

UTILIZATION OF ONLINE DISCUSSIONS TO ENHANCE
STUDENTS' ENGAGEMENT WITH WILLIAM GOLDING'S "LORD
OF THE FLIES"

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To the memory of my mother, my father, who would have been glad to see me at this moment.

To my wife and beloved children, Ahmed, Abdullah, Mustafa for their love and support.

To my brothers and my sisters for their support and encouragement to all my family members and friends for their love and support

To science,
enlightening us



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ABSTRACT

In the current educational landscape, we cannot deny the significant influence and effectiveness of technology implementation in education. However, the teaching of literature components in EFL classes in Iraq is most often still adopting traditional approaches of "tell them and test them". To improve the quality of English literature teaching and learning as well as to fulfill the needs of current students, shifting from the traditional to technology-enhanced approach is rapidly becoming a necessity. Thus, this one group pretest-posttest quasi-experimental study was aimed at investigating the impact of technology integration in the EFL literature classroom, specifically examining the impact of collaborative online discussions (ODF) via Facebook Messenger on students' engagement with the literary text through examining their test performance, journal responses and attitudes. In the study, 45 undergraduate students from the English department/College of Education of a University of Al-Anbar in Iraq conducted online discussions with group members on various elements of the literary text. The main data collection instruments were tests and journal entries which were aimed at measuring and investigating the effects of the online discussions on students' performance and responses; the pre-test and pre-journal entry were administered prior to the online discussions and the post-test and post-journal entry were done after the intervention. Survey questionnaires to gauge students' attitude were also distributed at the end of the study. Findings showed that the students were positive about the implementation of online discussions in their literature classroom and would recommend it as an interesting teaching approach as shown by their "attitudes towards the integration of ODF (Overall Mean = 4.03, SD = 0.84)" and "perceptions on the effects of ODF on learning the novel (Overall Mean = 3.99, SD = 0.87)". In addition, paired samples t-test analysis indicated that the online discussions had statistically significant impact on students' test performance $t(44) = 8.28, p < .001$ (two-tailed), and responses in their journal entries, $t(44) = 8.96, p < .001$ (two-tailed). For students' performance level, comprehension level recorded the highest mean improvement, $m = 20.86$, whereas analysis level recorded the lowest, $m = 6.62$ (total marks is 400 marks).



In terms of student's response levels, comprehension also recorded the highest mean improvement, $m = 1.13$, whereas evaluation level recorded the lowest, $m = 0.49$ (total marks is 16 marks). A Pearson correlation coefficient also examined the relationship between performance and response, and it showed a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.456, p < .002$). In conclusion, the study revealed that the contribution of online discussion in engaging students with the literary text was beneficial and should be recommended for the literature classroom.



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ABSTRAK

Dalam landskap pendidikan hari ini, kita tidak dapat menafikan pengaruh penting dan keberkesanan pelaksanaan teknologi dalam pendidikan. Walau bagaimanapun, pengajaran komponen kesusasteraan dalam kelas EFL di Iraq sering kali masih menggunakan pendekatan tradisional yang mana "memberitahu mereka dan menguji mereka". Untuk meningkatkan kualiti pengajaran dan pembelajaran kesusasteraan Inggeris serta memenuhi keperluan pelajar semasa, beralih dari pendekatan tradisional ke teknologi yang dipertingkatkan menjadi suatu keperluan. Oleh itu, kajian kumpulan kuasi eksperimen sebelum ujian-selepas ujian ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki impak integrasi teknologi dalam kelas kesusasteraan EFL, secara khusus mengkaji kesan perbincangan online bersama (ODF) melalui Facebook Messenger mengenai penglibatan pelajar dengan teks sastera melalui pemeriksaan prestasi ujian, respons jurnal dan sikap mereka. Dalam kajian ini, 45 orang pelajar sarjana dari jurusan Bahasa Inggeris / Kolej Pendidikan sebuah universiti Al-Anbar di Iraq telah menjalankan perbincangan secara dalam talian dengan ahli kumpulan mengenai pelbagai elemen teks sastera. Instrumen pengumpulan data utama adalah ujian dan entri jurnal yang bertujuan untuk mengukur dan mengkaji kesan perbincangan dalam talian mengenai prestasi dan respons pelajar; entri pasca-ujian dan pasca-jurnal telah ditadbirkan sebelum perbincangan dalam talian dan kemasukan pasca ujian dan pasca-jurnal dilakukan selepas intervensi. Soal selidik tinjauan untuk mengukur sikap pelajar juga diedarkan pada akhir kajian. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa pelajar bersikap positif mengenai pelaksanaan perbincangan dalam talian dalam bilik darjah kesusasteraan mereka dan akan mencadangkannya sebagai pendekatan pengajaran yang menarik seperti yang ditunjukkan oleh "sikap mereka terhadap integrasi ODF (Purata Min = 4.03, SD = 0.84)" dan "persepsi mengenai kesan ODF dalam pembelajaran novel (Purata Min = 3.99, SD = 0.87)". Di samping itu, analisis berpasangan ujian t menunjukkan bahawa perbincangan dalam talian mempunyai kesan signifikan secara statistik terhadap prestasi ujian pelajar, $t(44) = 8.28, p < .001$ (dua ekor), dan respons dalam entri jurnal mereka, $t(44) = 8.96, p < .001$ (dua ekor). Bagi tahap prestasi pelajar, tahap kefahaman mencatatkan peningkatan min tertinggi, $m = 20.86$, manakala tahap analisis mencatatkan yang terendah, $m = 6.62$ (jumlah markah ialah 400 markah). Dari segi tahap tindak balas pelajar, pemahaman juga mencatatkan peningkatan min tertinggi, $m = 1.13$, manakala tahap penilaian mencatatkan terendah, $m = 0.49$ (jumlah markah



