| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Opinions of the Fourth Year Students in English Department about Moodle Platform

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| ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify the fourth stage students' perspectives on Moodle Platform. In order to achieve the above aim, a questionnaire has been constructed. It contains (17) items. This questionnaire has been exposed to a jury of experts in the field of English teaching methods to show its validity and reliability. The reliability of the questionnaire is ensured by applying the spilt-half method. It yields (0.90). The fourth stage English language students of the English department/ college of Basic Education academic year 2020-2021 are chosen. The results showed that the students' perspective about "*Moodle Platform*" was negative towards most items considered as disadvantages, whereas the students' perspective about "*Moodle Platform*" was positive towards the rest items which are considered as advantages. In the light of the obtained results, recommendations and suggestions for further studies are introduced.

1. Introduction

Today, there is a diversion from learning that depends on the traditional approach and using a textbook to online learning. Since the internet, social media and globalization give more information, it leads to a need of using E-learning (Rasool and Dawood, 2021: 152). Also, in our lives, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) controlling daily life helps learners to learn, develop skills, creative thinking, critical thinking.... etc. (Stasinakis & Kalogiannakis, 2015: 50).

After COVID-19, all countries tried to put off teaching and learning inside classrooms in whole educational institutions and depended on technological educational platforms, e.g. Moodle, Google Classroom, Edmodo, Udemy...etc. Likewise, the University of Misan/ College of Basic Education adopted (Moodle Platform) to transfer the knowledge to its students. Therefore, these applications allow the learners to access courses' contents in various ways (images, pdf, word, sounds), and they can interact with their teachers and classmates via different types of communication tools (Sảnchez and Hueros, 2010: 1632). Stosic (2015: 112) mentioned the importance of focusing on the educational value of the educational technology instruments and applications that teachers use, their suitability for acquiring and instruments, and if there are positive impacts in using educational technology applications.

From this standpoint, I crystallized the idea of establishing a study to show the advantages and disadvantages of the Moodle platform and to find out the first created open-ended questions for a group of students to show their opinions of this platform.

1.1 The aim

The current research aims to identify the opinions of the fourth stage English language students about Moodle platform. This aim is going to be achieved by answering the following question:

What are the opinions of the fourth stage students about Moodle platform?

1.2 The value

The study can be useful in:

1. Expressing a clear opinion about the strengths and weaknesses of the Moodle platform used in e-learning.
2. Helping users of this educational platform and finding out if there are any gaps, problems or difficulties in using it in order to overcome them in the future.
3. To be a good source for researchers who study and research in the field of e-learning and education platforms.

1.3 The limits
This study is limited to:

1. The "Moodle platform**"** that has been recently used in e-learning at the University of Misan/ College of Basic Education.
2. The students (males/females) of the fourth stage in English Departments during the academic year (2020-2021).

2. Theoretical Background
2.1 Educational Technology
The term "Technology" came from the Greek word "techno", which refers to the willingness, skills, knowledge, tools and "logy", which refers to science, learning, and mental state. Various countries use synonyms for educational technology such as educational equipment, the technology of teaching...etc. (Stosic, 2015: 111). Educational technology also refers to an array of instruments that might prove helpful in developing and creating new chances for learning and motivate learners' achievement. Technology contains laptops, machines, smart applications, methods of organization and techniques (Gudanescu, 2010: 5646). Educational technology is seen as an important resource for instruction in foreign language teaching. There is wide use of its ability to create online environments in which students can take the benefits from them (Suppasetseree & Dennis, 2010: 29). Furthermore, the use of technology in English Language teaching has been increasing worldwide in the past years. Technology facilities are creating and using E-learning resources (Ibid: 31).

Budhwar (2017: 55) and Stosic (2015: 111) mentioned three domains of using Educational technology: technology as a tutor (computer gives instructions and guides the user), technology as a teaching tool and technology as a learning tool.

2.2The Benefits of Technology in Teaching
As mentioned earlier, technology has entered all fields of life and has become dominant. Likewise, all the centers of teaching and learning have become based on educational technology. Below are some of the benefits of technology:

1. It provides different ways of learning and teaching styles.
2. Learners can access information more quickly and easily than before.
3. It is broken traditional learning in the classroom and makes the teacher the encourager, mentor and coach.

