

The Challenges of Online Writing Learning via Microsoft Teams

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the challenges that EFL learners at Van Lang university faced when they learned writing in an online course via Microsoft Teams. 96 third-year students from two classes were required to complete a 10-item questionnaire for their online 10-week writing course. The findings revealed that they faced nine kinds of challenges related to technical problems, lack of concentration, lack of interaction, time management, health problems, gaining knowledge, motivation, psychological problems, and collaboration. The study suggests some implications for teaching writing skills to EFL learners online through Microsoft Teams.

Keywords: Writing skills, EFL learners, Microsoft Teams, online, social interaction

1. Introduction

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, students have to take writing courses online via Microsoft Teams. Scholars in the world have studied learners' taking online courses through Microsoft Teams and other online platforms. Allen and Seaman (2017) reported that about six million students enrolled in online classes in 2015 compared to 1.6 million learners in 2002. This means that a growing number of students have been learning online. It is also a case at Van Lang university where EFL students have been enrolling in online writing classes via Microsoft Teams with numerous challenges.

There are some advantages and disadvantages of learning online assisted by technology. Dorf (2019) classifies educational technologies into learning tools, educational resources, learning environments, and learning methods. Moreover, Bentley et al. (2012) and Nguyen (2015) support teaching and learning processes through internet connections, and this kind of learning process is regarded as an online/virtual learning system. Furthermore, Rojabi (2020) shows some differences between online learning and teaching from the conventional face-to-face classroom where students are present physically. He indicates the disadvantages of the face-to-face classroom, such as students' lack of chances for communication, self-confidence, and responding, and he also points out the advantages of online learning, including flexibility and

an engaging learning environment, which are beneficial for students learning. Additionally, Landrum et al. (2020) assert that virtual interaction in online classes offers convenience and flexibility thanks to unique characteristics of a learning management system, including authoring tools, feedback tools, rubrics, chat discussion, assignment submission, and files sharing. Also, Zayapragassarazan (2020) observes that online learning improves the learner's learning autonomy and self-discipline for their learning progress. However, Nguyen and Duong (2021) conducted their study on challenges of E-learning through Microsoft Teams for EFL students at Van Lang University in Covid-19 and found that the challenges they faced stem from two sources including external essentials and learners' own consciousness. These challenges were related to the internet connection, machine error, software error, and so forth.

A great number of researchers (e.g., Henderson et al., 2020; Tsai, 2018) have agreed that the Microsoft Teams application supplies better useful features such as chat rooms, collaborative discussion, content sharing, and video conferencing.

At Van Lang University, EFL students have shifted from traditional classes to the online classroom due to the Covid-19 pandemic. A lot of students have not been familiar with this way of teaching and learning writing. This is the reason why these students have challenges with online writing learning via Microsoft Teams. This study aimed to investigate the challenges that EFL students at Van Lang university face when they learn writing courses online through Microsoft Teams.

2. Literature review

Online learning

Online learning is considered an effective learning method. Zayapragassarazan (2020) pinpointed that online learning encourages learners' autonomy and self-discipline for their learning progress. Rojabi (2020) mentions that the student's participation, motivation, self-discipline, and learners' autonomy are emphasized in online learning.

MS Teams is considered as one of the effective online learning platforms. Microsoft Teams is a loud app digital hub that combines conversations, meetings, files, and apps together in a single learning management system (Microsoft, 2018). MS Teams is used by a great number of learners and teachers because its applications are easily downloaded through desktop and mobile devices, and outstanding features consist of chat rooms, collaborative discussion, screen content sharing, and video conferencing (Henderson et al., 2020; Ilag, 2020; McVey et al., 2019).

Challenges of learning via Microsoft Teams

There are some disadvantages of Microsoft Teams. First, teachers are unable to see their student's body language. It means that there is a lack of nonverbal hint expression of confusion on the students' faces which helps the teacher measure their students' understanding (Rojabi, 2020). Students cannot communicate with their teachers face-to-face all the time. Additionally,

teachers and students have to take more time to assess learners' online teaching and learning process (Bakerson et al., 2015).

