HOW TO TEACH ESL ONLINE CREATIVELY?

Abstract: The research deals with the challenges ESL teaching is facing due to the Covid-19 pandemic, online interactive tools that can boost students’ engagement during online classes are presented, ways of their effective usage in view of ESL are offered.

Keywords: ESL, online collaborative tools, jamboard, padlet, distance learning

Covid-19 pandemic has radically changed traditional concept of learning and teaching processes. Since spring 2020 distance learning has become an integral part of university education. Given the educational process has shifted from classroom sessions into online sessions, it has become much more difficult for teachers to hold students’ attention during online classes via such video communication tools for remote learning as Zoom and Google Meet. Moreover, speaking about ESL classes, one should not forget about their such mandatory component as students’ interaction with their groupmates.

Thus, it is possible to highlight the following problems of ESL classes held remotely which arose due to the specifics of online learning:

– decrease in students’ engagement during online classes;
– less possibilities for students to interact;
– few opportunities for teamwork and cooperation;
– lack of communication components inherent in face-to-face communication such as emotions and non-verbal clues.

Therefore, in order to each online effectively teachers should not just transfer teaching from class to Zoom or Google Meet sessions, they should comprehend the difference between in-class and online learning, to think over peculiarities and
difficulties concerning online classes, to understand their disadvantages, and, what is more important, their advantages over offline classes.

First of all, while teaching ESL online, it is obvious that Power Point presentation might not be so effective as, for instance, during online lectures as ESL teacher should not just present information but to make students use it in practice. Such traditional forms as an ordinary discussion during Zoom session cannot be considered the most engaging way to accomplish the task. Besides, if the number of students in the group is large, it can also be time-consuming. So, a good option is to use Zoom session rooms where students interact in pairs or small groups and the teacher follows them while joining the session rooms. But, how to add a creative component to such activities? A good solution is the usage of such online collaborative tools as Jamboard and Padlet.

Firstly, let’s consider some of the most useful activities of Jamboard regarding ESL classes which can be easily integrated in Zoom or Google Meet lessons. Jamboard is an interactive whiteboard. The most obvious usage of it during online classes is that it can replace the traditional whiteboard used in class. There you can present some information and tasks for students. If during the class the teachers share their screen with the students, after joining session rooms, students cannot see their teacher’s screen. So Jamboard might be a convenient tool for the demonstration of information when students work in session rooms.

Picture 1. Jamboard slide

But the most interesting part of Jamboard is the possibility for students’
collaboration, challenge and unlocking their creative abilities. The example of such activity might be the task when students are divided into teams to hold discussion in order to brainstorm ideas and to come up with the best ones. Thus, the teacher creates several slides on Jamboard for each team. The mode of sticky notes on Jamboard allows each student to write their ideas so they can be visible to all the groupmates (Picture 1). After the time in session rooms ends students come back to an open class discussion, present and share their ideas with their groupmates. Implementation of such activities during classes has significantly increased students’ engagement in online learning process as it corresponds to the needs of Generation Z including such features as search of new activities, short attention span, competitiveness, being tech savvy.

Another useful online tool to make ESL online classes more fascinating, intriguing, and interactive is the usage of **Padlet** which is a digital canvas for creating visually appealing projects that are simple to share and collaborate on. First of all, it has variety of backgrounds which is much more attractive rather than black or white backgrounds in online sessions. So, for Generation Z who is not used to look class after class at black or white screens, this is something that attracts their attention on a biological level.

Padlet is similar to Jamboard as far as creating activities is concerned. But, except for variety of backgrounds, it has variety of information presentation modes. So, depending on teaching purposes you can choose the form in which students’ notes will be presented:

– if you want to brainstorm ideas, you can choose a **wall** mode with a brick-like layout;

– if the task is to come up with follow-up comments or to add to a story, the mode of **stream** can be chosen, where the information is demonstrated as a streamline content in an easy to read, top-to-bottom feed;

– if the teacher needs to present grammar material, e.g. the usage of tenses, and to ask students to present their own examples and place them in the correct place, the mode of **timeline** helps successfully cope with the task, as it places content along a horizontal line;
– if the teacher challenges students to group and connect content, the **canvas** mode is suitable as it allows students to relate their own thoughts to the groupmates’ ideas and connect them by using arrows.

– the **backchannel** mode enables students to talk with one another and share media such as videos, photographs, files, etc. It is helpful for increasing interest in classroom conversations and for testing the students’ skills informally. And it is also efficient since this is one of students’ most popular way of communication in general.

![Padlet Wall Mode](image-url)

Picture 2. **Padlet Wall Mode**
One of the greatest advantages of both online tools is that they can be used after the class. The teacher can write the assignment on Jamboard or Padlet which involves students’ collaboration after the class. Students can write their thoughts there at any time and it will be visible both for the teacher and groupmates. Thus, distance does not create any difficulties for the accomplishment of creative collaborative tasks.

So, in the time when teaching and learning processes are challenged, it is mostly the teachers who need to organize them in such a way that students do not feel disappointed in receiving higher education and discouraged from boring online classes. Online teaching and learning give lots of options to make these processes engaging, creative, and interactive as well as to be in compliance with Generation Z’s preferences.

References: