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## Investigating EFL Instructors' Perceptions of using Blackboard in TEFL at IAU Preparatory Year

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**Abstract.** This study set out to explore the perceptions of teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) about the use of the Blackboard learning management system (LMS) in the preparatory year at Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University (IAU), Saudi Arabia. The useful Blackboard features that are not customarily exploited by EFL instructors, and the solutions EFL instructors suggested to solve the problems they countered during their EFL classes were also covered. The perceptions of the 63 EFL instructors about using Blackboard in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) teaching were collected by means of a survey. A mixed-methods sequential explanatory design was used for collating, analyzing, and consecutively integrating data. The findings revealed that the attitudes of teachers towards using Blackboard were significantly positive. Nevertheless, they disclosed that several effective Blackboard features are not explored for the benefit of teachers such as the electronic library, the evaluation system, the teachers' forum, and the group conferencing. The results recommended that teachers should be provided with intensive training on all the Blackboard features to increase its efficacy in teaching. Finally, some recommendations

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were offered to maximize the usage of this tool in compliance with recent research findings and instructors' proposals.

**Keywords:** Blackboard; instructors' perceptions; e-learning; learning management systems; technology acceptance model

## 1. Introduction

The rapid growth of information technology has revolutionized computer-assisted education and online instruction at all educational levels in many countries globally. Initially, online teaching was used as a supplement to face-to-face teaching; now it seems to have supplanted it in many areas owing to the outbreak of Covid 19 (Al-Drees et al., 2015). The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has adopted Blackboard as an accredited learning system in academic institutions. Blackboard is one of the LMSs that play a significant role in teaching and learning. Its familiarity with this technology has warranted a smooth transfer to its adoption as a means of instruction, not only at the level of higher education but also in general education as well. At the opening of every academic year, the Deanship of Preparatory Year and Supporting Studies organizes orientation sessions to help students learn Blackboard fundamentals, such as how to log in/out, upload assignments, download courses, use discussion boards, answer quizzes and comprehension tasks, use online resources, listen to audio/video excerpts, take tests, and check teacher feedback and grades. Another advantageous option offered to teachers is that they can present their courses synchronously or asynchronously either on or off campus.

Although there are several types of systems such as Angel/LMS, e-College, GNU General Public License/Linux, LearningSpace, the Sakai Project, Open-Source Portfolio Initiative, Moodle, and uPortal, Blackboard has remained the overriding e-learning corporation considered as "the be all and end all in educational instruction" (Bradford et al., 2006). Other studies have compared the Blackboard platform to other applicable educational platforms and provided evidence for Blackboard's dominance (Carvalho et al., 2011; Kulshrestha & Kant, 2013). The significance of this study lies in gauging the utility of Blackboard as officially used in the preparatory year, at Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University, Saudi Arabia. The research endeavours to examine the teachers' perceptions of this technological tool in terms of easiness, usefulness, and difficulties encountered. It also strives to determine whether all the Blackboard features are as fully employed as they were destined to be by its designers and whether they were utilized appropriately. It ultimately seeks to deduce some ideas from the suggestions of teachers as the direct practitioners of this high-tech system. This study aims at answering these research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of EFL instructors of Blackboard in terms of ease of use, usefulness, satisfaction, and challenges?
2. What are the useful Blackboard features that are not customarily exploited by teachers?
3. What are the EFL instructors' proposals to solve the problems they encounter when using Blackboard in teaching EFL?

## 2. Literature Review

Since its inception in 1997, Blackboard has been considered one of the most popular LMSs used in higher educational institutions as a platform for teaching and learning (Martin, 2008). It serves two main purposes: a repository of information as well as a tool for communication. As a repository of information, teachers can upload all sorts of information about the course material; as a tool for communication, they can communicate with students through various means, including email, announcements, discussions podcasts, and blogs (Chang, 2008; Tseng, 2020). This system offers instructors a flexible tool that can be accessed at any time from any place (Kraleva et al., 2019). It allows educators to manage material dissemination, assignments, communications, and other related aspects for their courses (Epstein et al., 2013). Researchers recommended the use of Blackboard for its benefits in education such as ease of use (Lin, et al., 2014), flexible accessibility (Heirdsfield et al., 2011), and accessible services (Watson & Watson, 2007). Henceforth, instructors can explain lessons; post announcements, programs, courses, and class materials; and take attendance. They can also post grades, vocabulary and grammar quizzes, assignments, discussions, video tutorials, practice tests, audio-recorded presentations as well as IQ listening comprehension and reading comprehension. All these features help teachers deliver their lessons efficiently and effectively.

