

Chinese English Teachers' Perspectives on “Distributed Flip MOOC Blends” From BMELTT to BMELTE

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ABSTRACT

This article reports on a study involving experienced university lecturers from mainland China reflecting on how to blend FutureLearn MOOCs into their existing English Language Teaching (ELT) curricula while on an ‘upskilling’ teacher education summer course in the UK in academic year 2016-2017. Linked to a British Council ELTRA (English Language Teaching Research Award) project, the study involved: a. the administration of a pre-MOOC survey relating to teachers’ beliefs towards online learning in general and MOOCs in particular; b. ‘learning by doing’: taking part in a FutureLearn MOOC; c. reflecting on the experience both face-to-face in workshops, in online forums and in a post-MOOC survey. The outcomes of this article highlight that the understanding of what a MOOC is might differ between the UK and China. The article concludes by presenting the perceived pros and cons of adopting a ‘distributed flip MOOC blend’ as previously discussed in related work.

KEYWORDS

Action-Research, Autonomy, Blended, BMELTE (Blending MOOCs for English Language Teacher Education), BMELTT (Blending MOOCs for ELT), Beliefs, China, Distributed Flip, ELT, MOOC, Reflective Practice

INTRODUCTION

A Metareflective Approach to MOOC Integration

This paper discusses the reflections on the adoption and implementation of a flipped-MOOC curricular integration approach by experienced teachers of English from a university in mainland China who were attending a teacher education ‘upskilling’ course at Coventry University (CU) in the UK. The study is mainly qualitative – even if it includes some quantitative data - and adheres to action-research principles (see Burns & Kurtoğlu-Hooton, 2016 on this point). Twelve teachers (all female) were involved in it: in the summer of academic year 2016-2017. The use of the expression “teacher education” as opposed to “teacher training” is deliberate here and aims to stress the value put on the development of an autonomous and reflective approach to teaching practice, in line with

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Dewey's educational philosophy (1933) and its more recent applications to ELT (English Language Teaching) (Mann & Walsh, 2017).

It is generally recognised that teachers' beliefs exert a strong influence on teachers' practice (e.g. Klapper 2006, p. 18; Borg 2001). These beliefs are often based on teachers' prior experience as both learners and teachers (Donaghue 2003), which may shape the teachers' "own world of thought and action" (Pennington 1996, p. 340). Borg argues the teachers' individual perceptions can be strengthened and extended through their education (2011) and, as reported by Mann and Walsh (2017, p.7) reflection is "fundamental to individual education and personal growth". Schön introduced the concepts of "reflection-in-action" (while carrying out the educational experience) and "on- action" after the educational event has taken place (1983) which can support teachers' active learning. Killion and Todnem coined "reflection-for-action" (1991 in Mann & Walsh 2017, p. 8), a future-oriented action which implies a certain level of prediction. For this project a reflective approach underpinned by action research "in-action" - while experiencing a MOOC -, "on action" - after having carried out tasks on the MOOC -, and "for action" - thinking how a MOOC could be integrated into future curricula - was adopted. Participants actively engaged in metareflective practice (Flavell, 1979; Efkleidis, 2006), recording their thoughts on their teaching perceptions, beliefs and practice while engaging with MOOCs and reflecting on how they could integrate them into their curricula in the future. There is evidence that the utilisation of Web 2.0 tools like MOOCs can foster learner autonomy (Cappellini, Lewis, & Mompean, 2017) and, as a consequence to this, in the context of the BMELTE (Blending MOOCs into English Teacher Education) project, teachers' agency.

Further details on the methodology followed for this study are provided below in the relevant section.

