

Chapter 4

The Effectiveness of Breakout Rooms in Blended Learning: A Case Study in the Faculty of Engineering, Design, and Information Technology (EDICT) Degree at Bahrain Polytechnic

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ABSTRACT

This research project describes the use of breakout rooms in the faculty of EDICT degree English courses at Bahrain Polytechnic. It draws on the experience of tutors employing breakout rooms in online classes and students' experience using the technological tools of breakout rooms and examines the effectiveness of breakout rooms in online and blended learning scenarios. Unlike face-to-face teaching and learning, breakout rooms pose many challenges to tutors and students which range between overseeing their own learning, focusing on following the instructions, communicating with a group of random participants, and completing the given tasks collaboratively at a distance. The findings reveal that breakout rooms learning processes have many benefits such as learning collaboratively, receiving peer feedback, and enhancing communicative skills. Additionally, identified barriers to breakout room use have been found including students' interest and motivation to work collaboratively online and the discrepancies of their language and technological proficiencies.

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3693-1022-9.ch004

INTRODUCTION

The breakout of the COVID19 pandemic has imposed a challenge to quickly incorporate online or remote learning into the curriculum. Traditional cognitive teaching and learning have shifted into a more student-centered and technological-based delivery. This move necessitated integrating technology in teaching and learning in higher education to conduct online classes. This has taken the form of communication through online tools contributing to the application of Bloom's taxonomy through which learners cognitively acquire knowledge, engage in the process of comprehending the knowledge, then applying it to the newly familiar and/or unfamiliar context. Learners have been expected to communicate collaboratively in different means technological spaces through which they analyze and synthesize information reaching the highest level of learning which is evaluation.

Bahrain Polytechnic initiated using Big Blue Button (BBB) as a tool embedded in Moodle to start communicating and teaching students synchronously right at the start of Cid-19. One of the features that BBB includes is breakout rooms which are virtual private rooms that students can be grouped in to work collaboratively in completing or solving tasks.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers such as Tonsmann (2014) and Chandler (2016) have explored the use of breakout rooms prior to the pandemic. They described breakout rooms as online spaces that are sub-rooms from main virtual rooms that allow interactive and collaborative learning. Teachers can have control over the selection of the participants, their numbers as well as the number of groups. The duration of each breakout room activity is also set by the teacher depending on the designed task aimed to be completed. Breakout rooms have video and audio-conferencing facilities as well as a chat room through which students can share textual information. In each breakout room, a student can be assigned as the administrator of the room to have control over the presentation option and screen sharing options. Ahshan (2021) illustrates a number of synchronous tools that could be employed to conduct real-time breakout room activities namely, Google Meet, ZOOM, BigBlueButton, Webex Meetings, GoToMeeting. Each one of these tools has its own technical set-up for rooms. To exemplify, BigBlueButton which is the tool used in this study, is an open-source virtual classroom software used in an e-learning management system, Moodle (Ukoha, 2022). Galindo-González (2020) and Čižmešija and Bubaš (2020) identify

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