

# Adaptation to Emergency Online Education: A Case of Oral Communication Skills Course in ELT\*

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## Abstract

The significant growth of the cases all around the world caused by the Covid-19 pandemic necessitated the intermittent closures in higher education in March, 2020 in Turkey. Yozgat Bozok University started online education synchronously and asynchronously via Google Meet and Google Classroom. This paper aims to present ELT students' online experience in carrying out Oral Communication Skills course adapted to distance learning. Secondly, by conducting qualitative research methods, it presents students' standpoints concerning the problems they faced with an unplanned and unprepared online education. The researcher sent reflective writing questions to students and then arranged online interviews. Qualitative data were analyzed by NVivo 12 and learner-reported data bring fruitful insights on students' attitudes towards Google Meet and Google Classroom. It is founded that these applications increase students' interaction and help them promote communication skills. However, poor internet connection and lack of internet access are noted by all the participants as a basic problem for online education. The present study drawing on current distance learning literature suggests instructors to design student-centred online environment to foster student participation.

**Keywords:** Communication Skills, English Language Teaching, Google Classroom, Google Meet, Online Education

## Introduction

Corona virus (Covid-19) pandemic, which started in December 2019 in Wuhan City of China and then rapidly expanded all around the world, has produced a huge effect on social life, economy, and, most predominantly, health. While governments around the world search ways to take precautions for preventing the rapid increase of cases, social-distancing is realized as one of the basic protection methods against Covid-19, which necessitates crowded places such as universities to be closed intermittently. In Turkey, the transition to online distance education due to Covid-19 for all levels of education started on March, 2020 just after the World Health Organization (WHO) declared Covid-19 a pandemic. Thus, institutions adapted their courses according to emergency online education which was unplanned and unprepared.

Educational institutions in Turkey implementing emergency distance teaching due to Covid-19 shifted their teaching systems from in-person classes to digital and/or virtual systems by using various online platforms and mobile applications. Zoom, Google Classroom, Google Meet, WhatsApp, and Instagram are mostly preferred digital platforms and applications used by universities during the lockdown. These user-friendly digital tools facilitate teaching and learning in many ways for both teachers and learners. Being paper-free, handy, and time saving, Google Classroom (GC) and Google Meet (GM) help teachers organize their courses for online teaching in terms of video conferencing, virtual presentations, posting announcements and instructions, sharing materials, and grading assignments. Submitting assignments anytime and anywhere, commenting on discussions, getting instant feedback from instructors and

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the screen-share facility for presentations make GC and GM convenient for students in order to prevent breakdown in their educational life during such emergency distance and online learning.

Unsurprisingly, online distance learning is challenging and has a reasonable adverse impact on students and teachers with low digital literacy and incompetence in media-driven environments. Emergency online education requires adjustment in educational technology and investment in innovations, which might be demanding for both teachers and learners as traditional teaching and learning settings need less technological devices and are mainly based on face to face interaction with teachers and peers. Hence, GC and GM could be respected in regards to their efficiency in enhancing digital literacy of all shareholders of education. Challenges and opportunities of GC and GM in an unexpected situation are proper to discuss in order to help instructors and learners who would practice upon these digital environments.

### *Google Classroom*

The present situation which necessitates closing schools and universities reminds us of the importance of digital tools to be used extensively and effectively in language teaching and learning. Hence, education in Yozgat Bozok University shifted from in-class to online systems with the "emergency" or "forced" distance learning by using GC and GM.

Since it was launched in 2014, GC has been remarked by researchers with the intention of exploring its effectiveness. Despite the limited availability of the studies, all the research related to GC shows the positive perception of students and teachers towards using GC for distance learning and teaching (Azhar & Iqbal, 2018; Khalil, 2018; Sukmawati & Nensia, 2019; Syakur, Sugirin, & Widiarni, 2020). The features of GC can be listed as:

- Fast setting process: Teachers can add students to the classroom by sharing the class code on WhatsApp groups or by mass e-mailing.
- Fast information sharing: It enables teachers to the share materials and links of online resources on the class stream. Also, teachers can start online discussions and provide forum questions through which students give feedback and comment on the teacher's and other students' posts.
- Time saving and paper-free: Posting homework becomes easier for teachers and submitting assignments takes little time for students. Teachers do not waste time by distributing and collecting papers. It helps teachers give feedback and grade assignments in an easy and paperless way.

