Student Engagement in an EFL/SFL Speaking LMOOC during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Influence of Learners' Social, Affective and Cognitive Dimensions

Blanca Cristofol Garcia

Universitat Oberta de Catalunya

Christine Appel

Universitat Oberta de Catalunya

Bioprofiles

Blanca Cristòfol Garcia is finishing her PhD studies at the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (Spain). She holds a Master's Degree in Teaching Spanish and Catalan as Second Languages from Universitat de Girona. Her R&I work focuses on the study of online learners' affective factors in telecollaborative contexts. She has taught Spanish Language and Culture at several educational institutions including ESADE (Spain) and the University of Florence (Italy). bcristofolg@uoc.edu

Christine Appel is a senior researcher and professor at the Universitat oberta de Catalunya (Spain). She has a Masters in Applied Linguistics from Trinity College, University of Dublin, and holds a PhD in Computer-Assisted Language Learning from Trinity College, University of Dublin. Her main research interests are the use of ICT in education, communication within virtual environments, second language acquisition and corpus linguistics. mappel@uoc.edu

Abstract

It is empirically demonstrated that Language Massive Open Online Courses (LMOOCs) contribute to the development of learners' foreign language (FL) competences. Thus, it is not surprising that these courses have experienced exponential growth over the last decade, being English as a foreign language (EFL) one of the most demanded subjects by LMOOC learners. However, LMOOCs face low learner engagement rates, which might be influenced by learners' proximal and distal variables. The present study contributes to the understanding of learner engagement in an English as a FL (EFL) and Spanish as a FL (SFL) speaking LMOOC during the COVID-19 pandemic. First, it aims to understand to what extent learner engagement in the course varied during the pandemic emergency period. Second, it aims to identify the aspects of the course that promoted learner engagement, related to learners' cognitive, affective and social

dimensions. The research context is *TandemMOOC*, an EFL/SFL speaking LMOOC offered annually by the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (Spain). Participants of the study were 2,585 enrolled learners in the *TandemMOOC* edition of 2019 or 2020. The study followed a mixed-method approach. First, data on learner participation was retrieved from the course system. Second, a post-course questionnaire with closed and open-ended items was administered to learners of the latter edition. Descriptive statistics on quantitative data and content analysis on qualitative data were carried out. Subsequent integration of findings showed that learner engagement in *TandemMOOC* increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, and revealed that aspects of the course linked to learners' social dimension were the most engaging ones.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, engagement with the language (EWL), language massive open online course (LMOOC), online speaking interaction.

*Corresponding author: Blanca Cristofol Garcia, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Av. del Tibidabo, 39, 08035, Barcelona (Spain).

1. Introduction

Language Massive Open Online Courses (LMOOCs) are defined as "dedicated Web-based online courses for second languages with unrestricted access and potentially unlimited participation" (Bárcena & Martín-Monje, 2014, p. 1). It is empirically demonstrated that these courses contribute to the development of learners' foreign language (FL) competences (Martín-Monje & Bárcena, 2014), and thus, it is not surprising that they have expanded over the last decade (Beirne, Nic Giolla Mhichíl, & Ó Cleircín, 2017), in particular for the teaching of foreign languages such as English, Spanish or Chinese, which are in high demand. Moreover, due to the imminent shift from traditional to online learning as a result of the COVID-19 breakout, these courses have become more widespread (Alamri, Zhongtian, Cristea, Lei, & Craig, 2020) and have experienced exponential growth[2].

Due to their nature, LMOOCs fall under the umbrella term of non-formal education, as they take place outside the framework of formal learning, and are characterised by being structured, systematic, and sometimes guided by an instructor (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974). Despite the fact that participation in MOOCs is beneficial for learners' education (Ferguson & Sharples, 2014),

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[2] For more information, visit *The Conversation* online newspapers article 'Massive open courses see exponential growth during the COVID-19 pandemic'. https://theconversation.com/massive-online-open-courses-see-exponential-growth-during-covid-19-pandemic-141859

the voluntary nature of these courses and the diversity of enrolled learners make, amongst others, learner engagement in this type of courses conspicuously challenging (Cook, Bingham, Reid, & Wang, 2015). Learner engagement occurs when learners are emotionally, behaviourally and cognitively connected to their study (Kahu, Stephens, Zepke, & Leach, 2014, p. 523), and it is linked, amongst others, to learners' satisfaction, self-development, and achievement (Kahu, 2013).

Recent research carried out on massive open online courses (MOOCs) released during the COVID-19 emergency period report improved learner engagement rates as a consequence of the global lockdown situation (Flores-Tena, 2021), a particular worldwide circumstance that caused, amongst others, individuals' sense of isolation (Schwartz, 2021). Nevertheless, concerning the specific area of FL education, the existing knowledge on learner engagement in LMOOCs during the COVID-19 pandemic is scarce, which makes it difficult to reach generalisable conclusions on this topic (Mahyoob, 2021). For this reason, the present study aims to gain new insights into learner engagement in LMOOCs during the COVID-19 pandemic emergency period, which today represents a gap in the literature of LMOOCs in FL education. More precisely, this research focuses on learner engagement in *TandemMOOC*, an EFL/SFL speaking LMOOC offered annually by the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (Spain). First, it aims to analyse to what extent learner engagement in *TandemMOOC* varied during the global emergency period in comparison to the previous edition of the course. Second, it expects to identify the aspects of *TandemMOOC* that contributed to learner engagement in the course of the COVID-19 pandemic emergency period. Consequently, the research questions (RQs) of the study are formulated:

RQ1: To what extent did learner engagement in an EFL/SFL speaking LMOOC vary during the pandemic emergency period in comparison to the previous edition of the course?

