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**| RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## Exploring the Efficacy of Video Conferencing for Emergency Remote Teaching of EFL: Perspectives from University Students

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**| ABSTRACT**

Due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, many educational activities worldwide have shifted rapidly to online or hybrid modes of learning, with the aid of various video conferencing platforms. One of the most widely used platforms for emergency remote teaching in Vietnam is Google Meet. However, its usage for online teaching and learning, particularly in English courses, is constrained by numerous limitations. To address the issue, this study investigates the use of a video conferencing tool, namely Google Meet, for English language teaching and learning at university using a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. The study involved 230 students from the Faculty of English Linguistics and Literature at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University in Ho Chi Minh City. The results showed that the majority of the students enjoyed using Google Meet for online learning of English and would like to continue using it in the future. Participants perceived all the functions of Google Meet as satisfying, with simplicity and convenience being the most appreciated feature. It is also found that there could be space for enhancement in the platform's ability to facilitate group communication and interaction.

**| KEYWORDS**

English teaching and learning, video conferencing, emergency remote teaching, Google Meet, online learning

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### 1. Introduction

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, many educational institutions have adopted virtual conferencing platforms for online teaching, including Google Meet, which has gained popularity due to its user-friendliness and accessibility directly through web browsers. However, there are limitations to the free accounts provided to USSH-VNUHCM lecturers, such as the lack of certain features necessary for online teaching, requiring technical skills to use effectively, and the need to integrate with other Google services. Moreover, there is a lack of research on the effectiveness of using Google Meet for teaching English in Vietnam. Therefore, the present study aims to address this gap and provide insights into the challenges and potential solutions for using Google Meet for English teaching in the context of USSH-VNUHCM.

### 2. Literature review

#### 2.1. Google Meet

Google Meet is a platform for online video conferencing created by Google as part of Google Workspace. Google Meet was released in February 2017 as a replacement for Hangouts. However, it was in 2020 that the service gained enormous popularity thanks to the lockdowns during Covid 19 pandemic. The period from January to April 2020 witnessed an increase of more than 30% in its frequency of use (Boland, H., 2020). By the end of April, the daily traffic to Google Meet had reached 100 million people, and the number kept increasing by 3 million every day (Boland, 2020a).

The free version of Google Meet, which came into existence in April 2020, allows any user with a Google account to hold a

conference on the platform for up to 24 hours and with a maximum number of 100 participants. Schools, institutions and businesses, etc., which need more advanced features can opt for the paid version, which allows up to 250 participants and 100 viewers in a conference and provides users with authority to set passwords to ensure security and confidentiality. Besides, users can choose to activate “noise cancellation”, – a handy feature that can help reduce noises from the environment, thereby improving the audio quality.

Google Meet is developed to support a large variety of operating systems, including iOS, Android, Windows, etc. As a part of the Google Ecosystem, it can be used in combination with other services for a better user experience. For example, a user can schedule an upcoming conference on Google Calendar and send invitations to others via Gmail. Google Meet has virtually all the features an online conferencing platform needs, from those as basic as screen sharing for making presentations to advanced ones like 720p-video recording and meeting encryption.

Google Meet was used as one of the platforms for online teaching and learning for all training programs at the Faculty of English Linguistics and Literature, University of Social Sciences and Humanities – Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City, during the four outbreaks of Covid 19 in Vietnam, starting from March 2020. All lecturers were provided with an account that grants them access to advanced features of Google Meet. Since then, it has become a favorite tool for many teachers to teach online sessions, which have now become part of many syllabi of the faculty.

## **2.2. Video conferencing**

Video conferencing (also known as virtual conferencing) is a technology allowing users at different locations to join virtual rooms where they can not only see and talk to each other but also share documents, video, audio, etc., making it an ideal choice for business meetings as well as online teaching amidst the Covid pandemic. Among the popular video conferencing platforms are Google Meet, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Adobe Connect.

The emergence of virtual conferencing in the 20th century proved to be extremely useful in field education and training, especially in distant programs where it has been widely used to deliver lessons and lecturers to learners in different places (Knipe, D., & Lee, M., 2002). Discussing the benefits of teaching through video conferencing, Cochrane (1996, p.318) argued that:

*The motives for using videoconferencing are varied and include providing access to learners in remote areas, ensuring that students are exposed to a technology which is increasingly used in professional practice, and easing course delivery problems when separate institutions merge*

Following the same line of thought, Freeman (1998) proposed that by using video conferencing with the video recording feature, lecturers do not have to deliver the same lecture twice, thereby reducing the teaching time and giving more time for preparing lessons. Learners, likewise, have more opportunities to approach lecturers and revisit old lessons.

