

Communicate with Confidence: MOOC for Lifelong Learning and Sustainable Skills Building

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ABSTRACT

This paper introduces a MOOC that has been designed and is currently being developed for lifelong learning and sustainable skills development, focusing on building effective communication skills for university students, working adults, and anyone, be they homemakers or industry players, who requires a flexible and self-paced, yet structured and professionally guided learning environment for personal development. Communicate with Confidence: From Campus to Career comes with seven modules, each targets a specific aspect of effective communication, while supporting the other modules by providing the fundamental knowledge to enable learners for a more cohesive understanding of the content. To achieve this, the MOOC team subscribes to a strict guideline of Gagne's 9 Events of Instruction in content development and task design, while adhering to ADDIE model to ensure this MOOC deliver the desired outcomes. This MOOC adopts a three-pronged approach to contribute to the attainment of the global goals – providing Quality Education (SDG4) through its pedagogically guided content and delivery, promoting Reduced Inequalities (SDG10) via its open accessibility to the global citizens, while building skilled communicators for Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG11). This MOOC presents substantial potential for commercialization through strategic collaborations with partner universities in Thailand, Japan, India, and Indonesia. Efforts are also underway to engage local corporations in integrating the course into both academic programs and corporate training, at national and international levels.

Keywords: MOOC, lifelong learning, effective communication, sustainable skills development

INTRODUCTION

In today's diverse and digitally connected world, effective communication is the gateway to academic success, better employability, and engaged citizenship. Abaci (2022) found significant correlation between entrepreneurship and communication skills in university students. In fact, communication skills have been ranked as one of the most valuable skills in the current labour market, together with problem-solving skills, flexibility, and teamwork (Baird & Parayitam, 2019; Tushar & Sooraksa, 2023). Beyond the professional environment, effective communication supports cooperation, inclusiveness, and civic engagement, enabling individuals to interact across a variety of cultural and professional environments (McLeod & Marshall, 2023).

Despite the widely recognised importance of good communication skills, there is still insufficient proper communication training available to people in many parts of the world. This is especially true for those who are not in school or live in areas with limited resources, who often struggle with money, distance, or inflexible schedules that keep them from learning these crucial abilities (UNESCO, 2020). This has mobilised greater inequality in opportunities, leading to widening socioeconomic gap.

Pollack Ichou (2018) explored the potential of MOOCs and established their ability in reducing global inequality in education. Massive Open Online courses, or MOOCs, were popularised in 2012, and reached

another height of significance in 2020 due to Covid-19 (Ossiannilsson, 2021). In the country's initiative to align the national education standards with global education trends, MOOCs were integrated into the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (Anealka Aziz, 2018). Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) was one of the pioneer universities that joined forces with Malaysia Ministry of Education to develop one of the 4 pilot MOOCs in 2014 (Anealka Aziz, 2018), and now there are 1312 MOOCs being offered in UFUTURE, the university's in-house MOOC and Learning Management System (LMS) platform.

Problem Statement

Conventionally held face-to-face training in communications in physical classrooms typically incorporate access barriers more prominently for marginalized and underrepresented groups. This is because such training programmes generally come with limited accessibility, inflexible timing, and costly. When many people are deprived of essential skill-building opportunities, they are also denied the opportunities to climb up the socioeconomic ladder, leading to greater social inequality (UNESCO, 2020) which could be a threat to societal stability, and even global security.

Being open and online in nature, MOOCs provide promising solutions for wider accessibility to education. However, due to instructional design and course implementation issues, many MOOCs experience poor learner engagement and low course completion rates. High attrition rates and low interactivity in these MOOCs signal urgent need for more structured and pedagogically sound approaches (Anson, 2019; Sullivan et al., 2019; Sosa-Díaz & Fernández-Sánchez, 2020). Furthermore, Shamsinar Ibrahim et al. (2021) pointed out the importance of support and guidance given to learners by MOOC course developers because MOOC learning can be difficult for learners who are not used to independent learning, or not very organised and motivated on their own.

Scalability and the interactive nature of the MOOCs have been revealed as congruent ideally with professionally guided and learner-focused approaches for lifelong learning (Anson, 2019; Sullivan et al., 2019; Ossiannilsson, 2021). The concept of lifelong learning is paramount in the achievement of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education) in promoting opportunities for continuing learning for individuals at any age level (UNESCO, 2020). Responding to the global call for continuous education, promoting a culture of lifelong learning has been included as one of the seven key strategies in Malaysia National Higher Education Strategic Plan (Loeff, 2023). However, underlying issues like the lack of more concerted coordination, management, and monitoring have become the stumbling blocks in realising this goal (Loeff, 2023). In fact, out of the three categories of MOOC, the number of courses developed for lifelong learning was found to be far behind the other two categories of course, niche and general (Anealka Aziz, 2018).

Overcoming these challenges requires an innovative, evidence-based approach combining flexible online provision and better learning design. The "Communicate with Confidence: From Campus to Career" MOOC is designed specifically to fill this major gap by providing an equitable and globally accessible framework for the development of the communications skills, while encouraging learner motivation and attainment through a framework of structured pedagogy.

