

A rising tide

Level: Pre-intermediate upwards

Timing: 90 minutes plus

Material needed: One copy of the student worksheet and Vocabulary record per student

Group size: Any

Overview

This lesson plan for both pre-experience and in-work business students is based around an original article first published in *Business Spotlight* Issue 3/2014. The article is about a new way of taking university courses and getting further qualifications online and (mostly) for free. The article is written in American English.

The tasks in the student worksheet will help the students to understand the content of the article and the language used. Additionally, the worksheet may help students think about further professional development.

The teacher's notes provide suggestions for teaching and learning strategies as well as ideas on how to present the tasks in the classroom, any necessary answer keys and extension tasks (for in class or as homework).

Lead-in

Ask the students to discuss this question. Write their suggestions on the board. Possible answers might be via: distance learning, an online course, weekend seminars, a blended learning course, evening classes, a crash course (in the holidays), etc.

Key words

Students match key words from the article with their definitions then scan the article to find the words and to read them in context. The definitions are numbered in the order that the words appear in the article.

Key:

1. tutorials; 2. reach; 3. signed up; 4. rushed; 5. joint effort; 6. lectures; 7. assignments; 8. peer assessment; 9. dropout rates; 10. undergraduate; 11. credentials; 12. overlap

Acronyms

Acronyms are abbreviations consisting of letters that form a word. Ask students to write out the acronyms in full before looking back at the article to check their answers. Ask them also to decide how best to say them. They could do this by reading the sentences in which the acronyms appear aloud.

Key:

TED = technology, entertainment and design

MOOCs = massive open online courses

MIT = Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Teaching and learning strategy: Acronyms

Acronyms can be tricky if you haven't come across them before. In addition to having to work out what they mean or stand for, students have to know how to say or pronounce them. For example, in the Acronyms task there are three different ways of doing this:

- *TED* is pronounced Ted /ted/ (like the man's name).
- *MOOCs* is said as one word (note the small 's' at the end of the acronym which tells us that this is plural and not part of the main acronym) /mu:ks/.
- However, when using the acronym *MIT*, you should say each letter individually – M.I.T. (not mit).

One way of finding out how to say a particular acronym is to find the acronym in an online dictionary such as <http://www.macmillandictionary.com/> which has audio to go with each word as well as the phonemic transcript. Another way is to type the word into YouTube or a similar video website and listen to the spoken acronym.

Two further acronyms can be found in this lesson plan: IELTS (the International English Language Testing System), said as one word /aɪeɪlts/, is the name of an exam which most international universities recognize as proof of a student's level of English. Also, in the links text at the end in the Webquest we can find the well-known acronym *UK* which everyone (hopefully) knows is not pronounced as one word but as two letters!

A rising tide

Questions and answers

Students choose the correct questions to go with the provided answers and write them in the spaces provided. After this they should read the questions and answers text in its entirety.

Key:

1. How much do they cost?
2. How much time do they take?
3. What qualifications do you need?
4. Do you get university credits?
5. Can I learn English with a MOOC?
6. Can the courses help me in my career?

Metaphors

Students find metaphors in the article and discuss their meanings.

Key:

rising tide – this is found in the title and is also used twice in the final paragraph of the main text. A tide is the name for the way that the level of the sea regularly rises and falls during the day. The tide comes in or rises, then it turns and goes out or falls and then turns again. Here, this reference is used to talk about the tendency of events to develop in a particular way, i.e. become more available and popular.

treading water – this is found in the final paragraph of the main text. When you tread water you manage to keep your head above the water and therefore do not go under, sink or drown. Here, this reference is used to say that universities should keep up with the trends and provide open online courses in addition to more traditional ones in order to stay in business.

The connection is water and, in particular, the sea.

Extension task

Ask students to find more water-related metaphors or idioms that could be used in business. For example:

to be in deep water

to throw cold water on something

plain sailing

to come adrift

water off a duck's back

Discussion

Students answer the questions in group discussions.

Webquest

In this exercise, students can choose from a range of MOOC websites to decide on a course they would consider taking. They then report back to the class explaining why they would consider doing the course they chose.

Vocabulary record

Here, students should be encouraged to record all of the new and useful vocabulary they have learned during the lesson, not only in the form presented in the article but also in related forms.

Related topics on onestopenglish

For follow-up lessons on the same or related topics go to the following lesson plans in the Business section on onestopenglish:

Business Spotlight: Good connections

<http://www.onestopenglish.com/business/business-spotlight/good-connections/552310.article>

You may also find topical and relevant Guardian news lessons here on onestopenglish:

<http://www.onestopenglish.com/skills/news-lessons/>

Are MOOCs the future of higher education?