RQ2: What aspects of an EFL/SFL speaking LMOOC contributed to learner engagement within the pandemic emergency period?

2. Literature review

The first successful MOOC was organised in 2008 by the University of Manitoba (Canada) with more than 2,000 international students (Pernías Peco & Luján-Mora, 2013). Today, MOOCs have proliferated, for which they offer a huge variety of subjects, have several sizes, and follow different pedagogical models. In any case, all types of MOOCs are seen, today, as

safe learning tools, able to promote education despite any worldwide emergency situation (Ricart Casadevall, Villar Navascués, & Hernández, 2020). However, literature shows that usually less than 10% of the enrolled learners in a MOOC complete the course successfully (Reich & Ruipérez-Valiente, 2019). In the case of FL learning, as generally occurs with MOOCs, LMOOCs are also highly valued courses (Bárcena, Read, & Sedano, 2020), although they face low learner engagement rates, too (Beaven, Codreanu, & Creuzé, 2014). Therefore, it is not surprising that scholars claim the need to conduct further research on LMOOCs in order to improve learners' experiences and retention rates within these courses (Kan & Bax, 2017).

In order to study FL learners' engagement, Svalberg (2009) establishes the Engagement with Language (EWL) model, which states that learner engagement is "a cognitive, affective and/or social process in which the learner is the agent and the language is the object" (p. 3). The dimensions of the EWL model are graphically represented in Figure 1 by three circles, as its distinction is necessary in order to have an in-depth understanding of the concept. However, the circles are surrounded by a dotted line, as the dimensions of EWL may overlap. Moreover, additional distal variables, such as learner structural factors (e.g., support within the course) and/or psychosocial factors (e.g., personality traits) may also interfere with EWL (Svalberg, 2012).
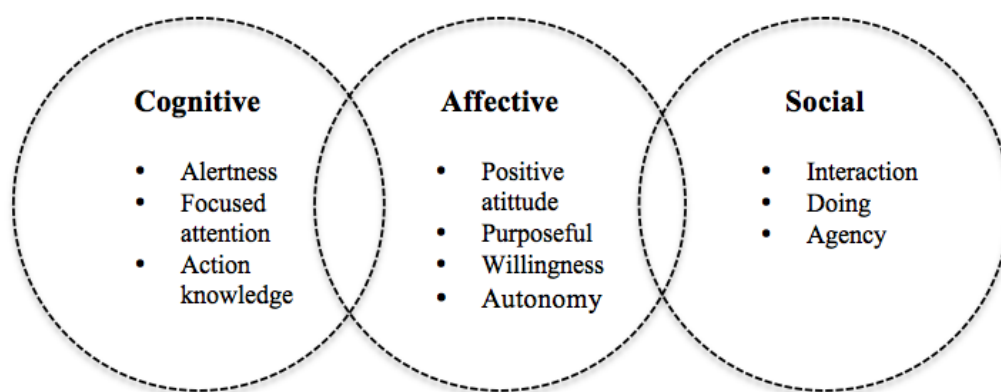

Figure 1.

Graphical representation of the EWL dimensions, adapted from Svalberg (2009, p. 4).

Concerning previous research on EWL in online learning contexts, a study carried out by Baralt, Gurzynski-Weiss, and Kim (2016) shows that learner engagement is lower in online contexts than in face-to-face contexts, although, according to the authors, several aspects of online language courses might be adapted in order to foster learner engagement. Regarding learners' cognitive dimension, Bárcena and Martín-Monje (2014) explain that LMOOCs should be designed under the premise that FL learning is mostly skill based. In this line, they

argue that LMOOCs should provide FL learners with opportunities for both individual and collective practice, in combination with theoretical explanations and examples displayed in a well-organised manner. Additionally, Sull (2012) points out the importance of providing learners with immediate feedback in this type of online FL learning contexts.

Moreover, in relation to learners' affective dimension, LMOOCs should be designed taking into account that, besides cognitive demand, language learning implies high emotional load (Dewaele, 2011), as FL learners' emotional experiences are significantly correlated to their motivation and learning outcomes (Dörnyei, 1994). Accordingly, Svalverg (2018) states that FL tasks should foster learners' positive, enthusiastic, and autonomous mindset towards the learning process, by offering meaningful activities based on topics related to learners' reality outside the course, which should be applied in the context of LMOOCs, too. Furthermore, concerning learners' social dimension, LMOOCs are required to guarantee peer-to-peer interaction (Sokolik, 2014), and to promote a sense of belonging to a community of learners (Moreira Teixeira & Mota, 2015) in order to be successful. In some cases, LMOOCs might also adopt an intercultural approach, which triggers learner engagement and positive attitudes towards the language learnt (O'Dowd, 2007). In addition, Bax (2017) explains that learners might have high expectations before starting an LMOOC, fed by the belief that they will become proficient in the target language (TL) solely by the fact of participating in an online course. Bax (2017) highlights that learners' unreal expectations can, indeed, lead to a drop in course engagement, and "*massive* might become *minuscule* as a consequence of this" (p. 15).

