

**USE OF MICROSOFT TEAMS IN TEACHING AND LEARNING
ENGLISH ONLINE TO IMPROVE ENGLISH LEVEL: A CASE STUDY
AT THE ACADEMY OF JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATION**

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ABSTRACT

In language teaching and learning, teachers and learners have a lot to choose thanks to the development of technology such as the Internet, computers, electronic dictionaries, and CALL, etc. The last two decades have witnessed a revolution due to the onset of technology, and it leads to some changes in the way people live and work in society. Besides, technology also plays an important part in spurring innovation in English teaching.

Due to the COVID - 19 pandemic, students in Vietnam could not go to school to study. Studying online was one of the best solutions, so the researchers taught their students during the worldwide pandemic of coronavirus disease 2019 via Microsoft Teams. Using Microsoft Teams to teach English online has its unique advantages. The authors carried out a case study to analyze the necessity of using Microsoft Teams to language teaching and also bring out the problems faced by using it. This study also aims to make English teachers aware of the strategies to use it in an effective way. The participants in this study were 28 first year non - English major students in class B2 in the Academy of Journalism and Communication who engaged in an English online course for 3 months of the COVID – 19 pandemic. Two sets of questionnaire and test combined with semi – structured interviews were conducted to determine the improvements of the students' English level and their positive attitude after the online course.

Key words: language teaching; innovation; technology; Microsoft Teams

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Rationale

Nowadays, thanks to the developments in information technology, there have been many important changes in the widespread use of technology in many fields, especially education. The trend to benefit from technological advancement is increasing significantly in many educational institutions such as high schools or universities. Many teaching methods have been applied because of the advanced technology like the Internet, computers, electronic dictionaries, and CALL, etc. Thus, besides traditional teaching and learning methods, online learning has been shown to benefit those who are able to obtain information by using technological items. According to Carol (2003), most technology – based courses produce learning outcome that are simply “as good as” their conventional counterparts. Besides, the results showed that by using technology, not only the learners improved their learning but the institute also achieved cost savings.

After the spread of the COVID – 19 pandemic, teaching and learning via the Internet suits the educational requirements because students in the world, especially students in Vietnam could not go to school to study. The students in the Academy of Journalism and Communication experienced the same situation, so the administrators thought that changing from regular classes to online classes had become an urgent need in order to make sure that all the course finish on time and all the students still assess the knowledge and do not forget the lessons during the pandemic.

English was the first subject which the administrator decided to carry out online courses because a lot of teachers in the Department of Foreign Languages had applied a lot of technical advancements in their classes before that. Since the first day of the pandemic, the use of Microsoft Teams had been introduced by the experienced teachers. However, this was the first time they had implemented online courses and there was just one week to prepare. Hence, it was not only obstruction for the faculty, but it was also a challenging task for each teacher, especially the teachers who had not had any experience before. For these above reasons, this case study was carried out in three months in the second term of the 2019 – 2020 academic year.

1.2. Research objectives

With the aims to implement the online English course effectively and help teachers interact and support their students online as well as generate their motivation and stimulate their interest in learning English, the case study was carried out to:

- analyze the necessity of using Microsoft Teams to improve the students' English level and also find out the difficulties that the students had during the online course.
- investigate their students' attitudes towards using Microsoft Teams

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Microsoft Teams

Microsoft Teams is a program produced by Microsoft and the first version was released in 2017. Microsoft Teams is a cloud app digital hub that brings conversations, meetings, files and apps together in a single Learning Management System (LMS). It aims to create a virtual environment among a community of participants for collaborative teamwork. In July 2019, 13 million daily users were using Microsoft Teams (Forbes, 2019) and the statistic rose dramatically in 2020. According to CEO Satya Nadella (2020), the figure increased to 75 million daily users.

