

MOOCs: A Disruptive Teaching-Learning Process in Interdisciplinary Boundaries

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Abstract

Our teaching-learning process has taken an alternate route-“disruptive learning” process which scatters the learning community beyond the classroom set up to get involved in language learning. Teaching-learning process in the 21st century is interdependent and interdisciplinary. The bottom line is whether MOOCs enhance the learners’ language skills. What factors are involved in developing the desired skills if their productive and receptive skills take a better shape? Keeping this in mind, this interdisciplinary study examines certain factors and their functions in enhancing the language learners’ productive and receptive skills in English language. This descriptive intervention in the form of open online education has significantly improved the learners’ listening skills, style of writing, unique expression of views, choice of words, pace of learning and their understanding. This analytical research confirms that the intervention of technology in the form of MOOCs is an inevitable cause of today’s English language teaching-learning process.

Keywords: MOOCs, Reflective Skills, Self-learning Skills, (Digital) Intervention, Social Sensitivity

1. Introduction

Dennis Fisher states, “Every age has its own thoughts, ideas, and values that influence the culture, the “spirit of the age” (ODB, 2013). And Foucault is true when he says “the main interest in life and work is to become someone else that you were not in the beginning” (as cited in Phillips and Cars, 2010, p. viii). This abstract idea has become concrete in the 21st century. People, especially learners across the globe are techno-driven and the technology with a sense of digital learning has influenced their faculty to view the motion of the world from the perspective of technology. The speedy growth of technology and its use in all phases of human life are reflected on our temperament today. Education without technology is beyond one’s imagination in the present century. This classroom research involves Bachelors of Business Administration and Bachelors of Business Management. And this study explores the language learners’ effective use of MOOCs and the implications of their online learning culture on campus. This study focuses on a few dimensions - Research Tools Used, Language Skills, Originality and Writing Practice, Multiple Intelligences, Learner Centered Approach of Teaching-learning Process, and Social and Sociable Sense skills to fathom their impact on the learners’ life within and without. It also explores whether these dimensions enhance the language learners’ language skills through the online courses they enroll in.

Massive Open Online Courses are inevitable in the techno-friendly society in which people with learning spirit from anywhere and everywhere aspire to gain knowledge free of cost or at lower price.

Modern discourses and great ideas born in world class educational institutions today have become easily accessible to students of all ages even from the remotest part of the world. MOOCs are a breakthrough in the world where knowledge production and innovation run parallel at breakneck speed, competing with each other to orientate the techno-wired generation towards inter and trans-disciplinary learning with a fine sense of social responsibility and accountability. MOOCs have ignited the sense of autonomy in learning for life support skills rather than accumulating certificates with high percentage. The seminal goal of MOOCs was to engage a multitude of learners from all walks of life with free education of uncompromising standard and it had to be on par with the university standard of education.

2. Online Education

Online Education in the world and Distance Education through open universities have been existing since long and they have been serving the purpose when it comes to delivering subject specific quality education beyond the university campus. Barber, Donnelly and Rizvi (2013) in "An Avalanche is coming" emphasize the significant contribution of online and distance education through The Open University in the UK and the Allama Iqbal Open University (AIU) in Pakistan. But the difference between the Open University education system and the MOOCs is the optimum and effective use of technology and its presence among the learners across the world. When the learners on campus education sometimes ignore the teaching instruction either through Learning Management System or through recorded video lectures, they include their active participation in Google+, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Facebook. They are able to initiate their discussion through an open forum. These digital discourses are the direct result of MOOCs. Jayson W. Richardson (2010) in "Learning Cultures in Online Education" state that "If the Internet is a blank canvas on which multiple cultures connect, collide, and find one another, then online learning is a container in which culture (s) are localized, co-created, and self-contained". This online education has taken an evolutionary path in the 21st century and the language learners are roped in "disruptive learning" in the form of Massive Open Online Courses. Clayton Christensen (1997) in his *The Innovator's Dilemma* informs the world about the learning with a difference wherein the teaching-learning process takes an alternate route in the form of disruptive innovation – "technologically straightforward". The disruptive innovations are concerned about the common-market and its essential needs for the sustenance. For, the common-market survives because of less expensive, affordable, qualitative and convenient products. The disruptive technologies known for value products support the emergent segment which is isolated from or remote to the main stream of the society (Christensen, 1997, p. 28-29).