Studies have shown that the use of video conferencing platforms brings many benefits to the teaching and learning of foreign languages. According to Wang (2004), video conferencing facilitates language learning as it allows learners to communicate effectively using both the target language and non-verbal elements such as facial expressions and gestures. A study on syntax negotiation conducted by Lee (2006) suggested that communication via video conferencing, thanks to its indirectness, is less pressurized than face-to-face communication. Jung, S. K. (2009), doing research on learners’ attitudes towards using video conferencing for learning English, concluded that most of the participants found video conferencing useful as it helped them interact with foreign teachers, transcending time and space barriers and reduced their levels of anxiety with the option to use text chat rather than talking. In general, the study suggested that using video conferencing is effective in improving learners’ oral fluency in English.

Nevertheless, there are some authors holding the opposite view on the use of video conferencing in education. Mason (2013), for example, remarked that while video conferencing may be suitable for classes with young learners, it is unlikely to be applicable to higher education contexts, where lecturing is the dominant method. Similarly, Freeman (1998) stated that although the use of video conferencing might be beneficial to some extent, teachers and learners believed that it could not be as effective as direct teaching and learning activities. To be precise, it was more time consuming to organize activities and maintain interactions between teachers and students via video conferencing, not to mention the time spent on technical and personal problems.

The use of video conferencing also raises questions about the quality of teaching and learning. Knipe, D. and Lee, M. (2002) commented on recent studies on video conferencing, stating that these studies focused more on the practical advantages of the platform than the quality of teaching and learning (p.302). Bollom et al. (1989) revealed some disadvantages of virtual classrooms, such as learners’ hesitation to ask questions or hold discussions, leading to their having fewer opportunities for interactions. A study conducted by Freeman (1998) showed that lecturers, in order to maintain the quality of teaching over video conferencing platforms, had to spend more time preparing lesson plans and materials. Even so, they still faced several problems, including reliance on other people, limitations in styles of teaching and a higher tendency for students’ negligence. Nevertheless, the study

showed no significant difference in the exam results of the control and the experimental groups.

In one study, Knipe, D., and Lee, M. (2002) investigated the teaching quality and learning experiences via video conferencing vs regular courses. The findings revealed that distance learning via video conferencing produced a distinct learning experience from regular classrooms. In terms of learning, students in conventional classrooms reported receiving more material and explanations, as well as more opportunities to work in groups and give presentations. Yet, faraway learners felt encouraged by professors and were able to take more notes. On the contrary, students in online classrooms felt disoriented, and their learning time was cut short.

In the Vietnamese setting, a recent study done in 2020 by Luong Dinh Hai and colleagues examined learners' views regarding learning using virtual learning technologies during the Covid 19 pandemic. The findings revealed that learners had a neutral attitude regarding the application of video conferencing in classroom instruction and thought that it was both a temporary and mandatory solution during the epidemic and lockdown period.

Another group of researchers, which included Le Huu Nghia and his colleagues, conducted a study in Vietnam in 2021 to determine the opinions of instructors and students regarding the quality of software and the efficacy of online teaching and learning practices at the Faculty of Traditional Medicine at the University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Ho Chi Minh City. According to the findings, the online teaching and learning software was found to be effective at a high level, with a lecture presentation rate of nearly 77% and a lesson retention rate of over 80%.

The abovementioned research provides varying perspectives regarding the efficacy of incorporating video conferencing in the context of language learning and teaching. However, these assessments lacked a thorough and systematic approach as they did not adhere to any established criteria for evaluating all aspects of the teaching-learning process and the utilization of virtual conferencing. With the evolution of technology, numerous video conferencing tools have emerged, each possessing distinctive features, strengths, and weaknesses. Therefore, it is crucial to evaluate each of these tools in order to ascertain their effectiveness. Previous studies utilized context-specific tools, and none were exclusively conducted for Google Meet, a widely used video conferencing tool at EF and around the world. This serves as the basis for the current study.