### *Google Meet*

Shifting face to face instructions to online distance education can be challenging for the nature of some courses which require the active participation of learners. Oral Communication Skills course carried out by the researcher in the department of ELT is one of such courses. As group works, presentations, discussion and interaction are integrated part of classroom activities of the course, with the changing environment of teaching and learning due to Covid-19 pandemic, learners should not fall behind in speaking and communication skills compared to other basic language skills in language learning. At this point, GM fulfils a need for a virtual class to hold a video conference.

Research shows that GM improves learners' self-efficacy and motivation (Ningias & Indriani, 2021; Putra, 2021) leading to increase in participation and to enhance speaking skills (Fakhrudin, 2018). GM provides many features for any kind of meetings and helps teachers to organize online live conferences. GM features can be listed as:

- Video and voice conferencing: Teachers can start unlimited number of meetings with their students. When needed, learners can turn on their video cameras and microphones to participate in the discussions, or to hold an online presentation.
- Drive Cloud storage: Teachers as organizers can safely and freely save recordings and store them in a folder in their drive. Recording link can be shared with the students by the teacher.
- Screen sharing: By selecting an application or a window on their web browser teachers or learners as presenters can share the entire screen or only a window during the presentation. Hence, GM provides a learning environment which increases interaction and participation.
- Chat messaging: Participants of the meeting can easily mute or unmute their microphones and, in order to avoid noise pollution, participants can enter a chat message during the video conference. Teachers can post questions using the chat field like a blackboard.

With the expanded use of Internet and innovations in educational technologies, web-based instruction is recognized as a crucial teaching and learning medium for online distance education (Khan, 2000; 2007). Teachers offering online courses should enrich learning environments by using technology and organize activities that enable students' engagement and flexibility (Khan, 2007; Oncu & Cakir, 2011). As research shows that engagement and motivation are the foremost challenges teachers face during synchronous online courses, teachers should foster learners' participation by dominantly student-centered activities and allowing them to create and present projects in a supportive environment, which in turn engages students in their learning process and increase their autonomy and flexible learning (Dennen & Bonk, 2007; Hernandez & Florez, 2020). Providing choices and giving instant feedback are also important to activate reluctant students. Considering all these elements to design a student-centered online class, the researcher designed Oral Communication Skills course providing interactive learning environment. The current research is prepared to make a contribution to the limited literature by asking the research questions below:

1. What do students think about the role of student presentations in online communication skills course?
2. What are the challenges of emergency online learning for EFL students?
3. What are the benefits of using online tools to promote communication skills?

### **Literature Review**

Several research and studies have put their effort to describe the benefits and challenges of online learning for instructors and learners. The current study, however, is limited to positive impacts and inevitable problems of GM and GC experienced by EFL learners of ELT department during their online practice. Accordingly, providing methodologies, strategies, and classroom tasks to further the benefits of technology in language classrooms, the literature reported considerable data significantly needed to be discussed to assist educators in an emergency online learning that we have been experiencing due to Covid-19 pandemic.



The literature review shows that several studies reveal the benefits of technology for EFL learners in online education in terms of improving learners' interaction, vocabulary knowledge, communicative skills, speaking performance and alleviating their speaking anxiety by motivating them to feel more confident and more relaxed (Alkan & Bümen, 2020; Banafshi et al., 2020; Gleason & Suvoalrov, 2011; Khalil, 2018; Ningias & Indriani, 2021; Putra, 2021; Syakur et al., 2020; Tirtanawati, 2020). Attempting to compare EFL learners' improvement in vocabulary in two different settings, in class and online environment, Banafshi et al., (2020) found out that some features of communication such as "answering others' comments, the stickers, and humour were more dominated in the online classroom" (p. 136). Also, the research shows us that virtual classes are more effective in learning vocabulary. Similarly, Cakrawati (2017) indicated the significant role of online platforms to help learners acquire new words. The asynchronous online learning, according to Alkan and Bümen (2020), "helped the participants' speaking anxiety decrease and their speaking performance increase" and in their study "asynchronous learning was found flexible" (p.140). Ningias and Indriani (2021) also present EFL learners' positive attitudes towards online education as the results of their research show that "the learners have enough self-efficacy in speaking during online learning" (p.28) and they stress how "the atmosphere of the classroom also becomes one important point to motivate them in delivering their speech" (p.32). Similarly, the research carried out by Gleason and Suvorov (2011) addresses the effectiveness of computer-mediated communication tasks presenting learners' perceptions regarding its benefits on improving their speaking skills, pronunciation, and its feedback opportunities.