Online courses have captured a prominent place in the teaching-learning process across the globe because they meet the demands of the learners for subject knowledge, academic skills, professional competence and life skills. Coursera, an education platform focuses on offering a world-class education with a high standard to everyone in the world free of cost. What do the learners pay in return? That is 'academic discipline' to complete the course with "reflective skills". The main objective of this platform is to promote life-changing education which "will improve their lives, the lives of their family, and the community they live in" (coursera). This online course platform engages with more than ten million learners offering around 880 courses from "115" partner institutions. From "Arts" to "Teacher Professional Development", there are twenty five areas of interest to learn in coursera.org. The platform uses around twenty languages as means of communication to deliver the courses to all its learners. Some of the leading universities are John Hopkins University, University of California, Irvine, Yale University, Duke University, University of Pennsylvania, Columbia University, Stanford University, The University of British Columbia, Nanyang Technical University, Singapore, Indian School of Business, University of Pittsburgh, and so on. All these global players have gone the extra mile to empower the common market (ordinary people who cannot afford a world-class education from ivy-league colleges) through free education for the social wellbeing. We do have other important online course platforms such as www.open.edu.au, class.stanford.edu, www.edx.org, and www.futurelearn.com. All these platforms and course providers play a pivotal role in giving free online education to anybody in the world and equipping the learners with adequate skills to be competent enough in life and work as well.

When you bank on the merits of MOOCs, they are multifold. The online courses are a gateway to learners of any age to learn high quality courses without paying a single penny. International universities and experienced educators with in-depth and practical knowledge interact with the online learners through videos, journal articles, authentic material for academic purposes and subject specific quizzes to inculcate interdependent learning style and online community culture in the MOOC audience.

These courses are designed to cater to the needs of one's life skills. And the courses come with purpose driven activities, specific aims and objectives to encourage the participants for definite progress in the teaching-learning process.

MOOCs are also concerned about reflective skills in which participants are guided to ask questions and debate with other learners to make the learning more reciprocal. As a result, this '*disruptive learning*' converts the teacher centered approach into '*participatory and collaborative learning*'.

3. Statement of the Problem

The teaching-learning process in the form of courses such as Developing Fluency and Clarity in English and General English for the students of Management Studies at UG level focused on thirty areas which help the language learners acquire language skills in the end. Among those, six significant dimensions – Listening Skills, Expressing Personal Views, Style of Writing, Use of Own Words, Pace of Learning and Better Understanding have enhanced their online learning. As a result, it's evident that language learners could enhance their language learning through some specific, receptive and productive skills when they take online courses of their choice. Table 3.1 throws light on the factors considered for the systematic investigation.

4. Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this classroom research is to take a stand that MOOCs play a vital role in acquiring desired language learning skills anywhere and everywhere. The secondary objectives focus on the following:

- To enhance the learners' performance in language learning through online courses of one's own choice
- To identify the leading factors that are evident in the language learners' journey while trying to acquire language skills through MOOCs

5. Methodology

It's an applied research and descriptive in nature. This study tried to examine certain dimensions that influence the language learners to acquire receptive and productive skills such as Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. This systematic inquiry involved the first year students of Management Studies, Christ University, Bangalore as an adequate sample of participants. This descriptive study uses the learners' attitudes, practices, concerns and interests to measure the learning outcome. This research attempts specifically to identify the opportunities the language learners get to enhance their learning, understand the situation (online learning-environment) in which they negotiate changes, discover certain attitudes which emerge as strong stimulants to increase their desire for acquiring language skills and to explore and investigate the possibilities of further research in the same area of interest.

A considerable amount of time spent in literature review paved the way for framing thirty questions to build a questionnaire using five point Likert scale as a research instrument. This scale was an instrument to gather data for analysis in the end. The scale ranges from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree and the respondents used the scale to register their responses. Table 4.1 displays the different parameters involved in the scale and the total number of selected students (samples) who completed the survey for analysis.