Finally, in order to improve learner engagement in LMOOCs, Fuchs (2019) suggests that a better use of these courses is achieved when they are considered as add-ons to learners' language classroom instruction. Today, after the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, which affected more than 60 countries, Fuch's suggestion is becoming a reality in FL education. Indeed, Chen et al., (2020) explain that online education is evolving from being an auxiliary method to being a key one. Nevertheless, Chen et al., (2020) also warn that, despite the increasing presence of MOOCs, these courses are still in need of improvement. In line with this, the essence of the present research is to contribute to a better understanding and development of LMOOCs, as their role in FL education is unsurprisingly expanding.
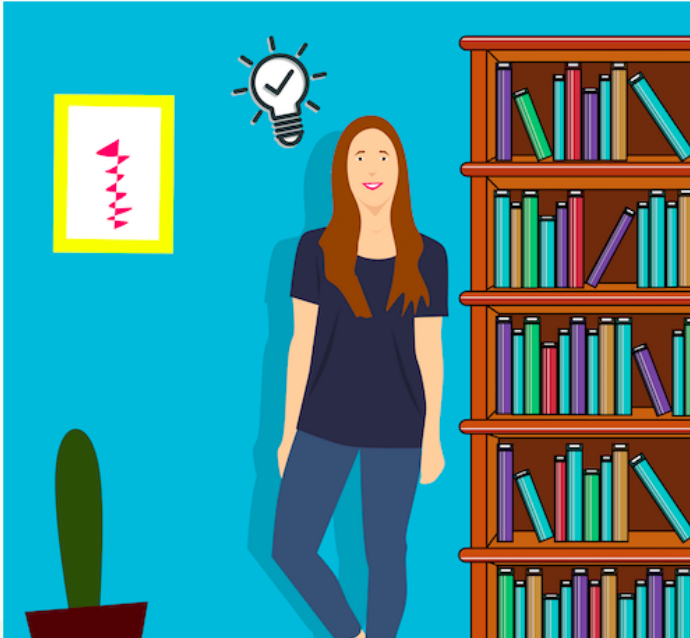
3. Methodology

Research context

The research context of the study is *TandemMOOC*, a six-week EFL/SFL speaking LMOOC offered annually by the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (Spain). The course is based on the e-

tandem language learning practice, through which two learners who have a different L1 interact in order to learn each other's language. For this reason, *TandemMOOC* is addressed to adult EFL and SFL learners who, according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)[3], have an intermediate or upper level of the FL and who are, at the same time, native or near native speakers of Spanish or English. Within the course, dyads are randomly formed by the course system and communicate via video conference in order to undertake a series of speaking activities, carried out 50% in English and 50% in Spanish. In addition, learners in *TandemMOOC* are guided by two language instructors who provide them with general feedback, while individual feedback is provided by the speaking partners, following the basis of tandem language learning.

The present study took into account two different editions of *TandemMOOC*, one released between October and November of 2019, and another one released between April and May of 2020, on the score of the global lockdown. Henceforth, these editions will be referred to as TM19 and TM20, respectively. In both editions, the course was displayed within the same platform, had the same structure and language instructors, and counted with almost identical activities and speaking topics. However, the TM20 edition also included a series of speaking activities and course materials related to the COVID-19 pandemic. An example of a speaking task in TM20 is shown in Figure 2.

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[3] For more information about the levels of FL proficiency established by the CEFR, visit the Council of Europe website: https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages

Figure 2. Example of a speaking task in TM20. Picture: Hassan, M. (2017). *Girl with ideas* [Image]. Retrieved from https://pixabay.com

Participants

Participants of the study were 2,585 EFL or SFL learners enrolled in *TandemMOOC*. At the moment of their enrolment, they completed a socio-demographic questionnaire and gave their consent to participate in this research. Of all participants, 1,098 were enrolled in TM19 (364 males; 734 females), and 1,487 were enrolled in TM20 (527 males; 960 females). All participants were over the age of 18 at the moment of their registration in the course. The mean age was 35.9 years ($SD = 12.3$) in the TM19 group, and 38.2 years ($SD = 12.8$) in the TM20 one. Additionally, there were more EFL learners than SFL learners in both editions of *TandemMOOC* (see Table 1) as EFL is, indeed, a highly demanded subject by LMOOC learners.

Table 1 *Information on Participants' Gender, Mean Age, and FL Learnt*

	Enrolled learners	**Male**	**Female**	**Mean age**	**EFL learners**	**SFL learners**
TM19	1,098	364	734	35.9	775	323
TM20	1,487	527	960	38.2	1,156	331

Regarding the level of the FL learnt, more than half of participants of the TM19 group reported to have an intermediate (n = 537) or upper intermediate (n = 324) level of the TL, as occurred in the TM20 group (intermediate, n = 691; upper intermediate = 519). On the contrary, participants who reported to have a proficient level of the FL represented a minority within the sample (see Table 2).

Table 2 *Information on Participants' Level of the FL Learnt*

	Intermediate	**Upper intermediate**	**Advanced**	**Proficient**
TM19	537	324	199	38
TM20	691	519	248	29

Furthermore, most of the learners enrolled in TM19 and TM20 were from European countries, although there were also learners from Asia, Oceania, America and Africa. In this line, participants of the study had different cultural backgrounds, as frequently occurs in MOOCs (García-Peñalvo, Fidalgo-Blanco, & Sein-Echaluce, 2018). Finally, concerning participants' native language (NL), the majority of enrolled learners in TM19 were native speakers (NSs) of Spanish (n = 587), followed by NSs of English (n = 286). Likewise, most of the learners who enrolled in TM20 were also NSs of Spanish (n = 940), followed by NSs of English (n = 231). In both TM19 and TM20 groups there were also bilingual NSs of Spanish or English and another language, and NSs of other languages, who represented less than a third of the participants of the two groups (see Table 3).

