The Practice of Online English Teaching and Learning with Microsoft Teams: From Students' View

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Abstract

With the Covid 19 epidemic's complicated happenings recently, promoting online teaching at universities in Vietnam has been an essential solution to ensure students' learning progress. At member institutions of the University of Da Nang, the selection and use of Microsoft Teams for online teaching have met the Ministry of Education requirements in the context of epidemic prevention and got certain results on the quality of teaching and learning. This study describes the effectiveness of online teaching on Microsoft Teams (MS Teams) in non-English major classes through students' feedback. We conducted a survey on fifty non-English major students at the University of Education-the University of Da Nang who attended online English courses from May to July 2020 to evaluate teaching and learning activities with MS Teams. The study also analyzes the advantages and disadvantages of online English teaching and proposes solutions to improve efficiency in the innovation of teaching methods and forms of teaching.

Keywords: online teaching, Microsoft Teams, non-English major students, teaching and learning innovation

1. Introduction

In this digital era, it is undeniable that online learning, known as E-learning, has gradually proven to be an indispensable tool in education, especially tertiary. With online courses, learners can popularize and improve their knowledge. During the extended school break due to the Covid 19 epidemic, member institutions of the University of Da Nang quickly deployed online teaching and learning on the MS Teams platform. This has been considered a timely solution that helps keep teaching uninterrupted and provided teachers and educational administrators an opportunity to promote creativity in online training. This article analyzes the effectiveness and challenges of the MS Teams application in the classroom environment. It also suggests solutions to improve online teaching and learning quality at the University of Danang.

2. Literature review

2.1. Benefits of online learning

It is said that with rapid developments in technology, distance education has become easier (McBrien et al., 2009). Online learning is considered as "learning experiences in synchronous or asynchronous environments using different devices (e.g., mobile phones, laptops, etc.) with internet access (Dhawan, 2020). While online, distance learners can join virtual lectures from anywhere, interact with instructors and other fellow students. Online learning can make the teaching and learning process more flexible, more innovative, and more student-centered (Dhawan, 2020). Learners who can form their self-regulated learning skills frequently utilize time management, reviewed material regularly, seek help from professors or peers, meet deadlines, and have the skill

of metacognition to reflect upon their own learning (You & Kang, 2014). Online learning comes with a lot of benefits. One of the most appealing benefits of online education is that it allows students to work at a time and a suitable place for their learning needs. Since everything is available online, accessing class materials and submitting work is very convenient. Synchronous learning provides a lot of opportunities for social interaction (McBrien et al., 2009). Interaction and communication have been identified as key factors in an online course's success, leading to enhanced student satisfaction and motivation (Savenye, 2005). Teachers engage students in some group project or teamwork. Distance learning fosters virtual communication and allows students to work with team members via email, chat rooms, and other easy-to-use methods. In this way, students need to communicate-whether verbal or written-with the teachers and other students to complete the tasks assigned. Thus, they can sharpen their communication skills. Teachers who teach online may also have set hours for student interaction, address questions, leave comments, and more. To make online courses more effective, teachers and educators need to get feedback from the students, ask questions, and broaden the student's horizon for the course content (Keeton, 2004).

2.2. Microsoft Teams (MS Team)

As part of the Office 365 ecosystem, MS Teams is an application that serves teamwork. It has an outstanding feature of displaying the most recently interacting group work content so that users are always up to date with the group's activities. Microsoft announced Teams at a conference in New York and launched the service worldwide on March 14, 2017. With such a user-friendly application, Teams now attracts more than 120 million users.

MS Teams integrates outstanding features that can be one of the effective online teaching tools for teachers as well as educational institutions. Some of the features can be mentioned such as:

- Online channels: Teams are made up of working channels. Each one contains work exchange boards, learning documents among team members.

- Chat in channels: All group members can see and add other chat forums in the General Channel.

