

Online Discussion via Facebook Messenger: Impact on students' test performance of William Golding's "Lord of the Flies"



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Abstract: *The teaching of literature component in the English language classroom heavily relies on the traditional methods like "tell them and test them"[1]. Recent development and advancement of technology have called for a transformation in the literature classroom through the incorporation of internet technologies and applications with emphasis on self-directed learning by means of online discussion and negotiation. Thus, this study aims to explore the potential of technology integration in the literature classroom through the utilization of an online discussion platform. The objective is to examine its impact on students' test performance of William Golding's "Lord of the Flies". This quasi-experimental study was conducted at a university in Iraq and forty-five undergraduate students enrolled in an English language course participated. The students were assigned to groups of four members and collaborated on Facebook Messenger as the online discussion platform for five weeks on various aspects of the novel. Scores from students English literature pre- and post-tests were analyzed descriptively and also using a paired sample t-test. Results revealed that there was a statistically significant increase in the students' pre and post-test scores. This indicates that the use of online discussions to understand and learn various elements of the literary text was significantly impactful and the approach is recommended for the literature classroom to help improve the students' responses to the text and test performance.*

Index Terms: *online discussion, literature test performance, Lord of the Flies, Facebook Messenger*

I. INTRODUCTION

The dynamic development of internet technologies has affected many aspects of life including in education and even in the language classroom. The use of these technologies has been reported to make language learning become more effective [2]. Consequently, online learning is rapidly permeating EFL/ESL courses in the past two decades [3]. One of the technologies often used are the online discussion platforms.

Online discussion platforms allow students to share thoughts with their classmates and instructors in a collaborative environment through reflecting on other students' postings and comparing progress with others [4]. In addition, learning in an online environment is different from traditional face-to-face learning whereby it can be carried out on different educational matters at anytime and anywhere. [5], [6]. Sharing ideas through postings between classmates is one of the vital aspects in online learning environments which helps students to compare their proficiency levels and progress towards the target language with others and work on improvement [4]. Even though this may have a negative impact on students who are too shy to interact online, there are studies which show that the online environment is far less intimidating compared to face-to-face interaction [7]. Various online platforms available on the internet provide ample tools and features in the form of chat, e-mail, social network services which can be explored for the language classroom and one of the fundamental platforms is online discussion forums [8]. Outside of the traditional classroom, online discussion is widely viewed as a valuable tool for promoting interaction and encouraging student's engagement with one another as well as the course material [9], supporting social interaction and teamwork [10], increasing students' participation and engagement [11], as well as enhancing critical thinking skills [12]. Due in part to these features, in higher education contexts the use of online discussion platforms for learning has increased and become an integral approach in the learning process [13]- [15].

There are two types of online discussion platforms; synchronous discussions require the interlocutors to be logged in simultaneously whereas asynchronous communication does not have specific limitations in terms of time and place [2]. One online platform which offers a space for online discussion is Facebook through its Messenger facility. Facebook is one of the famous social networking sites in the world today which possesses greater than 1.6 billion active users worldwide [16]. A number of studies have examined the integration of Facebook in education and claims that it can strengthen, enhance, promote and support learning [17], [18]. Facebook also has a variety of features that supports online discussion, that encourages participation [19] and enhance motivation as well as communication abilities [18]. In Iraq, the literature component which consists of learning the novel, poetry, short story and drama is a part of the English language curriculum of higher education institutions.

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The teaching approach for the component is still traditional and this causes a lack of interest in learning literature. Essentially, the reason for this is that instructors are often not trained to use different teaching approaches to cater to the students' interests [20] and thus, they teach literature in the same way that they were taught [21] using traditional activities. In a study, they found that students were not enthusiastic about the traditional teaching methods used by the instructors [22] and as a consequence they seemed to lose motivation in learning literature [23] even though it is a major component of the English language courses offered at the universities. In another study it was highlighted that instructors who adopted traditional techniques in teaching literary texts spent too much time explaining literary text elements in class and students considered these methods uninteresting and added to that many instructors merely taught the literature for the purpose of examination not for appreciation or understanding [24], [25]. To create a more relevant environment befitting the needs of current technology savvy students, there is a need for it to be introduced in the English literature classrooms as an approach to enhance motivation, interest, and fun, facilitating the process of learning literature [26]. The integration of new internet technology such as online discussions in teaching and learning the literature component in the English language classroom is necessary and timely in Iraq as it can enhance literacy practices and be really helpful to the literature learning process [27]. In addition, the adoption of technology too can promote interaction among students and between the students and the text [28]. Thus, teaching literature through the utilization of internet technologies offers a new technique that is perhaps more attractive as compared to the traditional approach currently used in many literature classrooms. As mentioned earlier, several studies have underlined the positive values of the online learning, however, few studies have actually measured the impact and effectiveness of using an online platform to enhance literature learning. In this quasi-experimental study, online discussion is introduced as a platform to facilitate students' learning of a novel through collaborative discussions with other classmates. Effects of the online discussions are examined in the students' literature test performance. The research question guiding this study was: Is there a significant impact of online discussion forums on students' literature test performance?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Online discussion