MOOC Selection

At CU various action research studies have been carried out to investigate English teachers' and MA in English Language Teaching students' reflections on the integration of MOOCs into existing curricula (Orsini-Jones, 2015; Orsini-Jones *et al.* 2015; Orsini-Jones, Altamimi & Conde 2017; Orsini-Jones *et al.*, 2017). In the ongoing BMELTT (Blending MOOCs for English Language Teacher Training) project - now renamed BMELTE, - discussed here, the content of a FutureLearn MOOC becomes an integral part of an existing curriculum in an institution that is not involved in the development of the MOOC itself. This MOOC blend is relatively new in the UK Higher Education sector, but there are numerous precedents in the USA. Kim (2015), Sandeen (2013) and Joseph-Israel (2013) report on how MOOCs have been integrated into traditional higher education. Sandeen calls this type of blend 'MOOC 3.0' or 'distributed flip' model (2013). This blended flip model can be 'distributed' in various ways. For example, in the September 2017 BMELTT implementation cycle, students from CU, from the University of Applied Sciences in Utrecht (HU) and from three universities in China - Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU), Sichuan International Studies University (SISU) and East China University of Science and Technology (ECUST) – were first of all accessing materials online on Task-Based Language Learning (TBLL) on the FutureLearn MOOC *Understanding Language: Learning and Teaching* (created by the British Council in collaboration with the University of Southampton (Borthwick, 2017), secondly they were reflecting on these materials online amongst themselves on a dedicated Moodle platforms and then, in the case of CU and SISU, they were also having face-to-face discussions in class on said materials.

Another feature that distinguishes BMELTT/BMELTE from other related studies on MOOC blends, consists in the fact that it does not directly relate to the integration into the curriculum of an 'L-MOOC' (Language Learning MOOC, such as 'Italian for beginners, see Motzo & Proudfoot 2017), but of MOOCs aimed at stimulating reflections on blended and online learning and other teacher education themes for language teachers, such as *Understanding Language, Learning and Teaching* and *Teaching for Success: the Classroom and the World*, or of MOOCs for other subjects, such as *Business Fundamentals: Effective Communication* or *Basic Science: Understanding Experiments*,

to support the reflection on how to teach English for Specific Purposes. The latter two were in fact those used for the teacher education summer course.

The blended MOOC flip curricular integration has proven to be quite successful to date (Orsini-Jones et al., 2017), but some issues have arisen due to changes to the way FutureLearn MOOCs are distributed that occurred in 2017. Up to 2016, the MOOCs offered by the UK-based FutureLearn platform (linked to the Open University, <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses>) were characterised by open access and learning at a distance that allowed their users to self-regulate their own learning, determining when, how and with what content and activities they would engage with (Hood, Littlejohn & Milligan, 2015). MOOCs used to share the “anytime, anywhere principle of m-learning¹”, as defined by Kukulska-Hulme and Shield (2008, p. 281), by allowing students to complete their studies at their own pace. In 2017 however, FutureLearn MOOCs, like the ones used for this study, started limiting time access. Participants have to pay for a subscription if they want continuous access to the MOOC they have been engaged with after the course – which normally lasts between three and six weeks - terminates. This major change put under discussion the initial conceptualisation of FutureLearn MOOCs as ‘disruptive’ open access technologies, as they used to be Open Educational Resources (OERs) on a massive scale. The acronym ‘MOOC’ was already being debated before 2017 (Orsini-Jones et al. 2015) because MOOCs can only be fully accessed in certain parts of the world and not others; the concept of ‘course’ in an environment in which a tutor cannot moderate effectively due to the number of participants has also been debated (*ibid.*). Since 2017 FutureLearn MOOCs have become less ‘open’ and probably, as a consequence to this, less ‘massive’ due to the subscription fee required after a number of weeks from initial enrolment. The evolution of MOOC accessibility calls for a re-definition of terms of reference and also has implications for those who, like the authors of this piece, used to regularly integrate them into their curricula because they were OERs.

However, MOOCs still provide sufficient value added and ‘flipped mode’ potential to be an interesting way of enhancing an existing curriculum, as reiterated by Zhang (2017), who used a MOOC blend at Shenzhen University in China to support the teaching of College English. Quoting Abeysekera and Dawson (2014), Zhang lists the key features of a flipped approach facilitated by the integration of a MOOC (2017, p. 17): most information-transmission teaching happens out of class; classroom time can be utilised for active learning and social-collaborative tasks; students are required to complete pre- and/or post-class activities to fully benefit from in-class work. Another benefit of utilising MOOCs is the exposure to massive social-collaborative opportunities they provide. As illustrated by Ferguson, Coughlan and Heredotou (2016), quoted in Motzo and Proudfoot (2017, pp. 89-90), “the MOOCs hosted by FutureLearn are underpinned by the pedagogy of conversational learning with a learning environment that aims to foster social interaction and collaboration between learners mainly through the use of embedded tools such as discussions”.

