Building Back Smarter: Transitioning an Oral Communication Tutorial Online

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1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced educators in 2020 to become innovative. While it has been a great challenge for some in the new online environment, SCIS PUT has experienced an efficient and successful transition. The communication technology available today has enabled a smooth transition online and a more efficient program has emerged. This article outlines the process SCIS PUT went through to achieve this success.

2. What is PUT?

The Power-Up Tutorial (PUT) in the School of Contemporary International Studies (SCIS) is an oral communication course for all first-year students. Since its inception, PUT has been one of the school's most popular courses, enjoyed by students and tutors. A possible reason includes the opportunity for students and native English-speaking tutors to engage in topic-based conversations through

an intimate setting. In the classroom, four students are seated at a table with one PUT tutor. This ratio provides students with an ideal environment to boost their motivation and improve their speaking skills.

Additionally, there are three important goals that help contribute to the success of PUT: (1) students become active participants by speaking with their peers and tutors, (2) students become confident speakers through multiple opportunities to have conversations, and (3) students become capable speakers by developing strategies to communicate throughout the course.

The physical closeness of students and tutors is a significant characteristic of the course. Eye contact, gestures, expression of empathy, and other examples are often used by students and tutors in the classroom to help develop conversations. These examples can help reduce anxiety some students feel during conversations in English.

3. What constraints were imposed on PUT due to COVID-19?

In early spring 2020, infections of the COVID-19 virus began to increase around the world, including Japan. At a similar time, faculty at NUFS started receiving memos making the request to prepare a COVID-19 action plan for the classroom which included the possibility of holding classes on campus in an environment of a pandemic. The action plan I created for PUT included guidelines designed to protect the health of students and tutors. The main guidelines included some of the following measures: physically distancing of two meters, wearing face masks, opening windows, sanitizing hands, and disinfecting surfaces. Each of these measures had a potential impact on PUT and will be described below.

Physical Distancing

This was a significant guideline, one that has been promoted actively around the world. Before COVID-19, PUT was conducted in a classroom at tables. The size of the classroom and the accompanying furniture with the number of

students and tutors, physical distancing of two meters would be challenging.

Firstly, there would be the challenge of actually getting a class of twenty (including tutors) in a classroom physically distanced at two meters. With the current classrooms, it would not be possible. An alternative larger classroom would have to be allocated, but unlikely with most classrooms already occupied.

Secondly, an average of twenty students and tutors with tables, chairs, mobile whiteboards, and media trolleys would be in the way. A likely consequence would be that students and tutors remain standing.

Thirdly, as one of the three goals, PUT relies on multiple opportunities for topic-based conversations. Once or twice during the class, students and tutors are moved, providing another attempt at the conversation. If students are standing without a table, changing conversation partners could become difficult to manage and may result in a lot of wasted time.

Face Masks

Face masks were another measure proposed to help mitigate the transmission of COVID-19. In my action plan, masks were to be worn by everyone at all times. Reports coming out of Canada in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic questioned the efficacy of wearing face masks in preventing the transmission of the disease. In Japan, however, wearing face masks has long been a normal way of reducing transmission of any infectious disease, even before COVID-19. There would not have been a great challenge in convincing students and tutors the importance of wearing a mask, and any impact wearing a mask has on the course would have to be evaluated.

It was perceived that there were two main challenges to overcome relating to wearing face masks in class. The first is how to become accustomed to wearing one. Students to a varying degree may already be accustomed to wearing them as is customary for many Japanese to wear a mask to help reduce the risk of spreading an infectious disease. Tutors on the other hand, for the most part,

would not be accustomed to wearing one. A major criticism of wearing a face mask in Canadian media has been the tendency of people to constantly adjust the mask, perhaps as a result of not feeling comfortable wearing it. This bad habit while wearing a mask contradicted one of the basic measures of preventing infectious disease—not to touch your face.

The second challenge related to the impact wearing a face mask would have on students and tutors speaking in the classroom. Before COVID-19, some students had the habit of covering their voice or speaking quietly. Whether it was out of shyness or lack of confidence, this would usually impact how they were understood by their interlocutors. A face mask would likely exacerbate the problem, making communication even more challenging. There are communication techniques introduced in PUT to help overcome this challenge, so a similar approach could be taken relating to wearing a mask.