The features of Microsoft Teams have been mentioned on their website, so by assessing Microsoft.com, people can have some background knowledge before using it. First and foremost, its system enables modern Office 365 software to be used to manage administrative, educational, and business work. Besides, it allows all elements of digital content and people can generate text chats so that conversations are maintained simultaneously. Moreover, Microsoft Teams also enables the implementation and management of meetings remotely in its direct and scheduled mode according to a date on the calendar applications. Last but not least, it is available with easy interactive interfaces on both device and mobile operating systems.

All the features mentioned above create a virtual learning environment, so the administrators and teachers at the Academy of Journalism and Communication decided to use Microsoft Teams for their online courses.

2.2. The previous studies

In Rababah's case study (2020), the researcher mentioned that there was a researcher named Al Sharif also wanted to investigate students' opinion about e-learning. His purpose was to find out the attitudes of students of Shaqra University towards e-learning. There were 366 students enrolling in undergraduate programs. The researchers used a descriptive analytical approach for the purposes of analysis, and a scale consisting of 28 phrases to assess the pattern of e-learning. There were three important findings thanks to this research. The first one was the positive attitude of the students towards e-learning. Secondly, depending on the specialization component such as scientific or literary, there were no statistically significant variations in students' responses to learning. Finally, there were some noticeable differences in terms of gender. The number of female participants who liked to use Microsoft Teams was slightly higher than that of male students. In the same year, the research to assess the attitude of students and teachers towards learning through Moodle such as Zoom or Microsoft teams was carried out by Maruthavanan. In order to achieve his goals, 100 respondents from teachers and students were collected. The results revealed that the attitudes of these participants towards e-learning were positive. In brief, it is clear that both studies above showed the students' positive attitude toward e-learning, especially Microsoft Teams; however, the authors did not mention the impact of Microsoft Teams in enhancing teaching and learning English and give sufficient suggestions to solve the problems that the students had.

In another case study, Bsharat and Behak (2021) figured out that the effects of Microsoft Teams' App in improving teaching-learning during the Covid-19. They said that using Microsoft Teams provided students with the opportunities to self-study and enhance their problem -solving skills, think critically and work well in a team. Besides, they also gave some difficulties that teachers had to deal with. For example, teachers had to work overtime to prepare lessons and learn how to use Microsoft Teams effectively. This study only focused on teachers' perspectives but did not address to problems that students could have.

In 2021, Perry also carried out a study to investigate the use of embedded digital tools to develop English language proficiency in higher education. The results show the benefits to students and teachers when using embedded videos, technology for communication, quizzes, games aimed at the development of English language proficiency. The research just

paid attention to the effects of digital tools, not focused on one specific type of LMS.

After analyzing these studies carefully, the researchers decided to carry out a case study to investigate the students' attitude in their context and the effects of using Microsoft Teams in teaching and learning English.

2.3. Research questions

For those mentioned reasons, two research questions are raised as follows:

1. To what extent, can the use of Microsoft Teams in teaching and learning English help to improve the first - year non-English majored students' level of English at the Academy of Journalism and Communication (AJC)?
2. What are the students' attitudes towards using Microsoft Teams?

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research setting

Because of the COVID – 19 pandemic, all the students and teachers could not go to school to study. Hence, learning and teaching at home or in other places that have an Internet connection were taken into account for the case study. The case study was carried out in one English class at AJC.

3.2. Participants

The case study was conducted with the 28 first - year non - English majored students in the university where the researchers were working in the second semester of 2019 – 2020. They are studying a high quality program at the Academy of Journalism and Communication. In this program, there are many majors such as broadcasting, journalism, etc. The students who follow this program have to get a 5.5 IELTS score.

The students had to take a placement test before they did the course. Their English levels were classified according to the classes they attended. There were 5 classes: A1, A2, B1, B2 and C. The participants studied in class B2 and their level of English was between elementary and pre-intermediate. In the first semester, the students had to do a three – month English course. They were all motivated and very hard working.

3.3. Research methods

In order to make the results of the case study more valid and reliable, both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used with priorities given to qualitative analysis of the situation.