In view of the experience of teaching teachers (or would be teachers) about MOOCs, despite the limitation to access caused by the introduction of subscription fees, which echoes the evolution of other popular OERs, MOOCs can still be utilised to stimulate reflection on learning and teaching in general and language learning and teaching in particular. Also, there is a growing interest for MOOCs in China. A number of online systems have provided platforms for teachers to deliver MOOC courses (Klobus, Macintosh & Murphy, 2015). Many Chinese universities are keen to use MOOC platforms to deliver their courses which are free to their own students as well as students from other universities. For example, Xuetang Zaixian (<https://www.xuetangx.com/>), - with involvement, amongst others, of Tsinghua University, Fudan University, Taiwan Tsinghua University and Taiwan Chiao Tung University - and Chinese University MOOC (<http://www.icourse163.org/>) - with involvement, amongst others of Beijing University, Nanjing University and Zhejiang University - are two popular online platforms for many universities to deliver their MOOC courses. Although there are studies in Chinese exploring the opportunity for EFL (English as Foreign Language) teachers to integrate MOOCs into their curricula (e.g. Ma & Hu, 2014; Chen, 2015), many teachers are still not aware of the scope of MOOCs and how to use them effectively. The low completion rates on MOOCs, the

lack of good quality materials and valid assessment tasks have also been identified as problematic issues for MOOCs in China (Chen, 2014). In their review of MOOC literature between 2008 and 2012, Liyanagunawardena, Adams & Williams (2013) highlight the cultural tensions that can occur on MOOC forums, where less confident contributors can be silenced by more assertive ones.

Unlike this study, most relevant publications on MOOCs in China (e.g. Chen, 2014; Chen, 2015; Ma & Hu, 2015; Zhang, 2015), appear to focus on MOOC platforms and studies in the USA. Also, they do not appear to provide information on how to use MOOCs or discuss effective approaches to MOOC integration into existing classes, particularly with reference to TESOL/ELT courses. Another distinctive feature of this study is that previous studies on MOOCs in China have not explored MOOC ‘distributed flip blend’ collaborations integrating MOOCs into existing curricula and generated a reflective discussion on this topic between lecturers in China and lecturers outside of China. Underlying this study is the belief that the context where language education takes place is one of the crucial aspects of language learning and teaching.

This study focuses on the experience of reflecting on how to integrate a MOOC into existing English Language curricula. The reflection was carried out by experienced teachers of English from Nanjing Agricultural University in China in collaboration with staff from Coventry University in the UK both while they were attending an advanced summer course on English Language Teaching at CU and after the completion of said course.

METHODOLOGY

The research methodology approach was based on related action research cycles (Orsini-Jones et al., 2015; Orsini-Jones, 2015; Orsini-Jones et al., 2017) that had preceded the implementation of this ‘spin off’ of the BMELTT project. A grounded mixed-method approach was adopted: both qualitative and quantitative data were collected, with a stronger focus on qualitative data. The teachers were actively involved in the study and there were some autoethnographic elements to it (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p.77). Both Li Wei and Hu Yuanyan, two of the authors of this article, contributed their own ‘MOOC journey’ and reflections to the study and also carried out further individual interviews addressing the research question on their return to China. The main data sources used were:

1. A pre-MOOC and a post-MOOC online survey administered through the Bristol Online Survey (BOS: a survey provider that complies with the UK Data Protection Act requirements) to involve participants in individual meta-reflections before and after they engaged with the MOOC modelled on previous cycles of the project;
2. The analysis of the discussion postings relating to the MOOC integration and blended-MOOC task design posted by the participants in Moodle;
3. The analysis of the reflective report by two of the participants who collated both their views on MOOC blends and those of the other participants in individual interviews carried out with the summer school participants at NAU on their return to China;
4. The reflections that stemmed from a post-MOOC focus group with the participants four months after the summer school had finished, when the initial survey results were analysed and triangulated. The focus group took place in China.