Air Circulation

A well-ventilated room was an important measure considered in our action plan to conduct PUT in the classroom during COVID-19. The current set up of the PUT classrooms provided two major challenges to this. The first was that the PUT classrooms have windows opening on the north side of the building, facing the Tomei Expressway. The windows are usually not opened because of the noise coming from the expressway. Opening the windows enough to get adequate air circulation could result in an annoying distraction to the conversations.

The second challenge was how to maintain a comfortable temperature in the classrooms. During warmer months, open windows would allow any cool air from the air conditioners to escape, resulting in an unnecessary waste of energy. Similarly, in cooler months, open windows would allow the warm air from the heaters to escape, resulting in a similar unnecessary waste of energy. Modern buildings with air exchangers and climate control systems are typically not designed to work with windows open and are generally more efficient in a

sealed environment. A sealed environment could potentially increase risk during an infectious disease outbreak.

Sanitizing Hands

According to health experts and often promoted around the world, keeping hands sanitized is one of the easiest and most effective measures that can be taken in order to reduce the risk of infection. During the early stages of the pandemic, alcohol-based hand sanitizer was difficult for the public to purchase. Stock at supermarkets, drug stores, and convenience stores were low and unreliable. Options online were prohibitively overpriced. I am unsure of the resources available to the university to ensure a reliable supply of hand sanitizer.

Soap and warm water is proven to be as effective as alcohol-based hand sanitizer. However, the ability to monitor and control all students washing their hands in the washroom before entering the classroom could have been challenging. As a result, hand sanitizer is a portable, hassle-free way to provide reliable protection. Students and tutors would use hand sanitizer before, during, and after class without much effort. Maintaining a regular supply of hand sanitizer would remain a challenge.

Disinfecting Surfaces

As a part of the action plan for PUT in the classroom, surfaces that students and tutors come in contact with would have to be disinfected regularly. With potentially hundreds of students passing through the PUT classrooms each day, reducing the risk of contamination from surfaces was an important consideration. The main challenge related to this was the large number of surfaces students and tutors would be touching. To help reduce the number of surfaces, we would remove all furniture from the room, including tables, chairs, whiteboards, and media trolleys. If we were attempting to make the classroom larger because of physical distancing restrictions, removing furniture would help that challenge as

well. Other classrooms removing unnecessary furniture would have presented a significant storage challenge for the university.

The alternative would have been for tutors to use alcohol spray and a cloth to wipe down all surfaces including furniture and doors before each class. Once in a routine and with eight tutors available, it would be completed quickly. With this in mind, the five or ten minutes that tutors have between classes is break time, normally spent either going to the washroom, getting some coffee or water, and discussing the classes amongst each other or with students. There would have to be considerations made to accommodate both disinfecting surfaces and using personal time.

4. How was PUT transitioned online?

With the announcement from administration stating that all courses at NUFS for the spring semester in 2020 will be online, the action plan to conduct PUT in the classroom was sidelined. A new plan for conducting PUT online was drafted. From one perspective, we were no longer confronted with the challenges outlined in the previous section. From another, we were confronted with the challenge of providing an oral communication tutorial online where students and tutors would participate at a distance.

The decision to go online was a unique opportunity to observe PUT from a fresh perspective. We had the chance to start from the ground up. Early on, we realized that although there would be significant challenges, including some disadvantages, there would also be some potential benefits. By incorporating online tools, it was possible that PUT would undergo a facelift to better reflect how students communicate today. I was interested in how PUT would grow into a more robust, flexible, and ultimately a better course due to the transition online.

When starting the new action plan for transitioning PUT online, there were a number of considerations that had to be made. We had to establish the following: (a) course goals, (b) use of communication tools, (c) role of tutors, and (d)

assessment. These will be outlined below.

Course Goals

With transitioning away from the classroom for the spring semester, we had to determine if the current goals for PUT were suitable in this new online environment. The goals have been modified over the years to suit learning and teaching styles, as well as trying to keep the course relevant in the school and greater society. We carefully examined the role of PUT and considered which goals would need modifying and which ones would stay the same. For reference, the goals for PUT in 2019 prior to COVID-19 were the following: (1) become more active and confident in English, (2) have meaningful conversations in English, and (3) use communication techniques to achieve the first two goals.

To achieve the first goal of becoming more active and confident, PUT incorporated recursive practice of conversations. By having multiple opportunities to express the same ideas to different classmates and tutors, students were able to experience a progressive move towards successful communication. This experience was aimed at building confidence. Having students change tables a couple of times during the class facilitated the recursive practice.

