

A Case Study of Home-based Teaching and Learning Practice at Ton Duc Thang University

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Abstract

Online teaching has not been widely applied in education until the severe widespread outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic on a global scale. Like other educational institutions, Ton Duc Thang university promptly switched to online teaching practice for all courses for the sake of teachers' and students' safety and health protection. To investigate the implementation of home-based teaching practice at TDTU as well as its advantages and disadvantages, a case study was launched by the university with the participation of three teachers and 76 non-English major students from three English classes at elementary and pre-intermediate level. The study was a qualitative design; observations and interviews were used as research methods. The researcher found that there are generally three main stages in every three-period online lesson: teacher's presentation with Zoom, students' assignment in Google classroom, and teacher's constructive feedback with Zoom. Teachers and students praised geographical convenience, time flexibility, and a customized learning environment and experienced technical problems. Students found it difficult to motivate themselves to study, had no self-discipline, and interactions were limited. Teachers also had difficulty in class control, and teachers exerted anxiety over technology use. These findings contributed to further research on online teaching practice as well as considerations as to whether face-to-face teaching and learning should be replaced in the long run.

Keywords: home-based teaching and learning, Ton Duc Thang University, Zoom

1. Introduction

With the ubiquity of the Internet and the accessibility of technology, the demand for online learning has been increasingly popular since the 1990s. Accordingly, a great number of researchers have delved into the effectiveness of online courses in comparison with traditional on-campus schooling in attempts to work out which model of education is better. While a meta-study conducted in 2010 reveals that e-learning would help enhance students' academic performance (Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, & Jones, 2010), plenty of other research favored the traditional in-class method over its online counterpart. The quintessence is the study carried out in 2002 by Noble, proving that the student participants preferred face-to-face instruction because of its more desirable learning outcomes. To weigh up the two training methods to have an objective view, there are many factors that need taking into consideration.

Due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 virus worldwide, many educational institutions have decided to replace traditional teaching and learn with online courses. In particular, Ton Duc Thang University swiftly switched to technology-mediated learning with the aid of Zoom and Google classroom. To make a humble contribution to the research into the field of online teaching and learning, this study was implemented, entitled "*A case study of home-based teaching and learning practice at Ton Duc Thang university*".

2. Literature review

2.1 Definitions of common terms in online education

In your literature review and also when describing your teaching environment, you need to tell us something about pedagogy. What is the pedagogy discussed in the literature for online learning? What pedagogy was applied in your case study context, and what exactly the students and the teachers were doing? You need to include a lot of detail in your paper to be interesting for people to hear about your context. You don't have to get things right but share some information to all relate to it: Include lots of detail.

There are various terms for online education coined by linguists and researchers. Some common ones are chosen and discussed as follows.

Keegan (2005) called this kind of educational approach “distance learning”, which does not take place in physical classrooms but over the Internet instead. According to him, one absolute necessity of this kind of education is the employment of technical media such as computer and video to create two-way communication between the instructors and the learners.

Additionally, "e-learning" or "m-learning" is also widely used in the era of technological advances. The first term, e-learning, is defined as interactive learning in which multimedia technologies and the Internet are used to improve the quality of learning by enabling access to a variety of online learning or teaching resources (the European Commission, 2001). The second one, m-learning or mobile learning, can be understood as any educational provision where the sole or dominant technologies are hand-held or palmtop devices” (Traxler, 2005). For this definition, it is implied that mobile learning employs a wide range of portable devices such as smartphones, tablets, laptops rather than desktops.

Web-based learning or Web-based education is also a term commonly used in online education. Keegan (2005) defined that web-based education as a "subset of distance education". Barron (1998) considered Web-based learning as "Internet-based learning" and "network-based learning". Therefore, they can all be defined as the method of learning using computers and Internet-supported technologies.

2.2 Types of online education

According to Algahtani (2007), there are two typical online education types, namely computer-based learning and Internet-based learning. Computer-based learning is an instructional approach employing computer software and hardware as the key component for the learning process. In this type of e-learning, a range of computers or laptops is used as the main tool. They can either assist the learning environment with interactive software for Information and Communication Technology or act as an instructional strategy to help the educators or instructors to manage and assess the learners' progress. On the other hand, the second, Internet-based learning, uses the Internet as a medium for the process of learning. Hence, the learners can access the learning content which was made available on the Internet before at anytime and anywhere without the teachers' presence. This type of e-learning provides any time with the comfort of time and space (Almosa, 2001).

