Employing Some Online Tools as a Tool Kit in Teaching English Online at University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City (UEH)

Ha Thanh Bich Loan, M.A

ABSTRACT

The pandemic caused by nCoV in 2019 has been changing the world in numerous areas, and education sector is not out of this consequence. In Vietnam, to stop the spread of nCoV, people had to stay home to practice social distancing regulation ruled by the government. This made face-to-face activities with many people unworkable, hence the activity of classroom teaching and learning was the first to be banned. With the motto "*Pausing learning activities at school but not stopping studying*" (T.Ha , 2020) by the government, educational organizations nationwide, especially universities, were forced to use Internet-based tools to support the process of teaching and learning in distance. The original purpose of these tools is to mainly serve business meetings, but they have gradually become exceedingly convenient channels for various areas. The fact that those are chiefly used for online meetings, but employed in teaching and learning has inevitably caused confusion to their users. Experiencing a few months of distance learning, to a certain extent, instructors and learners have gained copious knowledge and better skills of using online platforms. Although the quarantine expired and students have come back to school, recommendations on the use of common online tools as a tool kit in teaching English at UEH may be practical for stakeholders in online education, an indispensable trend in Industry 4.0.

Key words: *benefits, online tools, tool kit, online teaching and learning*

Background

Online learning or e-learning was mentioned in the previous century (Chau Thanh Tu et al., 2020) but apparently it has just been paid much attention to in this century. More and more countries have applied it in their educational programs because of the global development of the Internet and its obvious convenience.

In Vietnam, several universities have taken advantage of e-learning to innovate their curriculums as well as training approaches by providing wholly-online courses on their own websites.

Additionally, according to Wikipedia, online learning on Learning Management System (LMS) is popular throughout colleges or universities in the world. Also, in Vietnam, many universities have recently exploited LMS platform to make learning activities more flexible; i.e., students can join their classes whenever and wherever they want. This helps save their time and money for commute.

Learning on LMS is often deemed a part of a course. Students spend time there mainly practicing the theory that they have just learned through assignments given by their teachers or doing some tests as lesson revision. This means there is no interaction between teachers and students despite a wide range of handy sub-tools supporting online learning. In a word, LMS had not been fully exploited until the COVID-19 pandemic appeared.

Similarly, Google Meet and Microsoft Teams are popular worldwide because its features are mainly for business meetings, so they were rarely used by teachers and students until the COVID-19 pandemic happened.

Teaching and learning English online at UEH

According to the regulation for online learning at UEH, for each modular class with 45 periods or more, the time allocation for learning on LMS accounts for at most 30 percent of class hours.

As for English subject, students often spend time on LMS taking end-of-unit tests or doing further exercises. It means that LMS is deemed to be a channel for students to get e-materials, do practical exercises as well as check what they have studied through quizzes or SCORM; accordingly, there are barely interactive activities like exchanging information via *chat box*, discussing on *the Forum*, etc., which are built up on LMS.

For other online tools such as Google Meet or Microsoft Teams, before the pandemic, they seemed novel to both teachers and students since there was no need for delivering lectures online. Therefore, both instructors and learners were quite confused when using them during the quarantine due to COVID-19.

Though the nCoV is merely a virus, it has very strong "power" when coercing people to enter online classes whether they were ready or not during the pandemic. Consequently, teachers and students at UEH also integrated into this flow to keep everything moving forward.

As a saying goes: "There is always good luck in bad luck." In fact, after a few months of using those tools for online teaching and learning, both lecturers and students have become much better users, and can be prepared for online environment in the long run as the Fourth Industrial Revolution is happening.

Commonly-used online tools at UEH

Besides using the LMS, according to research by Vo Ha Quang Dinh & Dang Thai Thinh (2020), during the first semester of school year 2020, when Vietnam practiced the quarantine, 95.6% of the teachers at UEH used Google Meet, 38.7% employed Zoom, and 9.3% made use of Microsoft Teams for their online teaching.

The reason why Google Meet was on the top choice is that its features are not complex and it includes just a few simple functions, so it is user-friendly and really easy to operate. Plus, it does not require students to register or log in, but just click on the link sent via email by the teacher to join the class meeting.

Zoom was in the second position partly because it allows many users to show their camera at the same time, and with *Breakout rooms*, the teacher can choose to split the students into separate sessions. This is truly useful for group work activities. However, many large organizations in the world have stopped using it due to the insecurity of this software.

Microsoft Teams seemed not to be welcome as it has so many features and is not simple enough for beginners. Regardless of its complexity, Microsoft Teams has its own strong points with a wealth of functions to benefit from. Thus, teachers need training to be skillful at it to best serve their lectures first, and then support students when they join their online class.

Benefits from the above online teaching tools

For the particularity of School of Foreign Languages for Economics (SFLE), which must cover a large number of classes with roughly 10,000 students per semester, there is not enough time for teachers to exploit various online tools and their usage. What lecturers of SFLE need to deal with online classes is a *tool kit* which provides them with convenient functions to meet basic demand for a face-to-face English class such as syllabi, books, audio files, PowerPoint files, Word or PDF files, practical exercises, videos, teacher-student interactions, attendance checks, midterm tests, speaking tests, pair work, group work, and so on.

With respect to LMS, though integrated with an interactive tool like BigBlueButton, it appears not to meet simultaneous access of thousands of users to their classes on this system. Nevertheless, it is a useful channel for posting e-materials, creating tests, giving assignments, delivering announcements, updating information via the Forum, storing student's work as evidence for their online learning process, and so on. These functions are quite easy for teachers to use; for example, they can upload and arrange materials or documents in terms of specific categories for students to seek and promptly retrieve things they need. It is also uncomplicated when creating online tests, save and restore courses for new classes, etc.

