

Microsoft Teams in the context of freshmen ELF learning

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Abstract

The aim of this research paper is to determine how Microsoft teams worked when teaching the first-year English at Van Lang University through the COVID-19 pandemic. Microsoft Teams is a new application used by the university, and this paper reports on the experience of using it for other colleagues to critique and improve on. The sample for this study consisted of eighty freshmen selected from four classes. A set of questionnaires with fifteen Likert-scale items together with interviews served as instruments for data collection. The findings demonstrated that using Microsoft Teams for teaching and learning was an effective way to keep learning activities going on. In general, despite some inconveniences with the technological problems, the students were eager to a new means of learning but did not make good use of this collaboration tool in their learning. Also, the research paper results reveal that the participants possessed positive attitudes towards the benefits of using Microsoft Teams in online learning. In contrast, they expressed an unfavorable perspective on the drawbacks of using this tool respectively.

Keywords: attitudes, Microsoft Teams, benefits, drawbacks, implications

I. INTRODUCTION

With the global trend of educational era 4.0, there is always an inherent must in an attempt to improve the quality of education and encourage students' autonomy learning. Without a doubt, an ever-increasing demand for web-based teaching and learning has been generated by the easy accessibility of technological devices and social networks. Consequently, along with the strong development of information and communication technology, online education – also known as e-learning comes into life as a result of teaching and learning renovation. Indeed, online education, which is categorized into three common implementations: fully Internet-based learning, blended learning, and web-based supplements for face-to-face traditional learning, is not a new practice since it has been infiltrating into a vast number of schools across the globe (Gilbert, 2015).

There is a plethora of robust evidence that online learning is considered a pedagogical solution that facilitates personalized learning and flexibility to acquire knowledge regardless of time and geographical locations (Guragain, 2016). Nevertheless, it has been widely proven that e-learning develops unevenly in all regions of the world, with the strongest growth in North America and Europe and the prospective but less application in Asia and Southeast Asia. In line with the educational reform policy regarding industrialization and modernization enacted by Vietnam's government in 2010, the application of e-learning, especially in the higher education context, witnessed a significant increase for learners' sake. What matters is

Vietnamese e-learning is mostly in the form of blended learning, while traditional education with interactions between teachers and students is widely believed to be the most effective education method during so many years - ranging from primary schools to tertiary institutions (Le et al., 2013, p. 240).

In response to the common trend in today's education, both teachers and learners at Van Lang University have explored the Moodle software as an e-learning tool to facilitate learning and teaching since 2015. Like many other Vietnamese universities, e-learning activities in the university are in the shape of blended learning. Particularly, a majority of the lecturers take advantage of this learning management system in uploading a series of lectures, references; giving assignments, and hosting a forum. On the whole, this software facilitates students' learning by giving them more chances to keep track of the lessons, store the studying resources and discuss their concerns. Unfortunately, due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic at the beginning of the second semester of the school-year 2019-2020, all students throughout the country had to stay off school and be under social distancing, and Van Lang students were not an exception. To avoid the irresistible interruption of the training schedule, a new application, i.e., Microsoft Teams, was introduced to resolve other apps' problems, which fails to enhance a face-to-face interaction like that of traditional classrooms. However, this teaching method was not favored by those who are not accustomed to autonomy learning and subject to technological problems. In reality, despite 8-time unrivaled opportunities of supplementing registration, the number of students enrolling in the real-time courses was not up to 85%, not to mention the ever-increasing proportion of students' dropout during the semester. Hence, making Microsoft Teams a more beneficial teaching tool is far more necessary than ever before. Surprisingly, there are no studies to find out the students' perceptions towards the use of Microsoft Teams at Van Lang University. In other words, to what extent this online teaching tool is beneficial to students and what kinds of reflection students have after experiencing by themselves are not addressed formally.

The main purpose of this research paper is to explore how learners' – actually respond to learning English with Microsoft Teams' help. It also investigated how teachers at this university use Microsoft Teams as a facilitator of language learning. The results gave some teaching implications for those who would like to make better use of these teaching tools due to the drawbacks of using them revealed by the students respectively.

