the notion of 'disability' to foster institutional culture. Inclusive pedagogy is a matter of a whole educational system; starting with a school culture, which values differences and is fully aware of individual needs (Corbett, 2001, p. 11). In the same line of thought, inclusive pedagogy has to do with continual responsiveness (Ainscow, 2010, as cited in Makoelle, 2014, p. 1259) to deal with several challenges that occur in multi-cultural environments (Corbett &Slee, 2000, p. 134) in which there might be some linguistic barriers to learning and participation (Booth, Ainscow, Black-Hawkins, Vaughan & Shaw, 2000, p. 13)

Full inclusion will be the norm throughout this study. Traditionally, full inclusion indicates that despite special needs or handicap, all the students should be fully involved in classroom or programmes that cater for all (Schultz Stout, 2001).

2.1. Milestones of Inclusive Pedagogy

The inclusive pedagogy approach has its roots in the special education trend (Snyder, 1999, p. 175). The first milestone for the recognition of equal educational rights for persons with disabilities was in the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education. The main decisions stress the right to educational access for all human beings, segregation can be overcome when schools encourage inclusive practices, and that inclusive policies would facilitate educational opportunities for all students (UNESCO & MES, 1994).

There was also a change in the theoretical overview of persons with disabilities in the Salamnca Conference (1994). In this prospect, there was a shift from the medical model in which the issue is within the person himself, who is in need of medical intervention into a social and a democratic model. That means that society contributes to putting barriers by preventing persons with special needs from having access to education. As for the democratic paradigm, it has to do with the ability of society to grant persons with disability their rights in a society that is for all (Dreyer, 2017, pp. 389-390).

The used terminology for persons with disabilities has also undertaken further alterations. For instance, normalization indicates that even persons with disability are equal to all other human beings when it comes to rights (Kochhar et al, 2000, p. 12). Then, the terms

mainstream and integration were used to refer to the fact that persons with disabilities should be integrated in regular schooling, without any adaptation of the curriculum to foster participation (Lewis & Doorlag, 1995, p. 4). However, the term inclusive pedagogy addresses the shortcomings of previous notions by including all the components of a comprehensive system namely; all learners, educators, learning needs, pedagogy and assessment (Dreyer, 2017, p. 391).

Research studies about inclusive pedagogy have tackled different themes. For example, persons with disabilities, gender non-conforming students, and teacher-development programmes that foster inclusive classes.

2.2. Approaches of Inclusive Pedagogy

Loreman (2017) scrutinized the pedagogical approaches of inclusive education in Pedagogy for inclusive education that took place in the late 20th century. He distinguished three different approaches that closely relate to the principles of inclusive pedagogy namely; Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Differentiated Instruction (DI), and Florian and Spratt's Inclusive Pedagogical Approach in Action (IPAA). The main findings of this study indicate that all the approaches promote the principle of participation of all learners in education and classroom activities. However, there is a distinctive element between DI and the other approaches. Regarding DI, differentiated instruction is the main drive for this approach with an emphasis on providing different techniques and strategies to cater for students' with multiple range of abilities, and then adjustments can be done to realize meaningful participation of all of them. As far as UDL and IPAA are concerned with, difference is acknowledged and addressed, but not at the expense of other learners. That is, there is a provision of individualized instruction without identifying these learners in need of specific assistance. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) assert that, "Instead of providing something different or additional for children who experience difficulties in their learning; inclusive pedagogy seeks to extend what is ordinarily available to everybody. "The third finding points of Loreman's research point out the significance of recognizing diversity within classrooms; teachers should consider differences among learners and overcome any marginalization within their classrooms.

2.3. Teacher's role in Inclusive Education

The practice of inclusive pedagogy depends a great deal on the willingness of the teacher to engage in realizing its principles in his/ her classroom setting. Rouse (2008, p. 1) assumes that,

Inclusion requires teachers to accept the responsibility for creating schools in which all children can learn and feel they belong. In this task, teachers are crucial because of the central role they play in promoting participation and reducing underachievement, particularly with children who might be perceived as having difficulties in learning.

In this respect, the teachers should be well-informed about their mission in ensuring equal opportunities for all their learners. This matter is the focus of miscellaneous teacher education programmes that prepare the students-teachers to deal with inclusive environments and welcome learners from different backgrounds and various learning abilities.