Creating an online environment through GC is found effective as it enables learners and instructors to "carry out the learning process more deeply" (Syakur et al., 2020, p. 482). GC is regarded highly effective in supporting learners' motivation and confidence while helping instructors to complete scores and provide information and course materials without a time limit (Amin & Sundari, 2020; Khalil, 2018). In parallel with these findings, the research by Putra (2021) emphasizes that GM also provides effective learning process as the research concludes "the use of GM could significantly affect students' motivation in learning English during the virtual learning" (p.35). GM is considerably helpful to make students enthusiastic about responding and answering questions and to increase students' participation in speaking activities.

Fully online education, however, has some difficulties. Keeping self-motivated, studying regularly, and poor internet connectivity which prevents the natural flow of communication result in the misinterpretation of expressions, lack of interaction, and the lack of reliability of assessment and evaluation. Moreover, teachers' lack of skills in using

technology leads to a more teacher-centred methodology (Dhull & Sakshi, 2017; Ismaili, 2020; Korkmaz & Toraman, 2020; Lim, 2017; Moorhouse, 2020; Sun, 2014; Tirtanawati, 2020). Hernandez and Florez (2020) provide statistics (see Figure 1) to show demotivating situations that learners experience during online education.

According to EFL learners' and teachers' perceptions on effectiveness of GC, although this platform is useful for sharing materials and uploading assignments, it is insufficient for communicative and interactive facilities. Thus, it is suggested to be accompanied by other user-friendly online platforms (Amin & Sundari, 2020; Azhar & Iqbal, 2018). In order to enhance learners' motivation and participation in online classes, teachers should develop their technology competence and be prepared for a more planned and purposeful online class and design classroom tasks used with technology integrated language teaching (Al-Haj, 2020; Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Gunuç & Babacan, 2017). Recommendations to EFL teachers to create a more interactive and motivational digital environment can be listed as:

- Be knowledgeable and competent to operate educational devices.
- Be aware, appreciative, and equipped on using these educational devices.
- Establish guidelines.
- Adopt variations of technology.
- Provide access to your students.
- Encourage student interaction.
- Keep backup plan. (Al-Haj, 2020, p.566)

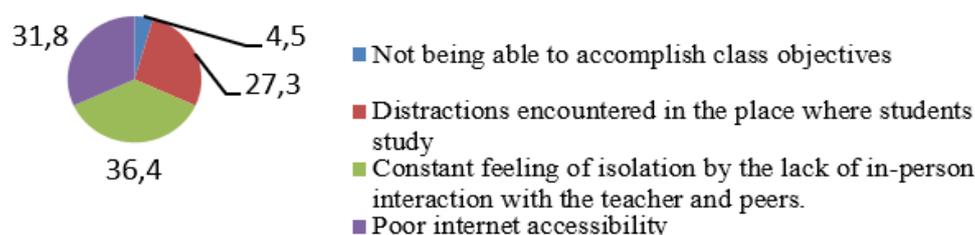
In conclusion, the research in the literature to improve the effectiveness of technology in language classrooms and eliminate the challenges, we can suggest teachers to apply student-centred approach. Enhance student interaction and participation by increasing the number of discussion sections will helpfully encourage students' creative and critical thinking. Additionally, it is suggested teachers to improve their digital literacy on purpose of a more planned and prepared classes in a digital environment.

## Method

### Research Design

The present qualitative exploratory study was designed to reveal ELT students' opinions about Oral Communication Skills course which was adapted to online education due to Covid-19 pandemic. The course was designed to enhance students' participation orally and motivate them to share their opinions in discussion sections. The course was divided into three sections: students' presentations, discussion part, and written comments.

**Figure 1.** Situations that might demotivate students the most (Hernandez & Florez, 2020, p.162)





A list of presentation topics was provided to students by the instructor through GC. They were given one week to choose the topic and then through GM, the instructor organized video conferences for online presentations. Students used the screen share facility of GM and on chat board they asked questions during the presentation. At the end of each presentation, at least one discussion question was addressed to the entire class by the student who made the presentation. After the live session, the instructor submitted homework on GC by asking students to write about the topic they discussed that week. The point of the written reflections as homework is to make students follow the live online course carried out on GM.