### **2.3. Criteria for evaluating video conferencing tools in classrooms**

To assess the efficacy of virtual teaching tools such as virtual conferencing, various researchers proposed different sets of criteria. Lauren M. Anstey and Gavan P.L. Watson (2018) developed a set of assessment criteria based on conducted studies, which are outlined as follows:

1. Functionality (such as scale, ease of use, and technical support),
2. Accessibility (including adherence to accessibility standards, user-focused participation, necessary equipment, and cost of use),
3. Technical aspects (such as integration with a Learning Management System, compatibility with different devices, operating systems, and browsers, and additional downloads),
4. Mobile design (encompassing accessibility, functionality, and offline access),
5. Privacy, data protection, and users' rights (including sign up/sign in processes, data privacy and ownership, archiving, saving, and exporting data),
6. Social presence (involving collaboration, user accountability, and diffusion),
7. Teaching presence (encompassing facilitation, customization, and learning analytics),
8. Cognitive presence (focusing on enhancing cognitive tasks, promoting high-order thinking, and fostering metacognitive engagement).

Le Huu Nghia and colleagues (2021) took a distinct approach to evaluate the quality of online teaching software at the Faculty of Traditional Medicine, University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. They utilized a set of five criteria that included the software's sound and image transmission quality, ease of use, the interaction between educators and students, and the login process.

Furthermore, Le Huu Nghia et al. (2021) also included two new criteria to evaluate the quality of online teaching: the level of lecture delivery and the level of lecture reception. Despite their evident divisions, these criteria cannot evaluate all significant components of online teaching, particularly those that integrate video conferencing.

Realizing the need for more thorough practical evaluation criteria that may target all elements of employing video conferencing systems for teaching and learning, including those of foreign languages such as English. Based on past research, expert advice, and our practical experience, we chose, standardized, and developed a set of criteria for assessing the efficacy and obstacles of utilizing Google Meet for teaching and learning English at our university. The following are the criteria:

1. The simplicity and convenience of use
2. The interaction between lecturers and classmates
3. The compatibility with different devices, platforms and systems
4. The capacity to import, exporting and sharing data
5. The data and information security
6. The support for varied teaching activities
7. The support for classroom and learner management

### **3. Research methodology**

#### **3.1. Research Questions**

To fulfill the purpose of the study, the research tools were used to seek answers to the following research questions:

1. To what extent did students enjoy using Google Meet to learn English online during the Covid-19 pandemic?
2. Do students still want to use Google Meet to learn English online in the future?
3. What was the students' perception of the efficacy of Google Meet functions in learning English online?

#### **3.2. Pedagogical Setting & Participants**

The study involved 230 random students from the Faculty of English Linguistics and Literature at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University in Ho Chi Minh City. The participants were categorized according to their year of study and their experience with online learning using Google Meet. The majority of the participants (about 40%) were in their second year, followed by around 30% in their third year, and just over 15% were in their first or fourth year. Almost all of the participants (95.6%) had previous experience with distance learning using Google Meet. In terms of exposure to Google Meet, 40% of the students had used it for one semester, about 35% for two semesters, and just over 25% for more than two semesters.

#### **3.3. Design of the Study**

The current study employs a mixed methods approach, which combines quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010), to investigate the use of Google Meet as an online conferencing platform for English teaching and learning. Due to the complexity of the teaching and learning process, a multiple approach research design is necessary to enhance the reliability of the research results (Creswell & Clark, 2011). The study utilizes the sequential explanatory approach, which involves two distinct phases: an initial quantitative phase followed by a second phase of qualitative data collection and analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The questionnaire survey was employed in the first phase, and semi-structured interviews were conducted in the second phase.

#### **3.4. Data collection & analysis**

In the first phase, a questionnaire survey was used to collect data from a large group of participants (Trochim & Nonnelly, 2001). A five-point Likert scale questionnaire was designed based on criteria proposed by Lauren and Gavan (2018), comprising 38 question items. The questionnaire was administered to the participants via Google Forms. In the second phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with students who agreed to be involved in an interview after completing the questionnaire. Interviews are a widely used research method in qualitative research for their ability to provide in-depth information about the experiences and perspectives of individuals (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Through interviews, researchers can gather rich and detailed data about a participant's attitudes, beliefs, and experiences related to a particular topic (Seidman, 2013).