First, pre-test and post-test were made to evaluate students' English level before and after the online course via Microsoft Teams. According to Bell and Campbell (1996), to measure the effectiveness of a new program, pre-test and post-test should be employed. In this case study, a pre-test was conducted in the first week and was done by the students before doing the online course, then a post-test was conducted in the same way as the pre-test. To assess the progress of the students before and after the online course, the results from the pre-test and the post-test were collected. The test was designed based on the format of Preliminary English Test (PET) in order to be suitable with the English level of the students. It consists of six parts with every two parts using to assess reading skills, writing skills, and listening skills. The time allowance for the tests is 60 minutes. The results of the test were divided into four categories: weak students (1- 5.4 scores); medium students (5.5 – 6.9 scores); good students (7 – 8.4 scores) and excellent students (8.5 – 10 scores).

The second instrument which the researchers used to collect the data is the survey questionnaire. A short questionnaire was adopted from Alameri et al (2020). This questionnaire consists of two parts; the first part is to investigate the awareness of the students towards the use of Microsoft Teams in the teaching process and the second part is to investigate the effectiveness of using Microsoft Teams in the teaching process for students. The questionnaire was delivered to the students using Microsoft Teams after the online course ended.

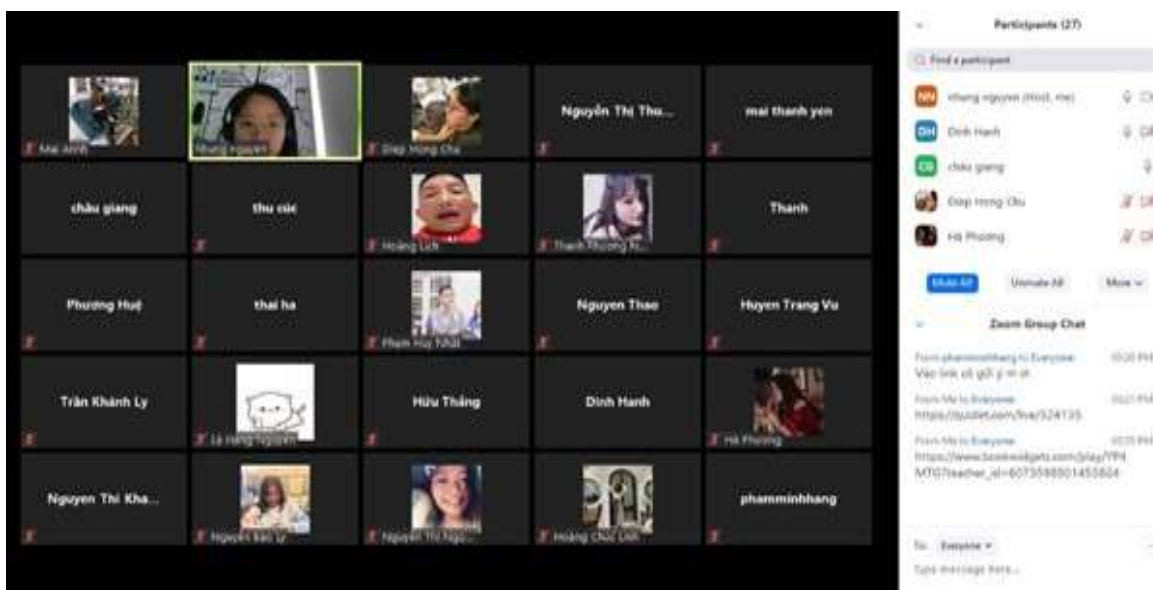
Semi-structured interviews were also conducted as the final research instrument when the course finished getting more detailed feedback from the students in class about the students' opinions when they used Microsoft Teams in learning English online. However, because of the limited time, the researchers chose 5 students randomly to interview.