Research Questions

1. How do the first-year English majors respond to the use of Microsoft Teams in online learning at Van Lang University?
2. What can be done to improve the quality of online courses in the application of Microsoft Teams?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Benefits of online learning

A review of recent literature on online learning supports that online learning should be integrated into schools' teaching programs due to it is beneficial in terms of flexibility, convenience, and personalized learning opportunities (e.g., Segaren, 2020; Guragain, 2016; Smedley, 2010). Specifically, in the area of flexibility and convenience, Zhang et al. (2006)

and Judahil et al. (2007) once emphasized the advantage of e-learning as a way of flexible learning with substantially less need for commuting to classes. Also, e-learning is far more flexible on account of time and geographic locations, allowing learners to select the best time or place to study (Guragain, 2016). In other words, students enabled to easily access resources such as videos, PowerPoint lecture slides, and so on for learning many times at many places, including at home, at a café, or even on the road. As far as Henninger (2012) was concerned, the advantages of e-learning were outlined with a way of relieving learner's anxiety about their study since no matter where they live, they are likely to receive the same quality of training.

In terms of the personalized learning experience, according to Wagner et al. (2008), e-learning could benefit students through the exploration of discussion boards, including forums, email, and chats, which motivated students to interact, expose and respect different standpoints without any fear of losing face. Hence, students can have continual access to materials regularly, seek help from teachers or peers, explore lessons at his/ her own pace, use preferred learning devices, and gain timely feedback in order to reflect upon their own learning.

In the review of recent relevant studies and related books, Seragen (2020) proposed a diagram presenting eight different benefits of e-learning, including flexibility, accessibility, global knowledge, students control study time, a chance for interaction, cost-effectiveness, better opportunity, and student-centered as shown in Figure 1.

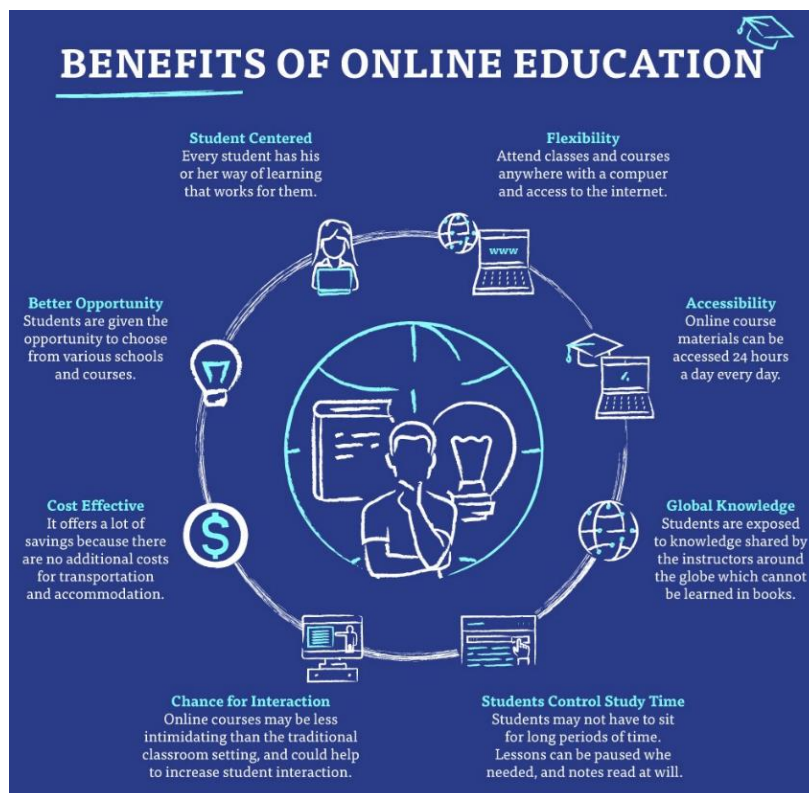


Figure 1. Benefits of e-learning (Adapted from Aragon, 2020)

Disadvantages of online learning

Like other teaching methods, e-learning also has its own drawbacks since it is not likely to replace unique features, including human emotional interaction as well as face-to-face interaction that can be found in the classroom. Also, heavy dependence on computer skills and Internet access, according to Twomey (2004), became a barrier for students to effective learning.

According to several research findings, online classes' anonymity drove students to be prone to cheating, which deteriorated ways of assessment and the quality of education. More importantly, e-learning was not effectively applicable to a multitude of specialized courses or discipline such as medical science and pharmacy, vocal arts, graphic design, and so on since it curbed learners' practical involvement (e.g., Akkoyuklu and Soylu, 2000; Hameed et al., 2008; Arkorful, 2014).