Objectives

This innovation comes with four objectives:

1. To develop effective communicative skills for academic and professional success.
2. To facilitate open and globally accessible education, thereby advancing SDG 4 (Quality Education).
3. To reduce educational inequalities by offering equal access to learning, in line with SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities).
4. To train competent communicators for sustainable communities, supporting SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities).

Product Description

"Communicate with Confidence: From Campus to Career" is a MOOC that offers an open and accessible virtual learning environment conceptualized for developing the core communications skills essential for sustaining capabilities for lifelong learning and sustainable skills development. The course is ideal for a global catchment audience of university students, employed professionals from various sectors, home makers, and adults from different backgrounds seeking a flexible yet self-paced and professionally guided learning environment. The course effectively remedies the existing access imbalances in communications training by offering a scalable solution amenable for implementation for educational systems and corporate training programs.

This MOOC comprises a total of seven related modules, one for every key aspect of communications, including interpersonal skills, public speaking, academic and workplace communications, cross-cultural competency, and digital communication success. The modules are designed in a gradual sequence so the student can first develop foundation-level abilities and then work through more advanced-level competencies for a complete and integrated learning experience.

The core features and functionalities of this MOOC are:

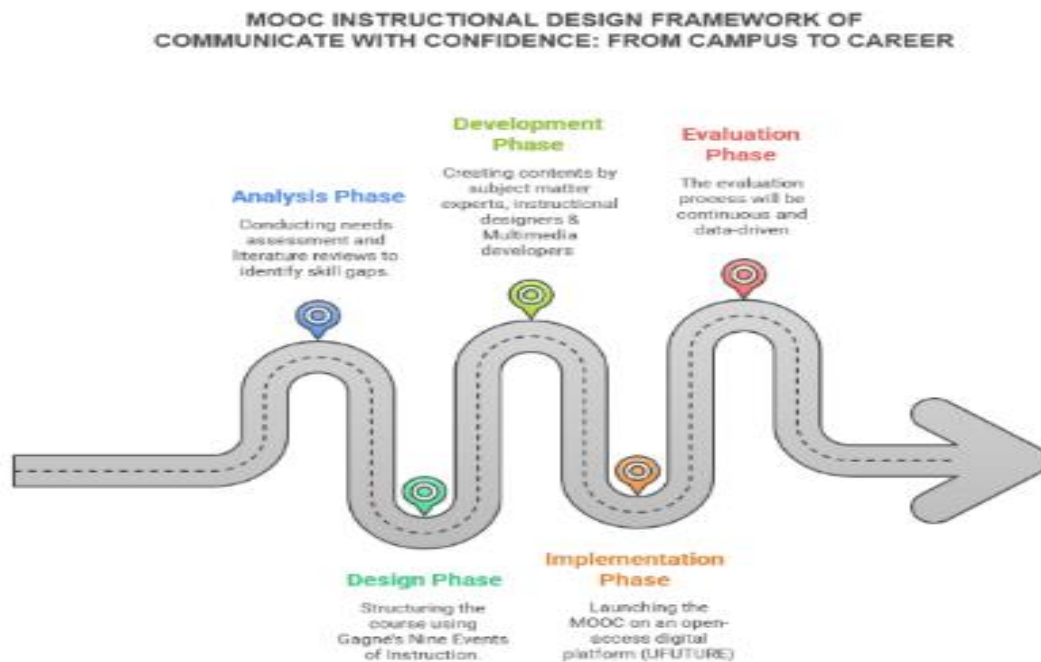
1. **Structured Learning Pathway:** Clearly defined set of modules allows for systematic skill-building and gradual knowledge accumulation.
2. **Interactive and Engaging Content:** Instructional video, infographic, additional teaching materials, final module activities in the form of interactive quiz or test, real-life case analysis, forums and scenario-based activities make the learner more engaged and also give a chance for application of skills.
3. **Assessment and Feedback Tools:** Periodic quizzes, evaluation questions, self-testing activities, and formative assessments yield immediate feedback necessary for monitoring the progression of the learner.
4. **Global Accessibility:** Created for online access and without any restrictions and thus transcending geographical, cultural, and socio-economic limitations.
5. **Scalability:** It can easily be integrated in university courses and in professional development courseware to support academic and vocational training.
6. **Alignment with SDGs:**
 1. Quality learning environment all (SDG 4: Quality Education)
 2. Open education opportunities for the marginalised groups (SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities)
 3. Lifelong learning to build more empowered and effective communicators for more resilient and sustainable communities (SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities).

METHODOLOGY

The development of this MOOC adhered to a systematic design of innovative instruction approach by integrating the ADDIE process and Gagné's Nine Events of Instruction to maintain pedagogic integrity, stimulate learner participation, and elevate proper skill acquisition. The hybrid framework methodology used in the design of this MOOC enabled a systematic framework for the structured development of the course, standardised evaluation, and continuous improvement.

The instructional framework of this MOOC is illustrated in Figure 1, while the detailed description of each step of design is presented in the following.