After the data collection, quantitative data was entered, scanned, coded and analysed using SPSS version 24 software, whereas qualitative data were analysed using the thematic analysis method to uncover common themes in textual data. After all, the two types of results were triangulated to cast more light on the research problems.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1. Students' Preference for Google Meet**

Table 1 denotes how students participating in this study preferred using Google Meet while learning English online. As indicated from the table, students generally showed high agreement on their enjoyment with Google Meet use when receiving online English instruction ( $M=4.02$ ,  $SD=.85$ ). Notably, the vast majority of the participating students (75.2%) agreed that they liked using Google Meet in their online English learning. By contrast, only a small proportion of the students (3%) in the survey showed their lack of

interest in the use of Google Meet. Meanwhile, over 20% of the students remained impartial towards their Google Meet use for online learning. This result was consistent with the result from the interview. Seven out of ten students said that they liked using Google Meet to learn English, two were neutral, and only one said that he did not enjoy his experience of using Google Meet.

**Table 1. Students' preference for Google Meet**

Did you enjoy learning English online with Google Meet?	Frequency (F)	Percent (P)	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation (SD)
Strongly disagree	3	1.3		
Disagree	4	1.7		
Neutral	50	21.7	4.02	.85
Agree	102	44.3	(Agree)	
Strongly agree	71	30.9		
Total	230	100.0		

#### 4.2. Students' intention to use Google Meet in future

Table 2 indicates whether students wanted to use Google Meet in their online English teaching in future. From the table, it is obvious that despite having quite different opinions, over half of the students (68,3%) agreed that they would like to use Google Meet for their future online learning (M=1.08). This figure is followed by over 20% of the participants who still had some reluctance to use Google Meet for their online English learning in the future. On the contrary, a tiny percentage (7.4%) was reported to refuse to use Google Meet in the future for their online learning of English. The result was in the same line as that of the qualitative data. Out of 15 students, eleven showed a willingness to use Google Meet in the future. Two thought that they might move to ZOOM or Microsoft Team, while the rest were reluctant and said that they might consider it again later if there were better options from their teachers.

**Table 2. Students' future intention to use Google Meet**

Do you want to use Google Meet to learn English online in the future?	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Std. Deviation (SD)
Strongly disagree	9	3.9		
Disagree	17	7.4	3.86	1.08
Neutral	47	20.4	(Agree)	
Agree	82	35.7		
Strongly agree	75	32.6		
Total	230	100.0		

#### 4.3. Students' perception of the efficacy of Google Meet functions

Table 3 reveals the way students perceived different functions of Google Meet to learn English online. Overall, the mean score of all the functions ranges from 3.62 to 4.57. It is striking that participants regarded all of the functions of Google Meeting as satisfying for their online learning of English. Among these, the simplicity and convenience of the use of Google Meet and its compatibility with different devices, platforms and systems received the most appreciation from the students (M=4.57, SD=.51 & M=4.56, SD=.54 respectively), whereas its support for interaction between lecturers and classmates of Google Meet was the lowest rated (M=3.62, SD=.73). This was confirmed by 13 out 15 students who said that they liked the simple interface of Google Meet and 11 out 15 students in the interview who said they enjoyed using Google Meet most because it could run on almost any devices or systems they had. In addition, a majority of the interviewed students (12 out of 15) all wished that Google Meet could have allowed breakout rooms as in Zoom so that they could work in pairs or in groups more easily.

**Table 3.** *Students' perception of Google Meet functions*

Features of Google Meet	N	Mean	Range	Std
1 The simplicity and convenience of use	230	4.57	Strongly agree	.51
2 The interaction between lecturers and classmates	230	3.62	Agree	.73
3 The compatibility with different devices, platforms and systems	230	4.56	Strongly agree	.54
4 The capacity of importing, exporting and sharing data	230	3.74	Agree	.76
5 The data and information security	230	3.94	Agree	.57
6 The assistance in varied teaching activities	230	4.19	Agree	.63
7 The assistance in classroom and learner management	230	3.81	Agree	.87

**5. Discussion**

**5.1. Students' preference for Google Meet use**

The results of the study indicate that the majority of the participating students enjoyed using Google Meet for their online English learning experience. Specifically, 75.2% of the students agreed that they liked using Google Meet, while only 3% showed a lack of interest. These findings suggest that Google Meet can be an effective platform for online English language instruction. It is important to note, however, that over 20% of the students remained neutral towards their use of Google Meet for online learning.

