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Compendium of Augmented Blended Teaching & Learning for Open Pedagogic Tools

Blended Learning Tool Evaluation - Zoom

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1. Introduction

Zoom is a widely used video conferencing platform that can be accessed through a computer desktop or mobile application. Zoom allows users to meet virtually online for video conference meetings, webinars, filesharing and live chat. There are several free and paid Zoom plans available, and a variety of functionality including the ability to hold longer meetings, set up and run webinars, link with other platforms such as Eventbrite and PayPal and many others. During the COVID-19 pandemic Zoom has seen a surge in popularity with millions of people using it to stay in touch with others. Zoom was launched in 2013, with over 400,000 people signing up to the platform within the first month. Within its first year, Zoom had amassed 200 million meeting minutes. According to recent research[1] as of April 2020 Zoom had 300 million daily meeting participants with the software registering over 3.3 trillion annual meeting minutes.

2. Testing and evaluation of the tool

As referenced in the previous paragraph, Zoom has seen a huge increase in its userbase over the past number of years and during the COVID-19 pandemic. It has gained widespread use in business and personal life, but perhaps the most impressive increase in user base has come from the education sector. Our research has shown that HEIs use Zoom for a variety of purposes including, but not limited to:

- Organising and conducting classes, lectures, and tutorials.
- Hosting course materials, various course files and other documents.
- Supporting student activities including meetings and using breakout rooms for collaborative work.
- Holding examinations, evaluations and giving assignments.
- Recording student attendance and various other reporting and tracking.
- Zoom facilitates communication channels and discussion forums. This also includes direct messaging, real-time chats, and audio-video conferencing.

In addition to the normal functions of Zoom, Zoom Webinar allows professional level webinars to be held. Integration with Eventbright, PayPal, Facebook and other platforms is possible, with live streaming also possible. Zoom Webinar is discussed in greater detail in the following sections.

Our research shows that one of the main advantages of Zoom is the simplicity of operation and organization. HEIs reported that both staff and students had a very short learning curve with the platform, and also that it did a simple job very effectively. Many HEIs reported that they had an institutional subscription to Zoom which allowed unlimited meeting minutes and attendees. HEIs also reported that the platform did everything needed and did this effectively with no crashes or software issues. Many HEIs said that students liked to use Zoom from their mobile devices and that this facilitated a greater attendance at classes and assessments.

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[1] https://backlinko.com/zoom-users

Zoom login screen

An example of a Zoom meeting with various attendees

3. Functionalities Supporting Blended Learning

HEIs reported that Zoom has a huge variety of functionality which supports blended learning. This is now discussed in the following sub-sections.

3.1. Supporting Professional Engagement

Zoom supports professional engagement in a wide variety of ways. Most importantly, there are multiple tools and settings available in Zoom which actively contribute to teaching, learning, and training by providing the security and flexibility necessary to ensure effective and timely communication between meeting participants. The platform also supports a variety of evaluation, analysis and management tools, thus creating a coherent educational ecosystem for HEIs. In addition, Zoom has recently launched its own app store where a selection of apps which increase the potential and effectivness of Zoom for use in HEIs. This includes the ability to make Zoom look like a virtual classroom as shown in the figure below.
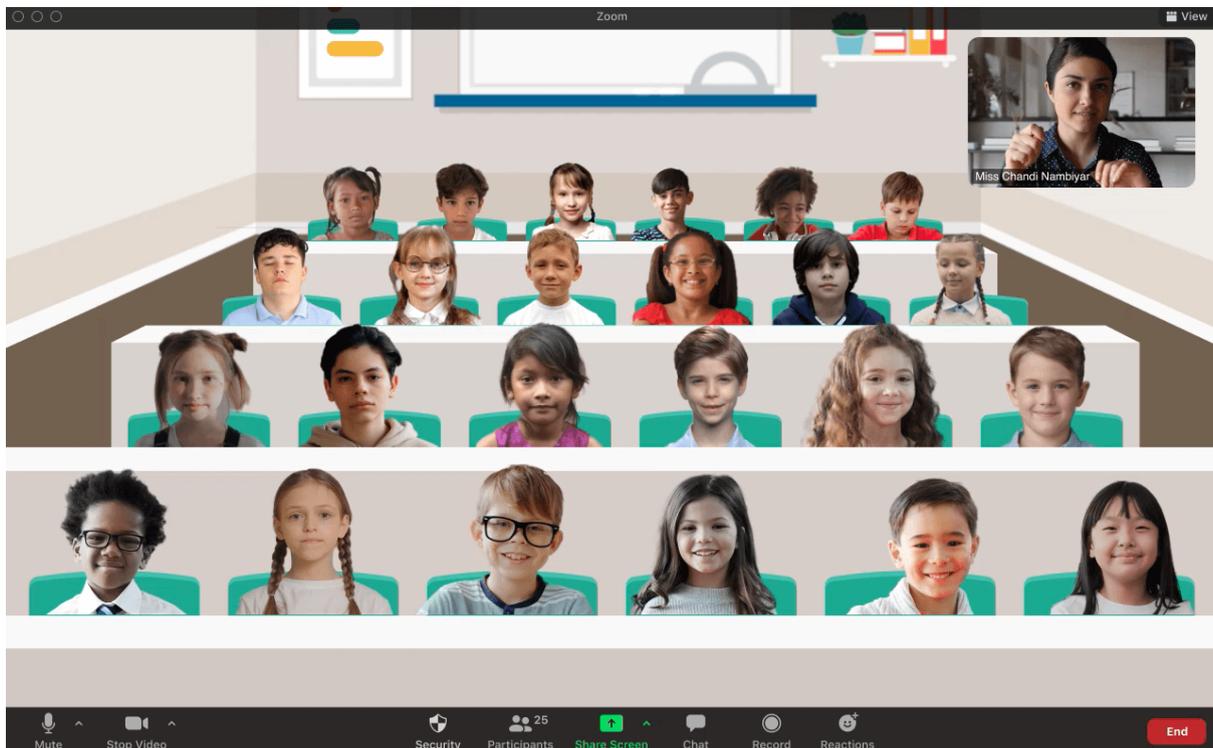
Zoom formatted as a classroom