The research questions of this study focused on the participating teachers’ beliefs regarding an autonomous approach to language learning and teaching facilitated by a MOOC, their views on online learning and whether or not they perceived a non-language specific MOOC as a useful platform to use to teach General English.

The overall questions set by the researchers where:

1. Can a 'flipped MOOC' integration approach support the teaching of English in China, with particular reference to NAU?
2. What is the teachers' perception of online and blended learning?
3. What recommendations could be made for the purpose of English teacher education in China following this project?

Informed consent was sought and obtained from all participants, in compliance with the Coventry University ethics requirements.

The Pre-MOOC Bristol Online Survey

The Pre-MOOC survey consisted of two sections. The first one, adapted from a related study by Orsini-Jones et al. (2015), included two types of questions:

1. Specific open questions that were used to gather sufficient 'biodata information' from the participants such as nationality, university affiliation, mode of study, native language (s), age, gender, English language proficiency, and previous teaching experience (Mackey & Gass, 2016, p.177);
2. Short-answer questions that allowed participants to express their opinions, attitudes, and expectations towards MOOC integration into existing curricula.

The second section covered attitudinal statements in Likert-scale format, which were based on the work) on autonomy in language education by Palfreyman (2003) and Benson (2007). This part of the survey aimed to identify participants' beliefs on learner autonomy in English language teaching and learning, with particular reference to the development of autonomy in online settings.

In the Pre-MOOC survey the teachers provided general information about themselves and their expectations regarding the use of a MOOC. The twelve teachers involved were all female and aged 31-50. Their proficiency in English was high, ranging between IELTS 6 (CEFR B2) to IELTS 7 and above (CEFR C2). The length of their teaching experience varied between six and twenty-three years. Eleven out of twelve stated that they knew what a MOOC was and three of them stated that they had taken part in a MOOC before. However, they all declared that they had never taken part in a course involving reflecting on a MOOC for the purpose of integrating it into their curricula. In reply to the question 'What are your beliefs regarding online learning', four participating teachers stated that "convenience" was a positive factor when considering online solutions, but two expressed concerns relating to both ITS problematic issues that might occur and the possible negative impact of a loss of face-to-face contact.

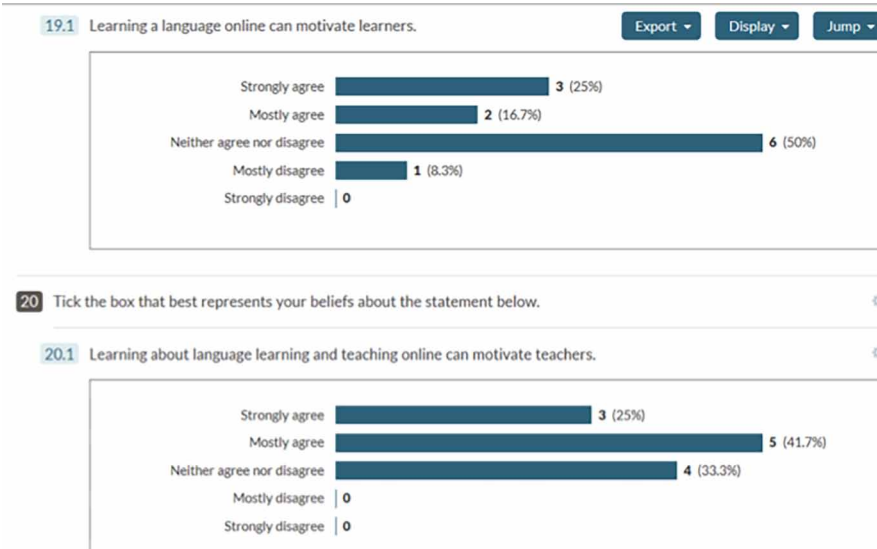
It was also interesting to see the replies to beliefs regarding language learning online (Figure 1), where most teachers agreed it was useful, but more for teacher education than for language learners.

Three out of the twelve teachers stated that they had taken part in a MOOC before. The survey answers to the Likert scale-style questions will be discussed further in the post-MOOC section below.