Moreover, Sun (2014) points that online learning lacks an organized schedule, repeated studying, and self-motivation. Also, previous studies have examined the level of learner's satisfaction towards interaction and learning environment. Fortune et al. (2011) observe that dimensions of online learning comprise face-to-face communication, learning environment, technology, preferences, and collaboration. These factors have impacts on teaching and learning writing online via Microsoft Teams.

Previous studies

Some researchers have investigated online learning via Microsoft Teams. Rojabi (2020) conducted his study to explore EFL students' attitudes towards online learning via Microsoft Teams. His study involved 28 university students who completed questionnaires through Google Forms after the course. The findings indicated that online learning through Microsoft Teams optimally enhanced the students' online learning environment. They had positive attitudes towards student-student interaction and student-teacher one when they experienced online learning via Microsoft Teams. The study suggested that future studies investigate students' satisfaction with taking online classes and the benefits of online classes via Microsoft Teams.

Similarly, Lin and Lin (2015) maintain that student-student and student-teacher interaction should be constructed to enhance communication and discussion in the process of teaching and learning. Besides, Radovan and Makovec (2015) assert that a learning environment is essential to create enthusiasm for students' learning. This motivates them to study better.

Tran (2021) carried out her study to examine the effectiveness of using Microsoft Teams for EFL learning of freshmen at Van Lang University. Eighty first-year students completed the fifteen-item questionnaire. Her findings indicated that utilizing Microsoft Teams effectively taught and learned EFL at Van Lang university and that the students had positive attitudes towards the advantages of using Microsoft Teams for their online study. However, she also pointed out some disadvantages of Microsoft Teams in online teaching and learning.

In addition, Ha and Ngo (2021) investigated the challenges of listening comprehension faced by English majors at Van Lang university when they studied listening skills via Microsoft Teams. 135 students participated in the study, and they had to complete questionnaires and answer for a semi-structured interview. The findings revealed that the students faced some challenges such as psychology, technology using skills, English competence, listening activities, and study environment when they studied listening skills online through Microsoft Teams. They also gave some suggestions for teaching and learning listening skills online via Microsoft Teams.

Research gap

There has been a great number of research on the benefits of online learning via Microsoft Teams; however, only a few research studies have been carried out to study the challenges of learning writing courses online through Microsoft Teams in Vietnam and at Van Lang University. This study aimed to fill this gap to investigate the challenges encountered by EFL students at Van Lang University in their online writing course via Microsoft Teams.

Research Question

To fulfill the purpose of the study, the study was designed to address the following research question:

What challenges did the students at Van Lang university face in online writing courses via Microsoft Teams?

3. Methodology

This study was conducted in two online writing classes at Van Lang University. Ninety-six students from these two writing classes participated in the study. They were third-year students, and they took this course as a compulsory subject in their learning process via Microsoft Teams. After finishing the ten-week writing course, the students completed the 10-item questionnaire about their challenges in online writing class.

This study employed a mixed-method to collect the data. The questionnaire consisted of 10 items in which there were nine items in the form of 5-point Likert (1: strongly disagree; 2: disagree; 3: neutral; 4: agree; and 5: strongly agree), and one item for the opened-ended question. The questionnaire survey was delivered and collected to examine the students' challenges in their online writing via Microsoft Teams.

All the responses to the questionnaire were collected online through Google Forms. Additionally, the data obtained from the questionnaire were presented in the form of tables and figures to indicate the challenges that the students at Van Lang university faced in their online writing course through Microsoft Teams.

4. Results/Findings and discussion

The challenges that the students at Van Lang university faced in online writing course via Microsoft Teams

The 10-item questionnaire was designed to collect data for quantitative and qualitative analysis, as shown in Table 1. The data analysis provided the percentages of the student's answers to the first nine questions of the questionnaire.

