

THE ZOOM EFFECT: CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES OF ONLINE ESL LESSONS

ZOOM-ЕФЕКТ: ВИКЛИКИ ТА ПЕРСПЕКТИВИ ОНЛАЙН-УРОКІВ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ

This article deals with the challenges English language teachers regularly face when working online. The article focuses on the importance to continue to implement teaching process seamlessly under difficult and challenging circumstances, using video conferencing platforms such as Zoom. Although this technology has opened up new opportunities for distant learning, it has also presented challenges for both ESL teachers and students. Taking into consideration the deficiency of system development of methods and approaches to teaching English online, the following scientific research is focused on scrutinising all sorts of possible solutions of the problems arising from the necessity to teach English on Zoom. The attempt to provide a comprehensive review of all challenges associated with the process of teaching English online was undertaken. The use of different strategies to keep students engaged, such as using interactive activities, discussions, and group settings in break-out rooms is examined. Communication barriers such as Internet disruptions, software glitches, background noise, etc. that may drastically exacerbate distant educational process are mentioned. The vital importance of facilitating favourable friendly atmosphere in virtual class to overcome the problem of psychological barrier is highlighted. All possible reasons for decreased attention span that can negatively affect the outcome of the studying process are considered. All the diversity of online resources that makes it possible to get in-depth information and allows not only to dramatically increase effectiveness of teaching, but also encourages students to self-study is mentioned. Advantages of using video conferencing platforms such as Zoom for teaching ESL are examined. In the following research Zoom's breakout rooms feature is taken into consideration as it offers a range of benefits for teaching ESL, especially in terms of enhancing speaking skills and student engagement. Being unavailable on other video conferencing platforms, breakout room feature makes Zoom a more suitable platform for ESL teachers who want to provide a more personalized and interactive learning experience for their students. The article is of great help to all foreign language teachers interested in the possible ways to deal effectively with challenges associated with the necessity to teach ESL on Zoom.

Key words: *distant learning, Zoom platform, higher educational institution, motivation, psychological barrier, Zoom's breakout rooms.*

Дана стаття присвячена розгляду актуальної проблеми, з якою регулярно стикаються викладачі англійської мови при дистанцій-

ному навчанні. У статті зосереджена увага на важливості продовжувати безперервне впровадження навчального процесу під час надзвичайних обставин, використовуючи платформи для відео конференцій, такі як Zoom. Хоча використання цифрових технологій відкриває нові можливості для дистанційного навчання, процес діджиталізації освіти створює ряд проблем як для викладачів, так і для студентів. Беручи до уваги недостатній розвиток системних методів і підходів до викладання англійської мови онлайн, дане наукове дослідження зосереджене на детальному розгляді всіляких можливих рішень проблем, що виникають у зв'язку з необхідністю викладання англійської мови, використовуючи платформу Zoom. Було зроблено спробу дати комплексний огляд усіх проблем, пов'язаних із процесом онлайн-викладання англійської мови. В статті перелічені комунікаційні бар'єри, які можуть суттєво ускладнювати ефективність дистанційного навчання. Вивчається використання різних стратегій для залучення студентів до навчального процесу, серед яких такі як використання інтерактивних заходів та жвавих дискусій у сесійних залах платформи Zoom. У статті підкреслюється надзвичайно важливе значення докладанню зусиль задля створення сприятливої дружньої атмосфери у віртуальному класі для подолання проблеми психологічного бар'єру. Розглянуті всі можливі причини зниження концентрації уваги, які можуть негативно вплинути на результат навчального процесу. Відзначено все розмаїття інтернет-ресурсів, які дають змогу отримати інформацію та дозволяють не лише різко підвищити ефективність навчання, а й спонукають студентів до самостійної роботи. Розглянуті переваги використання такої платформи для відео конференцій як Zoom для навчання англійської мови. У статті розглядається така функція Zoom як сесійні зали, яка є надзвичайно важливою саме для викладачів іноземної мови, оскільки вона пропонує низку переваг з точки зору покращення мовленнєвих навичок і залучення студентів до роботи. Стаття дуже допоможе всім викладачам іноземних мов, які цікавляться можливими способами ефективного вирішення проблем, пов'язаних з необхідністю викладання англійської мови онлайн.