On the other hand, Zeitoun (2008) had another way of classifying online education. The total online mode can create either synchronous or asynchronous interactions in his classification. The first mode enables the instructors and the learners to have direct online meetings via the Internet. This means they can have live interactions and get immediate feedback in real-time using video-conferencing or other similar means. Unlike the first mode, asynchronous e-learning is more flexible as the learners can access the e-learning environment whenever or wherever they want. This mode was facilitated by certain platforms and media such as email or thread discussions.

The kind under discussion in this study is computer-based learning or synchronous e-learning. In this case, both the teachers and the students are supposed to possess a computer or a laptop as a main means of conducting the teaching and learning process. With the aid of particular software and platforms, lessons are delivered through direct online class meetings.

2.3 The use of online learning in education

The dramatic development of the Internet and technological tools has led to the widespread use of online learning in education. Mertens (2009) indicated that Internet-based activities had been proved a great help to the learners' process of knowledge transmission. Therefore, many educational institutions like colleges and universities have started to apply blended learning, known as a mixture of traditional education and e-learning, in their teaching curriculum (Fry, 2001). Warschauer (1996) claimed that e-learning enhances the learning progress of the learners at any educational level and facilitates the process of assessment and evaluation, reducing the burden of workload for the teachers. Adding to the view, Keegan (2005) asserted that online learning has been contributing significantly to the changes in the role of instructors and learners. The teachers, known as main knowledge dispensers, would no longer play a major role in the teaching and learning process. Accordingly, the students would tend to employ self-learning during their process of gaining knowledge instead.

2.4 Research questions

The study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How is online teaching implemented in English classes at Ton Duc Thang university?
2. What advantages and disadvantages do teachers and students have during the implementation of online learning and teaching?

3. Methods

3.1 Research participants

Three teachers and 76 students who took part in the study were all from Ton Duc Thang University.

First, all of the three teachers have had at least two years of teaching experiences about the teacher participants. Among them, teacher 3 (T3) spent the longest time working as an English teacher at TDTU, while teacher 1 (T1) was the least experienced teacher in teaching. All three teachers have got bachelor's degrees in TEFL (teaching English to foreign learners) from public universities in Vietnam. Two of them (teachers 2 and 3) acquired Master of Arts in Applied Linguistics and TESOL.

Table 1.

Teachers' information

No.	Information	Teacher 1 (T1)	Teacher 2 (T2)	Teacher 3 (T3)
1	Class in charge	Foundation 2 – group 43	Foundation 3 – group 56	English 1 – group 38
2	Age	25	28	32
3	Years of teaching English	2	5	9
4	Degree/ Certificate of English	Bachelor's degree in TEFL IELTS 7.5	Bachelor's degree in TEFL Master of Arts in Applied Linguistics	Bachelor's degree in TEFL Master of Arts in TESOL

Second, as for students, the number of student participants in the current study was 76. They were first and second-year non-English major students from three classes with different levels. The students major in Chinese, Information Technology, and Accounting.

Table 2.

Students' information

Gender/Class	Foundation 2 – group 43	Foundation 3 – group 56	English 1 - group 38
<i>Male</i>	14	22	8
<i>Female</i>	12	6	14
Total	26	28	22

3.2 Research design

The study was developed as a case study, which is defined as “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single unit” (Mackey and Gass, 1998). This approach is ideal for this study because it can descriptively show “the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances”. According to Creswell (2009), three distinctive types of a case study are intrinsic, collective, and instrumental cases. Among the three, a collective case study that focuses on several cases to provide deep understandings of an issue after comparing or contrasting the cases is a good choice for the researcher in this study. By studying three different classes, the researcher aimed to grasp the practice of online teaching and learning at TDTU as well as its advantages and disadvantages.

3.3 Instruments

To answer the stated research questions, the researcher employed two instruments, observations and interviews.

3.3.1 Observations

A number of class observations were conducted online via the Zoom cloud meetings to delve into how distance learning and teaching were actually done in English classes. The researcher contacted the teacher participants and asked for the codes before the classes started to observe the chosen online classes. The researcher was then available in the class meeting on Zoom five minutes earlier than the students. So as to avoid their attention and any disturbance caused by the observer's presence, the researcher turned off the video so that no one could see him. This could help ensure the study's objectivity as the students would behave comfortably without exerting any inhibitions or nervousness during the observations.