Jones (2009) investigates the initiation of an online course entitled Curriculum and Instruction for Students with Severe Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities for twelve teachers who taught students with severe/profound intellectual developmental disabilities. The objective of this study is to improve these teachers professional learning so that they can adapt curriculum standards to individualized needs of learners. Therefore, the teachers participate in virtual conversations, demonstrations, activities and reflections. The results show that when

teachers had been assisted in developing their knowledge and skills in a given context, they could successfully apply them in their classrooms and engage in innovative teaching.

The shift from educational selection to a system that fosters inclusion paves the way for reconsidering student-teachers training that incorporates understanding of special needs education and inclusive practices. In this prospect, Lambe (2007) conducts a study at the University of Ulster in Northern Ireland in which 41 student teachers took part in a blended-learning programme about Special Education Needs and inclusive pedagogy. The programme assisted pre-service teachers in providing them with the appropriate knowledge, skills and reflective thinking. The aim of this initiative is to use in their teaching of cases including: emotional and behavioral issues, health problems, and deficiencies in language.

In the same line of thought, Leicester (2008, p. 38) points at hidden curricula in multicultural settings, in which these curricula may not respond to people from certain groups or minorities. These schools are able to spread the notion of social inclusion learners from various backgrounds by promoting a multi-cultural approach. For instance, in art classes, the learners do PowerPoint presentations about their homeland poets. Thus, the teachers deal with on-going curriculum adjustments to cater for the needs of all the students and create an environment that fosters tolerance rather than superiority and separation.

Florian and Linklater (2010) provide another view when it comes to identifying the roles of the teacher in a pedagogically-inclusive setting. The vision of this study is not to equip the pre-service teachers with assets to deal with different students or students with special needs. On the contrary, the initial teacher education course focuses on mainstream teachers and whether they can invest their knowledge and skills in situations where their learners are facing difficulty. Thus, the Inclusive Practice Project (IPP) at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland intends to investigate the principle of responsiveness to the differences among learners rather than signaling the differences as a major component in these settings.

The course was driven by three pedagogical principles governed by transformability. Transformability means that the learners' ability to learn is changeable and can be advanced according to what takes place in the classroom (Hart et al, 2004, p. 166). Inclusion of all learners cannot be realized through co-agency, trust and the engagement of all learners. Findings highlight the following themes that contribute to inclusive pedagogy, including: shared responsibility between teachers and their students, focusing on the students' needs, developing reflective practices and making adjustments in teaching to further students' engagement (Florian &Linklater, 2010, p. 374)

2.4. The Relation of Inclusive Pedagogy and the Identity Instruction

Inclusive pedagogy can be applied in other domains that transcend the assurance of education for special students or catering for differences within the classroom setting into addressing other issues such as the students' gender and varying identities within universities. In this respect, Le Pichon (2008) suggests that language teachers should be trained on how to manage an environment that welcomes students from different backgrounds and identities. Thus, the language teachers should be well-trained to reduce certain anxieties of Tran- and gender non conforming students. The focus on this category of students, particularly in the language classroom, is related to the high-frequency use of gender pronouns and gender agreements. Therefore, language classes should be built on respect and promotion of diversity through the engagement of the teachers and their Tran- and gender non-conforming students in conversations about their pronoun-use preferences. In addition, the language teachers should be highly selective when it comes to incorporating material in their teaching. For example, choosing texts that represent a variety of cultural and identity backgrounds can make the language classroom a setting that boosts the students' self-confidence and their participation in the language classroom.

The investigation of the EFL teachers' identity construction in pedagogically-inclusive settings is another field of interest, mainly in societies with social and multilingual diversity. In this context, Chan & Lo (2017) explore the possibility of constructing an inclusive identity in a setting where there exist some languages other than Cantonese and English, namely; Hindi, Urdu, Nepali, and Tagalog. Therefore, this study investigates how three primary teachers of English as a Foreign Language in Hong Kong develop their identities of inclusive education practitioners as an additional support to their Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE). The main principle of their inquiry is that any endeavor towards inclusion cannot be realized without the teachers' formation of an inclusive practitioner's identity. Chief conclusions show that all the teachers are willing to support and engage the marginalized learners tohave a voice in the language classroom. Thus, following some recommendations from their schools and Hong Kong Education Bureau, these teachers could design their own repertoire of classroom practices to respond to special needs or differences within their classroom. Furthermore, the two Chinese female teachers found it ambiguous whether to assume their identity as a Special Education Needs teacher or an EFL teacher in first place due to medicalizing discourse around the SEN learners. However, the case of the third teacher was totally different because he considers his learners' identities and backgrounds as a resource to inform his teaching practice. As a result, he constructs his identity as an EFL teacher and an inclusive practitioner with his learners.