6. Data Collection

This classroom based research opened a way to observe the online learners outside the classroom influencing factor and content examination. There are six parameters involved in the scale. The first parameter, Use of Research Tools focuses on areas such as use of search engines, Google doc, research links, use of online tools and discussion forum to improve their language skills. The second parameter, Language skills deals with comprehension, listening, expression of one's views, conversational skills and style of writing. The third parameter, Originality and Writing Practice includes improving classroom test score, using own words to build an assignment, repeated writing practice, plagiarized free work and use of secondary sources as a referential tool. The fourth parameter, Multiple Intelligences/Creative and Critical Perspectives, comprises learning through video lectures, power point presentations, learning speed, research interest, and a sense of inquiry. The fifth parameter, the Learner-centric Approach, involves the students' satisfaction, the students' individual progress, the teacher's minimal role, research aptitude and freedom. And the sixth parameter, Awareness of Social and Sociable Sense, looks at proactive approach, social sensitivity, social responsibility, sense of cordiality, and inculcation of sociable attitude.

Of all the dimensions, Listening Skills, Expression of One's Personal Views, Style of Writing, Use of Own Words, Pace of Learning, and Better Understanding have contributed to the language learners' growth of a few academic skills (receptive and productive) through MOOCs.

7. Data Analysis

The primary stakeholders of this study were the students of Graduate Management Studies. More than 80 questionnaires were circulated for the task; 65 respondents completed the questionnaire and responded to all the questions. All the 65 responses were considered for final analysis which consisted of 23 female learners and 42 male learners.

The responses received from the selected language learners reveal the fact that learners showed keen interest toward certain areas such as listening, writing, self-expression using own words at one's own pace, and improved understanding through online education.

The pie chart (figure 7.1) reveals the learners' overall interest in improving their listening skills. Most of the massive open online courses offer their world class education through video lectures. The online learners can download the lectures, listen to them any number of times, and answer the questions given to them. This chart displays the language learners' positive attitude toward the improvement of their listening skills. 88% of the learners have improved their listening because of MOOCs. Students in traditional teaching-learning set up may not achieve this state because this is a self-study learning; the language learners take the responsibility; the concepts, introduced through the course offered are challenging and this makes them invest extra interest in gaining the subject knowledge. 1% of learners' resistance shows the effectiveness of listening skills among the entire learners' group and the definite growth occurred in their learning curve.

One of the key features of MOOCs is to provide the online learners with "*Open Forum*" for discussion. The learners make use of the open forum to express their views and points. Every online course in the beginning will invite the learners to tell something about their background and purpose behind joining the course concerned. This forum keeps the learning alive because it is a transport of one's opinion, likes and dislikes, ideas and outlook and suggestions. This chart (7.2) underlines the fact that 54% of the language learners have voiced their ideas. This open forum has been a carrier to carry one's idea to the other end of the world. Most of the learners seem to believe in the exchange of ideas and for such ideation, expression of personal views is of great help in the techno-friendly world. This learning trend has picked up momentum in MOOCs.

All open online courses offer challenging assignments to complete the course for the reward. Most of the courses except language courses expect the participants to use English language to write their assignments. This writing practice encourages the learners to focus on grammar, punctuations, sentence structure and vocabulary words. Moreover, the learners's reading precedes their writing. Their subject related reading makes them familiar with writing style, appreciation, critical thinking, logical presentation and paragraphing. The pie chart - Style of Writing (7.3) ensures 40% of the language learners have improved their style of writing through the course they enrolled in. And 23% of the learners have acknowledged their progress in using grammar, punctuation and sentence structure in a better way. In fact, this analysis clearly reveals the steady progress in language learning, especially in writing skills.

The term '*plagiarism*' and its presence is very evident in college students' writing works in India when it comes to Continuous Internal Assessment submissions; however, MOOCs make the online learners feel confident in using their own words to frame sentences and express their thoughts in their own ways. This pie-chart – Use of Own Words (7.4) shows that 45% of the language learners have used their own words to draft their assignments for course completion. It tells the online learners spend time in reading and this reading practice or habit helps them gather subject specific vocabulary words to present their argument in the form of a writing task. This figure registers around 85% of learners and their plagiarized free writing for the award of their scores in their areas of interest.

Competition plays a major role among students in the classroom. Students compete with one another in every aspect of educational and career path. Conversely, Massive Open Online Courses have broken this wall of pressure and introduced the learning process which is self-paced. The online learning is a classroom free education which aims at life skills along with subject expertise. Learners are free from peer pressure to learn the required skills at anytime from anywhere. And the learners have an opportunity to observe their own pace of learning and learning speed as part of '*reflective practice*'.

The pie chart – Pace of Learning (7.5) pin points that there is no single language learner who will not be in favor of learning something at one's own pace. 58% of the learners are of the view that learning something specific at one's own pace is more effective than learning the same subject with a competitive spirit. Around 90% of the language learners like to learn the course of their choice at their own pace without any peer pressure.