3.3.2 Interviews

In order to get both teachers' and students' opinions about the problems and benefits during online classes, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participation of the three teachers and fourteen selected students from three classes. While the three teachers were coded as T1, T2, and T3, the students were coded as S1, S2, to S15. Because of the quarantine, the interviews were administered online using Zoom cloud meetings and recorded for the sake of data analysis. Each teacher was interviewed at their convenience, whereas the students were invited as a group for the interviews. With the support of the teachers in charge, the researcher contacted the volunteer students via social networks to agree on the date for the interviews. For some students who had scheduling conflicts with their peers, interviews were implemented individually at their earliest convenience. As an act of obedience to

the ethical research principles, all of the participants were informed that their participation in the study was kept confidential and anonymous. All the data collected from the observations and the interviews were then used for analysis by coding and themes grouping.

3.4 Platforms used for online teaching and learning English at TDTU

Online teaching and learning processes at TDTU were conducted with the use of the Zoom app alongside Google classroom. Zoom cloud meetings were the primary tool used for live class meetings where teachers and students had direct interactions. On the other hand, the teacher in charge was responsible for creating a class in Google classroom and then invited the students to join it via their personal email. Google Classroom was a platform where teachers created assignments for the students during and after the class. It also acted as a channel of communication between the teachers and their students. Teachers, who would like to update announcements, i.e., time and dates for online meetings, could make a post directly in Google classroom; and on the other way round, the students may write any inquiries there too.

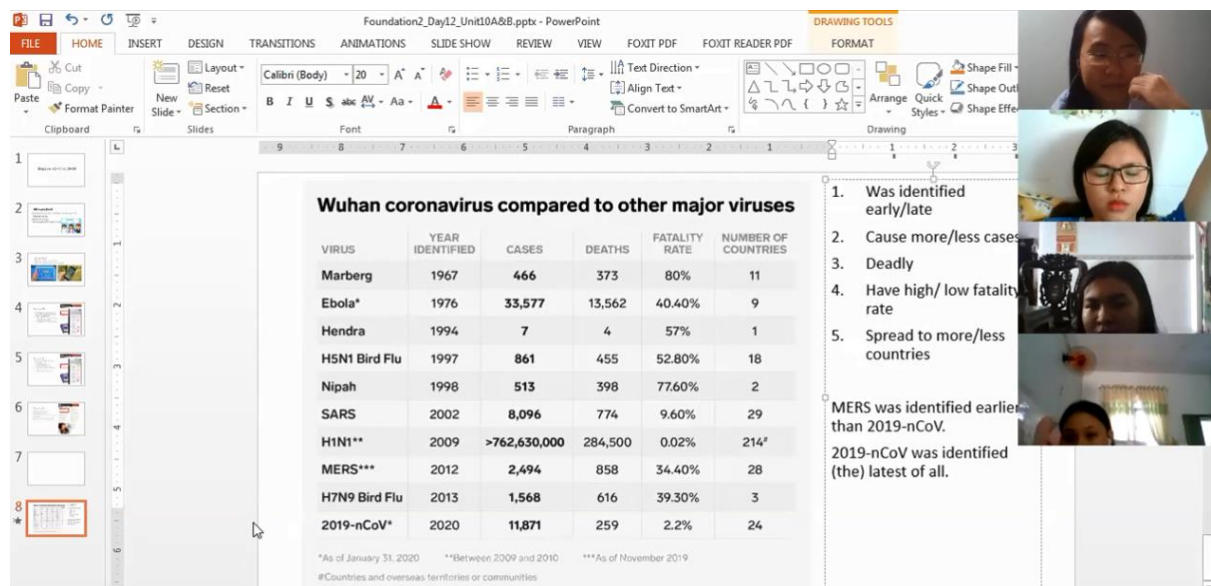


Figure 1: The teacher was delivering her lesson by using Share screen on Zoom app in an online lesson at TDTU