Table 1: Questionnaire for challenges of online writing learning

Challenges of online writing learning	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1. I have technical problems when I take this online writing course via Microsoft Teams.	1.0%	8.3%	27.1%	40.6%	22.9%
2. I am unable to concentrate on my learning when I take this online writing course via Microsoft Teams.	4.2%	18.8%	38.5%	34.4%	4.2%
3. There is a lack of student-student and student-teacher interaction when I take this online writing course via Microsoft Teams.	1.0%	13.5%	39.6%	37.5%	8.3%
4. I am not good at managing time when I take this online writing course via Microsoft Teams.	2.1%	27.1%	38.5%	27.1%	5.2%
5. I have some health problems when I take this online writing course via Microsoft Teams.	2.1%	20.8%	44.8%	25.0%	7.3%
6. It is difficult for me to gain knowledge when I take this online writing course via Microsoft Teams.	1.0%	12.5%	45.8%	31.3%	9.4%
7. I am not motivated when I take this online writing course via Microsoft Teams.	3.1%	16.7%	43.8%	29.2%	7.3%
8. I have some psychological problems when I take this online writing course via Microsoft Teams.	0%	5.2%	35.4%	41.7%	16.7%
9. I find it difficult to collaborate with my classmates when I take this online writing course via Microsoft Teams.	3.2%	31.6%	40.0%	17.9%	7.4%
10. What challenges did you face when you took this online writing course via Microsoft Teams?					

The qualitative analysis for the 10th item of the questionnaire revealed that the students at Van Lang university faced numerous challenges when they learned their writing courses online via Microsoft Teams.

Technical problems

The students reported that they faced some technical problems. The slow internet transmission or wi-fi had impacts on their online writing learning. Also, they lacked digital devices and equipment to study online. Even their laptop or cell phone microphone was out of work, so they could not answer the teacher's questions. Besides, they were annoyed with the redundant noise from their online classmate's microphone and cell phone and the structure of files on Microsoft Teams because they thought that the file structure was confusing for users to use and some tools

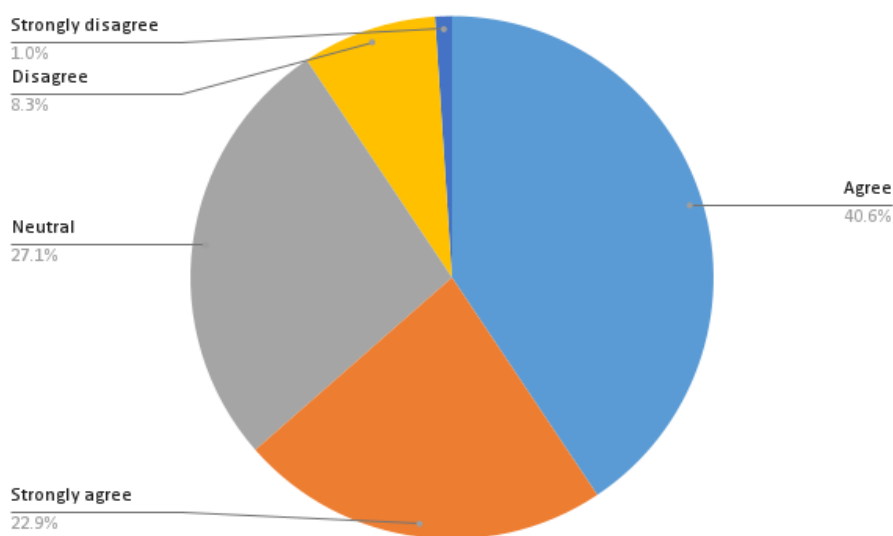
on Microsoft Teams were similar and redundant.