Online education differs from classroom teaching-learning process for self-study approach, learner-centered method, reflective learning, interactive and interrogative move toward acquiring skills and open discussion. Though the classroom learning environment caters to the needs of the learners with all these aspects of learning approaches, the online learners can personalize these academic skills. It is evident when 46% of the language learners from the Management Studies affirm their understanding towards their learning process, learning environment, social conditions and limitations, and the outcome of the course selected. This pie chart (7.6) reveals their academic independence, increased subject knowledge and social maturity and sensitivity. For, massive open online courses improve their subject and local knowledge and in turn, this knowledge enables them to access life skills to take care of their jobs in future. Around 78% of the learners are positive about their academic maturity and increased understanding to deal with their subjects with a difference.

8. Implications of MOOC Learning

- 8.1. The improved listening skills make the language learners become very interactive and participatory in knowledge production. This also develops their self-study skills and confidence to claim responsibility for their performance in academic rigour. Language learners through MOOCs improve their self-learning skills and get trained to “how-to-think” (Fisher 1) state that is to be autonomous in terms of critical perspectives.
- 8.2. The online learners exchange their ideas with other learners of different cultures. MOOCs become a multicultural/global hub for the exchange of individuals' ethnic ideas. MOOCs also help the learners implicitly or indirectly gain the knowledge of structuring the crux of the argument, inquiring the authenticity of the source and of arriving at a constructive conclusion in the form of open discussion.
- 8.3. Language learners develop “reflective skills” through MOOCs instead of just receiving subject knowledge and information out of teaching-learning process. This reflective approach in learning motivates them to be aware of varied aspects of language such as grammar, subject-verb agreement, punctuations, and sentence structure.
- 8.4. There is a clear distinction between the teaching content received passively in the classroom without any inquiry and the ideas and outlook processed with constant, systematic and careful investigation in the online platform. For, the online teaching-learning process results in discussion forum, peer review, quizzes and other tasks which help the learners to be original in expressing their feelings and thoughts.
- 8.5. The language learners' learning at their own pace motivates them to self-examine their strengths and weaknesses in terms of academic performance and study skills.
- 8.6. The learners' interaction through open discussion forum makes them sensitive toward other's space and energy (feelings and emotions).
- 8.7. MOOCs through self-study method encourage any learner to form a series of questions and find conclusive answers for them to take a position in acquiring skills. As a result, it increases their textual scholarship and academic maturity.

9. Conclusion

It is quite clear that factors taken into consideration for analysis have revealed the positive results in MOOC learning environment. The number of students aspiring to get good education is continually increasing. The infrastructure and traditional teaching methods are not sufficient enough to cater to the needs of the growing demand. As the world's second largest population, the use of advanced technology to cope with the needs has become imminent. This need has resulted in the extensive usage of technology in teaching-learning. It has also made changes in the pedagogical practices. In this regard, the intervention of online education is a remarkable achievement in the history of education in India as it alters the nature of instruction and learning. On the whole, teaching-learning process in future would be MOOC driven rather than classroom/teacher centered knowledge dissemination.

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Table 3.1: Factors influencing the Learners to Acquire Language Skills through MOOCs

Factors	Listening Skills	Expressing Personal Views	Style of Writing	Use of Own Words	Pace of Learning	Better Understanding
Strongly Disagree	1	1	4	2	0	1
Disagree	2	3	12	3	1	4
Undecided	5	5	15	2	5	9
Agree	31	21	26	29	21	21
Strongly Agree	26	35	8	29	38	30

