

# To blend or not to blend?

Lecturers' experience with blending MOOCs  
into traditional UK Higher Education modules



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# Overview

- Blended Learning and their Benefits and Challenges
- MOOCs as a Tool for Blended Learning
- Research Questions
- Participants, Data Collection and Analysis
- Results

# Blended Learning (BL)

The **integration of online activities and F2F learning** that resulted from the fundamental **re-thinking and reconceptualisation of the teaching and learning dynamic**, with a design that is congruent with the **learning outcomes, contextual needs and contingencies**, and **increases students' interaction** with instructors and peers.

(Garrison, 2011; Garrison and Kanuka, 2004)



# Blended Learning

- Different BL models (e.g. Rotation model, Flipped Classroom etc.)
- Different reasons for using BL
- Different online activities blended



# Blended Learning in HE

- There is uncertainty about the **future and sustainability of the business models** currently being used in HE (Yuan, Powell and Olivier, 2014)
- HE Institutions need to **rethink and reconceptualise their long-term delivery and interaction practices**, and a great part of this new educational concept will revolve around the use of **online technology**.
- A **BL model** can **help** to meet some of these challenges.

# Benefits of and Challenges to Blended Learning

## Benefits

- **Communication and Sense of Community** (Garrison, 2011; Akyol, Garrison and Ozden, 2009; Garrison and Kanuka, 2004; Garrison and Anderson, 2003)
- **Confidence, Critical Thinking and Reflection** (Akyol and Garrison, 2011 ; Garrison, 2011; Means et al, 2009; Meyer, 2003)
- **Independent Learning, Collaboration and Differentiation** (Bralić and Divjak, 2018; Bowyer and Chambers, 2017; Akyol, Garrison and Ozden, 2009)
- **Attendance, Retention and Learning Outcomes** (Du, 2011; López-pérez, Pérez-López, and Rodríguez-Ariza, 2011; Boyle et al., 2003)
- **Tutor and classroom time use** (Griffiths et al., 2015)



# Benefits of and Challenges to Blended Learning

## Challenges

- Openness and Accessibility (Seaton, 2018)
- Tutor Support and Interaction (Garrison and Kanuka, 2004; Vonderwell, 2003)
- Pedagogical Knowledge, Resources and IT support (Kaur, 2013; Hoffman, 2011)
- Change (Garrison, 2011)



# MOOCs as a Tool for Blended Learning

## But why MOOCs?

- MOOCs
  - make use of **high quality teaching resources** and are an expensive investment
  - have become prevalent in **HE**
  - now have **over 100 million learners** and **11 thousand courses** throughout the world (Shah, 2018)
  - can be **used independently** by students
  - can be **blended** into traditional courses
  - have the potential to **change traditional HE approaches to and assumptions around teaching and learning** (Wintrup, Wakefield and Davis, 2015)



# Research Questions

- ☐ **RQ1: Why have lecturers decided to embed a MOOC into their F2F modules?**
- ☐ **RQ2: To what extent have MOOCs been embedded into these modules?**
- ☐ **RQ3: How has this practice impacted the course design?**
- ☐ **RQ4: What were some of the benefits and obstacles that lecturers experienced with this practice?**
- ☐ **RQ5: What pedagogical, structural or practical suggestions did the lecturers have for new MOOC blend practitioners?**



# Participants, Data Collection and Analysis

- 6 lecturers with MOOC-blend experience
- 5 departments, 3 universities
- A mix of teaching UG and/or PGT
- A mix of teaching mostly Home and/or International Students
- 1 own MOOC, 2 own and other institution MOOCs, 3 other institution MOOCs
- Semi-structured interviews between 20 to 50 minutes
- Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2013)

# Findings

Why have lecturers decided to embed a MOOC into their F2F modules?

- Wider and more international discussions

So the idea is that students get the opportunity not just to engage with each other, but to also engage with the global group of learners and get a **different set of examples and perspectives**. [...] And it gives them the added value of **corresponding with people from all over the world**, you know? I've seen examples of just conversations that started off on a MOOC between people in completely different countries and backgrounds all getting value from each other. And **you can't, you can't reproduce that in the classroom**. You really can't. [...] So I think it can, you know, if you multiply that out, **you can really get much more out of a course**, any course, whether you're a student or a tutor, if you can bring in those **global perspectives**. I think that's a real benefit. [...] once they experience a useful conversation, or make a connection with someone outside of their course, they **learn things that they wouldn't have done in the classroom**.