This study extends research on inclusive education as a key component of modern classroom, but it considers the matter of an education for all from a didactic perspective. That is to say full inclusion caters for the need of all the students in the modules of research methodology and writing techniques.

3. Methodology

3.1.Context of the Study

The Algerian Higher Education witnesses a shift from the classical system to the LMD (Licence-Master-Doctorat) system. Within the newly established system, some measures are applied to integrate the classical system students in the LMD system in order to pursue Master's and Doctoral degrees. However, some students face prior knowledge difficulties in some fundamental modules such as research methodology and writing techniques. In this respect, classical system students are likely to find it challenging to keep up with LMD students in writing techniques, in which the artifacts are research-related texts. Hence, the practitioner researcher is in an ongoing process of raising questions about his/her practices and whether they cater for all of the students' needs and interests. Therefore, the practitioner researcher opted for full inclusive pedagogy to entitle all her students to an opportunity to learn and consolidate their research and writing skills in an online environment.

3.2. Participants

Table 1:

Table 1 showcases more details about the participants

The details of the participants

| Participants | Sex | Age | B. A educational system |
|--------------|-----|-----|-------------------------|
| A. I | F | 22 | LMD |
| I. I | F | 23 | LMD |
| A. H | F | 22 | LMD |
| M. T | F | 22 | LMD |
| F. H | F | 23 | LMD |
| Z. D | F | 22 | LMD |
| B. F | M | 23 | LMD |
| A. T | M | 23 | LMD |
| B. W | M | 22 | LMD |
| B. S | M | 22 | LMD |
| O. Z | F | 30 | ÉcoleNormale Supérieure |
| O. S | F | 33 | ÉcoleNormale Supérieure |
| Y. S | F | 28 | ÉcoleNormale Supérieure |
| Y. A | M | 25 | ÉcoleNormale Supérieure |
| B. H. H | F | 30 | Classical system |
| Z. M | F | 32 | Classical system |
| M. E | F | 33 | Classical system |
| K. S | F | 26 | Classical system |
| B. B | M | 30 | Classical system |
| I. R | M | 34 | Classical system |
| G. A | M | 26 | Classical system |
| G. M | M | 28 | Classical system |
| K. M | M | 29 | Classical system |
| I. N | M | 30 | Classical system |
| M. E | M | 26 | Classical system |
| C. S | M | 27 | Classical system |

3.3.Data Collection Methods and Procedures

The inspiration for conducting this research study comes from the practitioner researcher's interest to address contextual issues and "to examine unchallenged processes, practices, and expectations and to question meaning and reflect on experience in order to broaden [his/her] understanding and practice in the classroom", (Green, 1984, as cited in Airasian and Gullickson, 1994, p. 195). The practitioner researcher advocates a responsive stand to her students' needs and seeks support and guidance from her research partner. Hence, both researchers reviewed the related literature on inclusive education and developed the research methods and procedures. In this respect, they made the decision to include all the participants in the study and respond to two major aims. In addition, they selected a MOOC called Developing your Research Project. This course is developed by Southampton University in cooperation with FutureLearn platform that was launched by Open University in 2012 (Nava, 2018). The course lasts for 08 weeks of instruction and the students can learn on the platform at their own pace. The selection of this MOOC is based on the following criteria. The course covers the entire research process from the beginning of formulating the research questions until submitting the dissertation (Bentley, Fuller, and Thompson, 2014). It also

tackles research and writing skills such as formulating research questions and hypotheses, choosing appropriate research methods, gathering data, and note-taking.