Ключові слова: *дистанційне навчання, платформа Zoom, вищий навчальний заклад, мотивація, психологічний бар'єр, сесійні зали платформи Zoom.*

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Problem statement. It goes without saying that it is technological innovation that plays a crucial role in shaping our contemporary world. The outbreak of the Covid-19 and war in Ukraine has dramatically changed daily working routine of teachers. English as a second language (ESL) teachers are not an exception. It would not be an exaggeration to

claim that the habitual teaching methods used in the ESL classrooms had to be instantly adjusted to inevitable changes that were brought into the sphere of education because of the urgent necessity for all participants of the educational process to stay home. Since educational process couldn't be stopped despite any adverse circumstances, ESL teachers had to

continue to implement teaching process seamlessly under difficult and challenging circumstances.

The rapid transition to online teaching due to the pandemic and war in Ukraine has led to a surge in the use of video conferencing platforms such as Zoom for teaching ESL. While this technology has opened up new possibilities for distant learning, it has also presented a range of challenges for both teachers and learners. This article aims at exploring challenges and perspectives of teaching English on Zoom, with the goal of providing insights and recommendations for improving the online ESL teaching experience.

The purpose of this article is to take a closer look at challenges of digital transformation in teaching ESL. Unfortunately, digital transformation in education, as well as switch to online education is associated with many difficulties teachers have to face on a regular basis. It is necessary to highlight that the task of a teacher placed in online environment is to enhance the educational process and to take the most from technological benefits making transition from offline classes to online work as smooth as possible, while minimizing the drawbacks associated with online teaching.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Despite the growing importance of teaching English on Zoom because of the outbreak of war in Ukraine, recent research and publications on this topic appear to be relatively scarce. While war in Ukraine has accelerated the shift towards distant teaching, many educators have had to rely on trial and error method to determine the most effective approaches to teaching online. Thus, there is a pressing need for more research and publications that focus on developing evidence-based strategies and best practices for teaching English on Zoom. Such research could provide valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with the necessity to stay online, including the use of technology, as well as the promotion of student engagement and motivation.

Presentation of the main material. Let's take a look at challenges associated with teaching ESL on Zoom and consider all the possible ways to tackle the problems that inevitably arise. One of the main challenges that every ESL teacher faces in the higher educational institution is the lack of motivation to study. It concerns not only motivation to study foreign languages, but also unwillingness to study anything at all, caused by laziness, addiction to computer games/social networks/Internet, deficit of attention, etc.

Motivation is perhaps the most indisputable and essential factor in the success of learning in general and the study of foreign languages in particular. It goes without saying that if students lack motivation, it can significantly hinder the learning process. It won't be an exaggeration to claim that the lack of motivation can be a stumbling block in acquiring any skills and a foreign language is not an exception.

It should be emphasized that when trying to find out reasons for the reluctance to study, ESL teachers can usually hear that students realize the importance of knowing foreign languages in today's rapidly changing world and verbally demonstrate readiness to study, though as practice shows, students appear to be unprepared to make even the slightest effort. Such discrepancy between words and reality is caused by low level of self-organization, lack of time management skills, inability to self-study, etc.

Undoubtedly, we can claim that the shift to distant or online learning, unfortunately, made the things even worse for those students lacking motivation to study. [4, p. 113] Being the first-hand participants of digital transformation in the educational process, we may observe that the attention span of non-motivated students involved in the online learning process is significantly decreased, compared to those students who also lack motivation, but have to attend offline practical lessons.

It is necessary to highlight that reasons for decreased attention span are quite obvious, among which we can name such distractors as smart phone notifications, messaging using social networks or messengers that have become extremely popular among tech-savvy teenagers, Internet surfing, etc. Unfortunately, we can claim that in the majority of cases it becomes the biggest challenge for ESL teachers to compete with messengers for the attention of demotivated students. Thus, English teachers working on Zoom have to employ different strategies to keep their students engaged, such as using interactive activities, discussions, and group settings in break-out rooms. Although it can be challenging to create an interactive learning environment when students are not physically present, digitalization can make learning more interactive and engaging. Digital tools such as videos, podcasts, interactive quizzes and games, and online discussion forums allow learners to engage with the language in a more dynamic and stimulating way. This can help keep learners motivated and interested in their studies.

The other challenge that ESL teachers have to deal with is communication barriers. When teaching online, teachers may encounter communication barriers that make it difficult to convey ideas effectively. For instance, poor internet connectivity, background noise, frequent power cuts associated with the war consequences can affect communication between teachers and students. Participants of the distant educational process also have to cope with technical issues, such as network disruptions and software glitches, which can waste valuable teaching time. Teachers may have to repeat themselves frequently or use other means of communication such as chatboxes, which can be time-consuming and less effective.