Table 3 *Information on Participants' Native Language(s) (L1)*

	Spanish	**English**	**Bilingual Spanish and other**	**Bilingual English and other**	**Other(s)**
TM19	587	286	82	17	117
TM20	940	231	125	23	168

Data collection and instruments

Two different research instruments were employed in the data collection process. These provided us with two different sets of data.

- *Learner engagement and participation data* was retrieved from the course system in TM19 and TM20, with a record of the total number of speaking activities completed per active learner, as well as the total time they spent fulfilling the speaking activities. By active learner we refer to a learner who completed, at least, one speaking activity in *TandemMOOC*.

- A *questionnaire with closed and open-ended questions* (n = 98) was sent via e-mail to the active learners of TM20 at the end of the course. The questionnaire included 2 items on learner engagement, and 5 items on self-reported emotions related to the COVID-19 pandemic and their experience talking about it within the course. Open-ended items,

such as *'If tandemMOOC has given you some support in getting through the pandemic situation, please briefly explain why'* and *'During the course, did you learn anything about the pandemic situation in other countries that you did not already know?'* allowed participants to express themselves openly, and to give certain information that the researcher may not have contemplated before (Campbell, McNamara, & Gilroy, 2004).

Analysis

In the first place, participants' data was anonymised. Afterwards, in order to answer RQ1, learner enrolment and participation data in TM19 and TM20 was analysed by carrying out univariate analysis. Descriptive statistics allowed us, indeed, to organise and to summarise data (Frey, 2018). Besides, in order to answer RQ2, a mixed-method research approach was carried out with the aim to analyse participants' responses to the closed and open-ended items of the questionnaire. Data from the closed-ended items was analysed by carrying out univariate analysis, and data from the open-ended items was analysed through qualitative content analysis (Berelson, 1952). In consequence, a coding scheme was designed following Boyatzi's (1998) hybrid approach, which blends inductive and deductive coding techniques. The resulting coding scheme counted with three main categories related to the dimensions of the EWL model: *cognitive*, *affective* and *social* (Svalverg, 2009), and it was subjected to a process of interrater reliability that involved two experienced researchers of the field. Following, systematic text analysis was conducted (with) for the purpose of developing a controlled qualitative procedure (Mayring, 2000). Finally, information from the different data sets was integrated.

4. Results

RQ1: To what extent did learner engagement in an EFL/SFL speaking LMOOC vary during the pandemic emergency period in comparison to the previous edition of the course?

In the first place, data retrieved from the course system showed that, concerning learner enrolment, there was a 35.4% increase in the number of enrolled learners in TM20 (n = 1,487) in comparison to TM19 (n = 1,098), as can be seen in Figure 3.
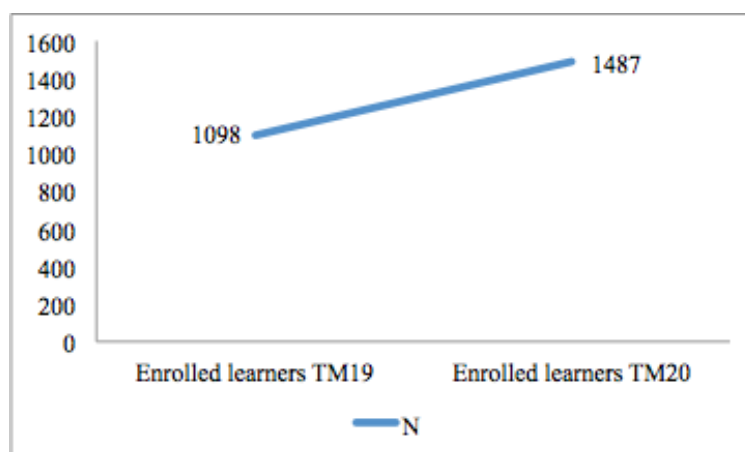
Figure 3. Increase in the number of enrolled learners from TM19 to TM20.

Moreover, in relation to active learners, there were 210 active learners in TM19, and 254 active learners in TM20. Therefore, active learners represented 19.12% of the total of enrolled learners in TM19, and 17.8% of the total of enrolled learners in TM20. Despite the slight decrease in the number of active learners in TM20 in comparison to TM19, the total amount of speaking activities completed by active learners in TM19 was 579, while in TM20 it was 910. There were, also, differences observed between the mean number of speaking activities completed per active learner, which increased from TM19 ($\bar{x} = 2.7$) to TM20 ($\bar{x} = 3.5$), as shown in Figure 4.
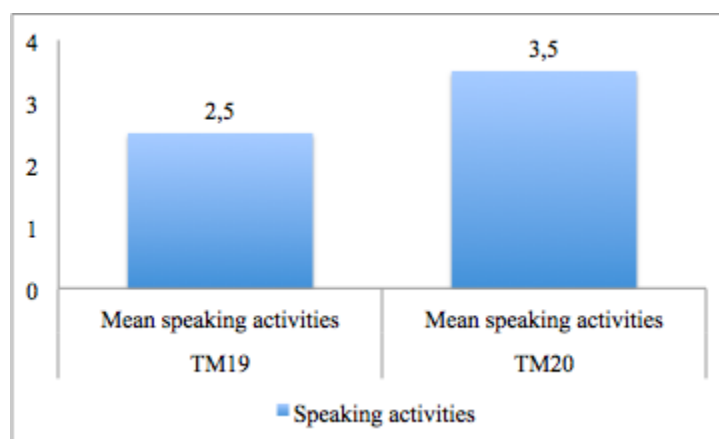

Figure 4. Mean speaking activities completed per active learner in TM19 and TM20.