With corrective feedback and prompting from tutors, students were able to achieve the second goal of having more meaningful conversations. Tutors were able to bring to the conversation context, experience, and depth.

The third goal of using communication techniques was delivered through structured handouts each week that accompanies the changing topics. With each topic, tutors introduced different techniques that helped students communicate more effectively.

We decided that whatever new format PUT was going to take online, we would be able to maintain these three goals. Although at this point, we had not decided which online communication tools we were going to use, but we knew that we could facilitate conversations in English amongst students and tutors

confidently. Nearly the entire world was in a similar situation and there was evidence of successful online implementation of courses through the media. The physical distance or remoteness between students and tutors, in our view, would not be a significant factor in their ability to communicate. We agreed that modern communication tools via the Internet would allow for students to reach the same goals of the course.

Online Communication Tools

With PUT transitioning online, it was necessary to determine a way to conduct live video conversations remotely. There were well established tools that I was familiar with, such as, Skype and Google Meet. The hardware needed for this was straight forward: an Internet connection, webcam, microphone, and speakers/earphones.

When the cases of COVID-19 started to increase in Europe and North America in early spring, schools started closing and students began studying from home. Media in those regions covered the topic of remote learning with technology during COVID-19 extensively. It became apparent that Google Meet and Zoom were two tools that were embraced by many educators.

Initially, Google Meet seemed like the suitable choice, as students had Google-based email accounts. When comparing the two with a colleague, Zoom emerged as the favorite. There were two main reasons for this: video clarity and Breakout Room functionality. I was using a stable connection and an up-to-date computer, but the poor image quality and audio/video delay was significant when using Google Meet.

While using Zoom on the other hand, the video image and audio was clear with no delay. For students who had a weaker Internet connection or a computer system that was outdated, the drawbacks observed using Google Meet could be greater. The Breakout Room function in Zoom was a significant factor in deciding which communication technology to use for PUT. Zoom allows,

through Breakout Rooms, classes to be divided into smaller isolated groups. This function enabled tutors to create a class structure similar to how PUT is normally conducted in the classroom. Instead of dividing students into groups by sitting at a table with a tutor, a similar environment could be created in Zoom with Breakout Rooms. We could create a Breakout Room with four students and a tutor, just like in the classroom. Google Meet did not have this function at the time, so organizing smaller group conversations would have been more challenging. With the higher audio/video quality of Zoom along with the Breakout Room function, we decided to use Zoom for PUT during COVID-19 remote learning.

Role of Tutors

Prior to COVID-19, PUT was implemented and maintained by a team comprised of one director, three full-time tutors, and ten part-time tutors. An initial consideration was how many tutors would be required to carry out the necessary tasks online. We were not willing to reduce the total number of tutors, so it was more of a question of how their skills, experience, and knowledge could be used effectively.

The consideration of how to best utilize tutors in an online learning environment was concluded when we decided to use Zoom and take advantage of the Breakout Room feature. The role of both full-time and part-time PUT tutors online did not change significantly compared to in the classroom. While in the classroom, a lead tutor (full-time) would conduct the class with class tutors (part-time) seated at the tables with students. Online, while taking advantage of the features of Zoom, lead tutors would conduct the Zoom meeting while class tutors would be in Breakout Rooms with students. Without the Breakout Room feature of Zoom, we most likely would have had to come up with an alternative format of PUT online. Zoom provided a realistic transition from the classroom format to an online format while maintaining the roles of our full-time and part-time tutors.

Assessment of Conversations

Another consideration that was important was the challenge of assessing students online. In the classroom during 2019, there were two assessments carried out during the semester. The week prior to the assessment, a preparation class was scheduled. Here, students would have the opportunity with their tutors to have focused conversations about a chosen topic. They would receive feedback just like during conversations in regular weekly classes. In the following assessment week, the lead tutor would organize groups of students to have a conversation on a chosen topic and a class tutor at the table would assess the students' conversations.

In 2020, while planning to conduct PUT online, we envisioned having a similar assessment of conversations using Zoom. In the Breakout Rooms, the lead tutor would organize groups with class tutors during the practice class as well as the assessment class. Breakout Rooms also enabled the lead tutor during the assessments to isolate a class tutor and students being assessed in the same Breakout Room, which allowed for a conversation with fewer distractions. Other students in the class who were not being assessed were in a Breakout Room preparing for their assessment, or in a separate, post-assessment Breakout Room participating in a reflection activity. The Breakout Room feature in Zoom provided the means for which to assess students in a way that was organized and efficient.