ialah 16 markah). Koefisien korelasi Pearson juga mengkaji hubungan antara prestasi dan tindak balas, dan menunjukkan korelasi positif yang sederhana ($r=0.456$, $p<.002$). Kesimpulannya, kajian menunjukkan bahawa sumbangan perbincangan dalam talian untuk menarik pelajar dengan teks sastera adalah bermanfaat dan harus disarankan untuk kegunaan dalam bilik darjah.



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LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

<i>O1</i>	-	Pre-test
<i>O2</i>	-	Post-test
<i>X</i>	-	Treatment
<i>CALL</i>	-	Computer-assisted language learning
<i>CL</i>	-	Collaborative learning
<i>CMC</i>	-	Computer-mediated communication
<i>EFL</i>	-	English as a foreign language
<i>ESL</i>	-	English as a second language
<i>G</i>	-	Group
<i>ICT</i>	-	Information and communication technology
<i>M</i>	-	Mean
<i>OD</i>	-	Online discussion
<i>Q</i>	-	Question
<i>R1</i>	-	Rater 1
<i>R2</i>	-	Rater 2
<i>RRJ</i>	-	Reader-response journal
<i>TRRT</i>	-	Transactional Reader Response Theory
<i>S</i>	-	Student
<i>SD</i>	-	Standard deviation
<i>SPSS</i>	-	Statistical package for social science
<i>UNESCO</i>	-	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<i>IV</i>	-	Independent Variable
<i>DV</i>	-	Dependent Variable



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The emergence of the internet and technologies has caused the flourishing adoption of online learning and teaching in higher education (Nazarinia Roy & Schumm, 2011; Reese, 2015). Unlimited services are offered by technologies to the field of education if the teacher and students utilize it wisely. Social media is a web 2.0 interactive tool and this prominent technology has major characteristics to enhance the learning process (Abdelmalak, 2015). A window has been opened by social media where collaboration, discussion and participation can take place across the border without the limitations of time and distance (Papa, Santoro, Tirabeni & Monge, 2018). Social media applications, with the support of the internet, allow connectivity within a learning environment that encourages learners' creative thinking and interaction with peers and instructors. For instance, online forums, wikis and Facebook help to open an interactive window to the world. Sun, Lin, Wu and Zhou (2018) stated that using social applications collaboratively can lead to an active discussion and participation. Specifically, online discussion forums supported by social media like Facebook have been proven to be an effective and desirable classroom tool (AlJeraisy, Mohammad, Fayyoumi & Alrashideh, 2015). There is now an increasing body of academic work that has set out to investigate the benefits that social media can have on the student learning experience. According to Graham (2014); Devi, Gouthami and Lakshmi (2019) states that social media has the potential of positive indicators which can reinforce class materials, positively influenced discussions, collaboratively work of interest and eagerness among students. He also indicated that social media can help



students achieve full potential and for it to be inculcated and encouraged through the learning process.

Facebook Messenger is a tool which can be utilized for collaborative synchronous and asynchronous discussions (Chang, Pearman & Farha, 2012; Kalelioglu, 2017). Studies have shown that among the advantages of using online discussion in the learning process are the increased interaction time and participation (Alzahrani, 2017) which in turn can lead to improved academic performance (Lambic, 2016). Learning in an online discussion environment is different from conventional face-to-face learning whereby online discussions can be conducted synchronously or asynchronously to post or respond to different educational matters at any time, anywhere (Al Shalchi, 2009; Dahlstrom-Hakki, Alstad & Banerjee, 2020). However, the success of an online activity is greatly based on how actively engaged learners are with the instructor, peers, technology and learning materials (Bowden, 2012; Martin & Bolliger, 2018). Therefore, the learning activities for online discussions have to be structured carefully. This study utilized Facebook Messenger as a platform for online discussions due to three reasons: (1) the Iraqi students' familiarity with Facebook Messenger would minimize time taken to train them to use the tool (2) most Iraqi telecommunication companies provide free data for the use of Facebook and (3) it is lighter to use in terms of internet data consumption in comparison to other platforms (Duhoki, 2017).