Both researchers participated in a presentation about the concept of inclusive pedagogy and how educational systems can contribute to a culture of inclusion that is governed by principles of learning and growing together. Then they introduced to them virtual learning opportunities in the 21st century and how every student can use technology to develop himself. Only 26 students out of 43 students agreed to take part in this study. In this respect, the researchers explained to them how to have an account on FutureLearn and showed them a video that shows all the steps that the students may follow to make contributions and to interact with other participants on the platform. At the end of the course, these students filled a questionnaire about their attitudes towards their inclusion in this online course.

3.4.Data Analysis and Discussion

The questionnaire serves as a reflection tool to measure the effectiveness of MOOCs as an inclusive tool in the language classroom. The first part of the attitudinal questionnaire provides an account of the participants' personal and educational background information. The second part of the questionnaire deals with the students' attitudes before engaging in a MOOC and then whether this online experience promotes inclusion and a sense of belonging to the academic world or not.

The aim of the first question, about having any idea about MOOCs, is to identify if the students have any idea about distant online learning. Only 3. 48% of the participants knew about the fact that some students could get access to online tutoring by paying the fees such as Udacity. The second part is particularly about the students' expectations about the content and learning about a subject matter on FutureLearn platform. Many participants (34. 61%) admit that they expect that the course content would be hard and demanding. These participants thought that online tuition is closely related to a high level of proficiency in computing skills as well as having a prior knowledge about research methodology. The partcipants with a percentage of (23. 07%) viewed the course as a new opportunity for them since it use modern ways of delivery such as interactive teaching, and the quality of being open to different learners across the world. Some participants (23. 07%) also consider the course to be helpful for them, mainly to address their deficiencies in research methodology and to aid them in conducting their research in an academic manner. The remaining group of participants (19. 23%) noted that this course would consolidate their in-class content only. Hence, the course served as a pre-exam preparation and revision.

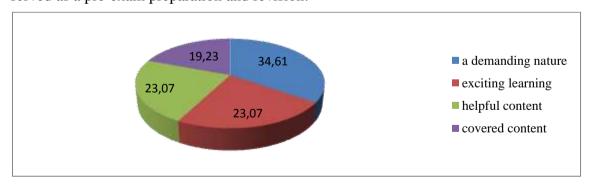


Figure 1:

The participants' assumptions about the online course

The second question addressed whether the course "Developing your Research Project" promoted inclusion of both categories: LMD and classical system students. The results showed that (92. 30%) of the participants could finish the online course throughout 08 weeks

of online instruction and engagement. In this respect, several factors contributed to the high level of the students' participation in this online course.

- 1. Anonymity: the participants can use pseudonyms. Moreover, the participants feel at ease to interact with other participants on the platform. That means that, in virtual spaces, interaction and sharing experiences is much more important than judging one's local errors such as spelling and grammar mistakes. Therefore, introvert students, in this study, showed a great involvement with other learners. This fact helps the practitioner researcher discover her students' potentials and interactive skills. Hence, it is also an opportunity for the practionner researcher to reflect on contextual factors (lack of time/ crowded groups) impeded her from realizing how positive and engaged her students are.
- 2. New methods of inclusion: openness facilitates the students' involvement in responding to the course content; this quality cannot be available in traditional classes in which the teachers are restricted by time and syllabus coverage. However, the participants make contributions in the comment section and by following other participants as well. Furthermore, at the end of every week of instruction, the tutors provide the participants with a briefing video in which they assess the overall interaction and answer some of the participants' questions.
- 3. Prior knowledge: as opposed to some students' expectations, enrolling in this course did not require a prior knowledge in the module of research methodology and writing techniques. The participants with different levels of proficiency can enroll in the course because there is a progressive motion of instruction throughout the course. Moving to another step in the course requires the participants to comment, answer a quiz, or deal with an activity.
- 4. Delivery Methods: the course does not rely on face to face interaction only. The participants are in constant involvement with the content of the course. First of all, they can choose the pace of learning because they can choose the appropriate time to access the course. Besides, they can download course videos and transcripts to refer back to them if necessary. Furthermore, there are useful resources, tips and applications on the platform that the students can download and use in their studies.