5. What have been some successes?

Overall impressions of how PUT was conducted online during the first semester have been positive. The criteria we used for determining if PUT was a success or failure are the following: (1) how closely we were able to mimic course goals of the classroom, (2) the motivation of the students to participate online, (3) the efficiency with which PUT class time was used, and (4) the opportunity students had to develop new practical skills.

Course Goals

When compared with 2019, the course goals in 2020, as we transitioned PUT online, were essentially unchanged. We were able to ensure that by moving online, we would maintain the three important qualities that characterized the program.

Recursive practice was achieved by creating multiple Breakout Rooms during the 45-minute class. Students continued to have two or three attempts at their conversation with their peers and tutors. With Zoom and the Breakout Room feature, we felt that the first goal was achieved as successfully online as in the classroom.

Tutors through Zoom were able to provide corrective feedback and prompting in a manner that was similar to the table conversations in the classroom. With adequate Internet connections and decent audio/videoquality, tutors were able to comprehend most of what students were saying and able to offer alternative words or phrases. In addition, tutors could provide contextualized examples based on their individual experiences. Teaching remotely did not greatly affect this part of the course.

In the classroom, Communication Techniques for each conversation topic were introduced through handouts. Lead tutors distributed the paper handouts to the students directly in the classroom. Online, a similar process was done, but rather than students physically receiving the paper handouts, they would have access to digital copies on the lead tutor's Google Classroom page. The students were asked to preview the handouts on Google Classroom, which would provide them with techniques for improving their topic-based conversations. For students who had trouble staying organized and often misplaced handouts, having them available through Google Classroom improved the likelihood of them applying the conversation techniques in the conversations. For this example, students having access to the handouts online enabled students to make better use of the Communication Techniques.

Student Motivation

Before COVID-19, there were a number of reasons why students were absent from class. For example, there may have been a conflict in schedules of a part-time job and class. Students may also have been feeling slightly under the weather and chose to stay home rather than make the trip to campus. The commute for some students can be up to two hours each way, and depending on a number of factors, it could become overwhelming. The level of attendance in a course is one way to gauge motivation of students. If the course has the right balance of interest, challenge, familiarity, attainability, and others, most students feel it is worth their while to attend. Even though PUT has a reptation of being one of the most enjoyable courses students take in their first year, it was not uncommon for some students to be absent from class. In addition to the reasons mentioned above, some students may have perceived PUT as being less important than their other required courses.

What became apparent early in the first semester when PUT had transitioned online, was that attendance was nearly perfect for most classes every week. Students, although sometimes a few minutes late, would regularly attend the remote Zoom classroom. There are a number of factors possibly explaining why attendance was so much better online than in the classroom, and many of the factors are the inverse of the ones causing the absence.

Some students no longer had to spend time commuting. For them, this saved upwards of four hours every day. For other students, they may have been able to resolve the schedule conflict with their part-time job with the additional time savings. Finally, students with a headache or an upset stomach may feel that attending a 45-minute Zoom from home was reasonable, compared to the time and energy investment needed in commuting to campus.

Additionally, it is important to address the possibility that there were some students less socially adjusted to in-person classroom environments. PUT is a course exclusively offered in the first year, so students who have anxiety about

attending university for the first time, speaking a foreign language, or other reasons, may be reluctant to attend. Students taking online classes from home were able to proceed with their studies and not have worry about managing some of their anxieties. Participating in Zoom at home has become a manageable task for some students.

Finally, motivation may be present in students who take to technology naturally or may have experience using computers and various communication technologies. They may not experience shyness or awkwardness while speaking into a microphone and looking at a screen. For these students participating in Zoom may seem familiar or an extension of what they normally do in their private time. They may see the opportunity to spend more time on the computer as a reward rather than a burden.

Class Time Efficiency

When students were taking courses on campus, they were physically moving from one classroom to another, and depending on whether they went to the washroom, got a snack at the convenience store, talked with friends, or got some extra help from a professor, students were sometimes late for class. In PUT students are sometimes a few minutes late, and this tends to be disruptive to a 45-minute class. To be fair, there are similar examples of how tutors can be late for class, resulting in an equally disruptive delay. To maximize the amount of time students have for conversations, lead tutors usually try to get the class started on time.

Table changes in the classroom have always been a topic of debate amongst tutors in PUT. There is the disadvantage of a lot of wasted time as students and tutors wrap up their first conversations, then students gather their belongings and move to the next table to start their second conversation. This fairly simple task should normally take only a short time, however, frequently it takes much longer. In a class that is only 45 minutes, this results in a significant amount of unproductive time.