<http://www.onestopenglish.com/skills/news-lessons/weekly-topical-news-lessons/2014-weekly-news-lessons-archive/weekly-news-lesson-374-6th-february-2014-are-moocs-the-future-of-higher-education/553391.article>

A rising tide

1 Lead-in

Discuss the following question in groups.

How can someone who does not have the time or option to attend a full-time university course obtain further qualifications?

2 Key words

Match the words to the definitions and then find them in the article to read them in context.

credentials
overlap
rushed

dropout rates
assignments
signed up

joint effort
peer assessment
tutorials

lectures
reach
undergraduate

1. lessons in which a student or a small group of students discuss a subject with a tutor, especially at a university or college _____
2. the amount of authority or influence that someone or something has _____
3. registered for something _____
4. hurried to do something _____
5. an attempt to do something, together with a partner, that is difficult or that involves hard work _____
6. talks to groups of people about particular subjects, especially at a college or university _____
7. work that you must do as part of a course of study or as part of your job _____
8. the process of making a judgment or forming an opinion after considering something carefully; the judgment or opinion being made by someone of equal standing, in this case, another student _____
9. the number or percentage of people who start a university course but do not finish it _____
10. a student who is studying for a first degree at a college or university _____
11. another word for qualifications _____
12. here, a situation in which two things are the same and provide the same service or degree _____

A rising tide

A rising tide

by Carol Scheunemann



The number of online courses offered by respected institutes is bigger than ever before. Carol Scheunemann tells us about their creation, the time involved, entry requirements and providers of this type of course.

intelligence and posted it on Stanford's site. Some 160,000 students signed up. Convinced that he was seeing the future of education, Thrun started Udacity, a platform offering courses from Stanford and other top universities – for anyone, anywhere and for free.

Distance learning and online education had been around for decades. And individual MOOCs had been available since about 2008, when the name itself was created. But suddenly, they were the next big thing. Private and public universities and institutes rushed to offer courses.

Udacity was quickly followed by Coursera, a platform with an even larger offering of high-status universities, and by edX, a joint effort by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Harvard. *The New York Times* called 2012 'The Year of the MOOC'. By late 2013, Europe's providers included FutureLearn in the UK and iversity, which offers courses primarily from German universities.

The character and structure of MOOCs vary widely. Some are lectures filmed in a classroom, whereas others look like a friendly chat in the professor's office. Many lessons include lively animation or game-like elements. There may be multiple-choice questions to answer during some lectures. What they all have in common is that you can watch the videos as many times as you want to or need to. And, although the majority of MOOC courses are in English, some of the videos have English subtitles, provide the full text or are user-translated.

Balakrishnan Srinivasan, 45, a computer engineer in Bangalore, India, told *The New York Times* that he frequently replayed the videos, which made him "feel as if he had a personal tutor."

Assignments are graded by computer, by teaching assistants, or through 'peer assessment', which means that students grade each other's work. Social-media chat rooms and forums bring tens of thousands of students together digitally to exchange ideas and to help and teach each other.

Because it's so easy to sign up for MOOCs, participants feel little obligation to finish the courses. High dropout rates are the result. Some students just watch the lectures but don't do any assignments. Others jump from one course to another, looking for the subject or presentation they like

- 1 What really surprised innovator and educator Salman Khan about online learning is that students said they would rather watch videos of lessons than listen to someone explaining the subject in person. He was telling a story about helping his cousins with their math. At the time, he was working as a hedge fund analyst in Boston and his cousins were in New Orleans. So he put a few simple video tutorials on YouTube. "I saw no reason to make it private, so I let other people watch it," Khan told listeners at the 2011 TED conference, a regular event that brings together experts on technology, entertainment and design.
- 2 Before long, Khan says, tens of thousands of learners around the globe had watched his math lessons and he began to dream of "a global one-world classroom". This led him to start the Khan Academy in 2008, a provider of free online lessons in math and other subjects. His videos also inspired other organizations to offer massive open online courses (MOOCs) via the internet.
- 3 One of Khan's listeners at the 2011 TED conference was Sebastian Thrun, a research professor at Stanford University, in California. As he listened, Thrun silently calculated that he would never reach as many students in his entire career as Khan had with a few videos. Within six months, Thrun put together an online course on artificial

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A rising tide

best. Some 95% of participants don't finish the courses. And according to a recent MIT-Harvard study, close to 40% of the people who sign up for the courses never even start them.

10 The study also showed that the people who sign up for online courses are not your typical college kids. MOOC students are older and tend to have had a university education. Almost three out of four participants come from outside the United States and about six percent of students are aged 50 or older.

11 In his blog, Udacity's Sebastian Thrun says "Students' average age is between 25 and 44. Eighty percent have an undergraduate or master's degree and are looking to explore a career transition or gain additional credentials." Thrun adds that the overlap with traditional university students is "as close to zero as you can imagine".