Table 4.1: Selected Students (sample) Set

SEX		
Sex	Frequency	Percent
Female	23	35.4
Male	42	64.6
Total	65	100.0

Figure 7.1: Analysis of Listening Skills

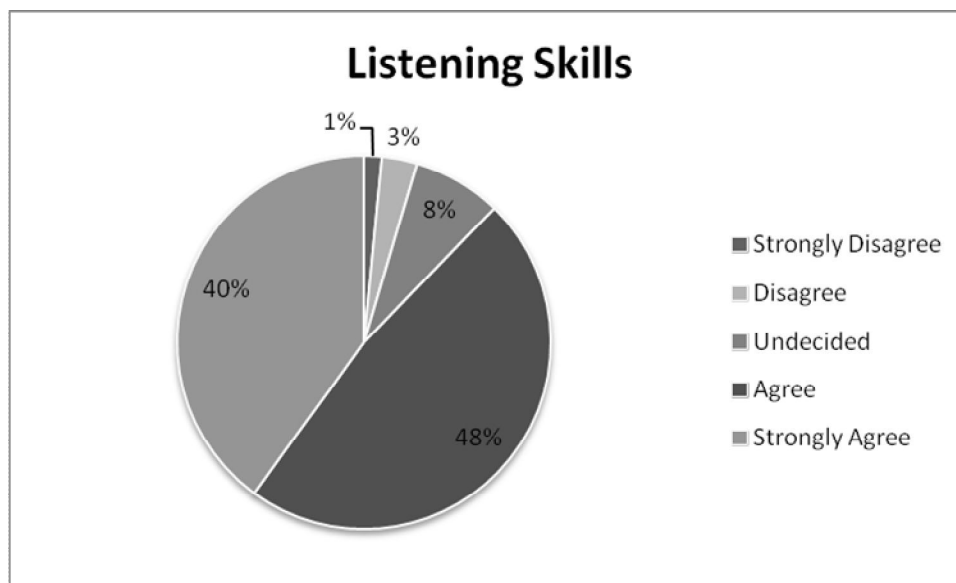


Figure 7.2: Analysis of Expressing Personal Views

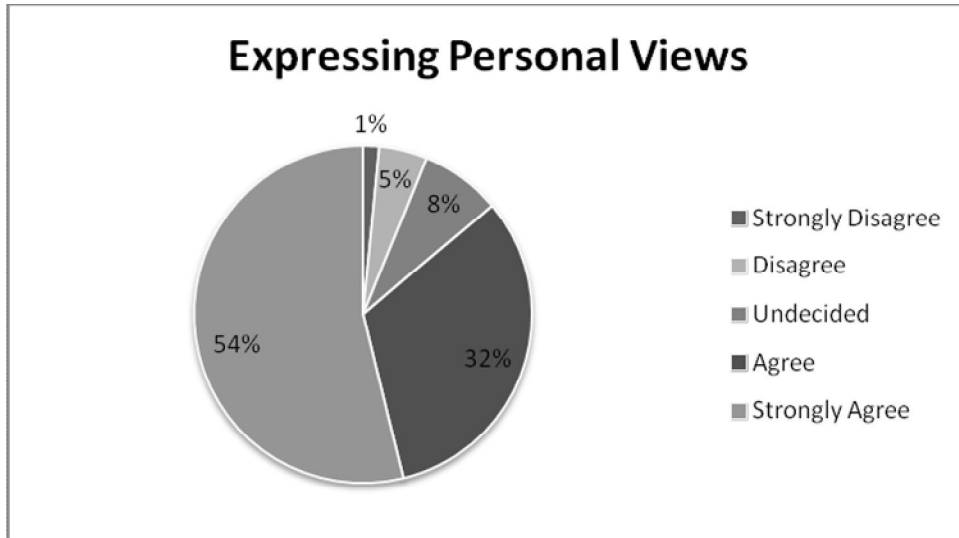


