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The Impact of Online Platforms in Enhancing Learners' Cultural Competence

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Abstract Article info

Remarkably, Algerian higher education is witnessing a revolutionary massive digital shift, wherein various online platforms; such as Google Classroom, were designed rationally to facilitate electronic learning, to meet the needs of digital native learners (An & Mindrila, 2020) and to foster learners' 21st century skills and competencies mainly the cultural competence. however, only few recent studies have prospectively examined the effectiveness of online

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- ✓ cultural competence,
- ✓ Google Classroom
- ✓ Recommended future reforms.

Résumé:

Remarkably, Algerian higher education is witnessing a revolutionary massive digital shift, wherein various online platforms; such as Google Classroom, were designed rationally to facilitate electronic learning, to meet the needs of digital native learners (An & Mindrila, 2020) and to foster learners' 21st century skills and competencies mainly the cultural competence. however, only few recent studies have prospectively examined the effectiveness of online platforms in enhancing learners' cultural competence in Algerian higher education, the lack of research on this topic has prompted an urgent need to investigate carefully the impact of online platforms in enhancing EFL learners' cultural competence (Azhar et al., 2018), questioning to what extent online platforms maximize learners' cultural competence, taking the case study of Algerian higher education in khenchela, wherein the participants were 1st

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- ✓ Futurs réformes

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1. Introduction

The effectiveness of online digital platforms becomes a primary concern of educators worldwide, it is one of the most valuable current discussions in the field of Didactics and educational sciences. Actually, several attempts have been done to diagnose the usefulness of these platforms still they did not focus on higher education. Thus, the rationale and purpose behind the study is to examine the usefulness and effectiveness of online platforms in higher education. The impetus for the research was current massive change in education especially in post Covid19 era. Consequently, this paper aimed at investigating the importance of online platforms in enhancing learners' cultural competence. It is important to agree on the meaning of the terms in this context. Thus, Culture: is the thoughts, actions, behaviours, values, communications, beliefs, customs, traditions, and institutions of racial. religious, ethnic as well as social groups. While Competence: is conceptualized in terms of knowledge, abilities, skills and attitudes displayed in the context of a carefully chosen set of realistic professional tasks (Gonczi et al., 1990)

and, Online Platforms: are a widespread economic phenomenon. They emerge to connect two or more groups of distinct users, and in this way they make transactions possible which otherwise would not take place. Platforms operate online and offline – common offline examples are newspapers and shopping malls, while online ones include search engines and social networks (Rochet and Tirole, 2003)

In order to provide an appropriate basis to answer the key question described above, the research team has identified the following objectives:

- ☐ To investigate the role of online platforms in enhancing learners' cultural competence.
- ☐ To establish good practice of cultural competence.

Interestingly, fostering the cultural competence of learners is the main concern of educators worldwide. Remarkably, several attempts have been made to diagnose the usefulness of online platforms still they did not focus on its link with fostering learner's cultural competence, consequently the rationale and primary aim behind the research is to examine carefully the impact and effectiveness of online platforms in fostering learners' cultural competence in Algerian higher education. The impetus behind the study was current radical change in education especially in post Covid19 era wherein a massive shift towards interdependency in education appeared. thus, the research aimed at investigating the role of Online platforms in enhancing learner' skills and competencies mainly cultural competence, this paper will accomplish this aim by meeting the following objective:

- ♣ To explore the role that Online platforms play in enhancing EFL student's cultural competence.
- ♣ To check whether the expectations attached to online platforms are realistic or not.
- **♣** To find recommendations to make online platforms more

effective virtual platforms.

The key question of this research is:

• Do online platforms enhance learners 'cultural competence? How? Being aware that the research question can be answered in very different ways and through various perspectives and approaches, the researchers have set the following preliminary biases, suppositions, and hypotheses as a starting point to narrow down the scope of the research and hence to make it more goal and target oriented. Based upon the previously mentioned studies, the researchers hypothesized that online platforms play a vital valuable role in enhancing learners' cultural competence in higher education. Thus it is hypothesized that the use of online platforms is extremely effective in enhancing learners' cultural competence.

Actually, the present study was conducted with the objective of investigating the impact of online platforms in enhancing learners 21st century skills mainly cultural competence at the level of Higher education. consequently, the data takes the specific case study of Algerian higher education in khenchela, wherein the participants were 1st year EFL students Master Degree at Abbes Lghrour university, worthy noted that the study is carried out after an English course of Teaching Culture via Google classroom online platform, since google classroom is an essential platform for promoting blended learning and professional growth (Iftakhar, 2016). Importantly, the significance of this study is that it mirrors the reality of educational practices in Algerian universities and it helps reshaping modern higher education towards encyclopaedic education. To achieve the aforementioned objective, a questionnaire involving 50students was administered to collect information. All in all, this research aims to verify and explore the interrelatedness between online platforms mainly Google

Classroom (see appendices) and learners 'cultural competence as an elemental goal to activate the role of education through training a successful and qualified generation to face the difficulties of real life innovatively.