There have been various measures taken to try to reduce the amount of time lost during table changes. Some examples include keeping the students' personal belongings along the wall of the classroom. This reduces a lot of the packing up and unpacking time students spend when changing tables. Another example is to eliminate table changes all together and focus on pair conversations at the first table. Students would change pairs throughout the class rather than tables and entire groups.

At home, most students spent the majority of their scheduled school day at the computer. Managing washroom breaks and snacks becomes easier. Although they are not seeing their friends face-to-face, they are most likely queued on their social media. Communication with professors is usually limited to emails which can take time to exchange. Transitioning online has resulted in most students being available and productive for the full 45 minutes of PUT class.

From the start of the Zoom, students' attention should be focused on the lead tutor, resulting in fewer distractions. Students are usually required to have their microphones turned off when they join. They only have the screen to look at. For these reasons, there is little time wasted in idle chitchat between students and tutors, or other activities unrelated to the course material. Although students chatting at the start of class is not necessarily impeding the goals of the course, it does take valuable time away from a 45-minute class.

In 2020, with PUT transitioning online, Breakout Rooms in Zoom have been able to improve the efficiency of partner changes with which recursive practice occurs. The time spent changing groups is minimized. The lead tutor has control over when the Breakout Room is going to close and return students to the main session. While pair conversations are still practiced, tutors are able to change Breakout Rooms more quickly and efficiently. Zoom has the effect of squeezing more time out of each conversation, which is a better reflection of the intended goals of the course.

Developing New Skills

Transitioning PUT online due to COVID-19 has provided a few beneficial opportunities. What has emerged from the amount of time students are spending with computers and related technology is an improvement in their digital literacy. Not only are they becoming more familiar with how to use computers efficiently, but they are also being introduced to all of the associated programs and applications. For PUT, students need to familiarize themselves with a personal computer initially, and then add multiple layers of technology such as email, Google Classroom, Zoom, media players, and learn how to troubleshoot microphone and webcam settings. Many students had little exposure to these technologies prior to the start of the spring semester in 2020. In addition, the learning curve was steep. Most students had to study course material and understand how to use new technology simultaneously.

To help students transition more smoothly online, the PUT full-time tutors developed short videos on how to accomplish certain tasks. These short videos included: how to adjust microphone, camera, and name settings on Zoom, and how to access Communication Techniques through Google Classroom. Most students viewed the short videos and benefitted from them.

Many students have embraced the dramatic transition online positively. The challenges presented and the skills they developed are not unique to PUT, but common and can be implemented in many of their courses. Most students understood that help from university staff, peers, and professors was less readily available and they had to search for answers and solutions on their own. From our observations, many students have become more independent as a result of transitioning online.

6. What have been some challenges?

Despite the hard work by the PUT tutor team and students, transitioning PUT online in 2020 has not been without its challenges. Most of the challenges

have been minor and have not interfered with the students being able to achieve the course goals. The three main challenges have been: (1) students not having adequate technology or Internet connection, (2) students not taking a proactive approach to communicating with their class tutors, and (3) keeping the PUT tutors adequately motivated or inspired.

Technology and Internet Connection

Most youth in Japan today are fairly literate with technology for popular media such as social networking, music, and videos. Out of a personal interest, many students are also familiar with the use of various electronic devices. Unfortunately, two gaps have emerged. The first relates to students who have not had an interest in media and are unfamiliar with the associated tools such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and so on. When PUT and other courses transitioned online, some students had a lot more catching up to do compared with others. Some students were reluctant to catch up with the technology.

The second gap that emerged related to students who did not have the resources to meet the demands of what PUT in an online environment required. Some students lacked financial resources or had time burdens to manage, which presented a challenge. High-speed Internet connections, devices, and associated technology such as webcams and headsets are costly. Some students may only have had access to a computer when either parent or sibling were not using it, due to the nation-wide shift to work and study remotely.

The impact on students that either had a poor Internet connection or other issue was that they may not have been able to participate fully in the Zoom conversations. Microphones cutting in and out, poor sound quality, screens freezing, or not being able to join the Breakout Rooms, were not uncommon in the first semester. The tutors and students in the class were mostly patient and supportive. In some cases, the technical issues became an unintentional icebreaker.