Additionally, in reference to learner participation, the total amount of time active learners spent completing the speaking activities within the course was 572 hours in TM19, and 738 hours in TM20. Besides, there was also a slight increase concerning the total amount of time spent per active learner fulfilling the speaking activities from TM19 ($\bar{x} = 2.7$) to TM20 ($\bar{x} = 2.9$), as
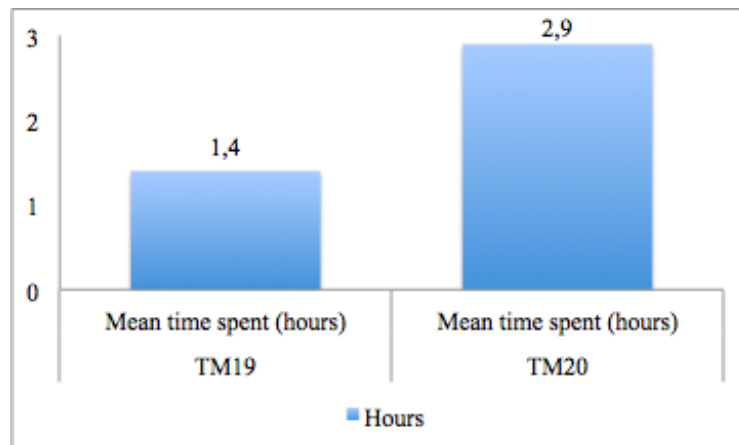
performed in figure 5.

Figure 5. Mean time spent (hours) fulfilling speaking activities per active learner in TM19 and TM20.

RQ2: What aspects of an EFL/SFL speaking LMOOC contributed to learner engagement within the pandemic emergency period?

Participants' responses to a closed-ended question (n = 98) on the aspect(s) of TM20 that made learners feel more engaged revealed that speaking partners were the most valued aspect in this matter, followed by the speaking tasks and the portfolio, a tool where learners' activity was registered, including the recordings of their speaking activities and their partners' feedback. As illustrated in Figure 6, site content and teachers were the two least engaging aspects of the course.
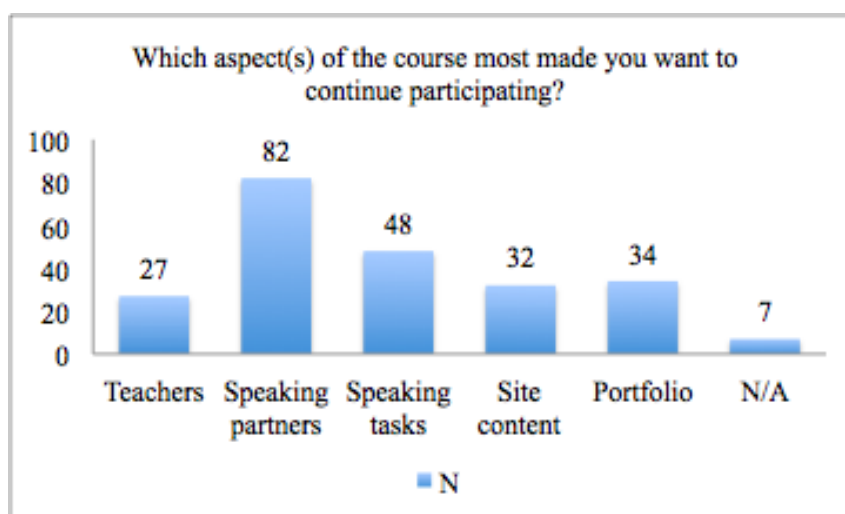

Figure 6. Aspects of TM20 that made participants engage with the course.

Accordingly, in a further closed-ended question, respondents (n = 98) indicated that the most valued type of feedback in TM20 was the individual and immediate feedback provided by their speaking partners, followed by their own self-reflection and teachers' feedback, as shown in Figure 7.
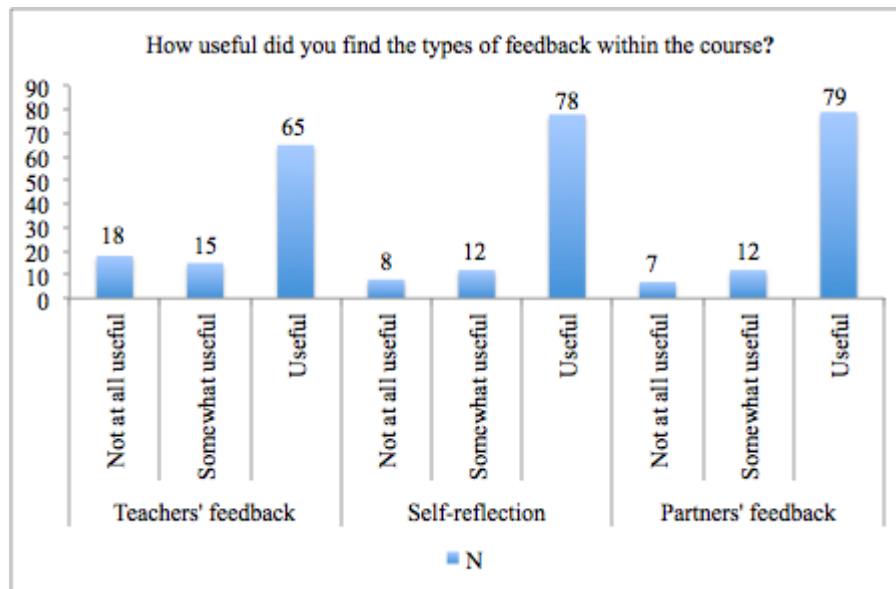