The third question is asked to identify whether the online course caters for the needs of the students in the area of research methodology and writing skills or not. Unexpectedly, the participants indicate that the course helps them discover a wide range of skills and develop new attitudes in the field of scientific research. The majority of the students (50%) pointed at understanding the significance of developing a repertoire of writing skills in the academic settings. The course enabled them to deepen their knowledge about writing genres such as the academic essay and the steps of writing a research proposal. When it comes to research methods, (38, 46%) of the participants reported that they developed their research skills and essential attitudes to undertake scientific research. These skills include writing reviews of literature, different research and data collection methods, academic integrity, and ethical practices (referencing and avoiding plagiarism). Another aspect that the course tackled was transferable skills; the participants (11, 53%) stated that throughout the course they developed an awareness of transferable skills and how they are important in several situations. These skills include: making initiatives, competency in IT, facing problems, work independently, time management skills, developing leadership skills, and being a part of a team.

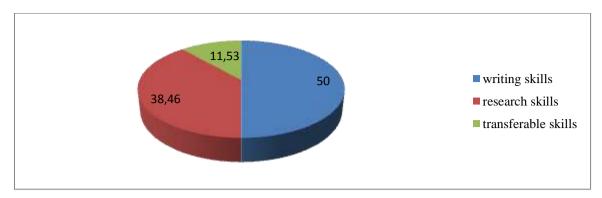


Figure 2:

Developing the participants' skills on MOOCs

The last question is about asking the students if this online tutoring inspires them to enroll in other online courses as well. The participants (80. 76%) admit that they have benefited from this experience in many aspects. They realize that having the appropriate resources and guidance foster their independence as students of the English language. They also challenge themselves and can interact with native speakers and learners from all around the world to share knowledge. Eventually, they show their readiness to enroll in new online courses as long as these courses would cater for their needs and interests. As far as the other participants are concerned, (19. 24%) enrolled in other courses as a voluntary step to consolidate their knowledge and skills in other modules such as TESOL, IELTS and writing reviews of literature.

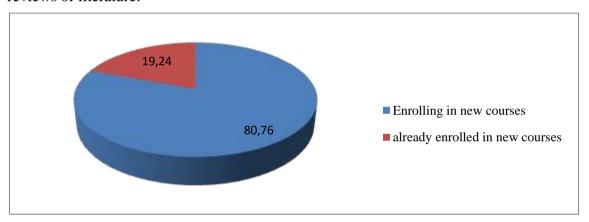


Figure 3:

The participants' willingness to enroll in new courses

This research study provides a broad understanding of promoting full inclusion through a MOOC. In many ways, this study confirms the findings of other studies in which inclusive pedagogy is a key of change and transformation in the educational context (i. e. Porter and Towel, 2017, p. 06) in which transformational education is based on inclusive pedagogy. The current study applies three keys for making a change into the practitioner researcher's classroom. These keys included:

- 1. Education for life: throughout the study, the students were engaged in a MOOC in order to provide with them with assets in independent learning via the virtual world in an attempt to enable them to seek further opportunities for learning.
- 2. *Promoting inclusion:* students from both streams (classical system/ LMD system) take part in learning about research methodology and writing techniques. The course fulfill their needs and they share their own experiences with other participants.

- 3. Tackling barriers to participation: in this research study, the practitioner researcher reflects upon a contextual situation; which is the inclusion of all the students in developing their research and writing skills as well. Besides, she tackles the issue of lack of time allotted to the module of writing techniques.
- 4. Prioritizing professional development: reflective practice leads to innovative methods. In this context, a MOOC was the innovative practice that made change to the role of the students and compelled them to seek autonomous learning in virtual worlds. In addition, inclusive pedagogy helps the practitioner research maintained qualities of caring about the students' participation and understood their difficulties. Thus, she could develop a responsive attitude, which is the core of inclusive pedagogy.

4. Conclusion

This study attempts to respond to a contextual issue in the module of writing techniques by advancing a responsive attitude towards the inclusion of the students from two different streams. The practitioner researcher, in this context, tried to engage her students in a Massive Open Online Course of FutureLearn platform by asking them to complete 8 weeks of instruction on how to start their research journey. At the end of the online course, the students exhibited positive attitudes towards this kind of online instruction since this experience equipped them with the needed competencies in research and writing. In addition to that, this course helped them develop the necessary attributes of the personality of a researcher who respects notions of integrity. This online experience supported the students' engagement in extending their repertoire about developing a research project. Also, it assisted them in identifying the necessary steps to accomplish any research study successfully. Furthermore, it gave them an account of the transferable skills that the students may use in other modules.

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