Regarding Google Meet, it offers a space for lively interaction from microphones and cameras, for giving presentations, sharing any kind of document, namely Word, Excel, PDF, or even sharing the desktop screen with just a few mouse-clicks. It is its simplicity that does help teachers who have not been skillful in using online tools for meetings.

What's more, Google Meet allows users to create different meeting rooms at the same time, so this point is beneficial to teachers in arranging Speaking test sessions.

If the whole class joins one meeting on Google Meet for a Speaking test, it will be annoying because when a pair or group of students are taking the test, the others are forced to suffer from the noise of their classmates' talk. On the other hand, the test takers do not want their friends to listen to what they are talking about.

Therefore, teachers can set a "room" - using one link of Google Meet - for students to wait for their turns. That is also the place for the next pairs or groups in line pick up topics and prepare for their performance, while the current pair or group is performing their job on another link posted in the chat box of Google Meet by the teacher. In the testing room, both teacher and test takers simultaneously turn on their camera and microphone to do the speaking task, along with recording the student's work as evidence for their test taking.

With Microsoft Teams, for English teachers, there are certainly so many sub-tools to use, yet with extremely helpful functions like *participant list*, which can be used for checking student's

attendance in each learning session, teachers can download *meeting attendance list* which includes specific time of joining and leaving. This especially helps when attendance is a part in assessing or grading student's diligence.

Moreover, Microsoft Teams seems to be confusing for beginners, but it is absolutely useful for its users, particularly students, to search for old messages during the previous class meeting from the chat box, or to seek old meeting recordings at any time they want, which can be impossible on Google Meet. Unlike Microsoft Teams, Google Meet allows the participants to record their meetings for individual use only in their Google Drive, so others cannot retrieve it when necessary.

Another advantageous feature of Microsoft Teams is that students must be certified by the teacher through checks on their email domain before being added to the participant list. This is not viable in Google Meet whatsoever.

Recommendations

With their own benefits, LMS, Google Meet, and Microsoft Teams combined (Nguyen Thi Thu Thuy & Truong Hong Ngoc, 2020) can be considered as *a teaching tool kit* with multi-feature that benefits SFLE's teachers in terms of convenience, appropriateness, and cost-efficiency.

LMS gives teachers flexibility and a variety of sub-tools to manage their students' online learning as mentioned above.

Google Meet is simple and convenient but its features do not completely meet teachers' demand for class management.

Microsoft Teams is complicated and cumbersome, but it may satisfy users with multimedia-rich features and provides professional environment for not only schools but also businesses. Using this online tool can train students in getting accustomed to a useful online working tool like this, which brings them better skills for their future job - the job in Industry 4.0.

With this online teaching tool kit, teachers can entirely set their mind at rest in organizing their online activities like uploading e-material sources, checking attendance, delivering lectures, giving presentations, group work, testing (in terms of written or oral form), or assessing their student's learning (Ali, 2018), and so forth, because the pros of this tool can complement the cons of the others, and vice versa.

Conclusion

Each online teaching tool has its own benefits. If it is fully exploited, the productivity it may bring to its users is innumerable. Nonetheless, with various contents of different school subjects, teachers will determine which tool is suitable for their students to reach specific learning targets or outcome which is regulated in each syllabus.

As regards English subject, especially non-major English, the tool kit suggested can help teachers and students to be secure on the Internet, brings them convenience, saves their time, offers teachers modern sub-tools to have effective class management, and provides teachers with a permanent

approach to integrate into Industry 4.0, in which online teaching and learning is a must as trend of future education.

REFERENCES

Ali, J. (2018). *9 Advantages of Online Training*. https://elearningindustry.com/advantages-of-online-training-9

Châu Thanh Tú, Trần Thị Thanh Trúc, Phan Thị Thanh Ngọc, & Nguyễn Ngọc Băng Tâm. (2020). *Thực trạng hình thức học tập trực tuyến tại trường đại học kinh tế Tp. Hồ Chí Minh dưới góc nhìn sinh viên.* Kỷ yếu tọa đàm – Dạy và học trong kỷ nguyên cách mạng 4.0, tại Trường đại học Kinh tế Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh. Nhà xuất bản Thông tin và Truyền thông. 468 - 476.

Nguyễn Thị Thu Thủy & Trương Hồng Ngọc. (2020). Sự kết hợp Google Meet và Moodle LMS trong bối cảnh học tập trực tuyến e-learning. Kỷ yếu tọa đàm – Dạy và học trong kỷ nguyên cách mạng 4.0, tại Trường đại học Kinh tế Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh. Nhà xuất bản Thông tin và Truyền thông. 446-459.

T.Hà. (2020). *Tạm dừng đến trường nhưng không ngừng việc học*. https://tuoitre.vn/tam-dung-den-truong-nhung-khong-ngung-viec-hoc-2020040218115879.htm

Vo Ha Quang Dinh & Dang Thai Thinh. (2020). *Một số khuyến nghị phát triển mô hình blended learning tại UEH.* Kỷ yếu tọa đàm – Dạy và học trong kỷ nguyên cách mạng 4.0, tại Trường đại học Kinh tế Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh. Nhà xuất bản Thông tin và Truyền thông. 477- 486.

Wikipedia. (2020). *Online learning in higher education.* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Online_learning_in_higher_education