The MOOC Selected for the Summer School Reflective Blend (FutureLearn Business Fundamentals: Effective Communication and the MOOC-Moodle-F2F Blend)

Although most of the teachers involved in the study were teaching General English, the MOOC used was *Business Fundamentals: Effective Communication* (FutureLearn) by the Open University, to explore how it could be used to teach either ESP (English for Specific Purposes) or General English. The choice was dictated by convenience and suitability, that is to say what MOOC was available at the time the group of teachers was in England and that could be useful to them for the purpose of discussing how to blend MOOCs in ELT.

Figure 1. Pre-MOOC BOS: Beliefs about motivation and online learning



The teachers used the selected MOOC in conjunction with Moodle. A dedicated Moodle website had been created for the summer school. They were asked to do some preparatory work before engaging with the MOOC. This consisted of:

1. Filling in the Pre-MOOC survey;
2. Reading background information on MOOC integration (e.g. Orsini-Jones, 2015);
3. Watching the presentation on MOOCs by Stephen Bax given at the BMELTT symposium held at Coventry University in July 2017 (Bax, 2017).

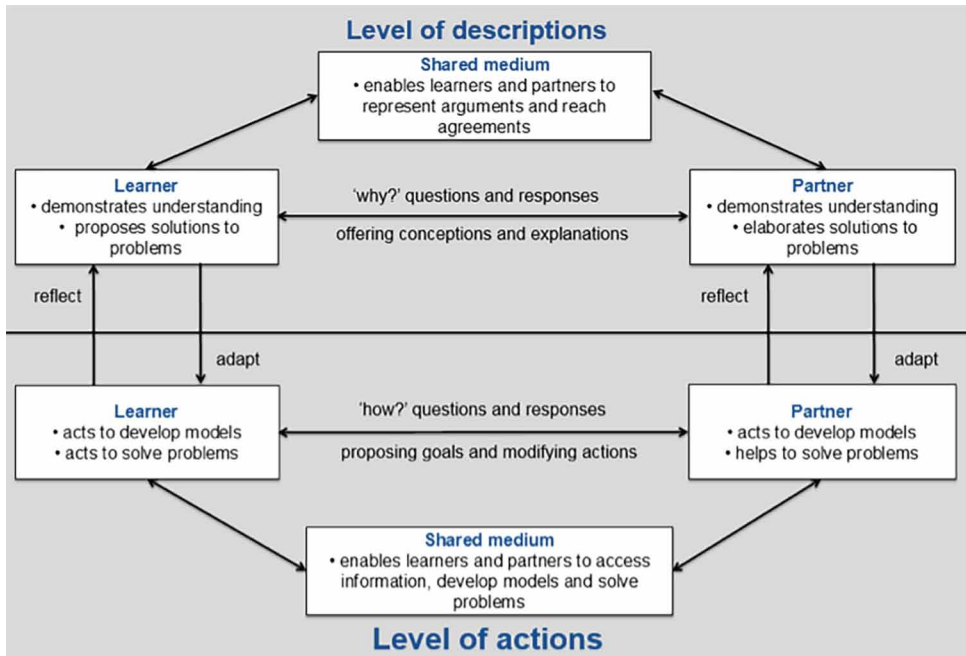
In class, during a 3-hour lecture/workshop session that followed the pre-MOOC work, the teachers were asked to register for the FutureLearn MOOC selected, and engage in an initial navigational workshop on the learning environment. The workshop included trying out the social-collaborative functions within the MOOC, by either posting their thoughts in the ‘comments’ section or ‘lurk’ in that environment to evaluate it. All FutureLearn MOOCs include sections that enable participants to engage in a ‘dialogue’ with other participants and/or the moderators in the forums for each unit, as well as with the materials available, as they are underpinned by Laurillard’s conversational model of online learning (1993) represented in Figure 2 (Sharples, 2016, used with permission).

The teachers were then asked to carry on with the MOOC outside classroom time, select an activity in the MOOC and design a blended learning task based on it. Most teachers had to teach communication skills for their General English courses in China, so the MOOC appeared to be appropriate for their needs. The out-of-class task design work was followed by a ‘flipped’ seminar/workshop on both the English contained in the MOOC and a reflection on how the MOOC could be blended into their ELT.