Chat function: This is a basic feature found in most business applications, allowing users to chat between groups and individuals and easily communicate between students and teachers or students and students.

- File storage on SharePoint: Each team using MS Teams has a site on SharePoint Online, which defaults to be a place of document storing. All files shared in the chats are automatically saved to private folders on the SharePoint site.

- Online video calls and screen sharing: Users can use video calls with fast and stable transmission speed. Teachers can also share the screen quickly to deliver lectures and facilitate teaching activities during the lesson.

3. MS Teams application in online language teaching

3.1. Research questions

To fulfill the purpose of the study, questionnaires are designed to get the students' feedback on their learning outcomes via MS Teams.

The research questions are:

a) What are the benefits of online teaching and learning with MS Teams?

b) What are the challenges of using MS Teams for language teaching and learning?

3.2. Scope and research subjects

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of online teaching with the MS Teams application, we have surveyed a group of 50 non-English major students at the University of Education, the University of Da Nang, who studied online General English courses on MS Team platform from April to July 2020.

4. Research results and Discussion

4.1. Benefits of online learning with MS Teams

During 12 weeks of our teaching, students' attendance was assessed as quite satisfactory. 85.2% of students participated in all lessons. 11.1% of them joined over 80% of lessons, and 100% followed the teacher's announcements in the General channel, which were related to learning materials and regular assignments.
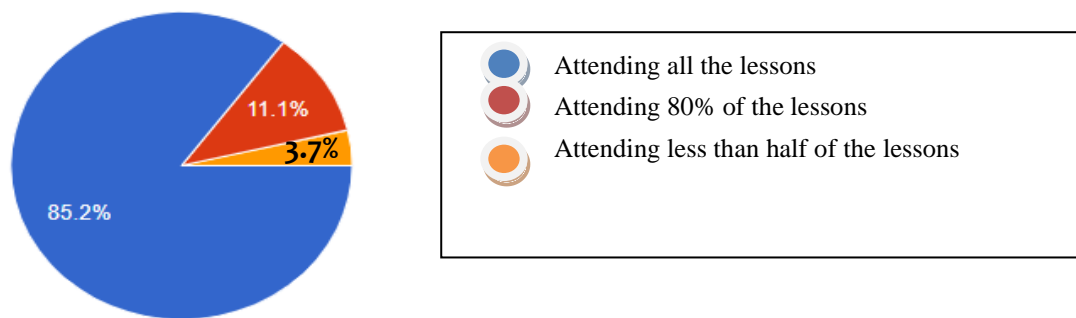

Figure1. Students' attendance

Exercises were weekly assigned to each individual or group in the form of writing or multiple choices or designed in assignments. Thus teachers and students can keep track of their teaching and learning progress. Statistics show that 77.8% of students completed all assignments on time, whereas 18.5% completed more than 70% of the assigned work. There were only 3.7% handed in more than 50% of the exercises. Through specific feedback and comments from teachers, students are aware of their strengths and weaknesses, thereby promoting their language proficiency.
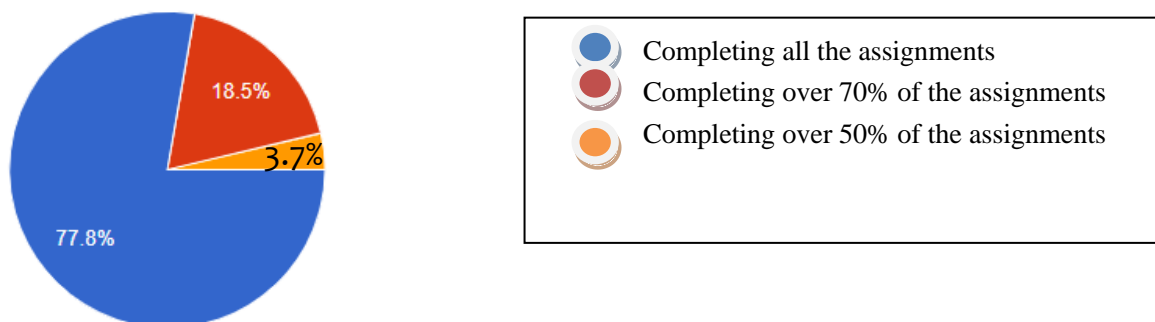