The high level of agreement among the majority of the students in favor of using Google Meet in their online English learning experience suggests that the platform has several advantages that appeal to students. These benefits may include the ease of access, flexibility, and convenience of the platform. The findings of this study support previous research that has shown the benefits of using video-conferencing technology to enhance language learning (Knipe, D., & Lee, M., 2002; Freeman, 1998; Cochrane, 1996). Online platforms such as Google Meet can help overcome geographical and time constraints, allowing learners to connect with teachers and classmates from anywhere and at any time.

However, it is important to consider the opinions of the students who remain neutral towards the use of Google Meet for online learning. This group may require more support or training to fully appreciate the features and functionalities of the platform. Alternatively, the platform may require further improvements to address any limitations or challenges that users encounter.

Future studies could explore the reasons behind students' neutral attitudes towards using Google Meet for online learning. It may also be worthwhile to investigate the features and functionalities that students find most valuable in a language learning platform and to what extent Google Meet meets these criteria. Overall, these findings suggest that Google Meet can be a useful tool for online language instruction, but further research is needed to explore its full potential for supporting effective language learning.

**5.2. Students' intention to use Google Meet in future**

The results suggest that the majority of students in this study were open to using Google Meet for their future online English learning, with 68.3% of the participants indicating that they would like to use it (M=1.08). This is a positive finding as it shows that students have had a positive experience with Google Meet and are willing to continue using it in the future. However, it is worth noting that a considerable portion of students (20%) still had some reluctance towards using Google Meet for their online learning.

One possible explanation for this reluctance could be related to the limitations of online learning, such as the lack of face-to-face interaction with teachers and classmates. This could make students feel less motivated and engaged in the learning process, which may affect their willingness to continue using Google Meet for future online learning. Additionally, some students may prefer alternative platforms or methods of online learning that better suit their learning styles and preferences. Despite these limitations, the high proportion of students who expressed their intention to use Google Meet for future online learning highlights the importance of technology in facilitating remote education. It also suggests that platforms such as Google Meet have the potential to enhance the quality of online learning experiences for students, particularly during times when physical attendance in class is not feasible.

**5.3. Students' Perception of Google Meet Functions**

The results of this study suggest that students found using Google Meet for their online English language learning to be a positive experience overall. The fact that all of the functions of Google Meet received high scores from the students, ranging from 3.62 to 4.57, indicates that the platform is effective in supporting online language learning. Moreover, the simplicity and convenience of

using Google Meet and its compatibility with various devices, platforms, and systems received the most appreciation from the students. This suggests that the platform is well-designed and user-friendly, making it easy for students to engage in online learning.

However, the study also found that the support for interaction between lecturers and classmates was the lowest-rated feature of Google Meet. This is in line with some previous research, such as Knipe and Lee's (2002) study, which found that students had fewer opportunities to interact in groups when learning on video conferencing platforms. This also confirms Jung, S. K. (2009) in the way that online interaction cannot replace the direct interaction between teachers and students. It is important to note that some students in the current study expressed a desire for Google Meet to have breakout rooms, as they felt that this would enable them to work more easily in pairs or groups. This suggests that there may be room for improvement in terms of the platform's support for group interaction and communication.

Overall, these findings suggest that Google Meet is a promising platform for online language learning. Its user-friendly interface and compatibility with various devices and platforms make it an attractive option for students. However, there may be room for improvement in terms of supporting classroom communication, particularly for group interaction. These findings contribute to the growing body of research on the use of technology in language learning and provide insights into how online platforms can be optimized to better support language learners.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study aimed to explore the effectiveness of using a video conferencing tool, namely Google Meet, for emergency remote learning of English through the lens of university students. This study suggests that Google Meet can be an effective platform for online English language instruction. The majority of students enjoyed using Google Meet and were open to using it in the future. The platform's ease of access, flexibility, and convenience were highlighted as its key benefits, while the need for improvement in terms of supporting group interaction and communication was also identified. These findings of the study offer some important insights into students-perceived effectiveness of using video conferencing tools in remote /online learning of English, partly contributing to the improvement of using Information and Communication Technologies in TESOL, especially in emergency remote teaching. However, due to practical constraints, this paper cannot provide a comprehensive review of all related theories and studies for a more rigid framework. Another potential problem is that the self-developed survey questionnaire in this study needs more validation so that it can be replicated in a larger population. Further research is needed to explore the full potential of Google Meet and other video conferencing/online platforms in supporting effective language learning of English from more diverse perspectives or with the involvement of more participants from different contexts.

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