For the literature classroom, the use of online learning and teaching is still relatively new. O'Flaherty and Phillips (2015) asserted that scholars and instructors are still searching for new methods to utilize within the literature classroom, to promote the construction of knowledge and personal responses. Manzolillo (2016) emphasizes in her study that using online discussion in the literature classroom can help students develop receptive attitudes and increase reading skill. She asserts that integrating online discussions for learning literature encourages positive interaction among students. In other studies, Boruszko (2013); Ahmadi and Reza (2018) states that adopting technology in the language classroom is regarded as a significant facilitator which improves learners' language learning skills. Through the use of technologies, dialogue interaction and cooperative learning are two important elements that could result in any classroom activity (Bodsworth & Goodyear, 2017). As such, the traditional concept of teacher-centered literature classroom activities can evolve into online literature discussions and most previous studies assert that online literature



discussion has many benefits, authenticity and identity development are two important benefits of online literature discussions (Petroelje, 2011; Bodsworth & Goodyear, 2017). Authenticity provides an authentic experience to enhance a learner's motivation to learn literature and the texts while identity development provides learners a platform to discuss their thoughts and ideas about literary texts freely. This is especially beneficial for those who are shy and have low self-confidence to speak in class to become more 'vocal' through online literature discussions (Coffey, 2017).

Transactional Reader Response Theory approach (TRRT) is a significant and desirable approach to the teaching and learning of English literature which emphasizes on the learner's individual knowledge and interpretations of the literary text. It helps the learner to control previous learning and puts him in control. It also motivates the learner and engages him to find evidence within the text. Woodruff and Griffin (2017) regards TRRT as an effective and productive approach to engaging readers in reading and interactions to literary text which gives freedom to the learners when responding to the text. It made learners become mature and confident readers and learn how to go beyond the written text by adding their individual aesthetic judgments (Inan & Boldan, 2018). According to Garzon and Castaneda-Pena (2015) applying TRRT in the literature classroom encourages and enhances the making-meaning process as well as helps the learner to explore and develop higher order thinking skills. Additionally, because modern classrooms today are filled with diverse learners from different cultures and attitudes who come to class with a unique perspective, this approach can benefit from the diversity. Kelley, Siwatu, Tost and Martinez (2015) suggest that because of these diverse and different goals of the students, instructors must realize the importance of connecting learners to the curriculum in their teaching and learning. This can help to attract learners' attention and make learning meaningful and TRRT stresses on the importance of the reader's role (i.e. the learner) in interpreting literary texts.

1.2 Background of the study

Iraqi universities prospered after the 1960s and the free education system was provided to everyone. Two ministries are responsible for education in Iraq; the Ministry of Education [MOE] which is in charge of primary and secondary schools and the

Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research [MOHSER] that is responsible for colleges, universities and research centers. Iraq had one of the best education performance and advancement in the region till 1991 (Al-Husseini & Elbeitagi, 2015). However, after 1991 due to wars, invasion and sanctions imposed by the United Nations and security council, the education system was badly affected. As a result, information and communication technology was introduced late in higher education. In most Iraqi universities there is no Wi-Fi technology and the implementation of e-technologies such as e-learning and e-books have been slow (Al-Azawei, Parslow, & Lundqvist, 2016). Recently, higher education institutions in Iraq have started inviting scholars and researchers to conduct studies in the field of e-technologies because many studies conducted in the Middle East and West have proven that the use of technology has the potential to enhance teaching and learning as it could promote efficient interactions, cooperation and collaboration (Al-Azawei *et al.*, 2016).

Al-Anbar University was established in 1987 with just three colleges and then expanded to more than twenty colleges which offer various courses such as medicine, engineering, applied science, arts and education. College of Education for Humanities consists of different departments such as History, Quranic Science, Geography and English language. Students in the English language department study for four years' subjects such as grammar, phonetics, methodology, poetry and novels. Each class has 55 to 60 local students and classes are from Sunday to Thursday. In English as a Foreign or Second language (EFL/ ESL) speaking countries, there has been a growing interest in the teaching of English literature components in the school and university curriculum. Teaching and learning literary texts is regarded as one of the major components in the Arab world in general and in Iraq in particular. In Iraq, English is used as a foreign language next to Arabic, and it is one of the compulsory subjects in Iraqi school curriculum and students will learn it for at least four years.