(Budhwar, 2017: 55-56)

4. It promotes skills and cognitive characteristics.
5. Motivating learners to work independently.

(Stosic, 2015: 113)

6. Making ESL learners learn at their own pace.
7. Increasing interaction among learners.

(Suppasetseree & Dennis, 2010: 30)

8. It contains forums and chat rooms to communicate between learners and their teachers and among learners.
9. Learners are familiar with the latest materials and handouts.
10. It gives the teacher the freedom to extend the time of the exam and other tasks.

(Feizabadi & et al., 2016: 1430)

11. It helps faculty to make readily and fast exams and quizzes.
12. It allows communicating with learners at all times and places.
13. Learners can receive their grades immediately after exams or maybe delay them for another time.

2.3 Moodle Platform

Moodle is one of the most popular Learning Management system (LMS) to support courses. However, if the subject to be taught or learnt is related to Mathematics, there is a lack of interactive modules to be integrated into LMS in general, Moodle in particular (Rodrigues et al., 2010: 1). Also, it is an acronym for "Modules Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment". The use of Moodle is not just limited to schools and universities; it can be used in business and individuals. It is considered a free open source that anybody can use (Çankaya & izmirli, 2009: 366). Cole and Foster (2007: ix) mentioned another meaning for the word "Moodle", adding to what was mentioned above, which is "a verb that describes the process of lazily meandering through something, doing things as it occurs to you to do them, an enjoyable tinkering that often leads to insight and creativity.

Rodrigues et al. (2010: 1) indicate that Moodle was developed during the 1990s by Martin Dougiamas, but its first revision was released on 20/8/2002. It was developed to assist teachers and faculties in creating online courses with a focus on interaction and cooperative construction of content (Amandu et al., 2013: 677).

To run Moodle, firstly, it must be installed on a master server, then the administrator gives usernames and passwords to allow the users to create their courses, add users to the system and manage other system functions. As well as, the user has three main roles: administrator, teacher, and student (Chourishi et al., 2011: 34-35).

2.4 Activities in Moodle

There are many activities in Moodle that can be distinguished as follows:

1- Database: " Activity allows creating, searching and maintaining records or entries. The structure of entries is predefined and can include a radio button, checkbox, dropdown menu, picture, text area or uploaded file. The visual layout of information is created by utilizing a database template. Database entries can be imported or exported and shared between courses. For example, a lecturer can use a database entry for creating a collaborative collection of books, journals, references or web links" (Deepak KC, 2017: 123).

2- Lessons: This activity is considered the most complex and strong in Moodle activities. It is a set of web pages that appears information and questions. These pages are short and usually end with one or a few questions related to pages' materials. When the learners answer a correct answer, they go to another page, but if they answer an incorrect answer, the current page either repeats or sends them to a remedial page (Rice IV, 2006: 134).

3- Assignments: The faculty can evaluate his learners' works and provide feedback to learners on where they stand. Also, it is considered good feedback to the faculty on the effectiveness of teaching (Chourishi &et al., 2011: 37).

5- Chats and Forums: Chats allow learners to communicate with other classmates and with their teacher. While, forums give learners more time to think and create their responses and transform them into more thoughtful discussions (Cole & Foster, 2008:1-2).

6- Glossary: It is one of the most underestimated activities on Moodle platform. It permits learners to create and keep a list of definitions; it is similar to the dictionaries (Rice IV, 2006: 160).

7- Quiz: It helps faculty to design and set tests. In Moodle, there are different types of questions, such as multiple-choice, true/false and short answers. These questions are saved in a categorized database and can be reused again at other times (Chourishi et al., 2011: 36).

9- Choice: It allows teachers to ask any question, as long as it's multiple-choice, then learners can choose their answers from several options. Also, it gives teachers free to choose when learners can see the results of their choice (Cole and Foster, 2008: 206).

10- Wikis: It is a group of collaboratively authored web pages. Learners can edit the page or add more pages to the wiki by generating links to new pages that don't yet exist. As well, it can be a strong tool for cooperative work (Ibid: 157).

3. Previous Studies

Research contacted by Alhothli (2015) aims to gain a more practical understanding of the benefits of learning a language through the application of Moodle and video sharing tools in a university-based English Language Institution environment.

Chukwuemka et al. (2015) contacted research that aims to investigate Computer and Instructional Technology Teacher Education (CITE) graduate students' views and opinions related to LMS using Moodle. The research was carried out in the CITE department faculty of education, Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU) Northern Cyprus. This research is a case study with a mixed-method approach. 30 master students participated; both a close-ended questionnaire and a focus group interview were conducted. The data analyzed revealed that students check Moodle regularly for updates on course contents, announcements, and discussions. Moodle enhances learning, and students are generally satisfied with Moodle as a way to manage their learning process; thus, more efforts need to be made.