3.2. Supporting Digital Resources

Also of huge importance to the HEIs was that Zoom supports a wide variety of digital resources for teaching and learning. This includes all of the Microsoft 365 Office suite apps such as Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Outlook. This support is also extended to the Zoom app store where extensions such as 'Zoom for Outlook' are available.

Zoom supports professional engagement

In addition to this, Zoom supports many other resources for digital engagement of both teachers and students. These include support of folders, files, URLs and many other video and voice formats. Furthermore, Zoom has an extremely active userbase and active user forms which provide support as well as a detailed historical repository or questions and answers.

3.3. Supporting Teaching & Learning

HEIs reported that Zoom has a variety of specific strengths for both supporting teaching and learning and for engaging students and teachers. The most important function of Zoom is the scheduling and facilitation of meetings simply and effectively. Meetings can be scheduled in advance and recurring meetings can also be set up. There is full integration of Zoom meeting schedules with both Windows and Apple calendars.


Zoom meeting example

In addition, teachers can manage multiple activities and configure multiple forms of engagement using the Zoom toolset. Webinars, workshops, and lectures can be scheduled and carried out securely and professionally using breakout rooms and the advanced other features of Zoom and Zoom Webinar. This includes limiting attendance using passwords, live streaming through multiple other platforms and secure management of ticketing through EventBright and PayPal.
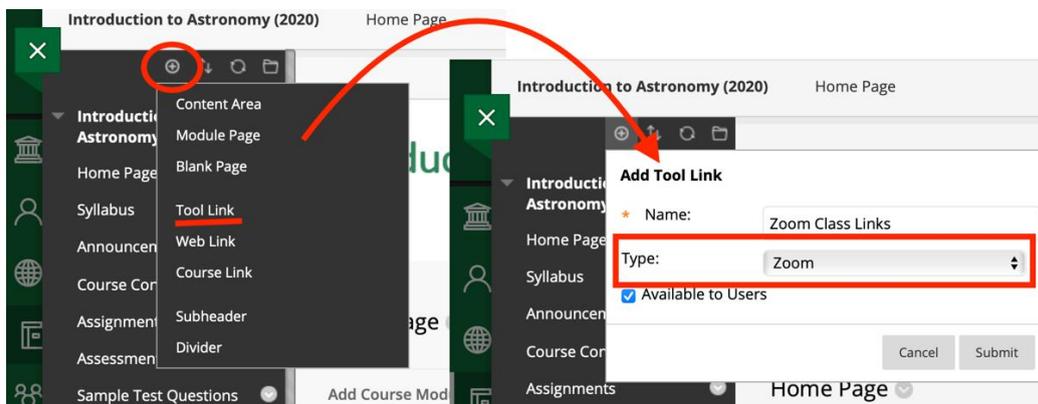
Zoom integration with Blackboard

Zoom also supports assessment by means of close integration with both Moodle and Blackboard. This has the effect of supporting the empowerment of learners in multiple ways, and also leveraging the considerable power of Blackboard and Moodle as collaborative learning platforms. Various pedagogical practices are supported by this level of deep integration, and other activities can be configured to allow students to communicate, evaluate and provide feedback to their teachers. Examinations, assessments and quizzes can also be configured to suit the

specific circumstances of the educational institution and the student cohort. This means that the digital competence of learners is also supported and certified.

Zoom Webinar

Zoom has an additional paid function which supports the set-up and running of professional level webinars. This is called Zoom Webinar and can be accessed as a paid add-on to regular Zoom. Many HEIs reported that they had institutional access to Zoom Webinar.

Zoom Webinar has an additional layer of functionality and allows people to be classified as host, co-host, panelist, or attendee with each having a different role and level of control. The host is the person in control of the webinar with full permission to manage the webinar in a variety of ways. Panelists can usually turn on/off camera and mic, chat with each other, view and send videos, raise hands and ask questions through the Q&A function long as the host allows. The host can also disable some features for panelists, including starting video, sharing attendee screen and recording. Attendees are generally view-only participants who can be given additional functionality by the host. Zoom Webinar can also be recorded to the cloud or local computer, and has the functionality to live stream webinars to Facebook, YouTube as well as other custom live stream platforms.

4. Tutorial Video and PowerPoint slides
The ACADIGIA resources for Zoom are available on the website here.

A wide range of other resources are available to support the use of Zoom. These include the Zoom website, and the Zoom community forums.