However, it is observed that student's engagement with literature is still poor due to the adoption of traditional literature teaching methods. In most EFL literature classrooms, the literature component is taught using the traditional approach. Transactional Reader Response Theory approach is seldom used in the classes to teach literature. Consequently, students in Iraqi universities could not express their thoughts and responses eloquently when they read any literary texts. Technology tools are also not utilized to facilitate reader response approach activities. Thus, this study which was conducted at Al-Anbar University in Iraq strived to add to the body of knowledge



on utilizing technology for literature teaching and learning. In addition, this study can facilitate literature instructors to find the best approach to implement reader response activities and technology in their classrooms.

1.3 Statement of the problem

In traditional literature classrooms, instructors often adopt the "tell them and-test-them" approach (Manzollilo, 2016 p.3). This technique is a series of lectures and explanations presented by the instructor followed by a final test. This technique may help students in their comprehension of the text but it is still not enough to motivate interest in reading the literary text and enhance critical thinking (Rohaniyah, 2012; Sinaga & Feranie, 2017). Because of the adoption of traditional techniques in literature classroom, students seem to lose motivation and they are unable to explore and respond to the text. In studies by, Ghazali, Setia, Muthusamy and Jusoff (2009) as well as Armstrong (2015) found that instructors spend too much time discussing literary text elements such as plot, setting, characters and theme in the class. Furthermore, Shah and Empungan (2015) highlights in his study that often instructors are not trained to teach literature components, they may find difficulties in applying the best techniques, approaches and methods to teach and control the lesson. A large number of literature instructors felt that they had few skills and lacked the knowledge of literature teaching methodology. In addition, students in the study responded that these teaching strategies are uninteresting. This is worrying as students seem to lose motivation in learning literature (Anderhag, Wickman, Bergqvist & Jakobson, 2016). They also add that instructors should present more interactive and interesting activities to make lessons more creative and exciting. Moreover, instructors need to involve learners with the texts and make reading literary texts an interesting and meaningful experience. Modern technological tools and the internet are seen as an alternative approach to enhance the learning and teaching of literature (Ahmadi & Reza, 2018).

According to Kaba (2017), technology provides ways to find the best techniques and methods that can assist instructors in implementing new techniques that can enhance interaction with the text, peers and instructors. Therefore, the study of literature through the adoption of modern technologies presents a new technique which may be more attractive as compared to the traditional approach. Modern



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multimedia provides a platform for activities and suitable opportunities through the use of various media and sources of information (Uygarer & Uzunboylu, 2017). Perhaps, incorporating technology such as computer and internet technologies in literature classes can encourage and motivate learners to interact with one another and enhance positive outcomes (Traore & Kyei-Blankson, 2011; Ahmadi & Reza, 2018). In another study, Manzollilo (2016) concludes that adopting online discussion to teach literature at secondary and university levels is necessary to develop fundamental skills of close reading, interpreting and critical thinking of literary texts. It states that communication through various multimedia can help develop an interactive atmosphere and encourage positive interaction among students.

Numerous studies have been conducted to explore whether students are learning better online as compared to traditional methods. Zheng and Warschauer (2015) stated that there is a clear increase in the scores of students after they participated in the online course which increase interaction in the language classroom. In other studies, (Choi, 2007; Holmes, Tracy, Painter & Oestreich, 2015) it is found out that students enjoyed learning in the environment created by online collaboration and the use of online activities increases their motivation for active learning. In support of these studies, Baleiro (2010); Dwaik, Jweiless and Shrouf (2016) suggest that a strategy to enhance learner's participation and response in the literature classroom is through reading literary texts in an online discussion of the literary text with the instructor and classmates. In addition, Biriya and Thomas, (2014) as well as Osborn, Byrne, Massy and Johnston (2018) state that online discussion can support student-instructor and student-student interaction and participation which can lead to improved communication. In all cultures, some students sometimes face problems of feeling shy to speak up face-to-face in the classroom (Radway, 2019). In Iraq, it is observed that students are rather reluctant to contribute in class due to their lack of language proficiency perhaps due to the fact that English is a foreign language for them (Elttayef & Hussein, 2017). To overcome this problem, Buelow, Barry and Rich (2018) then stated that by using online discussion it could encourage shy students who normally do not take part in physical classroom discussions to participate during online discussions. It stated that it could facilitate discourse during class and offered a platform for students to engage with other students without feeling intimidated as in a face to face environment. Students who do not have the chance to participate in the class have been found to become more 'vocal' through online discussions (Dixon,



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