Figure 7. Participants' assessment of the types of feedback in TM20.

As regards learners' emotional state, participants' responses (n = 98) indicated that the majority of them had been, somehow, emotionally affected by the pandemic emergency situation before the start of TM20. Besides, a minority of participants indicated that their emotional state had been extremely affected by the pandemic, as shown in Figure 8.
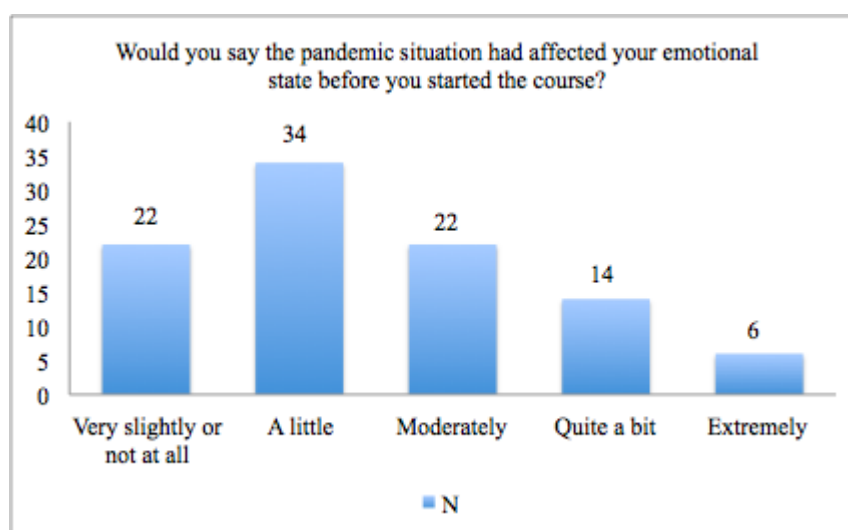

Figure 8. Participants' responses on their emotional state before starting TM20.

In line with this, the majority of the respondents indicated that their participation in TM20 had, to some extent, given them support to get through the global emergency period, while a third part of the respondents replied that the course had provided them with *very slightly or not at all* support within the emergency period. A detailed illustration of the responses to this item is represented in Figure 9.
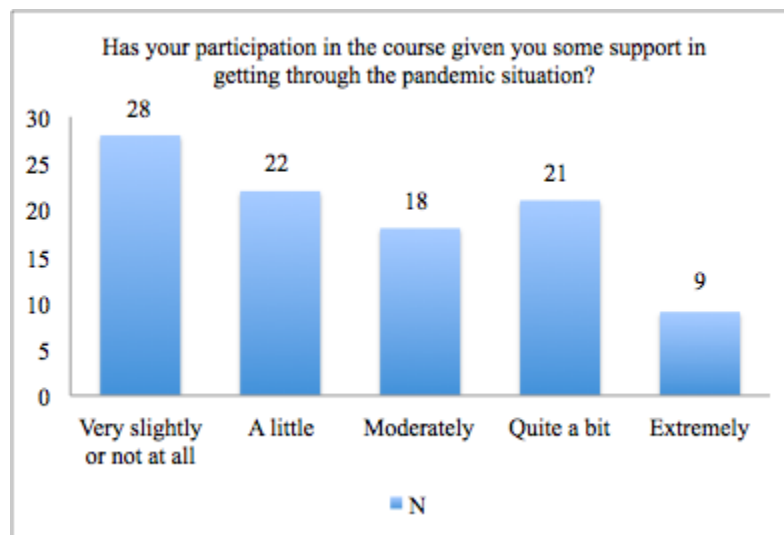

Figure 9. Participants' responses on the support that TM20 gave them in getting through the pandemic situation.

The question described in the paragraph above was followed by the open-ended question '*If TandemMOOC has given you some support in getting through the pandemic situation, please briefly explain why*'. Responses to the aforementioned question (n = 57) revealed that the *social* and the *affective* categories were, implicitly or explicitly, mentioned 29 times each by the respondents, while the *cognitive* category was mentioned 11 times. In this case, two codes of the social category emerged. One was 'social contact', which referred to the fact of being in contact with other learners, and of meeting new people. As participants reported, human interaction was considered as a valued support within the lockdown period:

> "I loved having the possibility to meet people in order to avoid the feeling of isolation" (Participant, TM20).

Moreover, the *social* category also encompassed the code 'gaining new perspectives', that referred to the possibility of knowing other people's experiences throughout the pandemic period. Indeed, several participants also referred to 'interculturality' within their responses:

"It has been nice to learn about how the pandemic is being dealt with in other countries". (Participant, TM20).

