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### EXPLORING THE EDUCATIONAL DIGITAL LEARNING SYSTEMS UTILIZED BY EFL POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS DURING THE COVID- 19 PANDEMIC QUARANTINE

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#### **ABSTRACT**

The Digital Learning Systems (Hence: DLSs) are being used during COVID-19 pandemic quarantine as means to facilitate students' learning process and as alternative methods of learning. Due to widespread university and school closures as a protection procedures to reduces the spread of COVID-19 all over the world, UNESCO does its best to cooperate with Ministries of Higher Education and Ministries of education in the countries that have affected by COVID-19 pandemic to ensure the continued education process for all students via alternative channels and methods of learning.

UNESCO has provided several learning solutions to enable educational institutions all over the world to continues the educational process. The aim of the present study is to explore the educational DLSs utilized by EFL postgraduate students in the University of Anbar; Tikrit University; and University of Babylon during the covid-19 pandemic quarantine, that means during the second semester of the academic year 2019-2020. The researcher built a questionnaire to collect the data of the study. The questionnaire was distributed via "Google Form". The research answers the following question: "What is the most educational Digital Learning Systems (DLSs) utilized by EFL postgraduate students in the University of Anbar; University of Tikrit; and University of Babylon during the covid-19 pandemic quarantine?". The results of the study revealed that the most electronic digital systems were ranked as following: in the first rank was the Google Classroom Set, in the second rank was the Hangouts Meet, in the third rank was the Zoom, in the fourth rank was the Free Conference Call, followed the WhatsApps, viber, and Telegram. While the following electronic digital systems were not used by the Iraqi universities students such as: the Dingtalk, the Lark, the Teams, WeChat Work, Skype, and Edmodo.

#### **Background of the Study**

The researcher believes that technologies in general, and technologies in education have developed the process of learning and teaching. Electronic learning method is one of instruction instrument to support conventional learning, which named "Blended Learning" (BL). Also, learning via electronic platforms is a new experience for all students, in Iraq. The digital learning has changed the face of learning process, it even changes the pedagogical approaches. It is now the time which forces all the educational institutions to implement the blended learning. As learning is a process to gain new information and knowledge that makes change

in human experience, now a days and due to COVID-19 pandemic quarantine (hence, C-19 PQ) the students do not acquire new knowledge only, but also new learning skills, that is the using of electronic educational platforms.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The postgraduate students in the Colleges of Arts and the Colleges of Education for Humanities specialize in English Linguistics and English Literature at the Departments of English are being taught via Educational Digital Learning Systems (hence: EDLS) and the social media programs during the C-19 PQ period. During the teaching and the learning process via the electronic platform, some students suggest to use different electronic methods such as Google Classroom; Dingtalk; Hangouts Meet; Zoom; Lark; Teams; Whatsapp, WeChat Work; Viber; Telegram; Free Conference Call; Skype; Edmodo; and Lark. Reviewing the literature and previous studies, the researcher found that students of each educational institution prefer a given electronic method as a vehicle to gain and receive knowledge. However, the present study seek the most EDLS used by the EFL postgraduate students in learning process to overcome the problem that happen between the students and the instructors in choosing a suitable digital tool. The researcher himself, each lecture, faces problem due to the opinions differences among postgraduate student in choosing the electronic digital method. Thus, knowing the most prefers DLSs that the students want to use in learning English language is very important to facilitate the learning process and to achieve the goal of the course.

### **Aim of the Study**

The study aims to investigate the most educational Digital Learning Systems (DLSs) utilized by EFL postgraduate students in learning at the departments of English in the colleges of Education and colleges of Arts.

### **Significance of the Study**

The outcomes of the study will be benefit for both the postgraduate students and the instructors in the departments of English to use the most favorable digital learning tool in teaching to deliver best knowledge.

### **Question of the Study**

To achieve the aim of the study, the following question was set "What is the most educational Digital Learning Systems (DLSs) utilized by EFL postgraduate students in the University of Anbar; University of Tikrit; and University of Babylon during the covid-19 pandemic quarantine?".

### **Definition of Basic Terms**

**E-learning:** It is a term that describes education using electronic devices and digital media.

**Digital Learning Systems:** It is an electronic platform that people use to communicate, learn, interact, and acquire knowledge and information.

## **Introduction**

Electronic Education has become very popular method of education specially since the beginning of C-19 PQ spread all over the world. Wide variety of E- educational technologies are being utilized to continue the education process in all educational institutes, the Higher Education has also adopted the E-learning platforms to achieve the ultimate goal (Rinaldi, 2013: 1). Electronic/ distance learning takes place when the students/ learners and instructors are not existed in the same area, it is considered as a formal instruction (Koohang and Durante, 2003: 105)

Al-Khayyat (2019: 1375) states some e-learning features, concerning using Smartphone in learning English language, that it provides flexible learning, provides virtual education environment, encourages independent learning, and provides dynamic interaction.