Table 2: Technical problems

Student	Comments
1	The disadvantage is that I have already clicked submit when submitting the article but haven't turned it in, so I haven't submitted it yet.
6	The connection sometimes is weak
8	Wi-fi connection sometimes is not stable. My laptop also has some mistakes after a long time of using.
9	Slow transmission
11	Disconnected with the internet or cannot join the class.
12	Sometimes I lost my internet connection
13	The wi-fi connection made me feel difficult to listen to the lecturers.
14	Sometimes my internet isn't good
16	Slow internet
17	Technology issues
18	Network problem
29	Sometimes I have trouble when Microsoft Teams doesn't show assignment reminders or teacher notifications
31	App does not have high security
34	Slow internet is a problem that makes me disconnected to the teacher
35	No equipment, no facilities make me difficult to study
37	I usually lost connection
39	Disadvantages : feel disconnected
40	My challenge is that I must listen to the lesson, but the microphone of teacher is not loud enough.
42	Perhaps it is a technological problem.
45	I face a lot of difficulties when I study online because I don't have a laptop. The network can be lost at any time because I use 3G and have to register every day which costs a lot of money.
59	Sometimes the connection is lost.
63	Slow internet connectivity
64	The internet at my home sometimes disrupted the lesson
65	Sometimes the internet connection is slow and I get kicked out of class.
68	Slow internet connection.
69	No mic; Teacher do not usually check the chatbox (big disadvantage).
77	Sometimes when the wi-fi connection was slow, it affected the learning process
83	When I try to understand the lecture, I have to listen carefully to what the teacher said, but a low Internet connection is obstructed that I cannot hear at all. And sometimes, people get distracted by many things around them while learning online.
86	File structure confuses users, similar and redundant tools.

The percentages of the participants who strongly agreed and agreed that they had some technical problems were 22.9% and 40.6%, respectively. Only 9.3% of the participants answered that they faced no technical challenges.

Figure 1: Technical problems



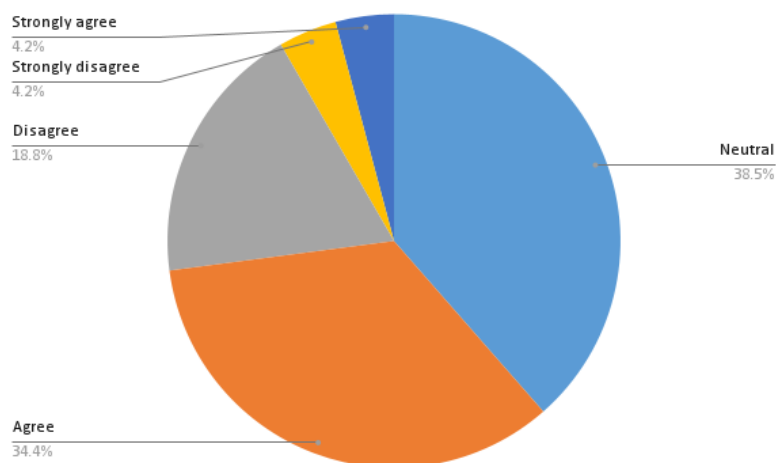
Lack of concentration

The findings revealed that the students lost their concentration during their online writing class. They answered that they did not have a private place for learning, and they sometimes did not know exactly what they were studying and did not understand teachers' online lectures. Additionally, they feel distracted during their online writing class because of certain inconveniences.

Table 3: Lack of concentration

Student	Comments
2	I can't completely focus on the lesson. In terms of the inconvenience, I don't think Microsoft Teams has one.
4	Hard to know exactly that students are studying or not
10	Online learning often causes us to lose more focused because things around like phones, drowsiness, ...
19	Hard to concentrate on professor's lecture
27	You will have to carefully pay attention to the lesson or you won't understand anything, because I think online teaching would be hard for us if you are neglecting
30	May not be able to fully concentrate on the lecture
32	I'm easily distracted, hard to concentrate, less interaction.
33	Although I was a bit stuck with housework, I managed to arrange it.
45	I am easily distracted because the school environment at home has a lot of distractions such as sounds, food, ...
88	I don't have the personal space for learning, the noise around is so loudly

18.8% and 34.4% of the participants strongly agreed and agreed, respectively. So, over half of the students felt distracted in their online writing class via Microsoft Teams. 38.5% of them had neutral answers, which means they neither agreed nor disagreed.

