Breakout Rooms for an Engaging and Effective Online Learning Environment

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Communication is essential for effective language learning either written or spoken. It paves the ways to the leaners to test their language learning hypothesis and to practice the target language with peers in collaborative language learning settings. However, COVID-19 pandemic has affected severely on language learning as it deprived students of their real classrooms: primary, secondary, and even tertiary. With the introduction of emergency remote teaching (ERT), instructors struggle to deliver the content but students' actual engagement and interaction in online classes is yet to be monitored. Therefore, the present study was conducted to examine the effectiveness of Zoom - Breakout rooms as a tool to engage students successfully during synchronous online classes in the higher education sector. The participants of this case study were 04 instructors and 200 students who used Breakout rooms in their online classrooms for a period of 15 weeks. The student sample was reading for a Higher National Diploma in English. As to the data collected through the Google form survey, the results showed that language tutorials have become effective and successful with the use of Breakout rooms for group discussions, presentations, speeches, role plays, etc. Both instructors and learners made positive remarks as collaborative learning, individual engagement, feeling of liveliness, sense of belonging, less anxiety and possible monitoring of the instructor. The key difficulties encountered were connectivity issues and inadequacy of technical skills. Moreover, the cases of non-contribution and idling were also occasionally reported. All in all, the sample assured the effectiveness of the Breakout rooms not only in conducting successful ESL tutorials during this pandemic period but also as a way to remain in contact with the peers.

Keywords: Breakout rooms; communication; language learning; online learning environment, student engagement

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