Figure 1 MOOC Instructional Design Framework of “Communicate with Confidence: From Campus to Career”



Analysis Stage

The project began with a needs assessment to identify communication skill gaps among the target audience and understand barriers to access. Data were gathered through literature reviews prior to the initial cycle of MOOC development. Subsequently data will be collected through stakeholder interviews, and surveys with educators, corporate trainers, and potential learners before course review and refinement.

Design Stage

Course design, learning outcomes, and evaluation strategies adhered to Gagné's Nine Events of Instruction, providing for methodical and effective learning events. Table 1 outlines the detailed application of Gagné's Nine Events of Instruction in this MOOC.

Table 1 Gagne's 9 Events of Instruction in MOOC “Communicate with Confidence: From Campus to Career”

Event	Description
Gaining Attention	Attention-grabbing beginnings and real-life examples are employed to motivate learners.
Informing Learners of Objectives	Stating the learning outcomes of the module at the beginning of each session.
Stimulating Recall of Prior Learning	Pre-lesson activities for connecting new learning and prior knowledge.
Presenting the Content	Use multimedia-rich materials, including video and case studies, to enhance understanding.
Providing Learning Guidance	Customised recommendations, structured reflections, and sequential directives.
Eliciting Performance	Role-play activities and simulation tasks for the practice of skills.
Providing Feedback	Timely and targeted evaluations aided by self-assessments and computerised tests.
Assessing Performance	Formative and summative assessments to measure learner progress.
Enhancing Retention and Transfer	Module recap, downloadable materials, and tasks for real-life application.

Integrating these events in the design of each module content allows for active engagement, better retention of knowledge, and the application of skills.

Development Phase

During this stage, course materials and learning resources were designed in collaboration by subject matter experts, instructional design experts, and multimedia development experts. The coursework consists of video lectures, relevant reading materials, short tests, and opportunities for interaction and practice.

Implementation Phase

Once fully developed, this MOOC will be released in UFUTURE, the open-access online platform of University Technology MARA (UiTM) for in-house enrolment and also global participation. A pilot study will be conducted using a small sample embodied the targeted demographic and comprised learners, instructors, and professionals. Feedback will also be obtained for usability, readability, and learner interest in the future MOOC review and refinement.

Evaluation Stage

The evaluation process is constant and data-driven. Skill development will be measured by pre- and post-course assessments. Learner engagement, completion of modules, and Student Learning Time (SLT) in tasks in the evaluation of the design effectiveness of the course. Feedback from the participants will help in the progressive improvement and the course's iterations. Learning outcomes will also be measured against average MOOC completion and satisfaction rates in determining success.

Potential Findings and Commercialisation

The "Communicate with Confidence: From Campus to Career" MOOC was created in response to the world's challenges in making communications training accessible and sustainable. Designed to be conducted in an entirely online fashion and available for everyone, this MOOC meets the requirements of the United Nations sustainable development goals (SDGs) in particular, SDG 4 - Quality Education, SDG 10 - Reduced Inequalities, and SDG 11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities.

Combining ADDIE for systematic development and Gagné's Nine Events of Instruction for instructional materials design, this MOOC provides a highly accessible, scalable, and pedagogically effective solution for global challenges in communications training. This innovation gives global access to quality, interactive, and professionally facilitated materials for the support of lifelong learning and sustainable development of skills.

Beyond its educational value, the MOOC shows significant promise for commercialization. The modularity allows for embedding in postsecondary educational frameworks and corporate training programs. A stratified system of delivery enhances financial sustainability by offering free core content accompanied by high-end offerings like certifications and individual coaching. Scalability of the course is accompanied by the possibility of localization of the content and the use of learning analytics for the continual improvement of the course while encouraging global reach. Internationalisation of this MOOC has been initiated with the potential collaboration with our partnering universities in Japan, India, Thailand and Indonesia.

NOVELTY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The "Communicate with Confidence: From Campus to Career" MOOC, applies Gagné's Nine Events of Instruction, with the ADDIE model to create an empirical model for engagement and effective learning. This MOOC supports active and experiential learning through interactive learning activities in addition to instant feedback and progressive skills building. The course is free, thus enabling access to all adults who wish to improve their skills for personal or professional development. The course's capacity to blend into the higher education system as MOOC support for existing programs, and professional development and corporate learning and development aligns it with hopeful outcomes for education and workforce capacity development all over the world.

To improve its ultimate reach and impact, future recommendations include conducting longitudinal studies to measure the long-term effects on learner skills and its practical usefulness in the real world. In addition, it is

suggested to build on this MOOC by introducing industry-specific modules to suit different audiences, creating multilingual options to maximize access globally and building partnerships to grow the course's adoption, learning and sustainability across governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), learning institutions and other relevant organizations. Other options may consider artificial intelligence for personalized learning, as well as to provide more accurate data-driven insights to engage and retain learners, and possibly boost the overall efficacy overall of the MOOC. These enhancements should contribute to this innovation being valued as a global model of sustainable and inclusive lifelong learning of communication skills.

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