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MỤC LỤC

Lời nói đầu

Báo cáo Khoa học điển hình

An ninh nguồn nước và những thách thức mới đặt ra cho khoa học công nghệ giải quyết một số vấn đề cốt lõi đến phát triển nông nghiệp, nông thôn

Nguyễn Hoàng Hiệp

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ADVANTAGES OF BREAK-OUT ROOMS AND CHANNELS IN MICROSOFT TEAMS IN TEACHING SPEAKING SKILLS FOR STUDENTS AT A UNIVERSITY

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1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching and learning online has existed since 1981 as a kind of education on the Internet (Harasim, 2000). According to Sadiku et al. (2018), this form of education refers to e-learning which offers synchronously and/or asynchronously Internet-based courses. These courses or even entire degrees have been offered by universities in the world but were not familiar in Vietnam (Le, 2020). However, due to the Covid - 19 pandemic, since the beginning of 2020, Vietnamese colleges and universities have shifted to online teaching through some e-platforms. At Hanoi University of Mining and Geology (HUMG), Microsoft Teams has been assigned as the official platform for delivering lectures and other class activities online. Microsoft Teams has served quite well the purposes like sharing screen or system sounds, checking attendance, assigning homework ... For an English class, it is rather convenient for teaching Reading, Listening and Writing skills but not Speaking skills. It is impossible for students to talk in the General (the main classroom) as groups or pairs since it creates noises or takes too much time. It is only ideal when one student presents or one pair of them make a dialogue. However, in learning any language, it is essential to learn all the four macro skills (Reading, Listening, Writing and Speaking) equally (Kagnarith, 2007). They interact and support one another to ensure the purposes

and quality of communication. Reading and Listening provide learners with input so that they can produce output through Speaking and Writing to make themselves understood.

Therefore, the challenge is how to create a similar environment to the one in a traditional classroom where the teacher can put students in pairs or small groups to practice speaking skills and control/ instruct them.

The study, consequently, tries to make use of the channels and break-out rooms in Teams to facilitate pair work and group work in teaching and learning speaking. In addition, it looks into any of their advantages in teaching and assessing students' progress.

2. THE METHODS OF THE STUDY

The study uses document analysis and synthesis as well as note-taking during the research. Survey questionnaires are also conducted with 138 first-year students who completed 2 online semesters. The questions focus on students' feedback on their learning speaking skills under break-out rooms and channels. Advantages of using the applications as well as students' speaking skills improvement will be revealed from data analysis.

3. SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF BREAK-OUT ROOMS AND CHANNELS

Break-out room is a new application added to MS Teams by Microsoft at the end of 2020. Thanks to them, the main room can be

divided into a maximum of fifty small rooms automatically or manually by the teacher. The teacher can allow time for working for those rooms and join each one to give instructions or assessments. The breaking of the main room can be done instantly with the presence of the whole class. Furthermore, the teacher can name the rooms if he/she likes.

Channel is also a tool to split the class into different small groups according to the topics they will focus on. Channels need to be made before class time and the teacher must add members manually. The maximum number of channels is only nine, so it is just suitable for a class of 18 students when they do pair work. Like in break-out rooms, the teacher can also name the channels, assign topics of discussion, and join / leave them when necessary.

Break-out rooms and channels are also similar in the way that they are completely private spaces, not being disturbed by any strangers and the members can present, talk, text, share visuals or audio there.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

4.1. Break-out rooms and channels' pros in teaching Speaking skills.

After two semesters of applying break out rooms and channels, some of their advantages were realized and will be listed below:

Break-out rooms and channels have created an environment that is quite similar to the one of an offline class. In that environment the teacher acts as the master who can set the valid time for each room/channel; open / close the rooms/ channels if desired; choose the members according to his/her teaching purposes. What is more, the teacher can move any students to another room/ channel once they have finished their discussion so that they can swap roles or practice with other peers. The teacher can assign tasks or topics of discussion for each pair or group so that they are able to argue or give personal opinions without disturbing

other pairs/groups or being broken into by strangers. Only the teacher can enter the rooms/channels to listen and comment on students' work.

Break-out rooms and channels help save a lot of time by allowing several rooms / channels to work at the same time. Students do not have to wait for their turns in the main room.

Channels are more suitable for group work and assigned tasks since they can only be created before class time with nine channels at most. On the contrary, break-out rooms cannot be made beforehand but instantly during class time with fifty rooms at most. Consequently, break-out rooms can be applied for both pair work and group work for any class size. Break-out rooms allow the teacher to swap members among rooms while channels do not.

One more advantage of channels and break-out rooms is that all the interactions and learning activities of the students in that room can be recorded and watched later. Afterward, group members can give comments and the teacher can rely on the records to give feedback or marks if necessary.

Last but not least, break-out rooms and channels can serve as an exam room. If the speaking test is taken place in the main room of the class, it will be time-consuming, noisy and the teacher must prepare a lot of questions since the used ones are exposed. If the speaking test is done in a private space like in a break-out room or channel, it will provide a quiet, safe and secret place for both examiners and examinees. By reusing one set of questions, the examiner can save time and compare examinees' competencies easily. If some students are taking the test at the same time, all the procedures like checking student ID or notify the rules and regulations can be made in the main room then each student will be assigned into one room with an examiner. In addition, the record will be the reference for the teacher's second check.

4.2. Students' feedback after using break-out rooms and channels in speaking classes

After two semesters of applying channels and break-out rooms in learning Speaking skills, a survey was made in order to collect students' feedback. 150 first-year students of four groups were asked and 138 of them gave answers. The table below shows the results of the research in which students express their perspectives after 2 semesters attending the course.

Table 1. Students' feedback after using break-out rooms and channels in speaking classes

Confident	More	92/138 (67%)
	The same	28/138 (20%)
	Less	18/138 (13%)
Motivated	More	88/138 (64%)
	The same	35/138 (25%)
	Less	15/138 (11%)
Want to continue the application		102/138 (74%)
Do not want to continue the application		36/138 (26%)

As shown in the table, almost 2/3 of them admitted that they felt more confident and interested in speaking English. They said that the risk of losing face when making mistakes was reduced to a minimum when they spoke in a private space. In their room or channel, the members could post learning materials, pictures, questions and answers; chat, text, or share screen and sounds like in the main room. They learned more vocabulary and used correct grammar thanks to practicing speaking skills frequently. Most of the students (74%) believed that break-out rooms and channels were the best solutions for learning Speaking skills when they can not communicate face-to-face and they would love to continue using them.

4. CONCLUSION

When it is impossible for traditional classes to be run, teaching and learning online is an effective alternative. However, online classes still have some drawbacks like "little or no face-to-face interaction" (Tom, 2017) or "additional training for instructors" (Immanuel Vinikas).

Therefore, to minimize those drawbacks, teachers should be creative, self-train and take full advantage of the available functions of the e-platforms. Results from this study as well as some above suggestions hopefully help other teachers in their teaching and create a motivating environment for their students to improve speaking skills.

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