Data was collected qualitatively in two steps. First, the researcher requested the students to make written reflections by asking them four questions regarding their online practices. Reflective writing questions were designed to shed light to the research questions of the current study. Reflective questions are listed below:

1. Do you believe that live online presentations contribute to your communication skills in English?
2. Do you believe that discussions via Google Meet contribute to your communication skills in English?
3. What are the challenges you face with distance education carried out online due to Covid-19?
4. Do you find Google Classroom and Google Meet practical and easy to carry with unplanned online Oral Communication Skills course?

Secondly, semi-structured interviews were conducted to six students on volunteer basis through GM to clarify their responses to the reflective writing. The interviews were conducted individually in the English language and lasted 15 – 20 minutes. The participants of the interview were asked three questions to explain their opinions in detail about online presentations, the facilities of GM and GC, and challenges of these programmes.

**Procedure**

For the validity, the researcher sent reflective writing questions to two experts; one from the Department of Assessment and Evaluation, and the other from the Department of English Language Teaching both occupied in Yozgat Bozok University as assistant professors. After the questions were reviewed and revised by the experts, the researcher applied for ethics committee approval from Yozgat Bozok University. Receiving the ethical approval, the researcher explained the objectives of the study to the student participants and obtained their informed consent. Reflective writing questions were sent to volunteer students by e-mail and the semi-structured interviews were conducted via Google Meet. Meetings were recorded and stored on Google drive. Interviews were transcribed by the researcher and the transcriptions were sent to each participant to verify the data.

**Participants**

Participants of the current research were ELT freshman students who took Oral Communicative Skills course in the spring term of 2019-2020 academic year in Yozgat Bozok University. 42 students took the course but 38 of them (called as RW1 – RW/38) voluntarily answer the reflective writing questions. Also, 6 students (called as S1 – S6) were involved in the semi-structured interview. Consent forms were sent to the participants before the interview.

**Data Analysis**

Data obtained from reflective writings and the transcriptions of the interview was analyzed through NVivo (version 12). Some grammatical changes were done while transcribing the interviews for the language efficiency without changing the intension and the meaning of the texts. The researcher used the software for the purpose of identifying codes, categories, and themes of the texts.

**Ethical Permission Information of the Study**

In this study, all the rules stated in the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) were followed.

**Ethics Committee Permit Information**

Ethic Board that Conducts the Assessment: Yozgat Bozok University Ethics Committee  
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**Findings and Discussion**

**Table 1.** Themes, categories, and codes

Themes	Categories	Codes
Benefits of online presentations	Higher self confidence	Decreasing anxiety Higher motivation Willingness to share opinions
	Improvement in peer to peer interaction	Involvement orally Posting questions Responding questions
Benefits of using Google Meet and Google Classroom	Facilitation of video conferencing	Experience in video presentations Facilities of using microphone and camera Screen share feature
	Facilitation of chat board	Instant feedback Facilitating communication Announcements and forum discussions Message any time
Issues faced due to online learning	Facilitation of record keeping	Not missing the class Classroom folder Watching any time
	External factors	Poor internet connection Power cut Sharing computer with family members No convenient environment
	Personal issues	Not being able to use camera and microphone Being unmotivated to participate Difficulties in comprehension

Data was collected to gain insights into students' opinions about the adaptations to online Oral Communication Skills course carried through GM and GC. The course included three sections: student presentations, discussions, and homework. Hence, reflective writing questions prepared by the researcher aimed at understanding students' perception of the effectiveness of presentations, benefits of implementing GM and GC, and challenges faced due to online learning (see Table 1). Then, interview questions shed light into the codes gathered from the reflective writing providing analysis in detail.



### *Benefits of Online Learning*

Participant responses to role of the live presentation in contributing their communication skills are analyzed and findings show that it affects students' learning process in two ways. First, presentations contribute to improving students' confidence in speaking skills. Secondly, by including discussion section after the presentation, it is observed that student participation and interaction increase. RW3 puts it clearly "Even if we make preparations before presentations, we always encounter with unexpected questions during the presentations. I think this is the hardest thing about presentations. Moreover, thanks to the presentations, we learn how to handle our anxiety and we can easily contact with audience." Also, RW9 points to the effectiveness of presentations:

"I believe that live presentations contribute to improving my communication skills in English, because I get questions about my presentation topic from my classmates and try to respond them in English. While I am doing this, I try to do my best to express myself in that language. I try to think about the most appropriate words or expressions. Also, since I get prepared before the presentation in terms of my speech, I learn how to address to people."