Figure 7.3: Analysis of Style of Writing

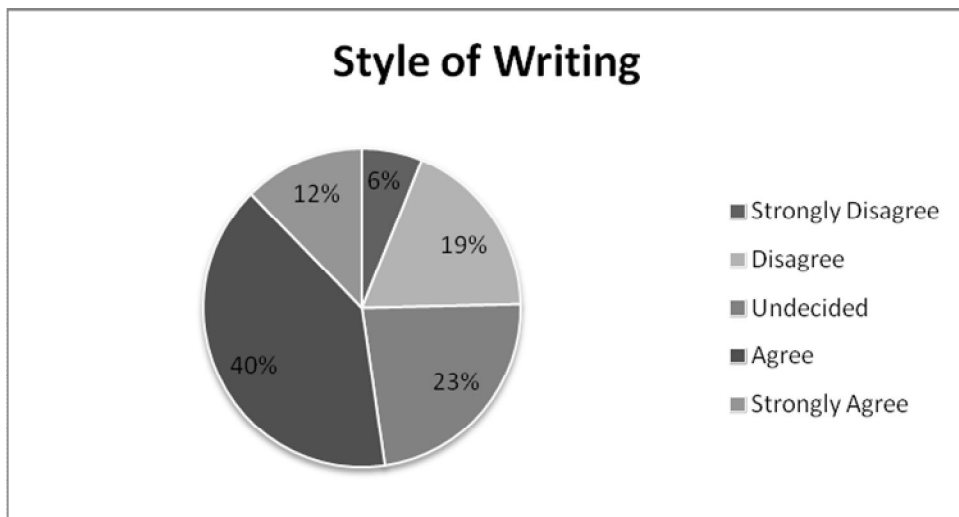


Figure 7.4: Analysis of Using Own Words

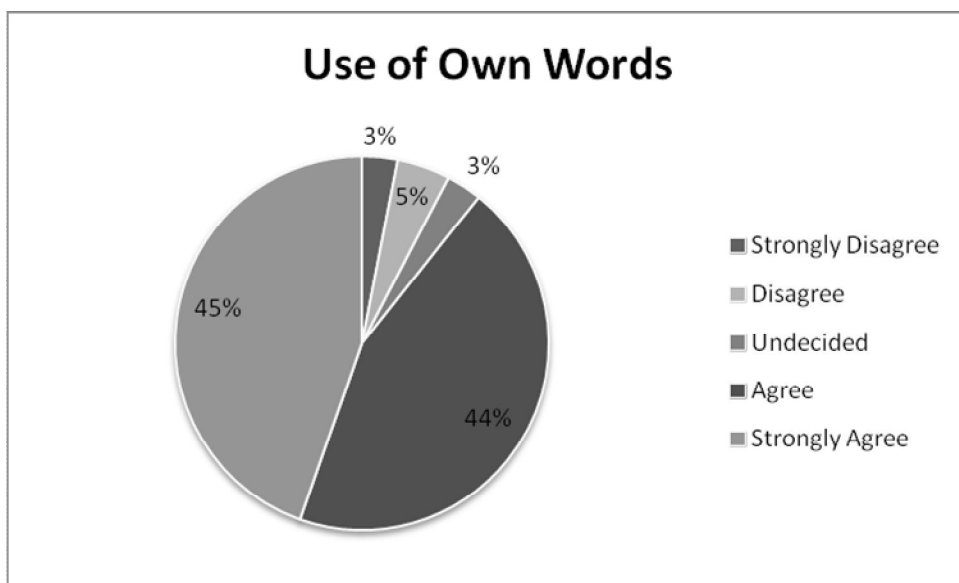


Figure 7.5: Analysis of Learning at One's Own Pace

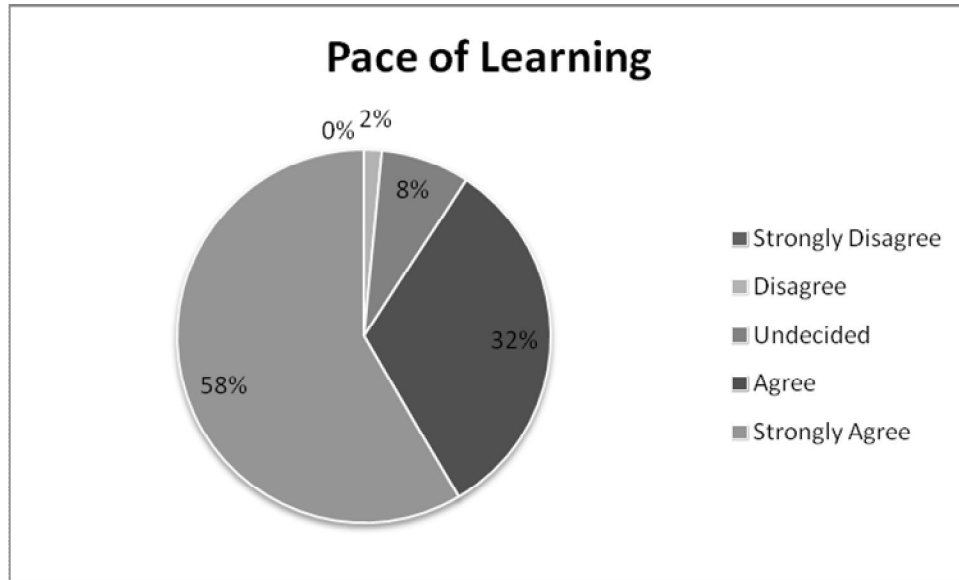


Figure 7.6: Analysis of Better Understanding