Figure 2: Lack of concentration*Lack of interaction*

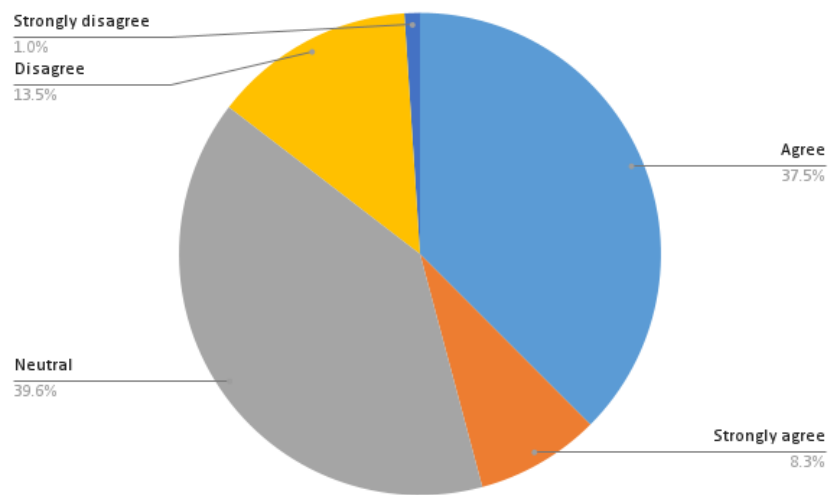
The findings indicated that there was less interaction with their teachers and classmates in the online classroom than that in traditional one. Not interacting with teachers face-to-face had an influence on their understanding of what they learned. Also, they reported that the class became less fun because of the lack of face-to-face interaction with their teachers and peers.

Table 4: Lack of interaction

Student	Comments
15	Lack of interactions
18	Less interaction with teachers
22	Online student feedback is limited
26	The disadvantage is not being able to communicate directly like in real life
45	Students also do not interact directly with teachers, so they often do not know clearly what they are learning
50	Teacher cannot see my reactions in the class
52	I think without direct interaction, the class is less fun
53	Too many things distract me
76	Can't interact face to face

The findings revealed that 37.5% of the students agreed that they needed more interaction with teachers and classmates, and 8.3% of them strongly agreed that they faced communicative problems with teachers and classmates when they studied writing online. They thought that the online, face-to-face interaction was not like direct face-to-face communication in real life.

Figure 3: Lack of interaction



Time management

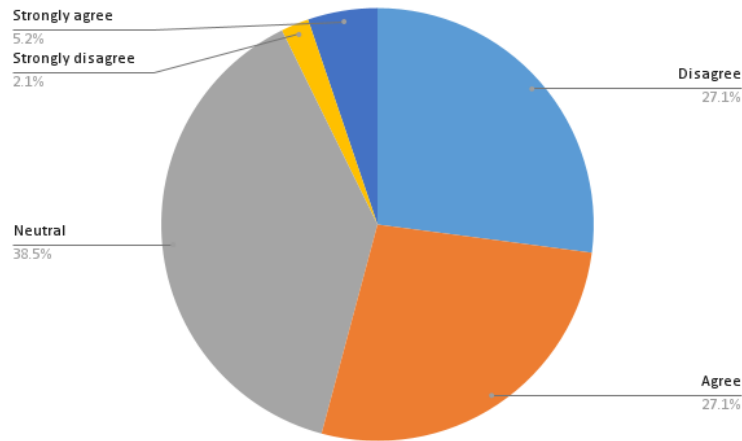
As seen from Table 5, the students had a challenge of deadline duration. They also believed that online courses required more time than on-campus classes, which asked them to study independently much more. The students were found to lack time management skills, so they could not remember when to submit their online assignments on time.

Table 5: Time management

Student	Comments
75	Deadline duration
84	Online courses require more time than on-campus classes, allow you to be more independent
22	Time management skills

The findings revealed that 27.1% and 5.25 of the students respectively agreed and strongly agreed that they lacked time management skills. They did not arrange their time properly.