All the mentioned methods were used to assess the effectiveness of carrying out online courses via Microsoft Teams in teaching and learning English when being applied in AJC. At the same time, the challenges of implementing the online course were exposed in order for the researchers to make a range of some suggestions for more efficient employment of such

online course using Microsoft Teams platform in the other upcoming courses.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The researchers asked their students to study English online twice a week on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Every lesson was divided into two parts, learning online with the teachers' assistance from 7 a.m. to 9.30 a.m. and doing assignments assigned by the teachers through Microsoft Teams platform such as doing exercises using Microsoft form from 9.30 a.m. to 11 a.m. It is a convenient tool because the teachers could check whether their students understand the lessons or not and knew who did not finish the assignments. Besides, the grades were assessed and the results were sent automatically. Hence, it could save the time and the teachers' efforts. At the end of each online lesson or whenever they had any difficulties in learning English as well as using this Moodle, the students could raise their questions by sending messages via Microsoft Teams.



4.1. Pre-test and post-test analysis

The results clearly showed that respondents were very conscious of the use of Microsoft Teams when they participated in pre- and post-test, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

In this case study, pre-test and post-test were conducted to assess students' performance before and after the implementation of Microsoft

Teams. As can be seen from the table below, these results were divided into four categories: weak students, medium students, good students and excellent students. According to the results from both tests, total post-test correct responses were highly significant than pre - test responses. There is a dramatic increase in medium students, good and excellent students while the number of weak students in post-tests consists of the lower figure. Particularly, the number of excellent students who got the scores from 8.5 to 10 increased fourfold in the post-test, whereas the figure for weak students who got 1 to 5.4 scores decreased significantly from 16 to 3.

Table 1. The pre-and post-test scores of class B2

	The pre – test scores		The post – test scores	
Weak students	16	57.2 %	3	10.7 %
Medium students	7	25 %	10	35.7%
Good students	3	10.7 %	7	25 %
Excellent students	2	7.1 %	8	28.6 %
Total	28	100%	23	100%

4.2. Questionnaire analysis

The second instrument which the researchers used to collect the data is the survey questionnaire. According to the results from the table 2, it can be seen that nearly all the participants were prepared to be trained with using Microsoft Teams course with 96.4%. Similarly, the same rate of participants agreed that the quantity of the knowledge obtained corresponded to their spent time and 85.7% saw that Microsoft Teams was helping them gain English learning material, whereas only more than half of them (67.8%) expressed that learning online via the way could be used not only in English but also in other subjects. It was illustrated that 89.2% of participants saw that Microsoft teams allowed them to use modern teaching and learning skills and increased their ICT skills by a proportion of 85.7%. The results revealed that eLearning was suitable for what the participants study at 82.1 %, and there was the same rate of 78.5% in using Microsoft Teams to coordinate the learning process more effectively and have more

practical exercises and lectures. Some participants found that e-learning via Microsoft Teams has improved learning process by improving contact between teachers and students, while 89.2 % of the students agreed that it was a valuable time and a useful thing to work with the electronic course. Also, the results showed that the quality of Microsoft Teams course was able to suit the educational level of today, at 92.8%.

Table 2. *The awareness of students towards the use of elements of Microsoft teams in the teaching process (in percent)*