As concerns the *affective* category, it encompassed, in this matter, four different codes. One was related to 'good time management', as learners expressed the usefulness of taking part of the course within the lockdown period:

"It provided some structure to my days, which had become uncomfortably unstructured" (Participant, TM20).

Moreover, within this category, participants' responses were also related to 'positive feeling and emotions by talking about the COVID-19 pandemic', 'improvement of self-confidence when speaking in the FL', and 'positive feelings and emotions by being distracted from the COVID-19 pandemic'. Concerning the latter one, participants explained how the course had offered them an opportunity to be mentally detached from the pandemic:

"When I was connected, I forgot about the COVID-19 problem" (Participant, TM20).

Lastly, concerning the *cognitive* category, the fact of 'learning' and having a 'focused attention' was mentioned as a supportive element by some participants.

"I got focused on learning and that is a valuable experience in a situation like this. Having meetings every day helped me to move focus to things that are important for me, like language learning" (Participant, TM2).

Additionally, learners' enjoyment while sharing their own experiences and discussing pandemic issues with their international peers was explored. First, a closed-ended question (n = 98) revealed that most participants enjoyed talking about it with their partners, and less than a third of the participants indicated that they enjoyed this experience sometimes. Finally, a minority of the participants reported that they did not find it enjoyable, as shown in Figure 10.
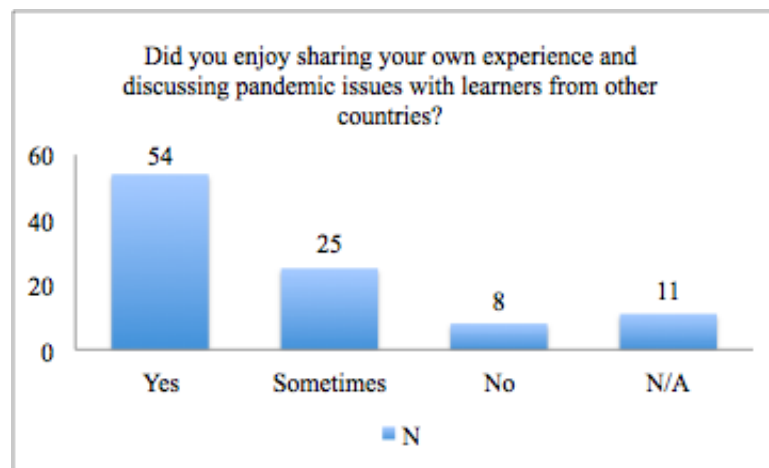
Figure 10. Participants' responses on their enjoyment talking about COVID-19 in TM20.

Along with the question described in the previous paragraph, the closed-ended question '*If you enjoyed sharing your own experience and discussing pandemic issues with learners from other countries, please briefly explain why*' was formulated. Data analysis of the responses (n = 61) showed that the *social* category was mentioned by participants, implicitly or explicitly, a total of 43 times, followed by the *cognitive* category, mentioned 15 times, and the *affective* one, mentioned 10 times. Within the *social* category, participants reported to have enjoyed 'social contact' and 'interculturality'. Moreover, they also enjoyed the fact of 'gaining new perspectives':

> "It is nice to know what's happening in different countries other than what we are being told on the news. I liked finding out in a more personal way rather than based on statistics" (Participant, TM20).

As regards to the *cognitive* category, participants referred to 'learning' as an enjoyable part of sharing with their partners their experience and thoughts about the COVID-19 pandemic:

> "I could learn and practice medical vocabulary that in normal conditions, I do not usually use (Participant, TM20).

Finally, concerning the *affective* category, participants in TM20 reported to have enjoyed the 'positive feelings and emotions experienced by talking with their peers' about the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, participants reported feelings of empathy or a sense of community, that made their experience within the course enjoyable:

> "I enjoyed sharing experiences with other learners because it helps to feel empathy

between us and realize that, in essence, we are the same all over the world as human beings, despite the differences in language, race, countries" (Participant, TM20).

5. Discussion

Results of this study showed that there was an increase in the number of enrolled learners in TM20 with respect to TM19. In line with Alamri et al. (2020), the increase in the number of enrolled learners in TM20 reflects the spread that MOOCs experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic emergency period. Besides, although the percentage of active learners remained similar in both editions of *TandemMOOC*, results revealed an increase in participation and engagement rates in TM20 with respect to TM19. More precisely, there was a rise in the mean number of speaking activities completed per active learner in TM20 in comparison to TM19, as well as in the mean amount of time active learners spent fulfilling them. These findings are consistent with Flores-Tena (2020), who also found improved learner engagement rates in MOOCs released during the COVID-19 lockdown. Moreover, according to participants' responses in the questionnaire distributed in TM20, we acknowledged that most active learners in TM20 were not extremely affected by the COVID-19 crisis, which may have favoured their participation within the course.

Findings of the study also pointed to different aspects of *TandemMOOC* that contributed to learner engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic emergency period. Regarding the *social* dimension of EWL, quantitative data indicated that speaking partners were the most valued aspect by learners, as well as the feedback they provided. Indeed, peer-interaction (Sokolik, 2014) and immediate feedback (Sull, 2012) have been previously reported to favour learner engagement in MOOCs. Moreover, concerning learners' self-reported emotions, the *social* dimension was the most recurrent in participants' responses. They referred to this dimension in terms of social contact, interculturality, and gain of new perspectives, which have been previously outlined in the literature as contributors to online learners' engagement (O'Dowd, 2007). Besides, the social dimension helped, in some cases, to palliate learners' feeling of isolation, generally caused by the global lockdown situation (Schwartz, 2021).