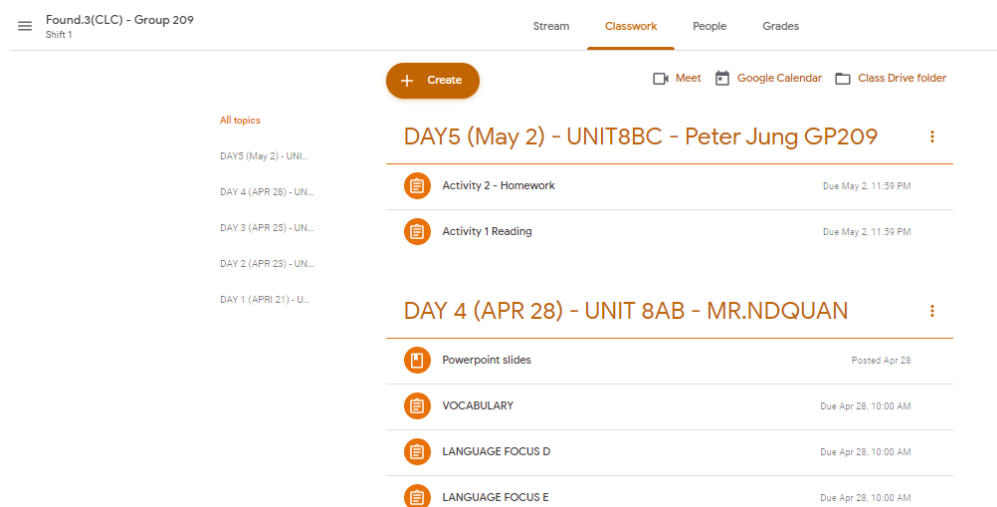


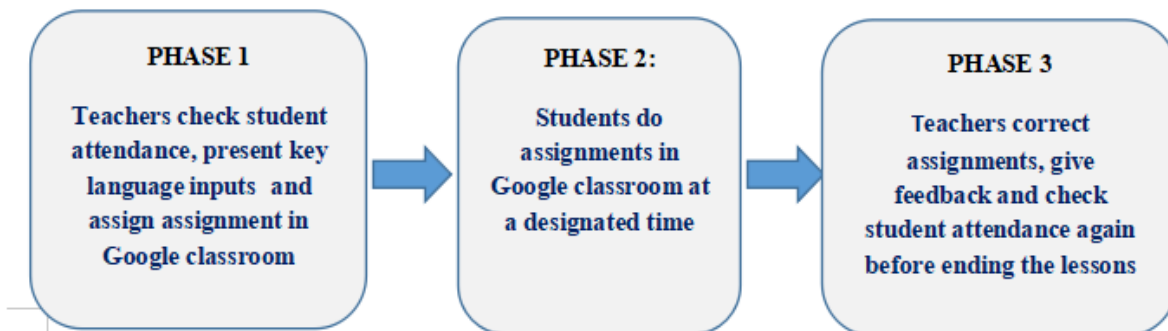
Figure 2: Prior to the online lesson, the teachers had to post materials for language input or exercises on Google

classroom platform

4. Findings and discussion

Research question 1: *How is online teaching implemented in English classes at Ton Duc Thang university?*

According to the data collected from a series of observations in three classes, a three-period English lesson can be divided into three main stages.



Phase 1: Teachers check student attendance, present key language inputs and assign assignments in Google classroom

There was a similarity in each lesson's first period presented by the teachers. They all started with settling the class down for some minutes before checking the students' attendance. Next, they opened the PowerPoint slides prepared beforehand and shared them with the students using the Share screen function. Then the key knowledge inputs were all presented. It was observed that the teachers called on some students to interact from time to time to ensure the students' full attention during the presentation stage. After providing the students with essential knowledge, the teachers checked if they had a good grasp of the lesson or not. Sometimes they asked questions and requested answers from the students, and they also occasionally organized quick games. Before stopping the Zoom app, the teachers reminded the students to visit Google classroom to do exercises assigned in advance. They also went through how to do the assignments and announce the students to the deadline.

Phase 2: Students do assignments in Google classroom at a designated time

As required by the teachers, the students started to do the exercises in Google classroom within the set time frame. The exercises given by the teachers were normally in the forms of short quizzes designed with Google forms. There were also writing tasks or open questions that required the students to write and submit their writing products in word documents. After finishing the assignments, they were allowed to take a short break for about 15 minutes before joining Zoom again for the feedback section.

Phase 3: Teachers correct assignments, give feedback, and check student attendance again

When the students were all present again in Zoom, the teachers then checked the answers and gave them constructive feedback. Students' scores for the assignments were automatically recorded, which would then be added to their total progress scores. After that, the teachers gave students some reminders if necessary and then ended the lessons.

Research question 2: *What advantages and disadvantages do teachers and students have during the implementation of online learning and teaching in English courses?*

Advantages perceived by teachers and students.