Similarly, RW14 addresses the same point by stating "while we are doing live presentations, we can ask and answer questions. It improves our self-confidence."

In order to understand the coded data, the participants were asked about the effectiveness of presentations in terms of improving communication skills in the interview. And the data obtained from the interview underlines that online presentations help shy students to decrease anxiety and to increase their willingness to participate as S1 puts it "If we did not prepare presentations, it would be bad for us, I mean for our speaking skills, because you know many students do not want to talk during the class. It is helpful for them, for shy students". Additionally, online presentations are challenging although it can be overcome by practicing as SP2 states clearly "At the beginning it was difficult, but later I started to feel confident and do my best to participate in the discussion sections" and continues by saying "the most important part of online presentations is, for me, that I do improve my speech, I mean, organizing my speech. You know I had to think critically before answering the questions". In the same way, S4 thinks that online presentations motivate students as they are more comfortable than in-class presentations indicating that "I think it is best way to improve my speaking skills in online learning, because I was so comfortable when compared to face to face education, I felt anxious to speak in face to face class."

In accordance with the current results, previous studies also reveal the need for promoting interaction in online learning including video conferences and presentations (Efriana, 2021; Nartiningrum & Nugroho, 2020; Putra, 2021; Yaşar, 2020). Abuseileek (2012) stresses in his research the significance of computer-based environments for decreasing students' anxiety in helping them feel less shy. He found that students do not fear to make mistakes and the reasons of shyness are eliminated in online settings. By the same token, Miftah (2011) points out that using presentations motivates students to participate and effectively increases interaction. From a parallel view, Putra (2021) highlights the idea that online courses are tended to be monotonous and boring for students if teachers do not vary their online classes with various activities and strategies. He finds that video conferencing motivates students and raises their success

in learning process. Students by asking and responding questions during the presentations actively participate in the class and this direct engagement helps them develop their communication skills. Higher level of interaction contributes to achieving learning goals and online presentations are beneficial for language learners in that shy students feel more motivated to participate in discussions compared to their performances in face-to-face learning.

### *Benefits of Using Google Meet and Google Classroom*

According to the data of the reflective writing, the main benefits of implementing GM and GC are the facilitations of video conferencing, chat board, and record keeping. Students agree upon the fact that to improve communication skills, interaction is significantly important and video conferences through GM are highly beneficial in online education. As it is pointed in RW15 "Especially Google Meet is more suitable for this course because it has various features and one of them is video conferencing". Moreover, students found it easy and practical for presentations as stated in RW20 "it has a 'share screen' button and it makes everything much easier". Also, RW1 agrees upon the same point "I think Google Classroom and Google Meet are practical and easier to carry with unplanned and unprepared online Communication Skills course because thanks to these tools we can easily express our thoughts". S5 and S3 point to the recording and storage facilities of GM and GC:

"We can easily reach materials and have no chance to miss or forget doing it; I mean homework or assignments, because they are always there without time limitation. We have notifications that inform us about announcements, feedbacks and assignments." (S5)

"We receive feedback for homework instantly and so it feels like a real class. Google Meet enables us to contact with our classmates and we can share our ideas easily, which is very important for communication skills. And if we are confused or miss something, then we can ask the teacher to clarify it and get answer immediately." (S3)

In line with the current findings of the present study, Khalil (2018) indicates that according to students GC is highly beneficial to increase student to student and student to teacher interaction as they easily access teacher feedback and course materials. Also, according to Cakrawati (2017), students find online learning practical and simple that encourages them to learn at any time in any place thanks to mobile phones, tablets, and computers. In a similar vein, Sukmawati and Nensia (2019) address to the practicality of GC which enable students to obtain information faster and to communicate directly with the teacher by sending a private comment.

The features of video conferencing, recording, sending message, and storage materials uploaded by the teacher make GM and GC preferable for online education. Baron (2020) confirms in the research that GM is found practical and easy to use in speaking lessons by students. In line with these findings, the present study signifies the effectiveness of these platforms to use with Oral Communication Skills course as students highlighted the features which help them share their opinions and comment on their friends' thoughts.