2. Literature Review

Culture represents how those within a space view themselves and how others view them (Dutro et al., 2008). According to Young (2010) exploring learners' cultural background issues in depth can help learners to acquire cultural competence worthy noted that cultural competence represents the state wherein learners are capable of recognizing and honouring their own cultural beliefs while at the same time acquire access to wider culture (Ladson Billings, 2006). Doubtlessly, Multicultural education emerged by 1960's in the United States. According to Banks and Banks (2004), the role of education is to foster learner's cultural competence, via integrating learner's cultural backgrounds in activities to achieve educational equity. Ladson Billings in 1995 developed culturally responsive instructional theories to teach culture.

2.1. Digital Electronic Platforms

There are various educational electronic platfrorms that serve teachers and learners. They facilitate the teaching and learning process in a motivating dazzling manner. To name the best digital learning platforms: Classroom, Socratic, Coursera, Skillshare, Udemy, Google Meet, Codecademy, Edx, Kahoot, Teachable, Future Learn, and Moodle. Interestingly some are free, others are not, offering teachers the opportunity to work virtually from home. Platfprms are of various categories, some are devoted for grammar notions, others are for writing skills..etc. they transformed educational environment completely. Therefore, higher distance education necessitates the incorporation of these online digital platforms. It becomes extremely vital to enhance learners' digital literacy skills, and digital media in order to engage learners in real life challenges. Thus, the plurality of electronic learning

platforms offers plurality of digital resources (apps, edublogs, social networking, and websites) that are addressed to learners with different larning styles. All in one platform. (Brazuelo & Cacheiro, 2015) learners can adapt and adopt various resources, they can discuss contents and plan for future realisations. Gomes (2016) believed that the learning platform is a way of structuring the instruction that fosters optimal organization of content and interaction with students, and it is used by most of the Universities.

2.2. Electronic Learning and Online Platforms

Online platforms facilitate learning process and enhance learners' skills and competences. Mainly the communicative competence and the cultural competence. Today various online platforms such as google classroom turns to be inseparable part of modern higher education, wherein Information and Communication Technologies 5ICT's) are inseparable integrated in every aspect of recent education and pedagogy. Interestingly, eLearning is defined by Liu (2010) as: "E-learning uses the Internet or other digital content for learning and education activities, that takes full advantage of modern educational technology to provide a new mechanism for communication and learning environment rich in resources to achieve a new way of learning." Generally, digital platforms are closely linked with any process of gaining knowledge via the use of information and communication technologies (ICT's). worthy mentioned that the term eLearning is not used interchangeably with terms such as: web-based education, distance education and online learning. Eventually, During the Corona 19 virus time, online platforms became the key solutions to all educational levels just after the lockdown of all educational universities, schools, and institutions. Furthermore, Rossiter 2007 said that: "There is a pressing requirement to understand better the nature of elearning, as an educational innovation, and to evolve contextually derived

frameworks for change which align with organisational culture and practice" that's why the more educators specify the definition of eLearning, the more teachers and learners apply it easily. Iftakhar (2016) mentioned that: "A virtual classroom is an online classroom that allows participants to communicate with one another, view presentations or videos, interact with other participants, and engage with resources in work groups. The very recent addition to virtual classroom is Google Classroom. Google has announced Classroom in May 2014 as a new tool in Google Apps for Education ». thus, Google classroom proves to be a very useful virtual educational platform. Janzen, M. (2014), declared that digital platforms Google Classroom has advantages mainly : : a- It is very easy to use. "Google Classroom's design purposefully simplifies the instructional interface and options used for delivering and tracking assignements; communication with the entire course or individuals is also simplified through announcements, email, and push notifications."

b- It is designed to save time. It integrates and automates the use of other Google apps, including docs, slides, and spreadsheets, the process of administering document distribution, grading, formative assessment, and feedback is simplified and streamlined.



Figure 1: Google Classroom Logo

2.3. Cultural Competence

According to Leininger and McFarland (2006) Culture is a specific individual or group's beliefs, values, norms, and lifeways that can be shared, learned, and transmitted; it influences people's thinking,

decisions, and behaviors in their everyday life. This is why the word "culture" implies the integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values, and institutions of a racial, ethnic, religious, or social group (Gilbert, Goode, & Dunne, 2007), Cultural competence refers to social workers' ability to identify their own affiliations to culture and recognize and respect differing traditions of culture in others in ways that influence styles of communication and expressions of respect.

3. Research Methodology

After reviewing the literature linked to online platforms and learners' cultural competence, the second part is devoted to explore the field work. It consists of the research tool employed for data collection purposes followed by the analysis of the findings and recommendations.