Microsoft Teams as a means of online teaching facility

Integrated directly with a full package of Microsoft 365 applications, Microsoft Teams has been commonly used in most large corporations and schools. It facilitates better communication and collaboration with absolute confidentiality. Its key utilities lie in performing a series of activities like real-time discussing, instant texting, PowerPoint presenting, programs sharing and running, whiteboard interacting, audio calling, giving assignments, and online meetings. Unlike other free web-conference tools, this copyrighted software is far more helpful in holding a long meeting, which can be lasted up to a few hours without interruption. Additionally, its easy-to-use and the simple interface takes the users a very quick time to get acquainted with the software by reading the manual guideline rather than participating in a relevant training workshop.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study was designed as qualitative research, which aimed at investigating students' perceptions of learning English with the help of Microsoft Teams at Van Lang University. Therefore, qualitative research instruments, specifically interviews and questionnaires, were used to collect data as they are considered effective instruments for gathering information about attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs in second language classroom research.

The respondents providing the data for this paper were eighty first-year English majors belonging to four classes at Van Lang University. Then, 10 of these students were interviewed face-to-face to gain further insight into Microsoft Teams' use in online learning. Noticeably, the interview comprised mainly of the two following questions:

1. *What are your experiences when you study online using Microsoft Teams?*
2. *What can be done to improve online teaching and learning by the use of Microsoft Teams?*

Data Analysis Procedure

The study results were presented in tables, and explanations were provided accordingly. Together with the questionnaires' data, the interviewed students' responses were presented.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Student attitudes towards using Microsoft Teams to online learning

Table 4.1.

Advantages of using Microsoft Teams to online learning

Items	SD %	D %	N %	A %	SA %
1. I found learning through Microsoft Teams convenient since I can study via my cellphone or laptop.	5 6.2%	6 7.5%	8 10%	22 27.5%	39 48.8%
2. I can save time because I don't have to commute to school.	2 2.5%	6 7.5%	6 7.5%	28 35%	38 47.5%
3. I feel comfortable for not being in a classroom surrounded by many classmates and not being prone to the coronavirus infection.	3 3.8%	6 7.5%	11 13.7%	33 41.2%	27 33.8%
4. I can access study resources easily and quickly through the toolbar "Files".	3 3.8%	5 6.2%	7 8.8%	20 25%	45 56.2%
5. I can study online at my favorite place, e.g., at home or at a café.	4 5%	12 15%	9 11.2%	20 25%	35 43.8%
6. I can correct my response easily by using the "edit" function.	3 3.8%	5 6.2%	7 8.8%	20 25%	45 56.2%
7. I can re-watch the recorded lectures at anytime and anywhere.	4 5%	5 6.2%	6 7.5%	15 23.8%	50 62.5%
8. I can receive frequent and timely feedback from the teacher and peers on my response(s) and assignment(s).	6 7.5%	9 11.2%	16 20%	31 38.8%	18 22.5%
9. I can study in accordance with my learning pace because I can pause or rewind the video clips many times after the meeting on Microsoft Teams.	7 8.8%	4 5%	18 22.5%	33 41.2%	18 22.5%
10. I have unrivaled opportunities to get involved in the discussion without embarrassment.	5 6.2%	10 12.5%	6 7.5%	37 46.3%	22 27.5%

[Notes: SD: Strongly Disagree; D: Disagree; N: Neutral; A: Agree; SA: Strongly Agree]

As shown in Table 4.1, most students expressed positive attitudes towards online learning through Microsoft Teams with higher percentages of agreement (A) and strong agreement (SA). Generally, the responses showed that most students rank the benefits of applying this software in online learning 4 and 5 on a 5-point Likert scale. Specifically, 86.3% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that learning through Microsoft Teams gave them flexibility because they could re-watch the recorded lectures at any time and anywhere. 82.5% was the second-highest proportion of participants expressing their agreement or strong agreement on the help of online learning through Microsoft Teams in saving time to school. 81.2% appreciated the ease of access to study resources and response correction when having

a meeting on Microsoft Teams, while 76.3% confirmed the convenience of online learning with a variety of learning aids, e.g., a laptop or even a cell phone. As far as the benefits of personalized learning opportunities, more than half of the samples, i.e., 73.8%, were stress-free from a fear of losing their face or shyness in participation.

