

Incorporating Internet-Based Applications in Teaching Integrated Language Skills to EFL Students

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, it has become more popular for teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) classes to engage their students in language learning by using Internet-based applications. However, each application is often designed to teach a separate language skill, so there is a need to incorporate some applications to teach four language skills effectively. Therefore, Kahoot, Wordwall, Google Form, and Padlet were combined in this action research to support the teacher in teaching integrated skills to 104 intermediate-level students of 4 EFL classes during a 15-week course at a tertiary institution in Vietnam. The purpose of this research was to describe how these Internet-based applications are incorporated in an EFL classroom through a teacher's reflective teaching journal and identify the students' perceptions of this implementation through a questionnaire followed by a semi-structured interview. The research findings indicated that a great majority of students (90.4%) somewhat and strongly supported the model of incorporating these applications in EFL classrooms with the four major benefits of facilitating their integrated language skill practices, fostering their active learning, encouraging self-studying, and increasing students' attention span. Accordingly, this paper concluded with a suggestion for more implementations at other institutions with similar contexts.

Keywords: *Internet-based applications, integrated skills, EFL.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The employment of technology in teaching English as a foreign language has had positive effects in enabling students to be more proficient in English language [1]. Indeed, teachers should know how to integrate pedagogical knowledge and skills with technology to promote language teaching and learning, keep classroom records, receive students' feedback, and conduct assessments [2]. Among these technological implementations, the appearance of Internet-based applications in teaching English has been considered as a means to enhance students' engagement in learning a foreign language [3]. Thus, applying Internet-based applications is highly appreciated in EFL classes at all educational institutes. With the outspread of the COVID 19 pandemic, this requirement has become more and more urgent.

As a result, Internet-based applications have been applied to a large number of EFL classes in Vietnam. There have been studies on the effectiveness of applying

technologies in teaching and learning English language skills [4-7]. However, the fact is that the Internet-based applications which EFL teachers often use seem to be designed to teach separated skills. Therefore, to teach integrated skills, teachers need to combine 2 or 3 applications at the same time in their classes.

Therefore, this action research was done in three intermediate-level EFL class at the University of Science - Ho Chi Minh City during the COVID -19 pandemic. During the semester, EFL teachers were required to apply blended teaching with five weeks of online study and 10 weeks of face-to-face study. The two research questions were formed as follows.

1. How are four Internet-based applications, including Kahoot, Wordwall, Google Form, and Padlet, incorporated in an EFL classroom?
2. What are the students' perceptions of this incorporation?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The benefits of applying technology in English language teaching have been studied for a long time. Warschauer et al. [8] showed that using the Internet in English teaching can provide authentic language materials, improve students' literacy level in on-line communication, encourage students to interact with the outside world, promote a positive learning atmosphere, and let both teachers and students work efficiently. Later, Awais et al. [9] agreed that "*The Internet (has been proven to be) an effective tool, suitable for educational purpose*". For the specific types of applications that could be implemented in language teaching, Beaty [10] discussed that eight widely-used ones are word processors, games, literature, corpus linguistics, computer-mediated communication, world-wide-web resources, adapting other materials, and Personal Digital Assistants.

More particularly, discussing the reasons for applying Internet-based applications into a language classroom, Andrade [11] indicated that this teaching practice would increase efficiency in lessons and activities. Recently, Ulla et al. [12] pointed out that "*various Internet-based applications encourage new teaching style and strategies, and more exciting and engaging activities, exercises, and positive impact on ELT to their students*".

Besides, Costley and Sato et al. also indicated that applying Internet-based applications could also expand the students' opportunities to collaborate in pair work and group work as well as expand their independent learning because they can learn at their speed and at any time [13-14].