12 But can giving away education for free be a good business model? Universities are investing in MOOCs because it's good for their reputation, lets them promote their organizations and expand their educational reach. They can experiment with new teaching methods, too. Although mostly free, MOOCs even offer revenue potential. For example, universities can license videos to other educational institutes, to companies, or partner with publishers. They can also earn a finder's fee from headhunters or firms looking for candidates with specific skills. By early 2014, the MOOC landscape had begun to change.

13 Udacity has reinvented itself, now offering mainly career-oriented skills building. It has partnered with firms, including Adobe and Salesforce.com, to create an Open



Education Alliance, in which companies provide the course content and a promise to recognize the certificates.

14 At the start of this year, Coursera had 6.5 million students, edX had 1.8 million, while Udacity had 1.6 million. The Khan Academy now has ten million visitors per month. Together, these and other providers offer hundreds of courses in computer science, economics, medicine, music, teacher training and more. Although MOOCs may not replace a traditional university education, they offer a way to explore new subjects or keep your job skills current.

15 Anant Agarwal, president of edX, has described online learning as "a rising tide that will lift all boats". In other words, there's more education for everyone. And if the tide is rising, it's probably wiser, and better for your career, to be sitting in a boat than treading water.

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3 Acronyms

What do these acronyms from the article stand for? Write them out in full.

TED = _____

MOOCs = _____

MIT = _____

A rising tide

4 Questions and answers

Write the correct question into the space above each answer in the MOOC basics text below.

- Will I get university credits for completing a MOOC?
- Can I learn English with a MOOC?
- How much time do they take?
- Can the courses help me in my career?
- How much do they cost?
- What qualifications do you need?

MOOC basics

1. _____

MOOCs are usually free, or a minimal fee is charged – usually around €50 – for a final exam, ‘badge’ or certificate. Some models offer free videos and membership in discussion groups but cost about €90 per month for services such as individual feedback.

2. _____

Total time per week varies from one hour (just watching the videos) to more than eight hours, including assignments. The videos are commonly divided into 10- to 15-minute segments. Most courses run six to ten weeks, but some take just two weeks, others nearly six months.

3. _____

No admission requirements exist and there is no application process. You just sign up using your e-mail address. Some subjects require you to have specific knowledge, for example, algebra or programming experience.

4. _____

Universities and other MOOC providers normally do not give credits for courses but there are a few that do. In

Europe, certain courses provide credits that are recognized by the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). A few degree programs are being developed that will include blended learning methods, with tutors, mentors, and real-life study centers. These are not free, however.

5. _____

A group of Australian universities has started a MOOEC (massive open online English course) platform. The British Council is working with FutureLearn to offer courses and preparation for the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) tests.

6. _____

Few employers would accept these courses in place of a traditional university degree. But you can learn new job-related skills, such as analytical thinking or app design. Many courses focus on projects, during which you create work samples that you can show to employers. You can list any certificates on your résumé or social-media profile. Taking MOOCs signals to employers that you want to continue learning and improve your chances of getting, and / or keeping, a job.

5 Metaphors

Find the metaphors below in the article, look at how they are used and discuss their meanings and relationship to each other in pairs.

rising tide

treading water

A rising tide

6 Discussion

In groups, discuss the questions below.

- What are the pros and cons of taking a degree course via a MOOC?
- Would you consider taking a university course online?
- Have you done any other kinds of online or distance learning courses?
- Do you think employers will value or accept qualifications that have been obtained via MOOCs?
- In your opinion, are MOOCs really the 'next big thing'?

7 Webquest

Read the information below and look for a course you would consider taking.

Main providers

These platforms offer courses from various institutions, although many other providers of MOOC-style training exist.

- Coursera (www.coursera.org) is the largest provider, with more than 100 partner organizations and universities, offering more than 600 courses in fields such as business, education, the humanities, and social sciences.
- edX (www.edx.org) offers courses from some 30 leading institutions, including the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard. In 2014, edX will start mooc.org, an open platform for building new courses.
- FutureLearn (www.futurelearn.com) is the first UK-led MOOC provider. It is owned by the Open University, a distance-learning organization.
- iversity (<https://iversity.org>) is a European MOOC platform that offers courses in English and German, primarily from German universities.
- Khan Academy (www.khanacademy.org) is perhaps not a true MOOC provider, this platform offers short lessons, rather than a multi-week course, mainly in math and science.
- MOOEC (www.mooc.com) Australian universities have created this MOOC platform specifically for learning English.
- Udacity (www.udacity.com) As of January 2014, this is primarily a company-oriented, skills-specific provider, but it still offers some university courses.
- See also www.mooc-list.com or www.class-central.com You can browse here for MOOCs by subject, institution, country or language.
- Find a playlist of TED videos about MOOCs at www.ted.com/playlists/141/moocs_101.html