Cakrawati (2017: 23) mentions the 21<sup>st</sup> educational global terms such as “21<sup>st</sup> century education,” “21<sup>st</sup> century learning,” and “21<sup>st</sup> century skills”. The educators' roles are providing atmosphere to help learners/ students to cope with the "21<sup>st</sup> century skills". The researcher in the present study believes that the C-19 PQ force the educators all over the world to learn and get knowledge via e-learning and on-line educational platforms. The learners nowadays live in a technological environment, they are forced to adopt and apply some technological skills to be able to continue learning.

Concerning the use of electronic platforms in delivering knowledge, Suherdi (2012) mentions that students who learn via electronic platforms need to develop skills for lifelong learning, literacy, information, media, and technology.

Zaidatun et. al. (2011) state that students spend long time on social network during their day. In fact, studies that investigate the impact of social network media prove that social network has great impact on students' communication, participation, interactivity and collaboration inside and outside the classroom and educational institutions.

Al-Khayyat (2020: 124) states that the Iraqi students at the level of preparatory school, have been trained to use English language in the level of remembering and understanding information. According to Bloom's cognitive taxonomy, the Iraqi students use the first and second cognitive levels. This case, during the covid-19 pandemic quarantine, led the students to use the most easy digital system which does not require high technology knowledge. The most important for them is to learn English language in smooth and easy way.

David et. al., (2009: 409) state that students benefit from the digital platform to help them in learning, and the students find it suitable tool than learning via traditional method.

Jayaluxmi (2020) states that the covid-19 pandemic has changed the life of the people all over the world. It has even has effect on the educational institutions which shift toward digital learning during the covid-19 pandemic quarantine, and the educational institutions have prepared for the "Digital Pedagogy". He also states, that before engaging students in learning via digital platforms, it is important to training the students to practice the digital platforms. The most used digital platforms were Zoom, Moodle and WhatsApp. Integrating technology in learning has a great effect on students' achievements.

So, using the most suitable digital platforms is based on both learners' interest and knowledge, and on instructor's mastering of the digital platform.

Anber and Al-Khayyat (2020: 582) state that technology has a great impact on our life, and it has change the way of education. Many novice teachings and learning pedagogical methods have been emerged based on digital tools.

### **Previous Studies**

Kiran (2020) investigates the postgraduate students' perceptions toward E-learning and in their career advancement. The participants are 30 postgraduate students from all specialization in the "Institute of Public Enterprise (IPE) of India. To collect the data of the study, a questionnaire is

used. The findings reveal that 91% of students have positive trends to learn via e-learning.

Koohang and Durante (2003) investigate students' perceptions toward the "Web-based distance learning activities/assignments portion of a hybrid program". The participants are 106 undergraduate students from Hybrid Program in Management Designed, School of Information Studies at University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, USA. To collect the data of the study, a questionnaire is used. The findings reveal that learners have positive perceptions toward the Web-based distance learning activities/ assignments portion of their hybrid program which promoted learning.

Zaidatun et, al. (2011) investigate students' perceptions toward the e-learning system via social networking as a major platform of the e-learning in university, and also investigate the skills required to manage learning platform. The participants are 234 students at one of the Faculties in a Malaysian's university. To collect the data of the study, a questionnaire is used. The findings reveal that the students have positive attitudes toward e-learning, and prefer social networking as an e-learning platform in learning.

Cakrawati (2017) investigates students' perceptions on using online learning platform in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Classroom. The participants are 40 students from high school in Bandung, West Java. To collect the data of the study, a questionnaire and interviews are used. The findings reveal that the students have positive perceptions toward learning via Edmodo or Quipper online learning platforms and they can help in promoting language skills. The results of analyzing the interview, the students believe that the use of Edmodo or Quipper stimulate their interest and engage them in novice educational experience.

Mahajan and Kalpana (2018) investigate students' perceptions toward the e-learning. The participants are 150 male students and 78 female students from second grade at Private Medical College in Chennai. To collect the data of the study, a semi structured questionnaire is used. The findings reveal that the students have positive perspective toward e-learning and they believe that e-learning can influence positively on their performances.

## Methodology

### The Population and the Participants of the Study

The population is all the EFL postgraduate students at the department of English in the colleges of Education and the colleges of Arts in all Iraqi universities.

The participants are from the College of Arts and the College of Education for Humanities in the University of Anbar; University of Tikrit; and University of Babylon during the second semester of the academic year 2019-2020. The participants are chosen randomly, 5 male and female students from each college. The total number is 30 male and female EFL postgraduate students. Table 1 shows the distribution of the students.