Recent studies in the Vietnamese context also showed that implementing Internet- applications in English teaching and learning has been beneficial. Pham et al. [5] concluded that this application brought a good language environment to students, gave learners interesting activities to practice language skills, helped teachers get instant feedback. Pham [6] stated that smartphones and laptops were students' favorite learning assisting devices. Those students preferred conducting language learning via applications for the sake of ease and convenience. Therefore, teachers should design activities using these apps to suit the students' learning needs. Studying the students' IT competence in learning English, Nguyen [4] showed that "*Mobile learning is catching up in the language teaching context of Vietnam even though most students have little experience with it*" and "*Despite some obstacles in getting familiar with the new platform, most students can adapt quickly and show digital-friendly learning styles*" [4].

However, according to Ardi [15], teachers need to be literate in computers and have a thorough knowledge of computer-assisted language learning, computer-mediated communication, and online-learning so that Internet-based activities could be applied successfully.

Similarly, Pham et al. [7] included that EFL teachers who were using ICT in teaching English in Vietnam had to face many challenges, including lack of ICT competence, lack of ICT facilities, oversized classes, heavy teaching load, lack of technical support, and lack of support from relevant authorities.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Setting and Participants

The action research was conducted at the University of Science - Ho Chi Minh City. The participants included 104 students aged from 18 to 20 from three EFL classes (18S4-1, 18S5-1, and 18C5-1) in the second academic semester of the school year 2019-2020. These students were at intermediate English level, and they were in the last course of the 4 EFL courses in the compulsory university curriculum.

Due to the outspread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the lockdown was established in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC). Consequently, this EFL course was conducted through platform Zoom for the first five weeks of the second academic semester and then was transformed into a face-to-face class for the rest ten weeks of the course.

3.2 Research instruments

3.2.1 Teaching journal

First, this action research was conducted by applying Internet-based applications to teaching four language skills. In particular, four chosen applications were Kahoot, Wordwall, Google Form, and Padlet for the following reasons.

3.2.1.1 Kahoot

This application was designed to help the teachers let students play vocabulary and grammar games by asking the students to join the games on their mobile phones. In this research, it was used to teach vocabulary and grammar as a way to teach pre and post speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. It was also applied to create a formative assessment and even to get the students' feedback by giving a poll at the end of each Kahoot activity. Moreover, the recently-applied Kahoot activities in the class were posted into the Google Classroom of each class later so that the students can reinforce their learning at home.

3.2.1.2 Wordwall

This application is designed to help teachers create lessons quickly. There are many interactive formats available in this app, such as matching, gap-filling, quiz, anagram, grouping out, labeling, and so on. Moreover, these quizzes could be transferred to PDF or Microsoft Word worksheets. In this action research, this app was

applied in teaching vocabulary, as a board game to practice speaking skills, and as a quiz for reading and listening activities. The lucky random wheel in this app was applied every day to engage students in the lessons more.

3.2.1.3 Google Form

Google Form, which is embedded into Google Classroom, was implemented mainly for listening assignments and sometimes for reading activities. Each week, the students were required to finish a listening assignment in Google Form. Students were required to listen to the audio files in the listening assignment and then complete the quiz on Google Form. A reading assignment was assigned once every two weeks using this app, too. The quiz results would be informed next week through students’ emails. They could check the results and know why their answers were wrong.

3.2.1.4 Padlet

Padlet is the canvas which let teacher and students share and collaborate as an opinion forum. It is also served as a website of the class where teachers can share lessons, videos, and pictures. Likewise, it can be used as a class portfolio to keep all the lessons and students’ ideas expressed in writing forms, photos, or pictures.

This study applied Padlet mainly for group discussion in speaking and writing. Students were asked to work in groups, and all the groups had to upload their speaking discussion result or their writing projects onto the class Padlet. This kind of activity was conducted both during the online study phase and face-to-face study phase.

In summary, the teacher kept the teaching journal, and she noted down which applications were employed for teaching language skills in each class. The purpose of combining these Internet-based applications can be explained in the following table.