Online discussions are described as an online-based communication tool that permits participants to post and receive feedback from different participants through an online platform [29]. Online discussions are used in the classroom for a variety of purposes such as interacting, sharing and reading [30]. It is becoming an important and integral part of the learning process especially in higher education [15] because it is believed that effectiveness in learning is derived from a relationship between the learning environment and educational process. In a facilitative environment, learning would effectively take place socially and develop through interactions with the instructors, other students and the learning materials [31]. As such, it changes the learning environment from the individual to a knowledge-seeking and

building community. The basis for this type of learning is constructivism [32] which encourages students' active and collaborative learning that emphasizes on sharing, participation and collaborative knowledge construction within the learning environment [33]. Discussions between students transform them into co-constructors of their own and other interlocutors' knowledge, reducing dependence on instructors. Online discussions have the potential to create the environment conducive for this co-construction of knowledge [34]. Studies on the use of online discussion for learning have emphasized that it has the following positive effects:

- moving classrooms from being teacher-centered to learner-centered resulting in increased learning [35].
- improving participation, interaction and engagement [36].
- assisting and developing writing skills [37].
- increasing comprehension and critical thinking [12].
- increasing social presence and increasing self-confidence [1], [38].

Due to the various potentials mentioned here, exploring its potential in bringing a traditional literature classroom into the digital age has interesting possibilities.

B. The effects of online discussion on teaching literature.

Even though few studies have looked into the effects of online discussion on literature teaching the few that has highlighted the following findings:

- Online discussion improves learners' ability in comprehending the literary text [30].
- Online discussion enhances actual student learning [39].
- Online discussion reduces students' lack of confidence and fear of making contributions to topics of discussions [40].
- Online discussion increase interactivity when discussing the text [41].
- Online discussion improves students' creativity and active participation in English drama classes [42].

Using these findings as the basis, it can be concluded that the utilization of online discussion in the literature classroom has the potential to facilitate and enhance the teaching and learning of literature. However, the studies have only looked at student participation and interaction in online discussions, and none have looked at its impact in terms of improvement in test scores or student performance except for perhaps [30]. Therefore, more studies are needed to investigate not only the effectiveness of online discussion in the literature classroom but also the outcome to teaching and learning.

III. METHODS

A quasi-experimental design (one-group pretest-posttest) was used for this study as it does not contradict with the existing curriculum procedures since the participants were already assigned to one class intact group [43]. Non-probability, convenience sampling method was adopted to suit the chosen research design.

A total of 45 students enrolled at the Department of English, College of Education for Humanities, University of Anbar in Iraq participated. The duration of the study spanned over fifteen weeks which is the regular number of weeks in a semester at the university. Prior to this, a pilot study was conducted with fifteen participants from another class but at a similar level to test the reliability of the test. The reliability of the test was 0.72 which is considered an acceptable value [44].

A. Data collection instruments

Pre-post-tests, the tests were designed to measure the degree of learning that has taken place after a person has been exposed to a specific learning experience [45]. In this study, the tests were used to gauge participants' performance before and after the intervention. The pre-test was administered in week 6 of the study while the post-test was in week 12. There were altogether four questions in each test which were set according to four levels from the Bloom's Taxonomy: knowledge, comprehension, analysis and evaluation (sample in Table 1). The students were required to answer each test within 50 minutes. The tests were rated by two raters chosen based on their experience in and exposure to teaching the course and rating students' work.

Table I. Sample of one question at the same level in the pre-test and post-test

Level	Pre-test question	Post-test question
Comprehension	How do the boys treat the beast at first?	How has Jack's personality developed during his stay on the island?

B. Research procedures

Gaining access to the site of the study from the gatekeepers and consequently getting permission to collect data is the first thing in all types of research practices [43]. The author gained permission for data collection from the authorities after explaining the nature and objectives of the study. After getting permission, the researcher visited the English department and computer laboratories to scope the classroom and computer facilities available at the university. Consent letters were then distributed to the students after the purpose of the study was explained. As, a result forty-five students agreed to participate in the study.

C. Classroom learning

One of the researchers took the role of participant-observer and taught the class was taught at the same time as the data was collected. The researcher conducted face-to-face classes in the first five weeks of the semester in which the first six chapters of the literary text, William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* was discussed. Pre-test was administered in week 6 of the study.