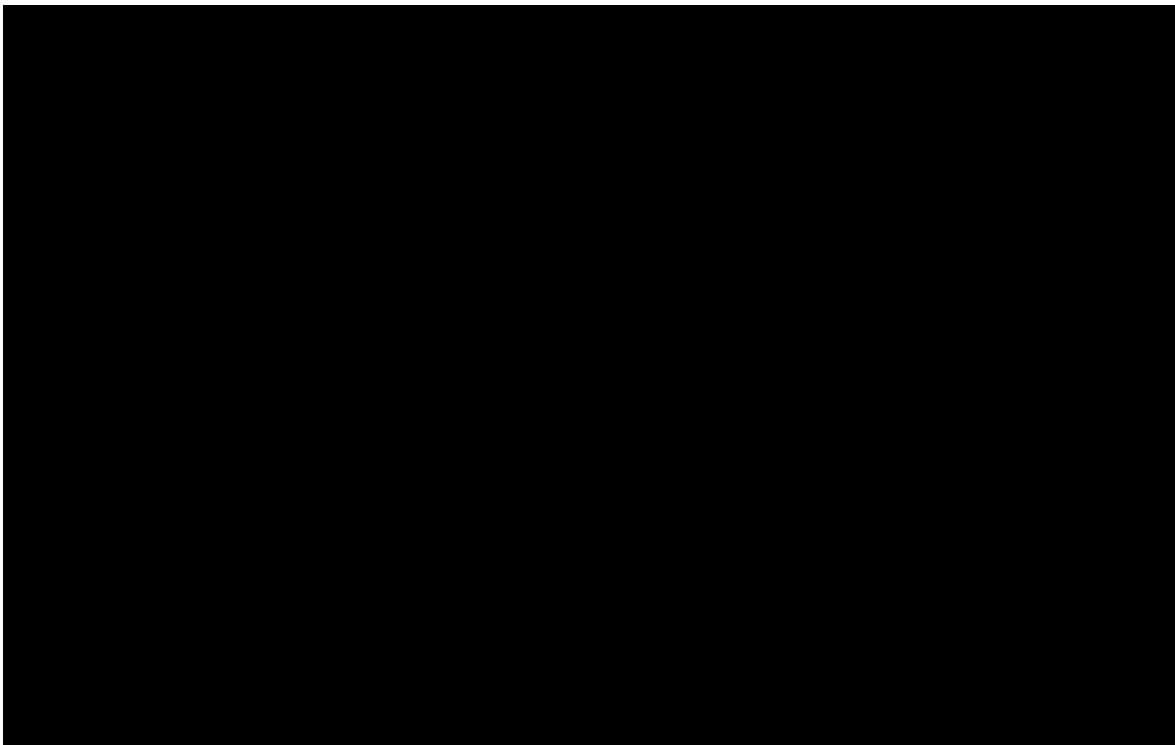
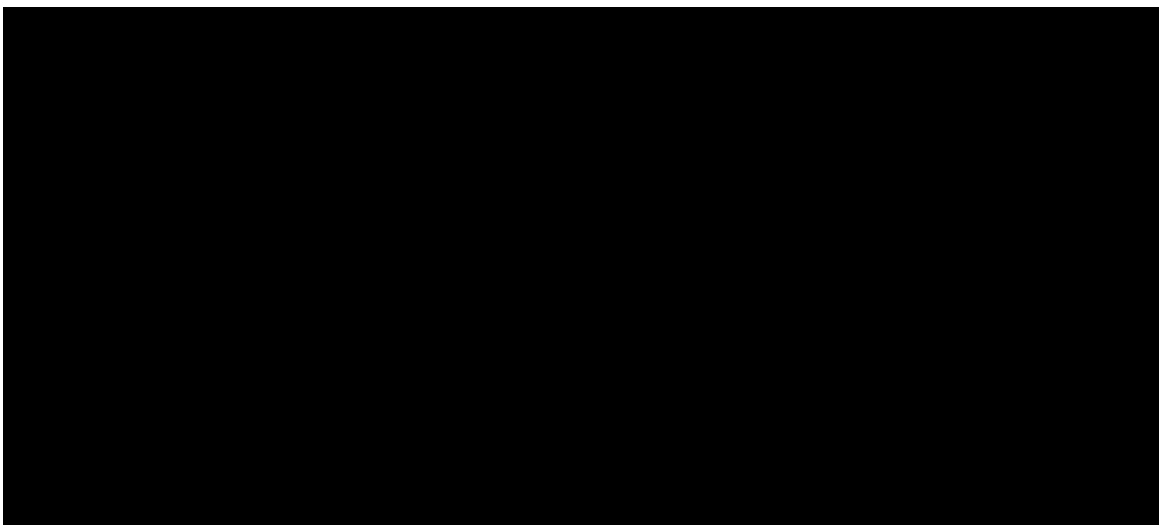