Table 1: Purposes of combining 4 Internet-based applications

APPLICATIONS	TARGET PURPOSE	OTHER PURPOSES
Kahoot	Teaching grammar and vocabulary in pre and post-stage of speaking, reading, listening, and writing	Promoting pair work, group work Assigning homework Getting feedback
Wordwall	Teaching vocabulary, grammar, speaking, reading, listening skills	Selecting students’ name Assigning homework Promoting pair work, group work

Google Form	Giving reading and listening assignments	Conducting a formative and summative assessment
Padlet	Teaching writing and speaking skills	Promoting pair work, group work, and peer assessment Class portfolio

3.2.2 Questionnaire

At the end of the course, all 104 students were asked to answer the questionnaire about their opinion and suggestions in combining 4 Internet-based applications in teaching English. The questionnaire included five questions, some of which were designed on a 5-point Likert scale. These questions focused on:

- Students’ attitude towards incorporating these applications
- To what extent these applications improved students’ learning performance
- Students’ preference on each of these applications

3.2.3 Interview

To identify the result of the questionnaire more thoroughly, an interview was conducted with the participation of 10 students. These students were randomly chosen with three students from class 18S4-1, three students from class 18S5-1, and four students from class 18C5-1. Those students were asked why they selected their answers and their suggestions to this teaching pedagogy.

3.3 Data analysis

The data were collected at the end of the academic semester to ensure both the teachers and the students could have overall opinions on the incorporation of the internet-based applications in efl classes. the data gathered from the questionnaire were analyzed both quantitatively, and then charts, graphs, and tables were drawn followed by a brief discussion. next, the interview data were recorded and then were grouped to be analyzed in themes. eventually, a conclusion and recommendation were given based on the findings obtained from the research work.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Students' attitude towards the incorporation of Internet-based applications in EFL classes

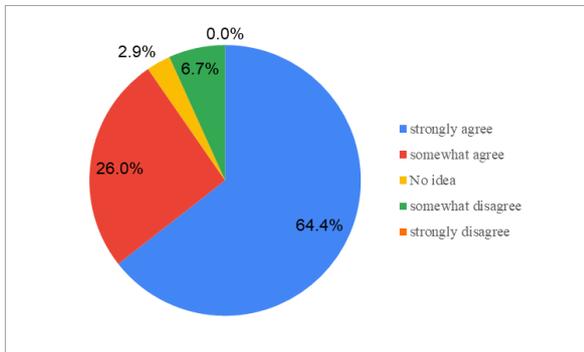


Chart 1: Students' attitude towards the incorporation of Internet-based applications in EFL classes

Chart 1 showed that 90.4% of 104 students from 3 EFL classes supported the incorporation of Kahoot, Wordwall, Google Form, and Padlet in their EFL classes. In particular, well over half of these students (64.4%) strongly agreed that this implementation was useful. Next, the number of students who somewhat agreed was 26%. Meanwhile, the percentage of students who didn't have any ideas was 2.9%. Just 6.7% of them somewhat disagreed, and there were no students who were strongly against this implementation.

From the high percentage of agreement from students, it can be proved that the incorporation of this Internet-based application had positive effects on their English learning procedure.

4.2 The effectiveness of 4 Internet-based applications in improving students' learning performance

Table 2. The effectiveness of 4 Internet-based applications in improving students' learning performance

STATEMENTS	CENTRAL TENDENCY		DISPERSION		
	MEAN	MODE	MIN	MAX	SD
learning more actively	3.8	4	1	5	0.93
increasing collaborating through group work	3.7	4	1	5	1
increasing collaborating through pair work	3.5	4	1	5	0.98
encourage self-studying	3.8	4	1	5	0.98
practice all language skills	3.9	4	1	5	0.86
promoting positive learning atmosphere	3.8	4	1	5	1
increasing students' talking time	3.5	4	1	5	1.04
increasing teacher- student interaction	3.6	4	1	5	1.08
increasing students' attention span	3.9	4	1	5	1.03

Scale: 1= strongly disagree, 2= somewhat disagree, 3= neutral, 4=somewhat agree, 5= strongly agree
N=104

The table above illustrated how the incorporation of Internet-based applications improved students' learning performance. The mode number of all categories is 4, which states that the incorporation has reached a positive result in EFL teaching.