Moreover, the *affective* dimension of EWL was also relevant according to participants' responses. In this matter, learners reported to have experienced positive feelings and emotions by talking about the COVID-19 pandemic and, at the same time, by forgetting about the pandemic problems while participating in the course, which might seem

controversial. Furthermore, in their responses they usually referred to their own feelings and emotions, but also to a sense of community, which has been previously found to foster learner engagement (Moreira Teixeira & Mota, 2015). This is tightly interrelated to the *social* dimension of EWL, as dimensions are not steady and they may overlap (Svalberg, 2009). Additionally, still concerning the *affective* dimension, learners also reported to have strengthened their self-confidence when speaking in the FL. Lastly, the less mentioned dimension of EWL in TM20 was the *cognitive* one. This dimension was linked to learners' possibility to practice their FL skills, earlier mentioned by Bárcena & Martín-Monje (2014) as a trigger for learner engagement. Moreover, participants also positively valued their capacity to focus on their FL learning despite the pandemic situation.

To conclude, it is to be noted that the aspects of *TandemMOOC* that most contributed to learner engagement within the pandemic emergency period are, also, those that constitute the basis of tandem language learning. Therefore, interaction with international peers, reciprocity, and learner autonomy were key to foster learner participation within the COVID-19 pandemic emergency period. On the one hand, learners had a general desire for socialisation, and the fact of giving them a space to talk about the pandemic with learners from all over the globe contributed positively to their emotional state. On the other hand, with the fast shift from traditional to online learning (Chen et al., 2020), there was an imminent need from learners to practice their FL speaking skills which, undoubtedly, motivated their participation within the course.

6. Conclusion and pedagogical implications

The present study provided us with deep understanding on learner engagement in an EFL/SFL speaking LMOOC released in 2020 during the COVID-19 emergency period. The course edition carried out in 2020 counted with improved learner enrolment and participation rates in comparison to the previous edition of the course, delivered in 2019, before the pandemic took place. Moreover, several aspects of the EFL/SFL speaking LMOOC that contributed to learner engagement were identified. In summary, the aspects related to learners' *social* dimension were the most significant ones, followed by the aspects related to the *affective* and, finally, the *cognitive* dimension.

As frequently occurs in research carried out on MOOCs, participants of the study were from a wide variety of countries, such as Spain, China, Turkey and India, for which its results

are not bound to a particular cultural context, but are transferable to further investigations on LMOOCs (García-Peñalvo et al., 2018). However, this study is not without its limitations. On the one hand, it took place during the COVID-19 pandemic emergency period, whose circumstances inevitably influenced participants' emotional state and behaviour. For this reason, further research carried out on learner engagement in an LMOOC during a post-pandemic period could lead to different results. On the other hand, this study did not take into account participants' individual differences, such as gender, age or FL level, in relation to their EWL. Concerning future research directions, we suggest that a focus on learner internal variables would provide the online EFL education community with additional and relevant information on learner engagement in LMOOCs released during the COVID-19 emergency period.

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Appendix

Post-course questionnaire (TM20)

Hello! This is a post-course questionnaire that will take you approximately 6 minutes to fill in. We would love to have your opinion on *TandemMOOC* in order to improve it in future editions. Thanks for your participation!

1. What is your gender?

    a) Female
    b) Male

2. What is your age group?

    a) 18 to 30 years old
    b) 31 to 40 years old
    c) 41 to 50 years old
    d) 51 to 60 years old
    e) 61 to 70 years old
    f) +71 years old

3. Have you previously enrolled in any other online course(s)?

    a) Yes
    b) No

4. How many speaking activities did you complete in this course?

    a) I did no speaking activities
    b) 1-3 speaking activities
    c) 4-7 speaking activities
    d) 8-12 speaking activities
    e) +12 speaking activities

5. Would you say the pandemic situation caused by COVID-19 had affected your emotional state before you started *TandemMOOC*?

    a) Extremely
    b) Quite a bit
    c) Moderately
    d) A little
    e) Very slightly or not at all

6. Has your participation in *TandemMOOC* given you some support in getting through the situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?

    a) Extremely
    b) Quite a bit

c) Moderately
d) A little
e) Very slightly or not at all

6.1. If *TandemMOOC* has given you some support in getting through the pandemic situation, please briefly explain why: _____

7. In *TandemMOOC*, there were some activities related to COVID-19. Did you enjoy sharing your own experience and discussing pandemic issues with learners from other countries?

a) Yes
b) No

7.1. Please, explain briefly why you enjoyed or did not enjoy sharing your own experience with other learners: _____

8. Which aspect or aspects of *TandemMOOC* most made you want to continue participating in the course? You can choose more than one answer.

a) Teachers
b) Speaking partners
c) Speaking tasks
d) Site content (videos, articles…)
e) Portfolio

9. How useful did you find the following types of feedback on your speaking skills?

	Extremely useful	Very useful	Useful	Somewhat useful	Not at all useful
Teacher's feedback					
My self-reflection					
Partner's feedback					

10. Is there anything else you'd like to share with us?