Figure 2. Completion of assignments

In addition, through regular discussion and comments from teachers, students become aware of their management during the course. Thus, they can form a more positive attitude towards their learning. This mode of learning is more effective in that students-especially shy and unconfident ones- easily interact with the teachers and other students and get a frequent evaluations from the teachers.
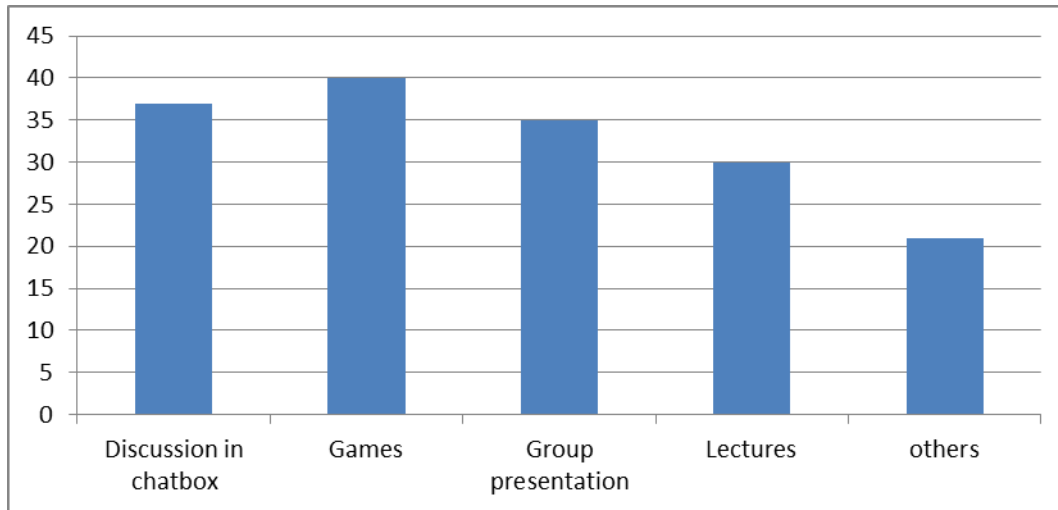

Figure 3. Students' favorite activities

As shown in Figure 3, 100% of students wanted to join games to consolidate what they have learned and to increase their interest in the lessons. The teachers apply various games such as Kahoot, Quizzi or design other games like Puzzles, crosswords to encourage students to participate. This activity can enhance students' confidence; promote competition among groups, thereby increasing teaching efficiency.

Another activity that draws 95% of students' attention in the online class is discussions about the lesson content via the chat box in MS Teams, which is considered suitable for shy students. Through permanent discussions, students have the opportunities to contribute ideas, answer questions as well as raise questions to teachers when needed.

Group presentations also attract 87.5% of students' participation. With a topic given by the teacher before the lecture, each group designs different tasks for the other class members to complete and join a variety of interactive activities. Group performance in the lesson helps teachers assess students' progress, create chances for students to improve their language skills, increase the diversity of activities in a virtual classroom, and make the lesson more interesting to the learners.

The biggest benefit of online teaching on MS Teams is that students can watch the lecture video. If students cannot participate in the class or want to revise some of the lesson content, they can easily download the video. This cannot be done if they are in a traditional classroom. Some comments of the students on the advantages of online learning are: "Studying online, I understand 100% of the knowledge"; "Online learning combined with regular homework helps us absorb more knowledge"; "In a large traditional class, I sometimes cannot understand the lesson. Learning on MS Teams, I can watch the video and revise the lesson easily".