D. Online learning

Online discussions via Facebook Messenger began in week 7 and ended in week 11. The intervention consisted of students having guided online discussions in groups and facilitated by Think-questions (see sample in Appendix1) supplied by the researcher. The students were divided into 10 groups of four and one group of five students each. Having 4 to 5 students in each group is supportive of online discussion dynamics and

would positively impact students' communicative experience [38]. Upon their request, the students discussed online, for more than ten hours, outside classroom time. The students said that through this arrangement they would have more free time to have the online activities. Prior to the discussions, the researcher provided the students with an instructional session on how to set up and use Facebook Messenger before the study begun. The researcher closely monitored the discussions even though he did not participate in the discussions. In week 12, the students were tested again with the post-test.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

Raters & Rating procedures

Two experienced raters were assigned to rate the pre and post-test data. The raters have a long experience in marking exam papers for the literature component. In addition, they are English lecturers who have taught the course. The researcher held a consultative session with the two raters to train them on how to rate the students' test papers according to the test rubric. Three sample test papers were photocopied for the raters to rate. The test papers were first rated and coded by the researcher. Then, the raters were asked to rate the sample test papers before their scores were discussed and compared with the researcher's scores. Each raters' scoring was moderated in this discussion to ensure that their rating was according to the expectations of the test rubric. Once satisfied with the outcome of the training, the researcher handed out the rest of the test papers which have been photocopied and coded with numbers. These procedures were done in order to prevent the raters from knowing any information about the students such as gender and names. The researcher had taken the protection by using codes in order to reduce influence to marking prediction by knowing the names or identity of the script owner [46]. Each question was rated over 100 marks which makes the total of the test as 400 marks. Inter-rater reliability was calculated for this study using Pearson Product Correlation Coefficient.

V. FINDINGS

A. Inter-rater reliability

A Person product- moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the inter-rater reliability of the scoring which would indicate the consistency of rating for Rater 1 and Rater 2 [47]. There was a positive correlation between the two raters' scoring of the pre-test, $r = 0.971$, $n = 45$, $p = 0.001$, and the post-test scoring, $r = 0.941$, $n = 45$, $p = 0.001$, revealing that there was a significant relationship between the raters' scores (Table 2).

Table II. Pre and post-Inter-rater reliability tests,

Type of the test	Pearson		Correlation	
	Rater	M	SD	Pearson Correlation <i>r</i>
Pre-test	R1	244.62	41.161	0.971
	R2	237.13	43.719	
Post-test	R1	291.40	29.678	0.941
	R2	290.49	32.183	

$P < 0.01$, two-tailed

B. Test results

There was an overall improvement in the participants' test performance between the pre- and post-test as indicated in Table 3:

Table III. A comparison of participants: pre and post-test total scores.

Student	Pre-test (400 marks)	Post-test (400 marks)	Improvement marks	Percentage of improvement
S1	227.5	285.5	58	14.5%
S2	252	304	52	13%
S3	197	325.5	128.5	32%
S4	260.5	283.5	23	5.75%
S5	268.5	302	33.5	8.25%
S6	268	329.5	61.5	15.25%
S7	218.5	291	72.5	18%
S8	257	287.5	30.5	7.5%
S9	222	314.5	92.5	23%
S10	228	284.5	56.5	14%
S11	283	309.5	26.5	6.5%
S12	246	354.5	108.5	27%
S13	287	304	17	4.25%
S14	130	258	128	32%
S15	135.5	299.5	164	41%
S16	186.5	343	156.5	39%
S17	264	277	13	3.25%
S18	213	316	103	25.75%
S19	270	274.5	4.5	1%
S20	271.5	324	52.5	13%
S21	265.5	273.5	8	2%
S22	300	311.5	11.5	2.75%
S23	299.5	308.5	9	2.25%
S24	247	286	39	9.75%
S25	246	299.5	53.5	13.25%
S26	224.5	245	20.5	5%
S27	214.5	274.5	60	15%
S28	230	288	58	14.5%
S29	244	273	29	7.25%
S30	222.5	326	103.5	25.75%
S31	168	208.5	40.5	10%
S32	192.5	253.5	61	15.25%
S33	232	263.5	31.5	7.75%
S34	237.5	260.5	23	5.75%
S35	277	284	7	1.75%
S36	260	300.5	40.5	10%
S37	295	323.5	28.5	7%
S38	335	342.5	7.5	1.75%
S39	237	296	59	14.75%
S40	249.5	256	6.5	1.5%
S41	213	221.5	8.5	2%
S42	258	259	1	0.25%
S43	239	285	46	11.5%
S44	171	275	104	26%
S45	296	310.5	14.5	3.5%
Min	130	208.5	1	
Max	335	354.5	164	
Overall mean	240.9	290.9	50.1	