Costa et al. (2012) carried out a study at the University of Aveiro (UA), Portugal, that analyses the functionalities and tools of the Moodle platform and their use by the students. The data was collected based on content analysis, one non-structured interview with the responsibility of the Moodle from UA, and a questionnaire applied to 278 students. The results showed that despite Moodle having great potential, it is mainly used as a repository of materials.

4. Methodology

4.1 Population and Sample

The population refers to the whole of potential participants, while the sample for the study is a part of the population, and all have features that make them members of the sample group (Schreiber & Anser-Self, 2011: 83).

The population of the current research consists of fourth stage English Language Department Students at the University of Misan for the academic year (2020-2021). The population and the sample of students are elucidated in detail in Table (1).

The sample of students is purposively chosen and divided into two samples: (61) students as a pilot sample and (119) students as the main sample.

Table (1)
The Population and Sample of the Study

Population	Sample	Pilot
188	119	61

4.2 Instruments of Data Collection

In order to recognize the opinions of the students about the educational platform (Moodle) and to identify the strengths and weaknesses from students' perspectives, A questionnaire is prepared for students and consists of five levels (very good, good, moderately, Acceptable, poor). An item (very good) is given (5) points, (good) is given (4) points, (moderately) is given (3) points, (acceptable) is given (2) points, and (poor) is given (1) point.

4.3 Validity of the Study

Validity is considered the most important characteristic in any good and appropriate tool to use in the specified research. Ebel and Frisbif (1991: 100) defined validity as the accuracy with which the scores measure a certain cognitive ability of interest.

The face validity of the questionnaire items has been achieved by exposing them to a jury of experts in the field of teaching, which have been judged valid by (90%). The final version of the employed questionnaire includes (17) items.

4.4 Pilot Administration of Questionnaire

Any researcher should carry out a thorough pilot study of his/ her instrument before using it in the study. The pilot study should include an individual sample from the population from which the researcher intends to draw his respondents (Gall & et al., 2003: 230). Applying instruments in the pilot study before actually employing them in the final data collection is very important in all methods. Likewise, the single major threat to the reliability and validity of a study happens when not enough attention is paid to the design and piloting of evaluation instruments (Weir & Roberts, 1994: 138-139). Therefore, the questionnaire was administered to a sample of (61) randomly drawn from the fourth stage English language students. This administration has been conducted in order to:

> 1-Check the clarity of the tools instructions.
>
> 2-Appreciate the time allocated for answering the tools.
>
> 3- Calculate the reliability coefficient of such instruments.

The pilot study for the student was carried out from the 23rd to the 27th of May 2021. The findings of the pilot administration have indicated that the questionnaire items are suitable for the respondents, and the time required to respond to the questionnaire is (40-50) minutes.

4.5 Reliability

Another important characteristic is reliability. Reliability is considered as the grade of consistency between two scores of the same test or instrument of the study (Mehrens & Lehmann, 1991: 249).

To ensure the reliability of the questionnaire, the researcher used spilt-half way. It is one of the methods to value the squared metric reliability coefficient. Here, the items are split into two subsets and compute overall scores on the items in both subsets. After that, compute the Pearson *r* between these two sets of subset total scores (Thompson & Vacha-Haase, 2012: 180).

The questionnaire which has been applied to this instrument on a sample of (61) fourth stage English language students is taken from the population of this study. The correlation coefficient is (0.81), which is considered a high degree of reliability.

4.6 Final administration of Checklist

After checking that the questionnaire is valid and reliable, it was applied from the 30th of May to the 13th of June 2021 to select samples that consist of (119) of the fourth stage English language students at the department of English/ University of Misan. They have been asked to respond to the assumptions of the checklist by choosing one of the alternatives (very good, good, Medial, acceptable, poor).

5. Research results

This study's question has been achieved by finding out the weighted mean for each item. Since the theoretical weighted mean is (3), the items with weighted means that are higher than (3) are considered acceptable. While the items with weighted means that are lower than (3) are considered problematic and will be discussed separately.

In order to achieve the study aim, the researcher calculated the weighted mean for all items of the questionnaire. See Table (1) and Graphic (1).