**Table 1: Distribution of the Participants**

Universities	College of Arts	College of Education	Total
University of Anbar	5	5	10
University of Tikrit	5	5	10

University of Babylon	5	5	10
Total	15	15	30

### Instrument of the Study

The researcher built an attitudinal questionnaire to elicit postgraduate students' perceptions toward using the educational Digital Learning Systems (DLSs) in learning during the covid-19 pandemic quarantine. The validity and the reliability of the questionnaire were calculated statistically.

### Result of the study

To answer the question of the study " What is the most educational Digital Learning Systems (DLSs) utilized by EFL postgraduate students in the University of Anbar; University of Tikrit; and University of Babylon during the covid-19 pandemic quarantine?", a percentage ratio is used. Tables 2, 3, and 4 show students' responds on the questionnaire items.

**Table 2: University of Anbar postgraduate students' percentages of the use of electronic digital systems.**

University		College of Arts %	College of Education %
University of Anbar	Google Classroom	19%	24%
	Dingtalk	0.00	0.00
	Hangouts Meet	28%	30%
	Zoom	30%	28%
	Lark	0.00	0.00
	Teams	0.00	0.00
	Whatsapp	1%	3%
	WeChat Work	0.00	0.00
	Viber	0.00	0.00
	Telegram	1%	2%
	Free Conference Call	21%	13%
	Skype	0.00	0.00
	Edmodo	0.00	0.00

Table 2 shows that the most used electronic digital systems at the University of Anabr, College of Arts and College of Education for Humanities are Hangouts Meet (28% and 30%), the Zoom (30% and 28%), the Google classroom (19% and 24%), the Free Conference Call 22% and 13%), the WhatsApp (1% and 3%), Telegram (1% and 2%) and the rest electronic digital systems are not used (0.00).

**Table 3: Tikrit University postgraduate students' percentages of the use of electronic digital systems.**

University	Electronic Digital Systems	College of Arts %	College of Education %
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<b>Tikrit University</b>	Google Classroom	51%	54%
	Dingtalk	0.00	0.00
	Hangouts Meet	16%	17.00
	Zoom	9.00	11.00
	Lark	0.00	0.00
	Teams	0.00	0.00
	Whatsapp	9%	7%
	WeChat Work	0.00	0.00
	Viber	2%	3%
	Telegram	3%	2%
	Free Conference Call	10%	6%
	Skype	0.00	0.00
	Edmodo	0.00	0.00

Table 3 shows that the most used electronic digital systems at the Tikrit University, College of Arts and College of Education for Humanities are the Google classroom (51% and 54%), Hangouts Meet (16% and 17%), the Zoom (9% and 11%), the Free Conference Call (10% and 6%), the WhatsApp (9% and 7%), Viber (2% and 3%), Telegram (3% and 2%), and the rest electronic digital systems are not used (0.00).

**Table 4: University of Babylon postgraduate students' percentages of the use of electronic digital systems.**

University	Electronic Digital Systems	College of Arts %	College of Education %
<b>University of Babylon</b>	Google Classroom	41%	38%
	Dingtalk	0.00	0.00
	Hangouts Meet	2%	2%
	Zoom	22%	21%
	Lark	0.00	0.00
	Teams	0.00	0.00
	Whatsapp	14%	16%
	WeChat Work	0.00	0.00
	Viber	0.00	0.00
	Telegram	19%	20%
	Free Conference Call	2%	3%
	Skype	0.00	0.00
	Edmodo	0.00	0.00

Table 4 shows that the most used electronic digital systems at the University of Babylon, College of Arts and College of Education for Humanities are the Google classroom (41% and 38%), Hangouts Meet (2%), the Zoom (22% and 21%), the Free Conference Call (2% and 3%), the WhatsApp (14% and 16%), Telegram (19% and 20%), and the rest electronic digital systems are not used (0.00).

## Conclusion

The results of the study revealed that the electronic digital systems were not all used by the postgraduate students in the University of Anabr, Tikrit University, and University of Babylon at the Colleges of Arts and Colleges of Education for Humanities. The most electronic digital systems that used by the students were ranked as following: in the first rank was the Google Classroom, in the second rank was the Hangouts Meet, in the third rank was the Zoom, in the fourth rank was the Free Conference Call, followed the WhatsApps, viber, and Telegram. While the following electronic digital systems were not used by the Iraqi universities postgraduate students such as: the Dingtalk, the Lark, the Teams, WeChat Work, Skype, and Edmodo.

The researcher infers that the use of the electronic digital systems is based on the most easy used system (the system that has easy features in installing and simple steps to be used), and also the students follow the instructors' advices in choosing the educational digital systems.

The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research order to teach all the students at the university level via Google G-Suite, thus the Google classroom has became in the first rank, also the instructors begins to hold seminars and conferences by using the Zoom and the Free Conference Call systems. When such systems become familiar to the university instructors they start to use them in the teaching process.

To sum up, the students used the most easy digital systems and feel comfortable, and also they use the systems that the instructors are familiar with to facilitates the educational process.

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