Both the teachers and the students had common perceptions of the advantages of online courses they were conducting via certain platforms. There were three main benefits coded from the data collected from the interviews.

Geographical convenience

All of the participants agreed that online teaching and learning practice brought them the comfort of space. They all found it convenient when they did not have to travel a long distance to the university to deliver or attend lessons.

It was kind of convenient because I could conduct my teaching right at home. I did not have to move anywhere. (T1)

The first benefit I can see is the convenience of the place. I could stay at home to learn using my computer... (S3)

Time flexibility

Besides the convenience in terms of place, it was shown that the teachers and the students also benefited from the flexibility of time. Regardless of strict adherence to the class start time on the schedule, the teachers posited that they could flexibly allocate the time when the lesson delivery was in progress.

Although we had to follow the class start time on the Portal strictly, we could still flexibly manage time during the lesson. For example, after the students finished their assignments, I started to give them feedback and correction. And when it was done, we could stop some time earlier than scheduled. (T2)

Similarly, some students also stated that they also had certain advantages from time flexibility while learning online with Zoom. For instance, they “*could do something else after quickly finishing all of the exercises assigned in Google classroom*” (S5) or “*asked the teacher to join another class with the same level at a more suitable time*” (S9).

Customized learning environment

Apart from benefits regarding time and space, home-based teaching created great opportunities for teachers to adjust the learning content and the time allotment for the purpose of the appropriateness of learning outcomes. T1 claimed that “*instead of following the steps available in the book, I had to redesign the content to make it more suitable for the students. It seemed more productive in the end because I think the rigidity of the tasks in the book sometimes did not help much*”. T2, similarly, shared that “*when teaching online, I selected the key knowledge from the book and added some extra activities or materials so that the students could better understand the lessons and learn something else*”.

Regarding the effectiveness of a custom-made learning environment, the students showed positive attitudes. In the interview, they stated that learning through the teachers' slides was pretty accessible and effective.

The lessons which were all put on slides by my teacher was very useful. The content was so concise and easy to understand. Moreover, he always posted his slides in Google classroom right after the lesson, which was good because we could read them again later (S7)

Disadvantages perceived by teachers and students.

Besides certain benefits of online learning and teaching discussed above, the participants faced several drawbacks, which are discussed as follows.

Overmuch amount of work

According to the three teachers, it took them much more time to prepare a lesson before "the Livestream" was conducted (T1). The extra amount of time was spent on designing the PowerPoint slides together with exercises or quizzes, which "took three times as much as teaching in the classrooms" (T1).

"It was so time-consuming to prepare a lesson before the class. I had to put everything on slides to show the students, then create quizzes in Google forms for them to do in the second period... (T2)

The lessons conducted online also took three periods as in physical classrooms, but I had to spend extra time to prepare for the lessons before that. There was no tool on my laptop, so I had to prepare slides to show the students instead. I even stayed up some nights until three pm to plan the lessons for the three classes the next day. (T3)

On the side of students, most of them also expressed certain concerns over the excessive amounts of time they were supposed to spend on doing assignments on Google classroom.

My teacher assigned a lot of homework in Google classroom and I had to finish everything to meet the deadline. There were times when there were so many exercises and the time given was so short, and I had to be quick to finish them just on time. (S3)

Another student also complained about the number of exercises he was supposed to do during online lessons: "I don't like learning with Zoom because there were a lot of things to do during the break. The teacher gave us a lot of assignments and asked us to finish them. It was called "break" but actually we had no break with this kind of learning. We spent more time trying to do the exercises to get the points..." (S11)

Technical problems

As stated, one problem commonly faced by the participants was Internet instability. This caused lagging or freezing during the class meetings, which occasionally created a disturbance to both the teachers and the students.

Poor Internet connection was the most common problem I knew. This happened to me and also my students. Sometimes I was out during the meetings because the Internet bandwidth was too low, which confused my students. On the other way round, some of my students suddenly disappeared on screen, and I had no idea where they were until they joined again and reported that it was the Internet instability that stopped them. (T2)

In agreement with the teachers on this issue, the students accepted that they had to experience certain problems caused by the slow Internet speed.

The Internet was so low, and I found it hard to follow the lessons. (S4)

We were interrupted at times because of poor Internet access, which was so frustrating. (S5)

I was out when the Internet was weak, and I had to provide the teacher with evidence not to mark absence. (S10)

Moreover, there were some extra problems such as broken webcam and microphones, which hindered the participants from seeing and hearing each other.