Interviewee

L

# Findings

Why have lecturers decided to embed a MOOC into their F2F modules?

- Multidirectional input

I am opposed to the fact that I got my specialisms, I'm not a specialist in everything, you know? [...] there's no way that I could ever give that much, you know, that breadth of different approaches and expertise. So I think that was a really good thing about it, you know? It's like, you get **access to experts [from] throughout the institution.**



So I think they'll get the benefits of kind of a **wider collection of academics and researchers, and also heritage professionals** too. So Yeah, I think that's, that's also kind of part of it. It's about kind of **expanding the scope of what's possible.**



# Findings

## Why have lecturers decided to embed a MOOC into their F2F modules?

- Real life learning and interactions

what I'm getting them to do, through studying the course, is to actually **practice what I think a lot of the things they'll need for the future of work are**, what is largely about digital communication, digital collaboration, online research, creating and building digital profiles, all that kind of thing.



Well, because I just want the students to **experience on the skin, what it's like to be engaged with technology**, because if they just learn about technology, they do not experience it. So they might have a lot of ideas, beliefs, and stereotypes about online. And **until they live it, they see what it is like, they cannot judge really.**



# Findings

Why have lecturers decided to embed a MOOC into their F2F modules?

- Digital and other transferable skills

I think we tend to **assume that [students] know [how to learn online], but they don't necessarily**. Even really basic things, like, how to make a comment, or how to add in a link. I think, when you've done this a lot, you just take it for granted, but for someone who's never done it before, it isn't necessarily obvious. And just think about **Netiquette** as well, like, you know, how to give encouraging feedback, and not to not to be critical of people whose languages, whose first language isn't English. [...] and it always surprises me that some people just struggle with that. **We're told all the time that young people in particular are great with technology but they're not. They're really not. They might know how to converse on WhatsApp, but they don't think about it in terms of learning or employability.**



# Findings

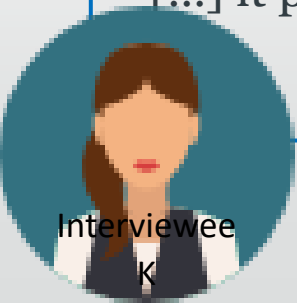
## Why have lecturers decided to embed a MOOC into their F2F modules?

- Additional resource

I have a variety of students on my course, and **some of them find what I teach them quite challenging**, and I thought it would exemplify things.



I think it is a good way of kind of **introducing some of the discussions** that we're gonna be having. [...] it provides them with quite a **good introduction as well in terms of the academic content**, and then obviously, they go into a lot more detail [in class].



# Findings

Why have lecturers decided to embed a MOOC into their F2F modules?

- Other reasons
  - Extra/Richer feedback
  - Better platform
  - Learning flexibility and inclusivity
  - Innovation



# Findings

What were some of the **BENEFITS** and obstacles that lecturers experienced with this practice?

- Teaching practice

it would allow me [...] to **compile some concepts that maybe didn't look quite clear in the way they were formulating their responses** [...]. So I could compile a quick list and then use it to say, hey, look at this, we need to develop a more nuanced understanding of that. Or I would actually go and say it in the comments, how about this?