Noticeably, 61.3% of the students reported that their response(s) and assignments could be reviewed with comments frequently and timely from their lecturers and peers, while 63.7% of the respondents could keep track with the lesson at their own learning pace since they found it easier to rewind or pause at the difficult part. 75% was the proportion revealing the students' comfort of studying at their favorite place rather than being in a crowded classroom and being subject to the coronavirus infection.

Although online learning through Microsoft Teams benefited students in many ways, its application was somewhat disadvantageous, according to the following findings.

Table 4.2.

Disadvantages of using Microsoft Teams to online learning

Items	SD %	D %	N %	A %	SA %
11. I lose my concentration gradually in a long-lasting teaching session (2 hours and a half) through Microsoft Teams.	5 6.2%	6 7.5%	4 5%	50 62.5%	15 23.8%
12. My knowledge acquisition deteriorates during 2-hour-a-half online teaching period.	3 3.8%	8 10%	10 12.5%	25 31.2%	34 42.5%
13. I feel exhausted when continuously looking at the screen.	4 5%	9 12.4%	12 15%	34 42.5%	21 26.2%
14. I am sometimes interrupted by the unstable network connection.	9 11.2%	3 3.8%	10 12.5%	46 57.5%	12 15%
15. I can't interact well with my friend due to their lack of a mic or camera.	3 3.8%	8 10%	12 15%	41 51.2%	16 20%

Table 4.2 reveals that the majority of participants de-appreciated online learning through Microsoft Teams, for 86.3% of the students claimed that they couldn't stay concentrated on the lecture during a long teaching session that lasted over two hours. In addition to losing concentration, 73.7% of the participants reported that it was quite hard for them to acquire knowledge in such a long period. In response to the rest of the items, students who revealed their agreement or strong agreement on being tired accounted for 68.7%, while 72.5% and 71.2% supposed that the network connection sometimes prevented them from studying and their classmates' lack of relevant aids caused problems in interacting with one another respectively.

Interview results

Question 1: What are your experiences when you study online in the use of Microsoft Teams?

The first question was to find out students' real-life experiences in studying online through Microsoft Teams. All of the interviewees stated that it was beyond their prior anxiety of online courses' quality because they found it convenient and flexible to some extent. Ten participants from different classes shared the same response that they could study at their comfort simply with a technological device and a network connection no matter where they are. In addition,

all of the interviewees appreciated the logical storage of study resources in the Microsoft Teams application, which helped them find out the needed files and re-watch them over and over again. In comparison with the traditional face-to-face learning, three out of ten students added that the lecture's content was simplified, and the teacher put into more practice with the introduction to Kahoot and Quizlet every twenty minutes. Four other students stated that receiving frequent and detailed feedback from the teacher and classmates to their response and assignment facilitated them to perform better and know exactly what should be improved.

Nevertheless, two other participants said that they were overwhelmed with the computer skills since their friends or they sometimes pressed the wrong button, i.e., "take control", which accidentally disrupted the teaching and learning process and caused a loss of control. They further explained that some of their friends were not responsible for their study by the fact that they joined the meeting and did their own business, e.g., sleeping, playing games, or doing household chores. Apart from lack of computer skills, one of the participants complained that she was annoyed with the other's microphone squeaking sound and the teacher's cacophony generated by the teacher's live recording. More importantly, she showed feeling isolated because she could not communicate with her classmates in the flesh.

Question 2: What can be done to improve online teaching and learning by the use of Microsoft Teams?

Of all the interviewees, eight students are expressing that most teachers made good use of Microsoft Teams that facilitated them to better online learning. As online learning activities are concerned, they all agreed that the content and the structure of the lesson should be simplified and gave room for practice and discussion time. To do so, they reported that lecturers should lecture within 10 minutes and then change the atmosphere into a relaxing and challenging way with the help of interactive games.

Meanwhile, one student reported that sometimes there was a technical problem, so learners fail to listen to the lecturer smoothly. As the participants' suggestion, the teacher should master the software before he or she started teaching. The other students added that sometimes their teacher looked somehow embarrassed when they talked in front of a camera and failed to manage students' attendance and performance properly. These students desired their lecturers to have a dashboard or portfolio to keep track of such problems.

5. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATION FOR TEACHING

The findings mentioned above are quite consistent with the literature on the benefits of online learning or e-learning. Particularly, the advantage of giving learners flexibility and convenience aligns with work by Guragain's study of e-learning benefits and application (2016). His conclusion is that the business of e-learning is fast growing since it assists students everywhere. More importantly, the findings do not contradict the literature review on students' personalized learning (e.g., Wagner et al., 2008). Although works in the literature review did not represent some strengths that emerged from the study (e.g., frequent and timely feedback, anonymously confident participation, learning pace adjustment), the findings contribute to support the application of Microsoft Teams to online learning as an effective solution for teaching and learning in the complicated situation of COVID-19 pandemic.

It is clear that using Microsoft Teams in online learning received much positive feedback. Students who experienced the software reported that they gained more than expected beyond the initial fear, ranging from convenience, flexibility, and personalized learning opportunities. Nevertheless, these advantages could not outweigh a series of drawbacks, including loss of concentration, lack of knowledge acquisition, the feeling of tiredness, lack of face-to-face communication and interaction, as well as heavy dependence on technology and network connection.

Implications for teaching

There is no reason that more and more Vietnamese universities and even high schools and primary schools have been implementing or are about to apply this web-based application instead of Zoom app in their training schedule for its easy-to-use characteristics and continuous long-time meetings. Following the worldwide educational trend in the era of comprehensive modernization, to cope with the ever-increasing risk of coronavirus infection, the Vietnamese school system should take advantage of Microsoft Teams for learners' sake. However, exploring Microsoft Teams in online learning successfully is quite a daunting task because it is always believed that traditional courses outperform online learning, and there still exists a vast number of shortcomings. There are many practical solutions for both teachers and learners to overcome such challenges.

As far as teachers are concerned, they have to hone their online class management by a plethora of helpful ways including using a new feature, i.e. Polly in Microsoft Teams to check attendance and mark learners' participation, checking and assessing students through quick assignments or a quick survey through Form apps. In addition, varying activities and changing teaching methods every half an hour should be carried out to ensure to stop learners from being bored and distracted. Short explanations or lectures should be followed by discussion, a short break with music, tasked-based learning, or interactive games, which creates an exciting online learning atmosphere. During a long-time teaching period, teachers are likely to focus on the main point and simplify some unnecessary content.

For the sake of learners, choosing the best place to study, which is tranquil and comfortable, is an absolute must for students to absorb the lecture at their convenience. Secondly, to avoid falling behind what the teacher is saying, students should briefly refer to the required materials beforehand. In other words, students have to cultivate their self-study in an attempt to learn and explore knowledge actively. Finally, learners should use opportunities for discussion to interact with their peers and the teacher with the help of a camera, microphone, and emotional chat forums in Microsoft Teams.

CONCLUSION

With an ever-increasing innovation in era 4.0 and the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, educational institutions face the challenges of requiring new approaches in education and preparing students to meet the diversified working environment requirements. Online learning is one of the successful means of teaching methods that best suits keeping the training schedule going on and a convenient online teaching and learning environment. From the findings of this study, beyond the fear and anxiety at the first time and some difficulties during online teaching

and learning, online learning using Moodle or Microsoft Teams is favorable and receives many positive attitudes from students and should be widely used and explored.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Students' questionnaire

The purpose of the questionnaire is to do a survey on students' attitudes towards using Microsoft Teams in online learning at Van Lang University. It is the foundation for teachers to have an insight into how students experienced this software. Therefore, I would like to appreciate your contribution in responding to this questionnaire. Your opinion will be confidential and only used in this research paper. Thank you for your cooperation.

Date:.....

Please read each statement carefully and mark your best choice.

- SD = Strongly Disagree
- D = Disagree
- N = Neutral
- A = Agree

SA = Strongly Agree

Items	SD	D	N	A	SA
1. I found learning through Microsoft Teams convenient since I can study via my cellphone or laptop.					
2. I can save time because I don't have to commute to school.					
3. I feel comfortable for not being in a classroom surrounded by many classmates and not to be prone to the coronavirus infection.					
4. I can access to study resources easily and quickly through the toolbar "Files".					
5. I can study online at my favorite place, e.g. at home or at a café.					
6. I can correct my response easily by using the "edit" function.					
7. I can re-watch the recorded lectures at anytime and anywhere.					
8. I can receive frequent and timely feedback from the teacher and peers on my response(s) and assignment(s).					
9. I can study in accordance with my learning pace because I can pause or rewind the video clips many times after the meeting on Microsoft Teams.					
10. I have unrivalled opportunities to get involved in discussion without embarrassment.					
11. I lose my concentration gradually in a long-lasting teaching session (2 hours and a half) through Microsoft Teams.					