Figure 4: Time management



Health problems

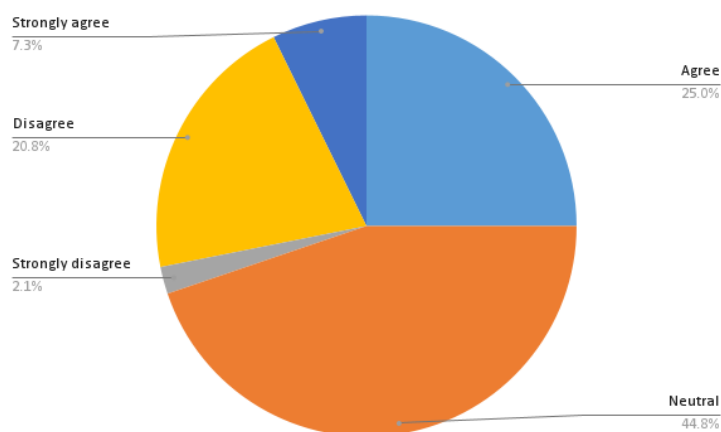
The findings showed that the students had some health problems. Their eyes got tired because they spent too many hours looking at the screen. They found that their eyesight and vision got worse. Therefore, studying writing online via MS Teams had impact on the students' health.

Table 6: Health problems

Student	Comments
3	Tired eyes
45	I feel tired, blurred vision.
51	Sitting too much will affect eyesight
57	I get tired looking at the screen
60	Studying online has a lot of impacts on my health

The results showed that 27.1% of the participants strongly agreed and agreed on health problems brought by online writing learning. 20.8% of them disagreed that online learning caused some health problems.

Figure 5: Health problems



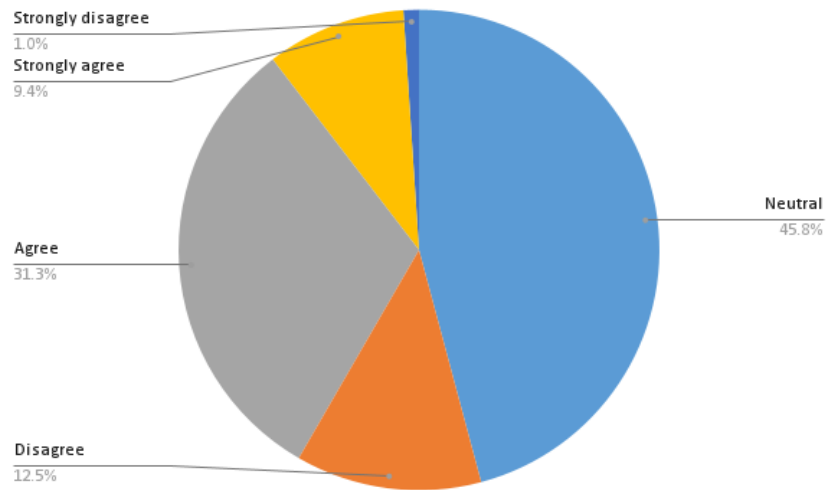
Gaining knowledge

The students commented that their ability to absorb lessons was limited in comparison with their gaining knowledge at school. This leads to a lack of understanding of lectures, which impacts their academic performance. They reported that their knowledge from online writing classes never showed real understanding. This can be explained that they cut/copied and pasted online materials to submit their assignments in the online writing course.

Table 7: Gaining knowledge

Student	Comments
18	The ability to absorb lessons is more limited than in school
45	Whether the student understands the lesson or not, the exercises never show real understanding.
47	Lack of understanding the lecture
60	I can't understand the lesson as I do at school

The percentages of 9.4% and 31.3% showed the number of the students who respectively strongly agreed and agreed on their inadequate knowledge gained from the online writing course. 46.8% of the students had neutral answers. However, 13.5% of the students disagreed on not gaining knowledge from online writing courses.