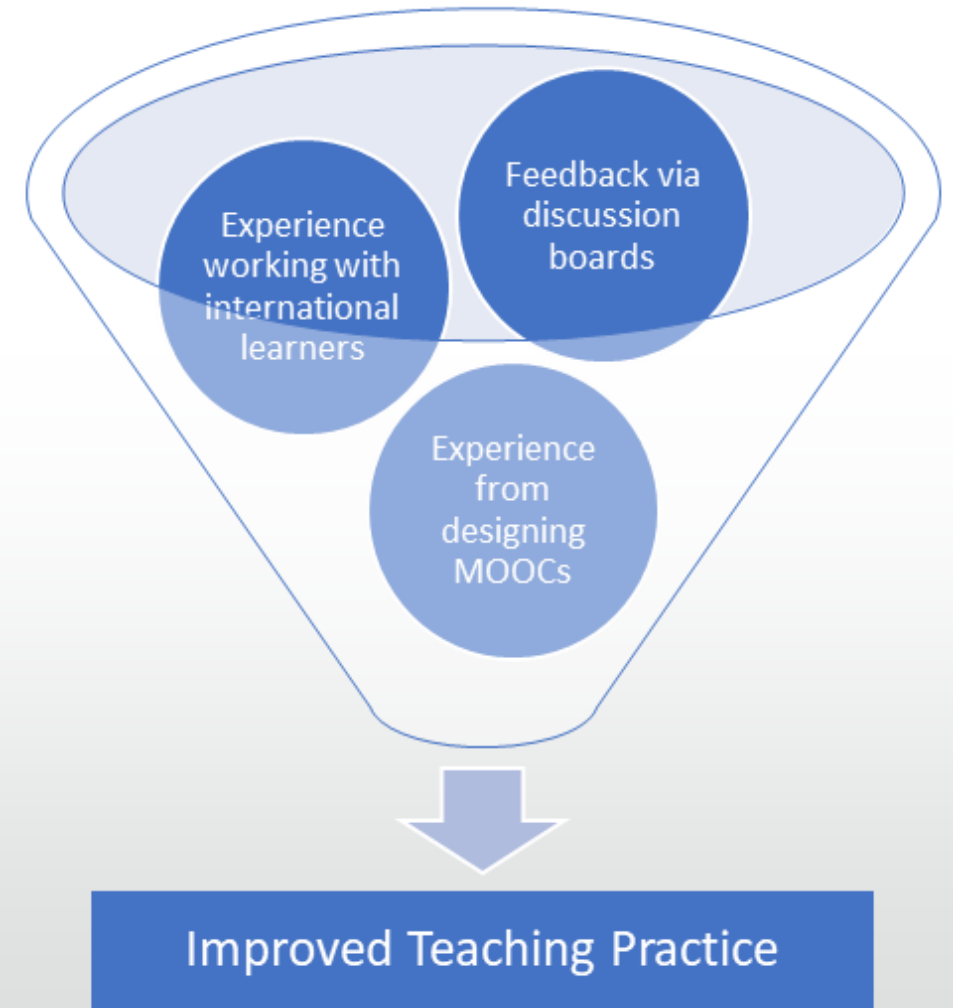
Being involved in MOOCs **has definitely impacted my teaching**. So I became much **more aware of the value of online resources**. [...]. So my use of online resources, I think is more sophisticated, or maybe not sophisticated, but there's more of it than it was before I got involved with MOOCs.



# Findings

What were some of the **BENEFITS** and obstacles that lecturers experienced with this practice?

- Get feedback and reflect on students' learning experience
- Lecturers and students able to take part in international conversations
- Work with students from different backgrounds
- Become more language aware



# Findings

What were some of the **BENEFITS** and obstacles that lecturers experienced with this practice?

- Feedback

I think I am a better tutor online as **I can give a more considered response to questions**, look things up etc without having to give an immediate answer.