Proactive Communication

While some students communicated issues or conflicts with their classmates and instructors naturally well, it was a challenge for others. Whether it was being absent from Zoom, not participating in the assessment activity, or not completing homework, some students struggled to communicate this effectively with their tutors. In the PUT classroom, where students were physically present, it was easier for tutors to follow up on any issues that related to the course. When tutors saw certain students, it was a visual reminder to communicate and attempt to resolve the issue or conflict. When in the classroom, students made an attempt at communication more readily when there was a tutor physically present.

In the online environment of COVID-19, some students and tutors may have had trouble adjusting to the feeling of distance and isolation. Although, webcams and microphones allow visual and auditory contact every week, some may feel a sense of anonymity or lonliness. Being separated and alone physically may cause some students and tutors to disengage from things that are right in front of them. A physical presence sometimes provides a better opportunity for students and tutors to communicate.

Staying Motivated

The online approach to learning from the spring semester in 2020 has meant that using computers, participating in live Zoom conversations, studying from home, and other examples, were enjoyed by some students. Perhaps there was a sense of familiarity, or a unique challenge. Other students, in contrast, may have felt the new online environment was disengaging, monotonous, and not what they had in mind when they decided to attend university. The students who were better equipped at adapting to change may have had a more positive outlook on the situation. Other students may have faced challenges that they were not prepared to address and were unable to access resources such as family members, peers, and tutors. As a result, these students may have seen the experience in a

more negative light.

Depending on whether students saw the new environment positively or negatively may have an impact on their level of engagement in the class. PUT has for a long time, had a reputation of being an enjoyable course and many students in the upper years wish they could take it again. Although many students from the spring semester have enjoyed their time in PUT online, some may have been experiencing something different from their expectations.

7. What lessons can be learned for re-entering the classroom?

When PUT returns to the classroom, it will bring with it some of the benefits that have been gained while online. Some of the benefits include using Google Classroom to distribute and collect course material such as Communication Techniques and homework. Google Classroom has been a simple platform through which tutors can distribute digitized handouts that guide students through topics. Model conversations, target vocabulary, and Communications Techniques all provided students extra support when preparing for their Zoom conversations.

When PUT does return to the classroom, there will not be the need to use Zoom as the main tool for communication. We will be able to return to face-to-face conversations at the able. One common complaint that many students and tutors had was that they missed their friends. This can be interpreted that face-to-face interactions play an important role in the development and health of many students. However, there are a few examples of how Zoom and Google Classroom can continue to play a role in PUT when transitioning back to the classroom. They include: Google Classroom for handouts and homework, and Zoom for extreme weather events, and both for developing digital literacy.

Google Classroom for Handouts and Homework

COVID-19 has provided a convenient impetus to move towards a paper-

less learning environment, which is simple and reduces the burden on natural resources. Using their mobile phones, students can access handouts through Google Classroom easily. Having access to PUT resources wherever they have an Internet connection can be seen as a positive development. Additionally, there are ways that homework can be created so it is all digital as well. Submitting a Google Forms assignment for homework is easy, fulfills important preparation criteria, and is easy for the tutor to check.

Zoom and Typhoons

One possible role for PUT could be in the case of an extreme weather events resulting in the cancellation of classes. During typhoon season in early autumn, class disruptions could be avoided by conducting the PUT class online using ZOOM. While in the safety of their own homes, students and tutors could conduct a modified PUT class. One possible drawback to this could be the large amount of training and practice involved for a low probability event. Students and tutors would have to familiarize themselves with Zoom in the event of extreme weather.

Developing Digital Literacy

Finally, it is possible to incorporate Zoom and Google Classroom into the regular PUT schedule as a way of developing the digital literacy of students. If Zoom classes for PUT are carried out twice a semester, even though all classes are in the classroom and COVID-19 is no longer a threat, students could continue to develop their knowledge and skills using online communication tools. Zoom could be used for the purpose of assessment preparation, making efficient use of the limited 45-minute class. Adding some variety to the schedule may be a welcome shift away from busy and anxious first-year students.

8. Conclusion

The adoption of Zoom as the main tool for communication in PUT has enabled the course to transition online without much disruption of the course goals or roles of the tutors. In fact, with the capabilities of Breakout Rooms in Zoom, the classes were often conducted more efficiently. Although most students and tutors will welcome the return to face-to-face conversations in the classroom, and the subsequent use of Zoom will inevitably wain, there may be opportunities for Zoom to create a paperless classroom, provide class time in the event of extreme weather, and contribute to the overall digital literacy of our students.