Table 3 indicated 92.8% of participants considered that e-Learning with Microsoft Teams helped them to improve the speed of learning and the same proportion of them find that they could remember and understand the lesson easily while they were online training with the kind of the teams. Readers could also see that less than half of Microsoft Teams' participants (35.8%) found difficulty in learning and solving their homework alone online without support from anyone. Since then, it has been suggested that the majority of people can strengthen their time management ability. By contrast, only 67.8 percent of participants agreed that Microsoft Teams could increase their motivation in studying while the rate of them is illustrated in Table 3 considered that the learning process via the Teams could be enjoyable consists of three quarters (75%).

Table 3. The effectiveness of using the elements of Microsoft teams in the teaching process for students (in percent)



4.3. Interviews

The interviews were conducted online via Microsoft Teams to find out more information about the students' opinions after the online course. There were three questions in the interview. The researchers interviewed five students from the class randomly and the researchers asked their students in their first language in order to create free environment and to guarantee the truthfulness of the information. Interview questions were structured based on the information that questionnaires could not exploit and it was designed in order to give more insights for discussion of results and suggestions. The first question was to find out the difficulties the students had when they studied online using Microsoft Teams. Next, the researchers also asked the students' opinions about their suggestions to tackle the problems. Finally, the students were asked about their attitudes towards the online course.

Semi- structured interviews with five participants revealed several problems. For the first question, the first student said that he came from an unprivileged family; therefore, he did not have a chance to own a computer while the second and the third shared that they only learnt computer skills at basic level which made them confused with learning online. The second student shared a situation that she experienced. It happened when a teacher called her to answer a question several times, but she could not adjust a right button on the keyboard. This made her feel discouraged at the

beginning period of learning on Microsoft Teams. Moreover, the others also agreed that they lacked the effective training and the available technical staff. Then, they suggested some possible solutions to deal with the problems when being asked the second question. All of them agreed that teacher should train students how to use Microsoft Teams effectively before organizing an online course. Also, they expected to be taught in the place that has a strong Internet connection by teachers while the others suggested that the administrators improve the number as well as the quality of technical staff. More importantly, five students expressed a general expectation that the administrators and teachers provide learners a handout to direct them how to master their ICT skills or search materials on Youtube by themselves to self-study. Finally, all the participants took part in the interview agreed to continue studying online via Microsoft Teams in the future because they realize its benefits and they were also getting acquainted with studying via the Teams.

4.4. Discussion

The primary goal of this study was to determine the improvement of learning process and the attitudes of students to show the effectiveness of Microsoft Teams, especially during the COVID-19. Using Microsoft Teams helped learners stay connected and engaged through remote learning. To try to increase the validity of the research, the authors used three data collection instruments: tests, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

The findings showed that excellent and good students gained higher marks in the post-test while the number of weak students decreased dramatically. This can clarify the effectiveness of learning online via Microsoft Teams to some extent and can become a high motivation to encourage learners to get involved in their lessons online. Another persuasive reason is that the questionnaires from the second data collection instrument showed that e-learning could help learners to use their educational knowledge and handle learning processes more effectively. Thanks to it, learners also look for more practical exercises and lectures by themselves, and they can utilize their spent time to obtain the quantity and quality of the beneficial knowledge. The results in table 2 have also shown that majority of students are prepared to be trained via Microsoft Teams. From the table, it can be shown that the communication between the teacher and the student was enhanced. Normally, students participate in big-size classes at school; they do not have lots of chances to ask for their teachers'

advice. However, they can receive the response quickly by putting the symbol of raising hand on Teams' tool and then hear their teacher's voice clearly and comfortably via the headphones. Besides, it is convenient for them to receive files or submit their exercises conveniently on Teams instead of sending them by emails. This can be one of benefits for learners to adopt various ways in exchanging materials or exercises with their teachers.