So there were various levels of blended learning and ‘flipped’ classroom tasks, reflected in Figure 3.

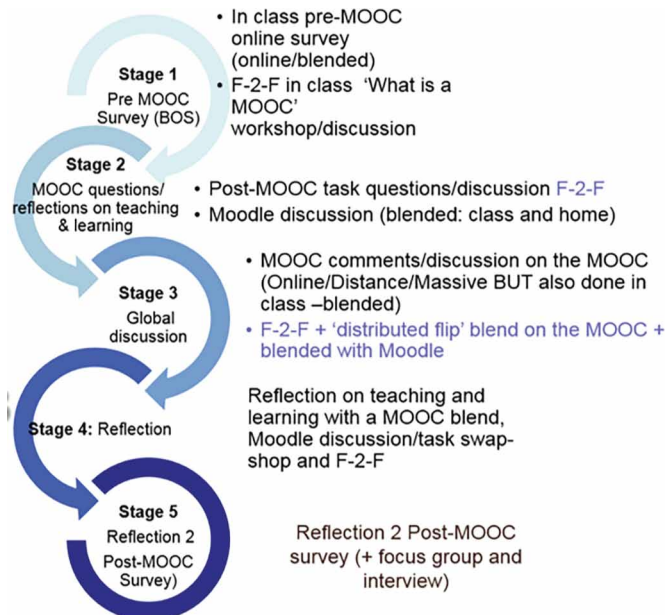
At the end of the week, the teachers were asked to post their blended-MOOC-inspired tasks online in the relevant asynchronous discussion forum in Moodle to share and discuss them. The tasks created were interesting and imaginative and were discussed in class face-to-face. Two sample tasks

Figure 2. Conversational model of online learning



Source: Laurillard, 1993 revisited by Sharples (2016)

Figure 3. Flipping the blend on a massive scale: "distributed flip"



Source: Sandeen, 2013; Orsini-Jones, et al. 2017

posted in the discussion forum in Moodle are reproduced in Tables 1 and 2, one for General English and one for translation.

On the whole the teachers appeared to have found the task stimulating and were very positive about this ‘new to them’ reflective experience.

The Focus Group Triangulation With the Post-MOOC Survey Results

Eleven out of the twelve lecturers who had taken part in the summer school in July-August 2017 took part in a focus group in Nanjing coordinated by the Principal Investigator in November 2017. They were shown the results of their pre-and post-MOOC surveys and asked to discuss on the three questions posed earlier:

- Did they think that a ‘flipped MOOC’ integration approach could support the teaching of English in China, with particular reference to NAU?
- What were their views on online and blended learning?
- What recommendations could be made for the purpose of English teacher education in China following their experience on this project?

In line with the definition of action research by McNiff, this paper describes “research with” (1988:4):

Table 1. Sample Task 1 for B1 level students – General English

<p>Class activities:</p> <p>step 1 Watch the video: What is LinkedIn (on the MOOC)? (1 minute)</p> <p>step 2 Ask Ss questions about LinkedIn, e.g. What they can do with LinkedIn? (2 minutes)</p> <p>step 3 Ask Ss to work in groups of 3-4, share their experience of using social media (8 minutes)</p> <p>What social media do you use most often? Why?</p> <p>What do you usually do on them? What are the benefits?</p> <p>How long do you spend on them?</p> <p>Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of using social media</p> <p>step 4 One spokesman of each group present their conclusion in 1 minute</p>

Table 2. Sample Task 2 for English major students studying interpreting B2/C1 level (20 min task)