Figure 6: Gaining knowledge

Motivation

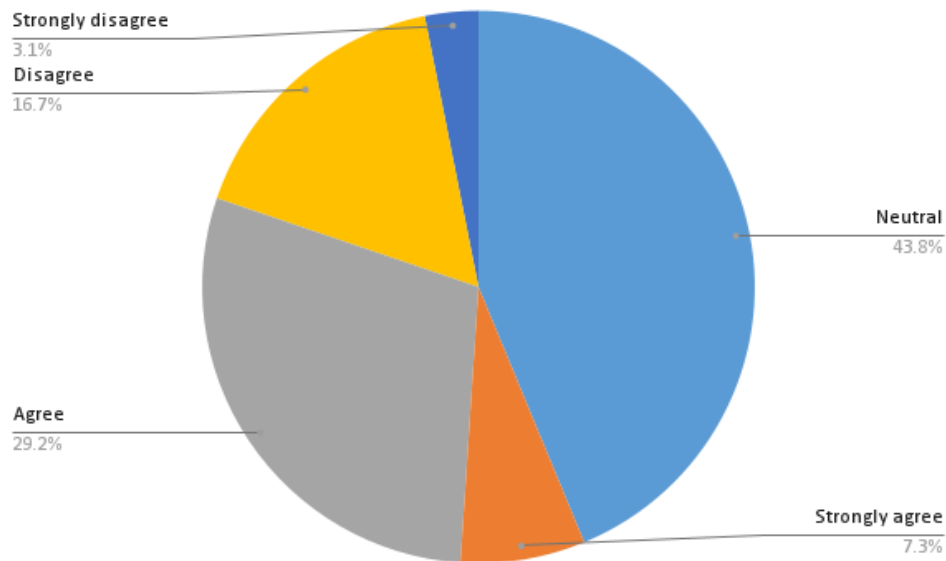
The findings indicated that the participants lacked motivation in the online writing course. They did not have enough motivation to study as much as they did at school. They believed that online writing learning required strong self-motivation of EFL learners.

Table 8: Lack of motivation

Student	Comments
57	I lack motivation
60	I don't have the motivation to study as much as I do at school
22	Requires strong self-motivation

7.3% and 29.2% of the students strongly agreed and agreed on their lack of motivation when they learn writing courses online. 43.8% of the participant answered neutrally. Only 19.8% of the students were found to have enough motivation for their online writing course.

Figure 7: Lack of motivation



Psychological problems

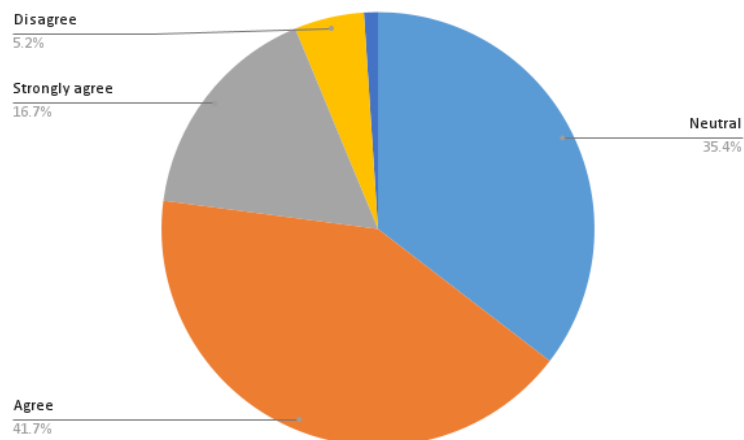
The findings also indicated that the students had some psychological problems when they studied writing courses online. They thought that staying away from school made them uncomfortable. They felt drowsy and lazy. Also, they believed that learning writing courses online via MS Teams caused their social isolation. It means that they were not comfortable and motivated for their online writing learning.

Table 9: Psychological problems

Student	Comments
22	Staying away from one place makes me not comfortable
22	MS Team can cause social Isolation
75	Sloth, drowsy feeling

The number of the students who agreed that they had some psychological problems related to their online writing learning was 58.4%. Only 5.2% of the participants disagreed that they had psychological problems. However, 35.4% of the participants answered neutrally.