In terms of using computer skills, the study findings in table 2 also indicated that ICT students were more likely than students with low ICT skills to use their skills. This could become a burden to students who were not very good at using technology and then tended to get bored with online learning. Moreover, the quality of the Microsoft Teams reflected today's educational level and could be used in all topics and the access of modern teaching and learning resources worldwide. Learners did not need to go to the library traditionally; they could actively look for their expected materials that are written by the variety of authors in the world. It could be said that the Internet had become a powerful tool for everyone to search the information which they want. The findings also indicated that Microsoft Teams helped students develop their own self-study abilities and encourage them to study without the need for any help from other students or teachers. Thanks to this, students were able to develop their time management skills. The vast majority of them tend to use Microsoft Teams which helped them to remember and understand the lessons easily. According to the participants, Microsoft Teams could contribute to making the learning process enjoyable and it could lead to good relations inside and outside the school, and then created positive influences on their friendships. In spite of the benefits of learning online using Microsoft Teams, the results of semi - structured interviews also helped readers understand more about some drawbacks that need supplementing. During the learning process, most of them agreed that there were still lacks of effective training. This can be explained that they had to learn online due to the pandemic, they did not have much time to be instructed with basic steps. Moreover, some of students found difficult in accessing technology, especially with students who belong to underprivileged families, they do not have good conditions to possess the gadgets such as smart phones, computers or lap tops. Finally, the lack of technical staff and ICT skills also discouraged some of students.

They did not get accustomed to dealing with the majority of problems online as they had done traditionally. Since then, some possible solutions have been suggested. In terms of teachers, before organizing an online

course, they should train students how to use Microsoft Teams effectively. Learners should also be well - prepared with clear schedules to get ready to get involved enthusiastically. Besides, teachers ought to encourage them to study in a place with a stable Internet connection. This can help learners focus more on their lessons to avoid external factors such as unstable access to the internet or even online disconnection. Importantly, teachers should allow them to take breaks between lessons to stretch, hydrate, or just unplug which helps them stay healthy and charged. Finally, it is necessary to make a lesson interactive by using “Whiteboard in Teams” during a live lesson. Students are likely to feel like being taught in a physical classroom. In terms of the administrators, they should consider and improve the number as well as the quality of technical staff. In fact, the experienced staff can make learners master the technological skills as soon as possible. Another suggestion is that the administrators and teachers should provide students with a handout to instruct them how to search self – study materials on Youtube or other resources. It is better if educational institutions may consider inviting experienced Microsoft Teams specialists to train and supporting both teachers and students with practical guides and professional development directly. They also can create a series of webinars to get started on Teams and have more updated resources. This can help teachers and learners to stay motivated and engaged. Interestingly, all the students who took part in the interview agreed to continue studying online via Microsoft Teams in the future despite its drawbacks. They realize its benefits and were also getting acquainted with studying via the Teams.

5. IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This current study aimed at investigating the use of Microsoft Teams in teaching and learning English to help improve the first-year non-English majored students’ level at AJC and their attitudes towards the use of the Teams in their learning. The study has determined the learning level of participants via pre- and post-tests and their attitudes towards the use of Microsoft Teams in learning. The results of the interviews showed that learning online via Microsoft Teams during the COVID-19 pandemic was highly known to participants and had a positive effect on their academic performances, achievement, and relationship between teachers and students or students and their peers at AJC. Besides some disadvantages such as lack of access to technology or ICT skills, the authors hoped that students at the university had a clear understanding and are well-prepared

to study with several courses on Microsoft Teams. However, due to the limitations of time, lack of resources and researchers' ability, the drawbacks are unavoidable. The study focused on a limited number of participants, was carried out in a certain university and in a short period of time. Therefore, it cannot be postulated that all these findings are valid for every student and further studies should be applied to different learners from different fields and more items and statements should be added and given to the participants.

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