<p>Pre-class:</p> <p>purpose: to know about the course (on the MOOC) and the video clip</p> <p>Task one (pre-class): reading (3m.)</p> <p>read what is networking.</p> <p>Task two (pre-class): shadow reading aloud (3.25m. X 3) and have one of the readings recorded</p> <p>In-class</p> <p>purpose: to know more about the video</p> <p>Task three (in-class): listening comprehension (3.25m.+3m.)</p> <p>Students are asked to listen to the video three times and answer a few questions.</p> <p>What are the advantages of social networking according to three speakers?</p> <p>Task four (in-class): blank-filling (3.25+2m.)</p> <p>Take away the key words about the advantages and do blank-filling.</p> <p>purpose: interpreting practice</p> <p>Task five (in-class): sight interpreting (4m.)</p> <p>Give students the printed transcript and do sight interpreting</p> <p>Task six (in-class): simulated consecutive interpreting (4m.)</p> <p>One student reads James’s words and the other interprets. There are 7 pairs.</p> <p>Task seven (in-class): simulated consecutive interpreting (4m.)</p> <p>Exchange recorded readings, listen to the partner’s reading and do consecutive interpreting. There are 8 pairs of students.</p>
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It is research WITH rather than research ON. (...) (It) encourages teachers to become adventurous and critical in their thinking, to develop theories and rationales for their practice, and to give reasoned justification for their public claims to professional knowledge. It is this systematic ENQUIRY MADE PUBLIC which distinguishes the activity as research.

The post-MOOC survey consisted of three sections. The first section, which was similar to the first section of the pre-MOOC survey, included a multiple-choice item that asked for the degree of participation with the MOOC. This question aimed to reveal the possible correlation between the degree of participation and the degree of change in participants' beliefs after they engaged with the MOOC. The second section of the survey consisted of Likert-scale type statements relating to participant's perceptions and attitudes regarding their MOOC experience.

In reply to question 6: "Are you considering blending an existing MOOC into your curriculum", all twelve tutors replied that they were. However, when the focus group was carried out in November, it transpired that only the same four tutors who were using MOOCs before they had attended the summer school were blending MOOCs into their curricula. The reasons provided in the focus group by the 'non-adopters' were:

1. Curricular constraints;
2. Slow server/ITS issues on campus;
3. Unsuitability of existing MOOCs for their teaching/learning needs;
4. Fear of increased workload;
5. Lack of value attached to MOOC developments by management (as opposed to publishing research papers);
6. Lack of personalized feedback provided on the activities on the MOOC;
7. Concerns about 'losing face' (existing 'off the shelf' MOOCs as a threat to the teacher's authority, as they might not be able to answer specific questions on the material covered).

Point seven above was further discussed during the focus group and appeared to have an intercultural dimension linked to the Chinese expectations about teacher knowledge and the Confucius tradition that a teacher is perceived to be 'omniscient', one of the participants stated:

Many teachers believe that, since the task of teaching has traditionally been defined as transmitting wisdom, imparting knowledge and solving doubts, the teachers are expected to provide feedback and answers to students whenever students have got any doubts. If teachers fail to provide accurate and clear keys to the answers, the students will often feel depressed and the teachers themselves will also feel embarrassed. This traditional expectation makes teachers feel under great pressure when they are facing the amount of information on a MOOC. Thus, a lot of teachers are reluctant to give students the freedom to choose from a number of MOOC sources in order to achieve some controlling effects.

The fear of 'losing face' and/or control was mentioned by most participants who stated that they would prefer to design their own MOOCs, rather than adopt existing ones, to be in control of the content and the activities and be able to provide appropriate feedback in a confident way. It also emerged that the definition of what a MOOC is was quite 'fuzzy', according to another participant:

When it comes to how to define "online and blended learning", opinions vary. In the context English teaching in Chinese universities, online and blended learning have many other names like MOOC blend, MOOC flip, MOOC integration, blended classroom, and flipped classroom. They are similar concepts with different meanings but without clear boundaries. Among them, MOOC, MOOC blend

and flipped classroom are new emerging concepts that are frequently mentioned by English teachers in Chinese universities. However, misunderstanding and confusion of concepts may occur.

What emerged was a rather broad definition of what MOOCs are. The MOOC acronym would appear to be associated with any online course, whether open or closed, whether free or carrying a subscription fee, including textbook-based online materials, as demonstrated by the teacher's feedback on MOOCs below, where the 'MOOC video clips' would probably be defined as 'additional courseware material' in other ELT teaching contexts, e.g. in the UK:

A textbook I once used called New Target English published by Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press provides ready-to-use courseware for teachers. The well-planned courseware is comprised of PPTs, audios and videos. A significant portion of those multi-media files are MOOC video clips.