Figure 8: Psychological problems



Collaboration

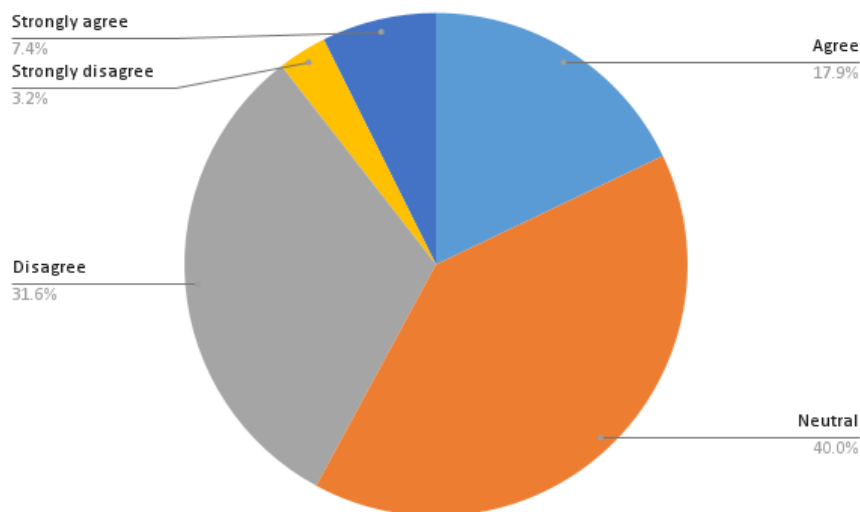
The students commented that they could not collaborate with their classmates in the online writing course. Additionally, the feedback from their teacher and peers was slow. Moreover, they reported that there was a lack of communication skill development in online writing classes.

Table 10: Collaboration

Student	Comments
74	Less connect and slow feedback
22	Lack of communicational skill development in the online class
73	I can't exchange with others because while online learning. I can't make friends and contact them if I need to ask about the lesson.

The findings revealed that the students could not collaborate with their friends well in their online writing courses, with the percentages of 7.4% of the students who strongly agreed and 17.9% of the students who agreed. 40.0% of the participants answered neutrally. 33.8% disagreed that they could not cooperate with their friends when they studied writing online. In general, the students could not exchange ideas with other classmates during online learning.

Figure 9: Lack of collaboration



5. Discussion

From the findings of the study, it can be said that the challenges that the EFL students at Van Lang university faced were synthesized in the following table.

Table 11: The challenges encountered by EFL students in their online writing learning

Number	Challenges of learning writing online
1	Technical problems
2	Lack of concentration
3	Lack of interaction
4	Time management
5	Health problems
6	Gaining knowledge
7	Lack of motivation
8	Psychological problems
9	Lack of collaboration

The findings of this study were not in line with Poston et al. (2020) that Microsoft Teams would be beneficial when there were group work and collaborative assignments. Additionally, the findings of this study were not completely similar to Rojabi's (2020) findings indicating that the students felt comfortable in discussing collaboratively and actively engaged in learning online because this online learning was new and challenging.

This study's findings were aligned with Nguyen and Duong's (2021) findings that the challenges the students at Van Lang university faced were related to external factors and learners' perceptions.

It is suggested that EFL writing teachers should consider these challenges to facilitate their students' online writing learning. From these challenges of online learning via Microsoft Teams, Rojabi (2020) suggests that teachers should supply learners with non-linguistic expressions (i.e., facial expressions or body language), useful learning materials and online learning instruction to encourage to actively engage in online learning classroom. The results of this study was partly similar to Fortune et al. (2011)' study on some dimensions of online learning such as face-to-face communication, learning environment, technology, and collaboration.

6. Conclusion

The study found a great number of challenges that EFL students at Van Lang university faced. The challenges were related to (1) technical problems, (2) lack of concentration, (3) lack of interaction, (4) time management, (5) health problems, (6) gaining knowledge, (7) motivation, (8) psychological problems, and (9) collaboration. The study results will help the EFL teachers and learners recognize the challenges and find ways to overcome them in the process of learning and teaching writing online via Microsoft Teams.

This study bears some limitations. The size of the participants was small, so the findings of the study could be overgeneralized. Additionally, the study failed to use other instruments such as tests and interviews to examine the influences of the above challenges on students' academic achievements in the online writing course.

Future research should explore strategies that students use to overcome the above challenges in their online writing class via Microsoft Teams and should use a diversity of research instruments to investigate the topic of this study more deeply.

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