Table 1: *The Weighted Mean of all items*

No.	Item Rank	Items	Weighted Mean
1	13	Use of the platform by mobile phone.	3.53
2	3	Upload and download lectures and files.	3.30
3	6	The level of protection within the platform.	3.25
4	4	Daily attendance record.	3.23
5	14	Use of the platform by computer.	3.21
6	5	Conducting daily and monthly tests.	3.19
7	11	Use the chat feature across the platform.	3.18
8	1	Students communicate with teachers within the platform.	2.82
9	8	Ease of use of the platform.	2.79
10	2	Quality of interactive lectures.	2.71
11	16	Voice delivery and pronunciation of words within the platform.	2.70
12	15	Students interacted with each other during the lecture.	2.62
13	7	Means of communication between students within the platform.	2.55
14	12	Feedback via the platform.	2.54
15	9	Learning motivation through the Moodle platform.	2.43
16	10	Understand and assimilate across the platform.	2.16
17	17	Focus while learning within the platform.	2.4

The result showed that the weighted average (for using the platform via mobile phone) that came in the first rank is (3.53), which is higher than the theoretical average (3). And the weighted average (for uploading and downloading lectures) that came in the second rank is (3.30), which is higher than the theoretical average (3). The same is true for the third rank (protection level inside the platform), which has an average weight of (3.25) which is higher than the theoretical average (3). The same applies to items (4, 14, 5, 11), which ranked fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh, respectively, and whose average weight is higher than the theoretical average (3).

The item (students' communication with teachers within the platform) came in eighth place with a weight of (2.82), which is lower than the theoretical average (3), where students believe that communication with the teachers is difficult due to the lack of lecture time and the large numbers of students.

The item (ease of use of the platform) came in ninth place with a weight of (2.79) which is less than the theoretical average (3), as students believe that using the platform has some complexity due to the lack of arrangement of icons.

The item (Quality of Interactive Lectures) came in tenth place with a weight (2.71) which is less than the theoretical average (3), where students believe that the quality of interactive lectures is not at the required level due to the weak internet and the student's dispersal of mind.

The item (Voice delivery and pronunciation of words within the platform) is ranked eleventh with a weight (2.70) which is lower than the theoretical average (3), as students believe that the teacher's voice is sometimes unclear due to poor network internet. Therefore the word cannot be distinguished.

The item (students' interaction with each other during lectures) ranked twelfth with a weight of (2.62) which is lower than the theoretical average (3), where students believe that interaction with each other is poor due to lack of time, large numbers of student and weak internet networks.

The item (Means of communication between students within the platform) ranked thirteenth with a weight of (2.55) which is less than the theoretical average (3), as students believe that there is no means of communication between students within the platform and there are no icons for that purpose.

The item (feedback on the podium) ranked fourteenth with a weight of (2.54) which is lower than the theoretical average (3), as the students believe that the feedback is not at the required level within the electronic classes.

The item (Learning Motivation through the Platform) ranked fifteenth with a weight of (2.43) which is lower than the theoretical average (3), where students believe that the reason for this is the absence of university atmosphere and classroom supervision which reduces students' motivation to learning.

The item (understanding and comprehension through the platform) ranked sixteenth with a weight of (2.16), which is less than the theoretical average (3), as the students believe that the reason is the absence of learning motivation, the student's dispersal of mind and boredom.

The item (concentration during teaching within the platform) ranked seventeenth with a weight of (2.4), which is less than the theoretical average (3), where students believe that the reason is the absence of classroom activities and attracting attention.

6. Conclusions
According to the results obtained from the current study, the following points can be concluded:

1. It is achieving the goals of the Moodle platform from a number of aspects according to the students' point of view.
2. Moodle is generally considered to be a moderately useful e-learning system from the students' point of view.
3. The weak internet, the large number of students, and using for the first time e-learning in Iraq are among the negative aspects of the platform.

7. Recommendations
Depending on the results and conclusions, the following recommendations are submitted:

1- Reviewing the Moodle platform and diagnosing the most important drawbacks of this platform.

2 - Work to develop and provide internet services in a better way than they are.

3- Providing universities with financial capabilities such as rooms for broadcasting lectures that contain an excellent internet network and advanced equipment for filming and broadcasting.

4- It is necessary to take the views of the teachers on the platform and know the solutions they propose.

8. Suggestions for Further Studies
Within the limitations of the present study and according to the findings, the researcher has formulated the following suggestions for further study:

1. Conducting a similar study on the other educational stages.

2- Conducting a similar study on other e-learning platforms to find out which platforms are less negative.

3- Conducting a study for specializations other than humanitarian specializations, such as scientific specializations.

4- Conducting a comparative study between the students' perspective of scientific specializations and the students' perspective of humanitarian specializations about Moodle platform.

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