The second benefit of MS Team is that students can easily interact with their teachers as well as their peers. For example, they can chat with the teachers and team members through channels created by the teachers on MS Teams during or after the lecture. According to the survey, the students said that: "We can talk to the teachers and complete a lot of assignments more quickly and easily than in other forms of study"; "I find it very effective and

flexible when learning online. I can easily communicate with the teacher or classmates without being scared or reluctant".

Some distinctive features of working on MS Teams can be listed as: assuring uninterrupted learning process; allowing teachers to create online learning environment; sharing documents and responding directly to students; teachers and students working together continuously, creating content, and sharing all resources on one platform; enabling students who are in isolation areas due to Covid-19 to join the online class and focus on their learning. MS Teams also facilitates teachers to build appropriate tests or quizzes, raise questions, give feedback quickly, organize, and easily track each student's grades. Austin (1978) finds that homework assigned and checked turns out to be more effective in improving students' achievement than homework assigned but not checked. Therefore, by checking and grading students' homework and assignments, teachers can make judgments on the students' progress, and students can be motivated to learn.

4.2. Challenges of teaching and learning online with MS Teams

Besides the advantages of using MS Teams in online teaching, there are also unexpected limitations. First, teachers and students sometimes get into trouble with Internet transmission. Although the country's information infrastructure and technologies are modern at present, it is obvious that users cannot log in to the class for a certain moment, their access is interrupted, or the audio and image quality is poor.

Secondly, it requires much effort from teachers. For lectures to be lively and attractive to the students, teachers must spend lots of time preparing lessons, designing lectures, and interesting teaching activities, which require so much time and concentration.

What is more, students' attendance is another challenge for teachers in online classes. Although MS Teams has a full range of features to help teachers manage classes, such as: checking attendance through Forms, teachers only manage the number of students at a certain time, not during the lecture. The important thing is up to students' awareness of learning full-time in online lessons.

Eisenberg et al. (2010) state that self-awareness is arguably the most crucial academic skill and a building block of self-regulation. It is the balancing and management of one's emotions in everyday life. However, a number of students do not have a high sense of self-awareness in learning, considering online learning is compulsory. Thus, their learning outcomes are not efficient.

5. Conclusion

Although being well-known as a tool for teamwork, MS Teams is also recognized as an effective online teaching tool with a lot of outstanding features. MS Teams meets the requirements of organizing a virtual classroom, such as: chatting and calling, sharing screens, recording calls and meetings, assigning and responding to students' assignments…

Online teaching with MS Teams is a temporary but effective solution for us to join hands to comply with the Government's regulations on anti-epidemic campaigns without affecting the planned teaching process. The use of MS Teams for teaching foreign languages in the last semester has initially received positive feedback from the students.

Although schools and universities have returned to the traditional form of education since the country has partly emerged from the crisis of Covid-19, it is suggested that we should continue to promote the effective use of MS Teams for teaching by combining both traditional and virtual classrooms. MS Teams should be used as a

supporting tool for managing students' learning at home. It makes life easier for teachers, helping them distribute assignments and communicate with their students one-to-one. Teachers can assign homework to individuals or projects to groups. Applying MS Teams, students can make plans for their learning, study the lesson content before attending the class, or discuss in groups to work on projects. Teachers and students should continue to exchange the information related to the lessons, and teachers use MS Teams to assess students' learning outcomes. In addition, it is necessary to strengthen communication between teachers and students through forums and channels on MS Teams so that the teachers can get feedback on their teaching, thereby making appropriate adjustments for improving the teaching quality and meeting the subject's requirements objectives.

29/2001/CT-BGD&ĐT, promulgated by the Minister of Education and Training, stated clearly that for education and training, information technology has a strong impact, changing teaching and learning methods; and that information technology is a means towards a learning society. Actually, the application of information technology will help students access many resources and increase their learning autonomy. If we overcome the existing challenges, online learning combined with on-campus learning will be a mostly-chosen form for university learners.

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