### *Issues Faced due to Online Learning*

Analysis of the interview and the reflective writing reveals the challenges that students face during online learning.



The issues are categorized as external and personal factors affecting students' online learning process negatively. Poor internet connection is the major challenge students have to deal with according to the data gathered from interviews and reflective writing. Being unable to concentrate on online classes due to family members interrupting during the class is another important reason preventing students to be successful in the online setting.

In RW10 the issue is stated as "Poor internet connection was the most challenging thing because sometimes I could not catch what the teacher says because of my Internet." Also, RW32 indicates the same problem "Internet connection is one of the main problems, and I do not have a computer so I connect with my mobile phone and this makes it difficult for me, I mean doing my homework on my phone takes too much time." RW2, RW3, RW6, RW17, and RW38 put the fact that home environment and family members play a vital role in students' online performance:

"Dealing with the family members is so tiring. Sometimes they do not think that you are at the online class and they just burst into the room." (RW2)  
"Sometimes the situation of my home is not suitable for the lesson. So I have to focus on my lesson while listening to vacuum cleaner." (RW3)

"The biggest problem for me is that home environment and living with my family is not suitable for online education." (RW6)

"You know we have to attend the class from home, and sometimes it is difficult to find a suitable and quiet place for online class." (RW17)

"My home is not convenient because I have a big family living in the same house. Also, I have to help my parents for housework. And so I am usually tired and all these things affect my performance in online learning." (RW38)

Data of the interview provides detailed information about personal factors such as the inability to use technological devices, being unmotivated to participate, and comprehension difficulties. S4 addresses the issues stating "You know we require some technological devices for online education, but some of my classmates do not have laptops and it is difficult to follow the teacher through a mobile phone. Also, we could not see each other so it is not always easy to comprehend the subject." According to S3, online settings or environment can be un motivating for students as he states "Some students do not have microphones and cameras and in such circumstances, they have no opportunity to make eye-contact or see facial expressions. I mean due to these, students feel unmotivated to participate or even anxious." Additionally, S6 talks about the same problem by saying "My computer is not new and sometimes I have problems with turning on my video camera because it does not work properly. And this makes me really nervous during the class."

The findings related to the challenges students faced during their online experience are similarly indicated by the research conducted by Korkmaz and Toraman (2020). According to their research, the major problem educators experienced occurs from students' poor internet connection. Also, lower student motivation is another problem experienced by the instructors during the online education. In a similar vein, Tirtanawati (2020, p.21) finds out that the "slow-speed internet access" is the main obstacle for students although they consider GC and GM effective virtual learning platforms.

Referring to another reported problem of decreased motivation, the finding of the research carried by Sun (2014) suggests students' lack of maintaining self-motivation during their online practices. The research indicates that fully online learning demanding student to be more organized in terms of self-regulation becomes difficult for students to keep themselves motivated. In line with the findings of the present study, Efriana (2021) demonstrates the similar problems in the research in which students' unwillingness to participate in online learning is stated as one of the major problems reviewed by the researcher. Briefly, the findings of the current study reveal the similar problems founded by the studies in the literature.

## Conclusion and Suggestions

The findings of the current study reveal ELT students' experiences during online education due to Covid-19. Data gathered from reflective writings was coded and the interview was conducted to analyse the coded data in detail. The study explores the role of online presentations in Oral Communication Skills course, set of challenges in emergency online learning for students, and the benefits of implementing GC and GM to promote the students' communication skills.

Online presentations held through GM enable students to interact with each other and participate in the online class orally. Students feel less anxious and more confident to talk in English in online environment compared to in-class performances. GC is beneficial for students in terms of receiving the course materials and teacher feedback, and submitting homework, leaving comment and sending private message. Although students find these platforms practical and easy to use, data confirms that they face some problems which make online learning challenging. The biggest problem is poor internet connection or no internet access. Another problem the participant students have reported is the inconvenient home environment as they want their parents to be more sensible during the video conference and less noisy to prevent the issue of loss of concentration.

As the literature suggests, these challenges can be overcome by implementing several strategies and teachers have a significant role to motivate students during the online learning process. Teachers should follow the current innovations in educational technologies and increase their technology-literacy. Several technological devices and online platforms offer teachers online settings to carry lessons when it is needed. However, teachers should search and decide on the application which suits the objectives of the course.

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