The conceptualisation of what a MOOC is becoming fuzzy in all teaching contexts, not only in China. Borthwick (personal communication 2017) reports that FutureLearn have introduced business models which broaden the interpretation of 'MOOC.' Borthwick now frequently uses the term 'online courses which reach a mass audience' rather than 'MOOC,' in relation to most courses run through the FutureLearn platform. This is because the course material is open and freely available during the course run, but if learners wish to retain access to course content, they are now required to pay a fee, an 'upgrade'. It should be noted that a range of course options are possible through the FutureLearn platform. So according to Borthwick, even in the UK the picture is becoming more nuanced and so many of the definitions do not reflect current reality any more (or at least the range of current realities). Some FutureLearn MOOCs, for example, could be said to be not as open as before, as a subscription fee must be paid after a while, which would, it could be argued, call for one 'O' (open) to be dropped from these MOOCs.

With reference to Stephen Bax's work on the normalisation of technology (2003; 2011; 2017) this might suggest that the original version of the pioneering Open Educational Resource (OER) MOOCs might not become 'normalised' and rather be renamed as 'online courses'. However, as the 'MOOC' acronym has been adopted and promoted by the Ministry of Education in China (see <http://www.icourses.cn/home>), it might also be possible that the definition/understanding of MOOCs specific to the Chinese context is already normalised in China as 'online courses', not necessarily massive, not necessarily open.

In both the post-MOOC survey and in the focus group, all participating teachers agreed that using the MOOC to reflect on their practice and to develop an autonomous approach to language learning and teaching had supported their personal development as ELT specialists. They all valued the experience for their Continuous Professional Development (CPD). So, although some expressed doubts about blending MOOCs into their curricula, all agreed that they had found the reflective teacher education MOOC blend on the summer school very beneficial for their personal development.

CONCLUSION

The research questions posed for this study were:

1. Can a 'flipped MOOC' integration approach support the teaching of English in China, with particular reference to NAU?
2. What is the teachers' perception of online and blended learning?
3. What recommendations could be made for the purpose of English teacher education in China following this project?

With reference to question 1, it would appear that all teachers at NAU use flipped models for ELT, but they do not all use MOOCs for their blends for the reasons highlighted above. All participating tutors are acquainted with online and blended learning and make use of these in their learning and teaching practice, but most are skeptical about the value of online platform as opposed to classroom face-to-face contact; this was illustrated in the pre-MOOC survey table reported above and demonstrated by the lack of adoption of MOOC blends following the teacher education course by tutors who had not used them before. Most stated that they could see MOOCs like the ready-made FutureLearn ones as an ‘add-on’ for students to do in their own time, as an extra resource to use, as opposed to being a core aspect blended into their own curriculum. But some were developing their own online courses or using Chinese courses created for ELT.

With reference to question 2, while some of the replies provided were in line with those given by tutors in other countries too (Orsini-Jones et al. 2015), for example the difficulty in integrating a MOOC into an existing curriculum and the extra workload in redesigning the syllabus to accommodate the blend, two aspects stood out as ‘context specific’. The first one was the concern about the threat to the teachers’ authority if they feel they might be unable to provide answers on materials designed by others. The second was the way the MOOC acronym has been understood in China, where a MOOC could be an online course or even a section of an online course, possibly attached to and/or supporting an existing textbook (e.g. support courseware).

As for question 3, the authors of this paper have all greatly benefitted from this exchange of ideas on MOOC research and practice for the purpose of ELT teacher education. The joint cross-continental discussion has helped all participants and the principal investigator to uncover aspects of online learning and blended learning they had not considered before and see their language learning and teaching practice from different intercultural perspectives. So, even if doubts were expressed regarding the adoption of a flipped MOOC blend by some of the participants, all agreed that they had gained new insights into ELT theory and practice.

This was only a small-scale action research project, so we need to exert caution before we can generalise its results. It is hoped that it can be scaled up to other Chinese lecturers and other universities in China to verify the validity of its findings and further explore how distributed flip MOOC blends are perceived.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ *Mobile Assisted Language Learning*, which refers to the use of mobile devices as a tool for language learning instruction (Chinnery, 2006, p. 9).

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