Online learning can be challenging for both teachers and students, as it requires a different

approach to time management. Teachers have to manage their time efficiently to ensure they cover the required curriculum while allowing students to engage in interactive activities and discussions. Assessment and feedback can be another challenge in English teaching on Zoom. [5, p. 146] Assessing students' progress and providing feedback is critical to ensure that students understand the concepts being taught. However, it can be challenging to assess students' comprehension and understanding of the language when teaching online. Additionally, providing individualized feedback can be time-consuming, especially when teaching a large class.

Often ESL teachers have to deal with so-called psychological barrier that can become a serious stumbling block for any student. Needless to say that it is the task of a foreign language teacher to create a favourable friendly atmosphere in the class, where no student, even the shiest one, will be afraid to get in awkward situation while speaking a foreign language, though sometimes this task for the teacher is not the easiest one. Speaking activities in the offline ESL classroom for shy, unconfident students with low self-esteem and high levels of anxiety, i.e. people experiencing psychological distress in all situations associated with the evaluation of their activities could be quite embarrassing experience, leading to intimidation. [2, p. 21]

In case we deal with shy students lacking confidence, online educational process can have some advantages. Unavoidable digital transformations in teaching ESL have turned into huge plus for shy students with psychological barrier. Favourable and friendly home atmosphere, where a student is alone at home or among family members, facilitates participation in speaking activities. Moreover, the opportunity to study with the camera off can be very beneficial for the students with low self-esteem. Since online education is not associated with stressful situation of being in front of an audience and having the stage fright feeling, fear of speaking activities is not so intense in ESL virtual classroom.

Modern digitally transformed society dictates new requirements for the process of teaching foreign languages. Undoubtedly, the use of computer technology has a number of undeniable benefits. Learning a foreign language is associated with the necessity to process a lot of information. Electronic dictionaries and encyclopedias, multimedia resources, including authentic audio and video materials, digital versions of printed books, authentic newspapers and magazines, educational websites, forums, video conferencing platforms, digital educational tools - all this diversity makes it possible to get in-depth information, allows not only to dramatically increase effectiveness of teaching, but also encourages students to self-study. In this way, the benefits of using technology in teaching ESL are difficult to overestimate.

The platform Zoom has become increasingly popular for teaching ESL in recent years. This online platform offers many advantages for both teachers and students, making it an effective and convenient tool for language teaching as it offers real-time communication. With its video conferencing and chat features, students can interact with their teacher and classmates as if they were in a physical classroom. This provides students with a more immersive language learning experience, as they can hear and see their teacher's pronunciation and facial expressions, which can aid in understanding.

Moreover, Zoom offers a wide range of interactive tools that can be used to enhance the learning experience. Teachers can use features such as screen sharing, virtual whiteboards, and breakout rooms to create engaging and dynamic lessons. These tools allow teachers to share presentations, videos, and other multimedia resources with their students, as well as to divide students into smaller groups for group work and discussions. Undoubtedly, one of the most significant benefits of using Zoom in teaching ESL is the possibility of using breakout rooms. Breakout rooms enable teachers to divide large groups into smaller groups for practicing speaking skills. This is the feature that is not available on other video conferencing platforms, but it is the breakout rooms that can significantly enhance the teaching and learning experience for ESL students. Zoom's breakout rooms feature offers a range of benefits for teaching ESL, especially in terms of enhancing speaking skills and student engagement.

Breakout rooms enable students to work collaboratively with their peers and participate actively in discussions, which improves engagement levels and overall learning outcomes. With smaller groups, teachers can provide more personalized feedback and individual attention to each student, addressing their unique needs. It is quite understandable that ESL students need ample opportunities to practice speaking skills, which can be rather challenging in a large group. Breakout rooms allow students to interact with their peers in a more relaxed and comfortable setting, enabling them to develop their speaking skills at their own pace.

Moreover, breakout rooms promote collaborative learning, which is essential for ESL students. It enables them to learn from each other, share their ideas and experience, and work together to achieve a common goal. It won't be an exaggeration to claim that Zoom has become an indispensable tool for language learning. With its many benefits, it is no surprise that more and more teachers are turning to Zoom for their ESL classes.

Conclusions. All in all, it should be pointed out that a foreign language teacher working online has to adopt a mixture of solutions that would meet the needs of every single student in the ESL virtual classroom,

so that the educational process might be carried out to the full extent. That way it would become possible for all participants of the educational process to enjoy putting technology to work on your own needs, while trying to minimize all the drawbacks that the digital transformation has brought to our everyday life. With the right approach, ESL teachers can ensure that their students receive high quality education, regardless of the circumstances we are put in.

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