3. 2. Research Design, Methodology and Instrumentation

Worthy mentioned that a questionnaire is set of relevant questions designed purposefully to generate the statistical information from a target population to accomplish the research objectives.

3. 2.1. The Research Tool

Importantly mentioned, the research employed a quantitative methodology for gathering and analysing data. Wherein the tool which was used for the collection of data was a questionnaire that was administers via a private Facebook group in order to accomplish the research aims and obtain the information for the subjects, a questionnaire for EFL learners is administered in the forms of scientific text to be analyzed carefully. The questionnaire consisted different forms of questions mainly a closed ended questions (multiple response and Likert scale) and open-ended questions. Interestingly, it was reviewed by 6 external researchers. The appropriate modifications were made before the

questionnaire was administered to the participants. The study follows a case study design, with in depth analysis of the findings. This work takes the form of a case study of Algerian higher education. wherein the researchers will randomly choose a sample of Algerian EFL learners via a private Facebook group of EFL learners of Khenchela, collect data about their attitudes, opinion, and experiences of the effectiveness of Google classroom online platform to foster learners' cultural competence.

3. 2.2. The Population of the Study

Doubtlessly, the population of this study consists of Algerian EFL teachers in higher education, in Abbes Laghrour University of Khenchela, wherein the researchers will randomly choose a sample of 50 learners of English language, 1st year Master Degree, collect data about their opinion about the effectiveness of Google classroom in fostering learners' cultural competence.

3.3. The Questionnaire

Actually, the questionnaire starts with a brief introduction that justifies clearly the main aim of the research. it contains 10 questions in different forms. Most questions are of multiple-choice type where EFL learners are asked to tick ($\sqrt{}$) in the corresponding choice. Some questions are open-ended questions requiring learners to give their personal answers and justify them where necessary. Concerning the order of questions, it is linked with the sections, this questionnaire is made in the form of three sections, each one aims to provide specific set of information purposefully. Section one is dealing with the incorporation of online platforms in Algerian higher education, while, section two is entitled online platforms and fostering Learners' Cultural competence, and section three is about recommendations to make online platforms more effective tools. The Data obtained from the questionnaire will be treated in tables and graphs. Information will be presented and analyzed according to the

order of the items in the questionnaire. (Below is the analysis of some major questions).

3.4. Analysis and Interpretation of the Questionnaire Section One: Online Digital Platforms

Section one deals with the participants' background information and the incorporation of digital platforms in higher education. For example, concerning the gender of the participants, a random selection strategy was used here. In The sampling of 50 EFL learners, the majority of the participants were female learners, representing about 86% of the whole participants (about 43 female learners), while a minority of learners representing 14% participate.

Q2: Do you get satisfied when incorporating online platforms in learning?

Table 2.

Learner's Attitudes about Incorporating Online Platforms in Learning

| Options | Number | Percentage |
|---------------------|--------|------------|
| Extremely satisfied | 30 | 60% |
| Very satisfied | 05 | 10% |
| Somewhat satisfied | 05 | 10% |
| Somewhat | 03 | 06% |
| dissatisfied | | |
| Neither satisfied | 7 | 14% |
| nor dissatisfied | | |
| Very dissatisfied | 00 | 00% |
| Extremely | 00 | 00% |
| dissatisfied | | |
| Total | 50 | 100% |

The majority of learners are highly interested and extremely satisfied by the incorporation of online platforms in their learning wherein no one opted for extremely dissatisfied.

Section Two: Online Platforms and Fostering Learners' Cultural competence

Q3: Do you think that Google Classroom is an effective virtual platform?

Table 03. Learners' Attitudes towards the Effectiveness of Google Classroom

| Options | Number | Percentage |
|---------|--------|------------|
| yes | 28 | 56% |
| no | 22 | 44% |
| Total | 50 | 100% |

The result indicates that 28 learners believe that Google Classroom is an effective tool to teaching and learning, representing about 56%. (see appendices) In the second part, 22 learners declared that Google Classroom is not an effective instructional tool.

Q5. Do you think that Online Platforms help in enhancing learners' cultural competence?

Table 4. Learners Opinions Concerning Online Platforms Enhance learners' skills and competencies or No

| Option | Number | Percentage |
|--------|--------|------------|
| Yes | 40 | 80% |
| No | 10 | 20% |
| Total | 50 | 100% |

The table shows that learners believe online platforms foster learners' skills and competencies. The majority of the participants representing 80% chose yes as option.

Q5: Do schools need to prioritize cultural competence?

Table 5: Schools and the Need to Prioritize Cultural competence

| Options | Number | Percentage |
|---------|--------|------------|
| Yes | 50 | 100% |
| No | 00 | 00% |
| Total | 50 | 100% |

All the participants stated clearly that modern schools need to prioritize cultural competence, this means that they believe that this competence is valuable in recent education and pedagogy.