12. My knowledge acquisition deteriorates during 2-hour-a-half online teaching period.					
13. I feel exhausted when continuously looking at the screen.					
14. I am sometimes interrupted by the unstable network connection.					
15. I can't interact well with my friend due to their lack of a mic or camera.					

APPENDIX 2: SCREENSHOTS FROM MICROSOFT TEAMS' ACTIVITIES

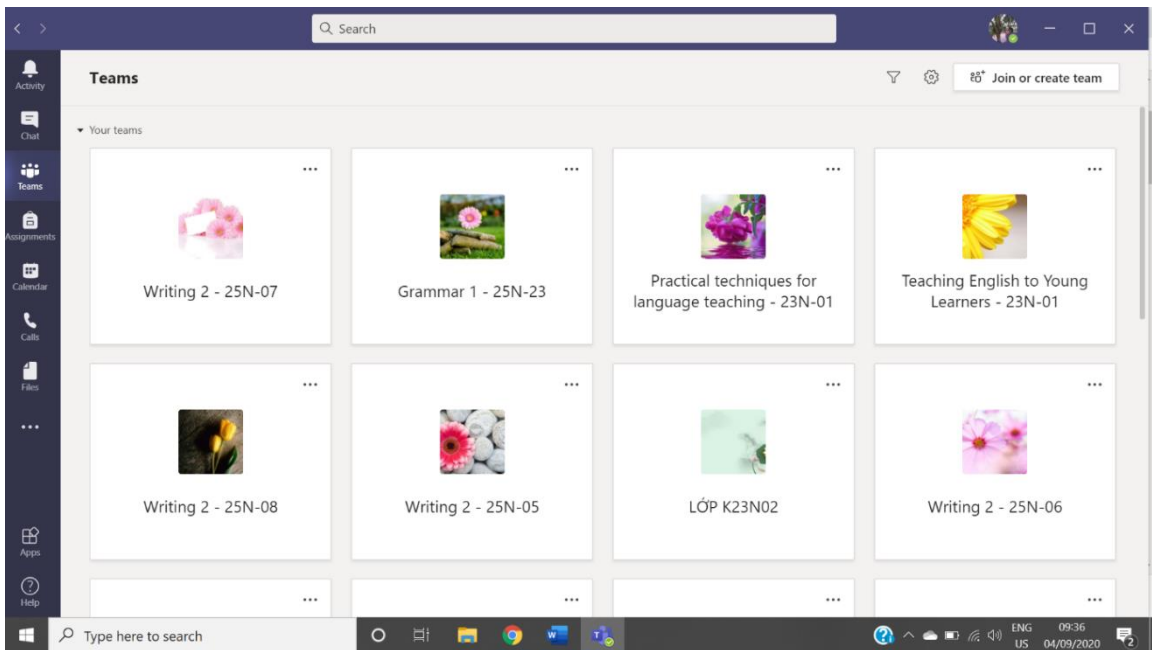


Figure 3: Microsoft Teams Interface

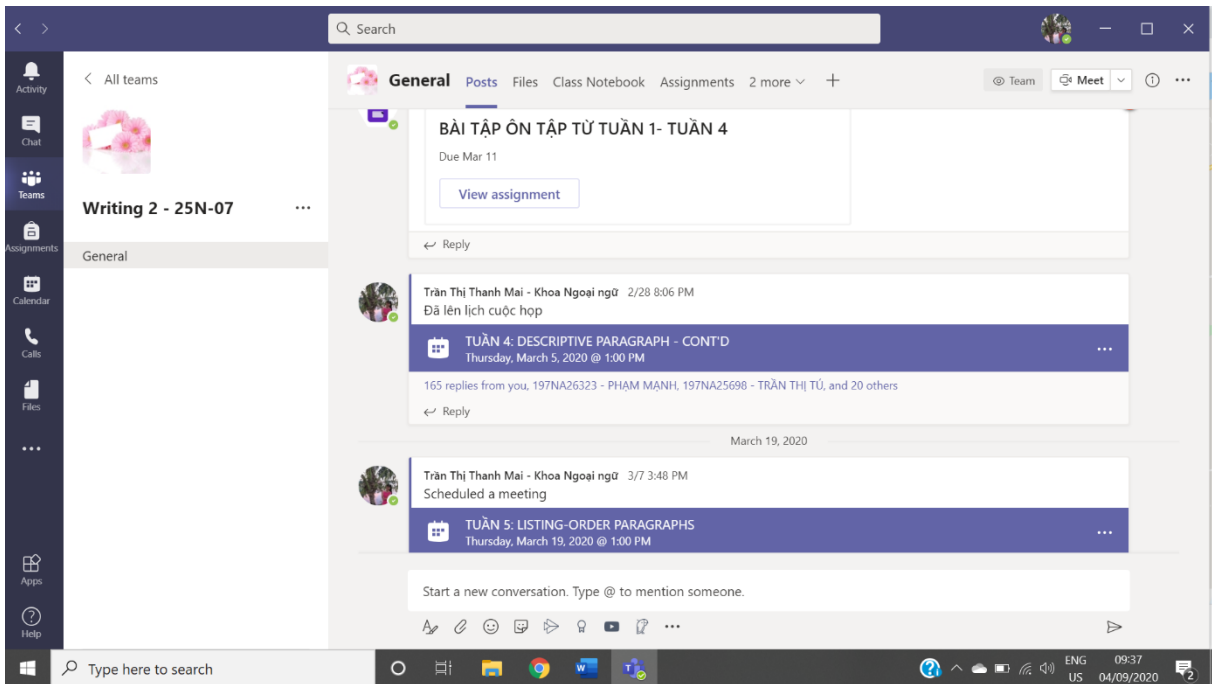


Figure 4: Screenshot from one writing class

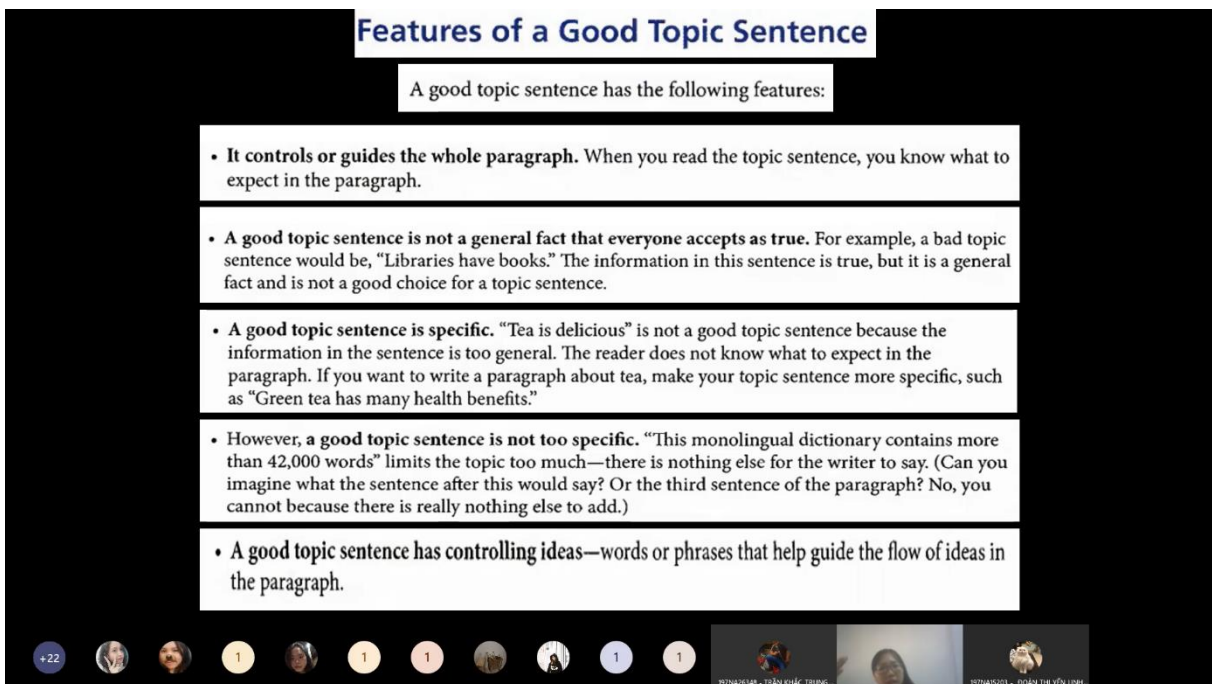


Figure 5: Screenshot from one writing class