

Chapter 6

Optimizing Research Techniques and Learning Strategies With Digital Technologies: Exploring the Benefits of Online English Language Programs in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Face-to-face strategies have been the primary method for language learning over the past decades, particularly for teaching English. However, online platforms were less utilized in educational institutions until the rapid shift caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This shift highlighted the potential of virtual programs in language education, leading scholars to recognize their benefits. This study explores the importance of online English platforms in addressing literacy challenges and improving proficiency in Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs). Through surveys of Foundation Programme Department (FPD) students and instructors, the research will analyze platforms like Microsoft Teams and Zoom, assessing their effectiveness in English language learning.

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic brought unprecedented disruptions to the educational sector worldwide, forcing institutions to rapidly adapt to new methods of teaching and learning. As a precautionary measure to curb the spread of the virus, face-to-face interactions, including lab sessions, workshops, and other practical learning activities, were halted. In response, providers of higher education quickly implemented social distancing strategies, which necessitated a swift and widespread transition to online teaching environments. This shift was not merely a temporary solution but rather a complete overhaul of the traditional educational model, where curricula had to be redesigned to suit the dynamics of virtual classrooms (Mohammed, Khidhir, Nazeer, & Vijayan, 2020). The pandemic accelerated the need for innovative solutions, pushing educational institutions to adopt advanced technological tools to ensure continuity in learning. With students unable to physically attend classes due to lockdowns and travel restrictions, online modes of learning became essential, allowing them to adhere to safety guidelines while continuing their education (Zoom, San Jose, California).

The abrupt transition to online learning environments posed significant challenges but also presented opportunities for the integration of digital technologies that could potentially enhance the learning experience. Various platforms have emerged as essential tools during this period, with technologies like Microsoft Teams, Slack, and Kaizala playing pivotal roles in facilitating virtual education (Slack Technologies, San Francisco, CA). Microsoft Teams, in particular, was adopted widely due to its user-friendly interface, robust communication features, and seamless integration with other Microsoft Office applications. It provided a comprehensive suite of tools that made it easier for educators to deliver lessons, share resources, and engage with students effectively. Platforms like Zoom became synonymous with virtual classrooms, enabling synchronous learning and live interaction, which helped bridge the gap created by the absence of physical classrooms. Slack, a platform initially designed for workplace communication, also found its way into educational institutions, serving as a tool for project collaboration, group discussions, and instant messaging.

At the Military Technological College, Microsoft Teams was chosen as the primary platform for online learning, considering its versatile features and secure, integrated cloud system. This platform allowed educators and students to conduct lectures, share PowerPoint presentations, and distribute essential documents seamlessly (Almarzooq, Lopes, & Kochar, 2020). The ability to store files on a secure intranet, combined with tools for real-time communication, made Microsoft Teams an ideal solution for the college's academic and administrative needs. Additionally, it provided a centralized platform for departmental meetings, enabling faculty members to collaborate, share ideas, and communicate with their teams without the need for

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