Some students just kept saying that their webcam was broken and asked me for my permission to let them have a blank screen instead of turning on their video. (T1)

Speaking of technical problems, I found that the audio was inactive at times, and I had to ask my students over and over again just to know if they could be hearing me or not. Then I had my laptop fixed at the store with a new microphone separately connected to my laptop. (T3)

No self-discipline

In the interview, the teachers asserted certain typical problems about the students' indiscipline while attending the lessons via the Internet. They can be named inappropriate learning postures, eating and drinking misconduct, and frequent lateness.

Some of the students did not study seriously. Even though I had consistently told them to choose a quiet place and have a good sitting position during the lessons, they still ignored what I said... I could notice they were both learning and watching films or listening to music at the same time. Some others even laid on the bed with their laptop on their belly, which was so annoying... (T1)

I was shocked at times when noticing that some of my students still covered themselves with blankets in the early mornings. It seemed they were not awake yet, still sleepy, and could not stay focused. Some students recklessly ate and drank while I was teaching. I reminded them so many times about the classroom rules, but this still happened from time to time...(T2)

I observed that my students usually joined the class late. Just a few came early for the lessons. I think students' tardiness partly came from their thinking that it was quick to access the class meetings online instead of allotting some time to get to school... (T3)

Limited interactions

Due to the large number of students joining the class meetings, the teachers admitted that they had difficulty covering the whole class at a time. Therefore, interactions were limited to a certain extent.

Online interactions were not as easy as in the classrooms. There were many students present during the class meetings, and when I asked a question and invited a student to answer, I had to wait for him to unmute himself, which took a while. (T1)

I had to limit interactions with the students as few as possible for fear of having not enough time. It took a lot of time for interactions via the Internet to happen for some reasons. The students might not hear me clearly, and I had to repeat the question over and over. Then for some students who were distracting or not available, I had to wait for ages to hear them say something whenever I called them. (T2)

Difficulties in class management

Class controls from a distance are such a big problem for teachers. All of the teachers agreed that it was hard to manage the class during an online lesson even though they made great attempts to use Zoom's functional buttons.

It took me a lot of time to check if the students were still there listening to me. (T2)

Some of my students just kept making excuses about their broken cameras and refused to turn them on when I requested. Then I did not even know if they were actually listening to me or doing something else. Some even used a fake profile picture to trick me into believing that he was listening to me. I didn't know until I asked him to answer a question... (T3)

Anxiety over the use of technology

A number of participants shared that they were anxious at first when switching to teaching and learning online in fear of technology. The stated reason was that it was the first time they had had such an experience.

Their anxiety came from a lack of familiarity with the participants' application.

When I heard that the department had an announcement on online teaching, I was a bit worried because I had not been familiar with this kind of teaching. I had never heard of Zooms before. I remember that the first online lesson was such a mess. I even did not know how to turn on my microphone... (T1)

To be honest, I was scared at first because I was not good at technology. I was such a technophobe, actually. I had to spend the whole night searching on Google and watching videos on Youtube to learn how to use Zoom for teaching. The Department's announcement came so late, and I did not have much time to familiarize myself with the tool. I was even stressed about that. It was such a nightmare when looking back on those days... (T2)

Sharing the same ideas, students affirmed that “learning with Zoom app was completely new,” and they, therefore, “found it hard to adapt to this kind of learning” (S4).

It was the first time I had used Zoom for learning. I was a bit afraid because I had not known how to use it as well as how to install it on my computer. (S9)

I had never used this app (Zoom) before, so I did struggle at first. I was so nervous on the first day when I turned on the app and saw my teacher's and my friends' faces. (S13)

Learning through Zoom was a bit hard at first because I had not tried it before. Things were much easier later as I got familiar with the app. (S14)

5. Conclusion

In general, it can be seen through a series of observations that the practice of home-based teaching and learning at TDTU went through three main phases: Teacher's presentation of key knowledge inputs, Student's completion of assignments and Teacher's feedback and correction. Each lesson lasted for three periods, with 45 minutes being spent on each stage. Regarding the participants' perceptions of this mode of education, both the teachers and the students asserted that they had certain advantages and disadvantages while teaching and learning online via Zoom cloud meetings and Google classroom. However, the drawbacks of this education mode far outweighed the benefits, which was clearly stated by the majority of the participants. Overall, they expressed a strong preference for a traditional classroom atmosphere to bring more productive educational outcomes.

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