Section Three: Recommendations to make Online Platforms more Effective tools

Q6: What do you recommend to foster learners' cultural competence through online platforms?

Learners suggested interestingly several top recommendations to maximize their cultural competence via online platforms, below are the main suggestions:

- ✓ Educators ought to choose special online platforms that are devoted specially for cultural purposes such as:
- √ Gapminder
- ✓ Reading Rainbow
- ✓ Everyday Racism
- ✓ National Geographic Education
- ✓ Roots and Shoots
- **✓** Homes by Tinybop
- **✓** The Wonderment
- ✓ Better World Ed
- ✓ Newsela
- ✓ Oddizzi
- **✓** Belouga
- ✓ ePals

- ✓ Academia
- ✓ LuvLingua
- ✓ National Geographic
- ✓ One Globe Kids
- ✓ Be Confident in Who You Are
- ✓ Learn Korean
- ✓ ZamericanEnglish
- **✓** Duolingo
- ✓ Cake
- **✓** Historypin and others...
- Teachers are advised to help learners improve their cultural competence via online platforms in addition to face-to-face interaction.
- Administrations must use assessment checklists to assess the
 effectiveness of the online platforms used in the university and
 adjust their use accordingly.
- Create more culturally diverse virtual environment as in the: Zoom, Kahoot and Academia.
- Make sure to choose the less expensive platform to guarantee the involvement of all learners.
- Teachers should vary the teaching materials to motivate all learners (pictures, documents, videos, ppt...)

Learners are encouraged to take part in the learning process as active agents virtually, they had better discuss contents, debate cultural issues.

4. Findings and Discussions

After the administration of the questionnaire the responses of learners were transformed to an Exel worksheet to be analysed. Nonetheless, the responses can be summed up by saying that:

Algerian EFL learners are completely aware of the impact of online platforms in enhancing learners' cultural competence. The Positive results that the researchers revealed in the research have confirmed the hypothesis that states: online platforms enhance learners' cultural competence. And yet it depends on the choice of the platform and the proper use of it.

5. Conclusion

All in all, online digital platforms offer the opportunity to 21st century learners to maximize their skills and competencies mainly the cultural competence if they are used properly. In a globalized era, the use of online digital platforms becomes necessity, consequently, teachers ought to have special training to achieve digital professional development, they must choose the appropriate digital platforms for each competence, following this step with ongoing formative assessment and formative feedback to reach high quality education of digital natives.

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Appendices

Photo 1: Blended Learning in all Levels at Abbes Laghrour University English Language Department.



Photo 2: Interaction among Participants

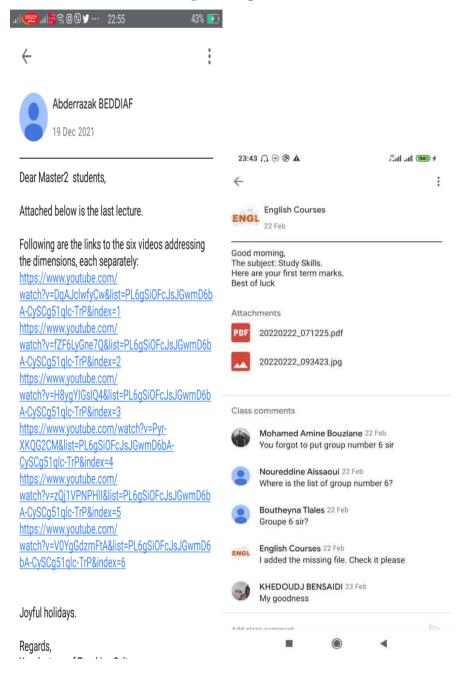


Photo 3: Different forms of files

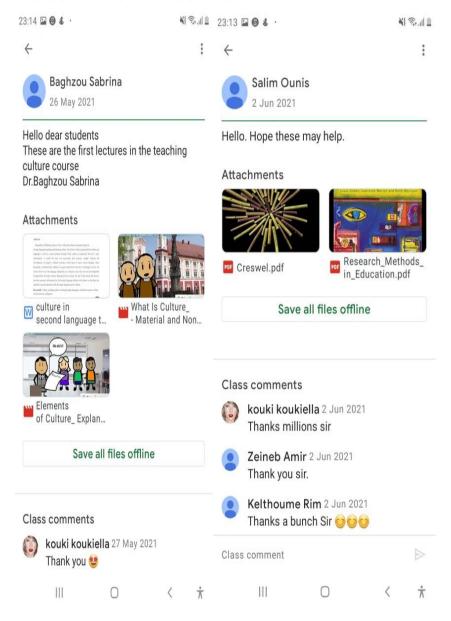


Photo $n^{\circ}4$: Examples of the use of Gmail messages and Facebook Private Group

