Microsoft Teams as a powerful tool to optimize English study experiences for B1-level non-majors at Academy of Journalism and Communication:An effective approach to improve students' vocabulary skills

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Abstract: *Among the abundance of apps that have been developed to allow for e-education to happen, Microsoft Teams is a giant. For teaching staff from Foreign Language Department at Academy of Journalism and Communication, it is a wise choice to help students hone their vocabulary skills.*

It is also crucially important to notice that the software itself is now becoming increasingly popular in Vietnamese university as it is almost free and user-friendly, which makes it highly accessible to all students. Additonally, a majority of university lecturers have considered it as an indispensable means of teaching English because Microsoft never ceases to develop it, improve it and popularize it. With new applications being made available every several months, English teachers as well as lecturers have been totally interested in how versatile and helpful it can be. This article also brings a deep insight into some common and highly effective functions that are both known by or still new to most students and even educators. It also attempts to show some evidence of how this means of language education elevate students at Academy of Journalism and Communication, making them confident English language users.

Keywords: *Software, accessible, means of teaching*

1. Introduction

Across universities in Vietnam, Microsoft Teams has become a widely used AI tool that aids English education for so many years now. In the case of Academy of Journalism and Communication, it has been used for over 7 years.

Learning a new language has long been realized as a challenging and time-consuming job, especially for non-native English speakers in Vietnam. The main reason for this is that they lack tools that aid them effectively in the long and demanding process of English study. Additionally, in spite of advancements in technology and innovative teaching methodologies, many students still grapple with learning and mastering the English language in the new context where too many AI tools are introduced at the same time. Ridiculously enough, it normally takes a huge amount of time for individuals to get themselves used to a single AI tool. This promts the writer to introduce his students Microsoft Teams as the most versatile technology for several reasons:

*Students at Academy of Journalism and Communication have been used to this app for years

now, especially since the Covid-19 global epidemics.

*It is compulsory that online lessons are taught every semester and up to 30% of the total amount of time allocated to teaching and learning via Microsoft Teams.

*Both students and teachers show a deep interest in distance education for a wide variety of reasons, but they all agree that this form of education boosts study effectiveness immensely.

*Microft Teams is free to use and extremely user-friendly. Therefore, all the parties concerned find it comfortable to exploit this tool. In other words, it does not require its users to spend long hours to study it before using it.

2. Content

2.1. An overview of Microsoft Teams

It was officially introduced to students at this institution in 2019 when the global pandemic Covid-19 meant that everybody had to stay home. They were strictly prohibited from going out of their own place. Then, people started to realize that Microsoft Teams is a powerful tool for language learning, allowing you to connect with English-

speaking teachers and students around the world. Here are some detailed steps you can take to use Microsoft Teams to learn English:

Find a language learning group or teacher on Microsoft Teams: You can search for language learning groups or teachers on the Microsoft Teams platform. Joining a language learning group or connecting with a language teacher is a great way to start using Teams to learn English.

Join or create a channel: Once you've found a language learning group or teacher, you can join a channel. A channel is a dedicated area within a team where you can communicate with other team members. You can also create your own channel if you want to connect with other English learners.

Participate in conversations: Once you're in a channel, you can start participating in conversations with other English learners. This is a great way to practice your speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. You can also ask questions and get feedback from other learners.

Use the chat feature: Microsoft Teams has a chat feature that you can use to communicate with other English learners. You can use this feature to have one-on-one conversations with other learners, share resources, or practice your writing skills.

Share files and resources: You can use Microsoft Teams to share files and resources with other English learners. This could include vocabulary lists, grammar exercises, or reading materials. Sharing resources is a great way to learn new words and phrases and practice your English skills.

Use video conferencing: Microsoft Teams also has a video conferencing feature that you can use to connect with other English learners face-to-face. This is a great way to practice your speaking and listening skills and get feedback from other learners.

Attend virtual language classes: Many language teachers offer virtual language classes on Microsoft Teams. You can attend these classes to get more structured learning and practice your English skills in a more formal setting.

Therefore, Microsoft Teams is a versatile platform that can be used for language learning. By finding a language learning group or teacher, joining or creating a channel, participating in conversations, using the chat feature, sharing files and resources, using video conferencing, and attending virtual language classes, you can use Microsoft Teams to improve your English skills.

2.2. Some applications

Using Microsoft Teams to enhance students' language skills

Teams is an all-encompassing tool that evens the playing field for English Language Learners because it offers a wide range of functions that allows them to practice studying vocabulary in a way that is highly engaging: multidality.