- Novelty and unpredictability

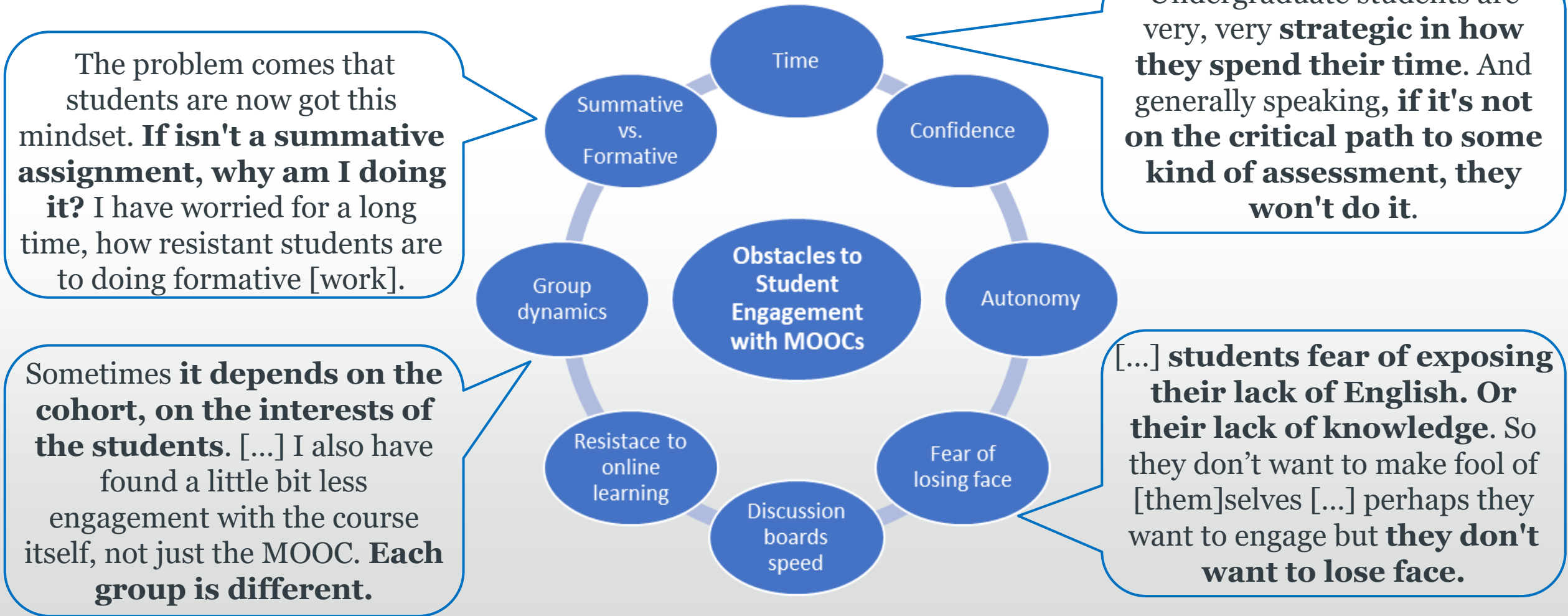
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# Findings

What were some of the benefits and **OBSTACLES** that lecturers experienced with this practice?

- Student Engagement and Motivations



# Findings

What were some of the benefits and **OBSTACLES** that lecturers experienced with this practice?

- Control over the MOOC

One of the practical difficulties, is that FutureLearn now **restricts the amount of time that learners can access the course**, and unless they actually pay for it. [...] So we are using the project money to pay for the students to have ongoing access to the MOOC. [...] so they'll be able to access it right through the lengths of the course and draw specific topics for their assessment at the end of module. [...] **but it's difficult, you know, unless you've got this budget, it's too expensive to encourage people to do it otherwise.**



The fact that **the MOOC wasn't fully in our control was a bit problematic** as well. So that was difficult.

# Findings

What were some of the benefits and **OBSTACLES** that lecturers experienced with this practice?

- Time consuming

Well it's **time consuming**. So whoever does it, In fact, I tried to bring on board a colleague, and he thought it was **too time consuming** for his taste.



One of the obstacles [...] is that I have had **very little time** to sit down. I always think, next year I'm going to have so much time, and I'm going to really integrate this so well. And then a thousand new things happen. And life happens, or many other projects happen. And I am **integrating at the last minute**. More time would be ideal to get a better integration and make the most of it.



# Findings

What were some of the benefits and **OBSTACLES** that lecturers experienced with this practice?

- Students' inexperience with and beliefs of online learning

they may have never heard of FutureLearn [...] But **they've got this preconception that it's somehow cheap.** [...] Often students think that if the university is making them do an online course that it's somehow a cop out, it's kind of trying to save money. And they much rather just sit in a room and go to sleep whilst someone is talking. And this is really frustrating. [...] **You're struggling from the start a bit because people seem to think it's a negative thing.** So that's a shame.



So we had to book a lab, and **I had to make sure they understood the various levels of difficulties** even for passwords, because the most students did not understand it was not my MOOC. So I had to explain that it was not my MOOC, that they had to register for FutureLearn, then I had to explain they didn't need to use the University password because it was something else. **And then they got a bit confused [...].**