Table 3 illustrates participants' test performance in pre- and post-tests as well as the total improvement for each student. The findings show that there is a clear increase in the scores of all students in the post-test. S 38 recorded the highest score in the pre-test (335 marks) and S 12 scored the highest marks (354.5) in the post-test. However, these students did not record the highest improvement between both tests. The highest improvement, was S15 by 164 marks (41%) while the lowest, S42 improved by only 1 mark (0.25%) of the total score. Interestingly, S38 who recorded the highest score in the pre-test at 335 marks showed little improvement (1.75%) whereas S14 who recorded the lowest score in the pre-test (130 marks) showed more improvement in the post-test (128

marks, 32%) to score 258 in the post-test. It would be interesting if these students were interviewed to understand the results better.

C. Paired sample t-test

In order to determine whether there was a significant impact of the online discussions on students' test performance, a paired sample t-test was conducted. A paired sample t-test would indicate the effects of the independent variable (online discussion) on the dependent variable (test scores). This test is applicable to the design of this study because the researcher wanted to measure each student twice; once before the intervention and one after it [44]. Table 4 and 5 illustrate the results of the paired samples t-test,

Table IV. Paired samples statistics

	Mean	N	Std. deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1 Pre-test	240.88	45	42.13	6.280
Post-test	290.94	45	30.47	4.542

Table 4 presents the results of the paired sample statistics which shows the mean for the pre-test (M= 240.88, SD=42.1) and post-test (M= 290.94, SD=30.5). There was a clear increment in the mean of the test score, post intervention

Table V. Paired-samples t-test

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. Error Mean					
				lower	upper			
Pair 1 Pretest- Posttest	-50.1	41.83	6.23	-62.63	-37.49	-8.03	44	.000

Table 5 shows that there was a statistically significant difference in the pre-test (M=240.88, SD=42.1) and post-test scores (M=290.94, SD=30.5) $t(44) = -8.28, p < .001$. These results suggest that online discussions really do have an effect on the students' test performance. Specifically, the results suggest that online discussions are effective in promoting students' deeper understanding of the literary text

VI. DISCUSSION

In this study, the students have demonstrated an overall increase in literature test performance after utilization of online discussions for learning the novel in the literature classroom. Even though the undergraduate students were exposed to only five weeks of online discussions there was a significant improvement in their test scores. Underpinned by this finding, the study asserts that using online discussions in the literature classroom can lead to better understanding of the literary text and performance in the tests, which has been mentioned as possible outcome in a number of other studies within a similar context [1], [30], [39], [42] and in other contexts [33], [38]. However, in comparison to other previous studies mentioned, the present study is one of the first studies that have examined the effects of online discussions specifically using Facebook Messenger in learning a novel.

The novelty of this study within these parameters should be recognized. In sum, the findings demonstrated that online discussion is an appropriate approach that can be developed to achieve desired learning outcomes [48] which has the potential to enhance learning environments and increased achievements [49], [50]. This study can help shift the literature classroom from mainly using the traditional approach to a blended and technology enhanced environment [1] in which learners can participate equally, be engaged in, work collaboratively and socially and become vocal and creative participants of active learning [49].

VII CONCLUSION

Online discussion forums are considered to be a powerful tool for the integration and improvement of academic capabilities such as motivation, collaboration, social presence and critical thinking. Due to these proposed advantages, online discussions should become more utilized in the literature classroom especially in higher education where critical thinking is expected. A well-designed course which integrates online discussions can encourage more participation from students, fostering different socio-constructivist attributes of the learning process. In this study, the researchers examined and assessed the effects of online discussions on students' test performance. Statistically significant finding supports the researchers' call for the incorporation of online discussions in learning literature texts. The results clearly showed that students' improvements were due to the interaction with peers, discussing elaborately the elements of the novel under study. As the literature reviewed in this paper highlighted, online discussions was the valuable tool used to help the students interact with each other as well as the course material [9], and encouraged teamwork as well as engagement with the text and task given via the Think-questions [10]. Therefore, this study as backed by its findings postulate that online discussions when used to discuss elements of the literary text outside of the literature classroom is effective in enhancing students' responses to the text and performance (scores) in the English literature test. In addition, this paper recommends that more research needs to be carried out in the future with different platforms and English courses. It also recommends that literature instructors start thinking of incorporating online discussions to convert the traditional teaching of the literature classroom. To do this, training instructors in using internet technologies in their literature course is necessary to overcome troubles of unfamiliarity with technology.

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