+ Immersive Reader and Reading Coach: These allow students to practise pronunciation with any words/ sentences/ texts that they wish to. There are a lot of choices to make when it comes to voices and accents. This saves them a lot of time and energy as looking up words with dictionaries can be boring and make the learning experience less interesting.

+ Immersive Reader as well as its amazing features all at the push of a button: This includes the Picture Dictionary, line focus, read aloud, and the ability to translate their work into over 59 languages. The writer can assign tasks in English, and allow students to translate the assignment into their first language. This is a great help for self-study leaners. They can translate the prompts and questions without needing to open a translation tool. While translating is not always necessary for higher level students, B1-learners benefit greatly from this function as only understanding what tasks ask them to do means they are able to show what they know.

+ Teams also improves the ability of teamwork, which has always been a much-needed life skill for all students, but used to be ignored in the past as a result of lack of supporting tools. Students now do not need to commute to unversity to meet up with their classmates. They can have a dialogue with people of their groups at their fingertips. Clearly, studying vocabulary with friends contributes significantly to their success. They can achieve a lot by simply reading aloud a short text to friends and listening to their comments.

2.3. Using Microsoft Teams to manage in-class activities

This app also allows lecturers to take control of their classes far more efftively than in a traditional classroom, which inevitably leads to higher learning quality. To begin with, students must take part in by their cameras and they have to pay attention all the time. This means lecturers can easily notice who are watching their lessons attentively or not. They can

ask anyone to answer their questions, or they can check student's attention. This is much better than teaching in a lecture hall because students can easily play tricks on their lecturers when sitting next to each other. For example, the crowd psychology says that gathering together may give students a strong feeling of getting more power over lecturers. They often feel comfortable chatting with each other, helping their classmates answer any questions and therefore, lecturers cannot make sure of every one of their students are following their lessons. However, teaching online means that students often sit at home and many academically ambitious students love it because they can totally focus on their learning without being distracted by weaker ones. It also means that students are not crowding or trying to exploit the teamwork to cope with their lecturers. It mostly means that every single individual has to make efforts on their own and differences in performances are easily seen.

For English learners at this institution in particular, Microsoft Teams can enable them to produce good spoken language. As regular practice is vitally important in the process of English learning, using this software can lead to students being more confident in exchanging conversation even with natives. The first application to mention is Immersive Reader that helps students to practice pronunciation – the one area of English study that most students at this institution find most challenging. Immersive Reader can broaden their horizons at any levels, from word pronunciation to sentence and paragraph pronunciation. It is specially designed to students can customize their learning needs; for example, they can choose to begin with pronouncing just a list of individual words that they want. They can also practice anytime and anywhere as long as they have an internet-connected device.

Even more useful than Immersive Reader, a recently integrated app is Reading Coach, which shows students if they are pronouncing a word or sentence wrong or right. It demonstrates errors by providing a detailed table of what has been done well and what needs to improves. It gives them plenty of chances to practice and overcome their weaknesses. It never complains if they do not do so well or make silly mistakes. It does not care about the length of inputs. You can add a lengthy document or more

wisely a short version of a reading part, or you can only give it some words. The app can work highly efficient and extremely easy to use.

Lecturers have been used to giving homework assignments with Microsoft Teams for a long time. It helps them to keep track of students' work. Those who hand in their work and who do not can be easily found out. This makes assessment and marking extremely doable for lecturers. Fairness, therefore, is ensured better.

3. Conclusion

The results have been so positive, with lectures helping satisfying all learner's needs. Obviously with the wide use of technology, both lecturers and students benefit immensely. The burden of workloads is relieved for lecturers and this also means less stress. It is inevitable that the effectiveness of English education is brought to a new level, which without AI tools could have been reached.

In addition, apart from their lecturers, Microsoft Teams can be a great coach or language trainer. 61% students in an interview in 2023 said that their learning experience got so satisfying with greater confidence in engaging in English conversations with others all over the world. Also, they studied this language with greater achievements such as higher scores since they knew and made use of Microsoft Teams. It also leads to them being more committed to their homework assignments: They never forget to do their homework because it can act like a work reminder.

Teachers all state that assessment has been fairer and more precise than ever as everything is saved and proofs for assessing students are still there. This reduces the chance of making errors in assessment from 66% to merely 21%, especially when it comes to subjectivity. This clearly leads to a much healthier education environment.

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