The two highest categories, which have a mean number of 3.9, help students practice all language skills and increase students' attention span. The result from

the interview also pointed out the explanations of this effect as student 5 answered:

"I really liked studying English through these applications since it made me pay attention to the lesson more. The way the teacher conducted activities made me keep my eyes on the screen during the online class, and when we turned into face-to-face class, I indeed tried to go class on time not to miss the lesson."

Student 3 also explained why he could improve all his language skills through these applications:

"Because of the poor-quality speakers in my classroom, it is often not useful to study listening in a face-to-face class. With the assignments from Google Form, I had the chance to practice my listening and reading every week. I also think that using Wordwall and Padlet in speaking and writing activities is fun."

Taking the second-highly appreciation involves learning more actively, encouraging self-studying, and promoting a positive learning atmosphere (mean: 3.8). It can be explored more with the answer of student 8: "The way the teacher let us study English with these applications is very exciting since I could enjoy the fun atmosphere and remember what I have learned at the same time."

In short, the fact that all categories asked in this question had quite a high mean and mode numbers probably proved that the incorporation of these applications has been successful in engaging students to active English learning and promoting their language skill practice.

4.3 Students' preferences of 4 Internet-based applications

Table 3. Students' preferences of 4 Internet-based applications

APPLICATIONS	CENTRAL TENDENCY		DISPERSION		
	MEAN	MODE	MIN	MAX	SD
Kahoot	4	4	1	5	1
Wordwall	3.6	4	1	5	0.95
Google Form	3.8	4	1	5	0.97
Padlet	3.6	4	1	5	0.9

Scale: 1=strongly dislike, 2=somewhat dislike, 3= neutral, 4= somewhat like, 5= strongly like
N=104

As shown in table 3, Kahoot won the priority of students with both mean and mode numbers at 4. Taking second place in the list is Google Form the application mainly used in assigning listening and reading assignments. Both Padlet and Wordwall took third place in the list; however, their mean and mode numbers are high, too (respectively 3.6 and 4).

When being asked about their preference, student 1 noted that:

"I like studying English with Kahoot more than these other apps because it's really fun to play games and compete with other students. This platform is designed in a way that you can see the

result immediately on the screen right after you clicked an answer on your phone. My teacher often asks us to play in pairs or teams of 3-4 students, and we have 5 seconds to discuss together. That way makes us collaborate more in learning."

Student 10's answer is about Wordwall and Padlet:

"When the teacher picks up our name by using the random wheel, we feel so excited, and we all know that everyone has to speak so that we pay attention more to her questions and tasks. The same is with Padlet where we have to post all our discussion results. Thus, we all have pressure to collaborate and complete the task together."

In short, both the questionnaire and interview results indicated that the incorporation of these applications is highly appreciated by students of 3 EFL classes.

5. CONCLUSION

This action research has attempted to establish the procedure for teaching integrated English skills with the teaching aids of 4 Internet-based applications, including Kahoot, Wordwall, Google Form, and Padlet. These applications were implemented in teaching all four language skills within five weeks of online studying and the rest ten weeks of face-to-face studying. This study's findings proved that this pedagogical practice had had positive effects on students' learning. Indeed, the significant results are helping students practice language skills, fostering students' active learning, encouraging students' self-study, and expanding student's attention span. Also, students regarded Kahoot and Google Form as their preferences

among these applications.

The study results have shed light on the following implications for EFL teachers and administrators. First, Internet-based applications should be highly encouraged to be applied in English language teaching at the tertiary level for its large number of advantages. For this reason, the language classroom should be equipped with a strong wifi connection so that it will be more convenient for EFL teachers to apply this pedagogical practice in their classes. Last but not least, implementing Internet-based applications requires teachers to be competent in using technology in language teaching. As a result, EFL teachers should be trained more to be familiar with useful Internet-based applications.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My sincere thanks go to the Centre of Foreign Languages, HCMC University of Science, HCMC National University, to offer me an opportunity to

complete my action research and all students of three EFL classes 18S4-1, 18S5-1, 18C5-1 for enthusiastically participating in my study.

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BIODATA

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