# Findings

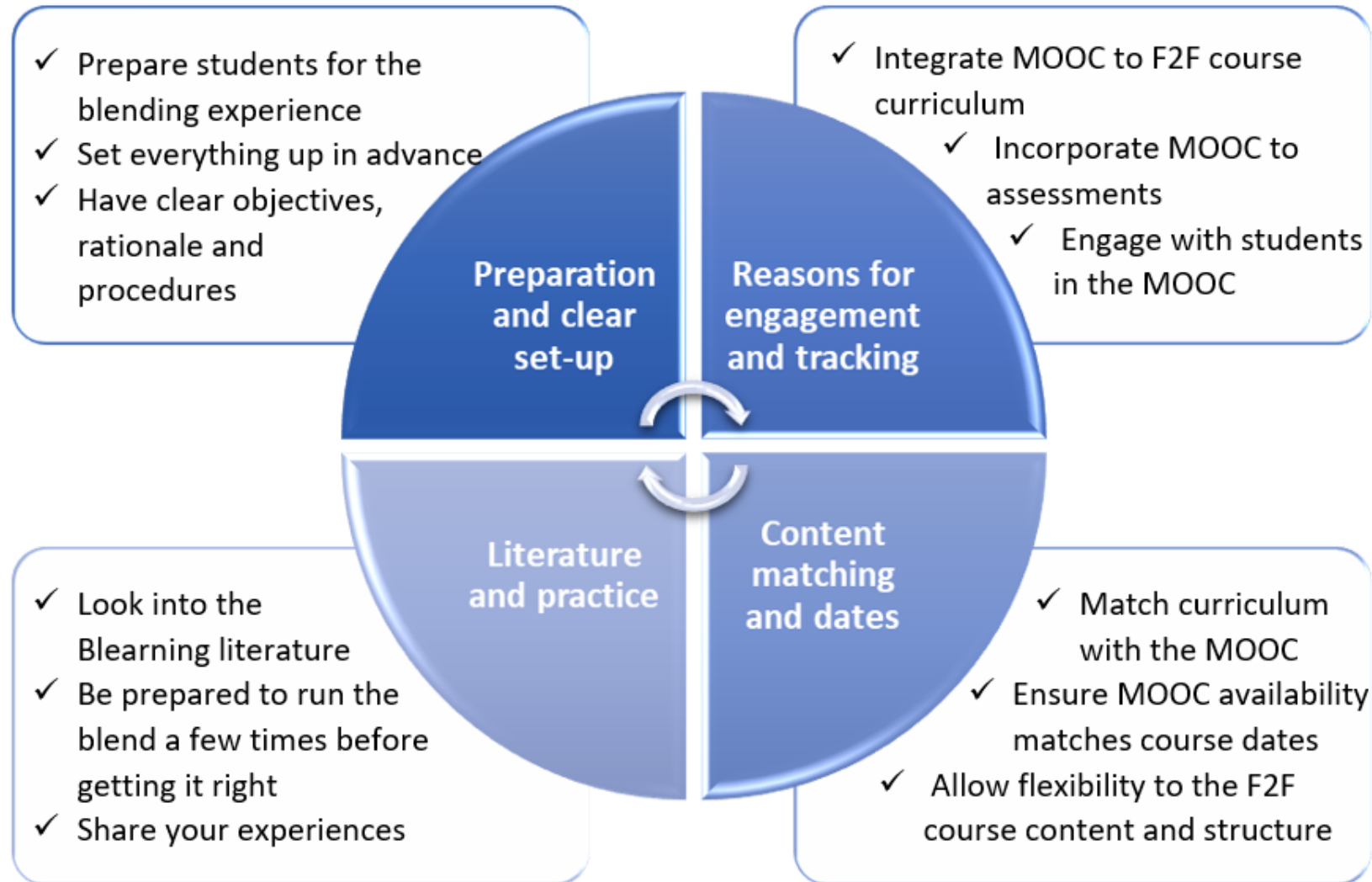
What were some of the benefits and **OBSTACLES** that lecturers experienced with this practice?

- Other obstacles
  - MOOC interaction risks
  - Setting the right expectations
  - Different audiences



# Findings

What pedagogical, structural or practical suggestions did the lecturers have for new MOOC blend practitioners?



# Final thoughts

- Rationale for MOOC-blend and its benefits/obstacles
- Suggestions on what to consider when integrating MOOCs into their F2F teaching
- In order to facilitate MOOC-based blends,
  - universities need to back lecturers to ensure they have the support they need when implementing such educational innovation;
  - universities need to address students' misconceptions on using online technologies, and offer students the digital and linguistic support they need to engage online and make use of the web in their learning process;
  - MOOC platforms ought to support lecturers and universities with a more flexible or different access to their courses.

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