### 2.1 Principles for gauging web tools

The present study strives to delve into relevant literature to sort out the benefits and downsides of Blackboard. To examine the effectiveness of technological tools, researchers established some benchmarks for accepting or rejecting them. According to Chickering and Gamson (1987), good practice must meet the following seven principles: (a) encouraging contact between students and faculty, (b) developing reciprocity and cooperation among students, (c) encouraging active learning, (d) giving prompt feedback, (e) emphasizing time on task, (f) communicating high expectations, and (g) respecting diverse talents and ways of learning (p. 2).

Other researchers have endeavoured to discern the validity of technological tools through another set of criteria. The model of Chickering and Gamson (1987) served as a trendy framework for Graham et al. (2001) who applied their seven principles as a practical lens for evaluating online tools. Importantly, Davis (1989) set up three criteria for gauging web tools: perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and user acceptance of information technology. Moreover, Davis (1993) investigated the technology acceptance model (TAM) and identified a correlation between information systems on the one hand and perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, attitude toward using, and actual user behaviour on the other hand. Drawing upon Davis (1993), Yi and Hwang (2003) elaborated on the TAM, incorporating the motivation components of self-efficacy, enjoyment, and learning goal orientation to judge the effectiveness of web-based tools. In addition, Brett et al. (2006) deployed the TAM to gauge stakeholders' perceptions of usage, usefulness, and ease of use. Their results indicated that the Blackboard features related to course documents, lectures, announcements, and quizzes proved to be more useful and more frequently used than a discussion board,

websites, and e-mails. They also found that many novice instructors do not know how to use all the Blackboard tools because they lack adequate knowledge. Within the same perspective, Moonsamy and Govender (2018) explored the usage of Blackboard among instructors at a South African university, relying on the unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT) model. They found that the staff preferred Blackboard, mainly for its facilitating conditions in teaching. Furthermore, Opoku and Enu-Kwesi (2019) explored the applicability of the TAM in terms of usefulness and ease of use in twenty-two articles and found that it was the most suitable model. Therefore, the present study adopted these benchmarks because of their validity for diagnosing teachers' perceptions of Blackboard.

## **2.2 Blackboard benefits**

Blackboard is reported to yield many benefits for teachers such as efficient use of time, availability of resources, interactivity, participation, engagement, learning experience, quick feedback, tracking, building skills, time management, communication, and subsequent high achievement (Bradford et al., 2006; Brett et al. 2006; Heirdsfield et al., 2011). Along the same line, Eldridge (2014) found that Blackboard offered more flexibility and efficiency to Kentucky University staff. Correspondingly, Alzahrani and Aljraiwi (2017, p. 24) described this tool as a "flexible, scalable and expandable system" for disseminating web education. Using the TAM, Moonsamy and Govender (2018) advocated adopting Blackboard to ensure effective teaching. Similarly, Blackboard is regarded as an influential tool for publicizing learning and developing effective teaching (Eldridge, 2014; Elsayy & Ahmed, 2019). More specifically, Heirdsfield et al. (2011) revealed that the staff believed that Blackboard afforded various benefits including cooperative learning, active learning, recurrent communication, rapid feedback, task deadline, talent diversity, and learning styles. Above all else, communication in Blackboard is given due emphasis as instructors can post announcements, use the chat function, create threads via the discussion feature, and provide quick feedback and constant formative assessment (Chen et al., 2014). Indeed, there is a consensus among researchers that Blackboard is regarded as a genuine tool for elevating the teaching profession (Elsamanoudy et al., 2020; Baig et al., 2020; Francescucci & Rohani, 2019). Overall, instructors seem to favour Blackboard owing to its multimodal communication and information-sharing tool.

## **2.3 Teachers' satisfaction**

Other studies placed more emphasis on motivational factors as prerequisites for adopting technological tools. Emphasis on satisfaction, emotions, motivation, and enjoyment was underscored by Vrieling (2014). Blackboard flexibility is reported to bring about instructors' positive perceptions and satisfaction (Martin, 2008). In this regard, Krieg and Henson (2016) reported that Blackboard resulted in general satisfaction among instructors. Consistently, Khafaga (2021) indicated that instructors had positive attitudes toward Blackboard; this standpoint strengthens the acceptance of using web tools. Correspondingly, Shakil et al. (2021) revealed teachers' enjoyment of using Blackboard and their preference for using it instead of traditional teaching. Moreover, Ahmed and Mohammed (2020) found that instructors had a significant appreciation of the use of Blackboard. Aldubaibi (2018) found that Saudi teachers asserted that they initially encountered

considerable hurdles in using Blackboard; however, these were easily overcome in due time. They also insisted that some Blackboard features are not used at all by teachers because they are neither implemented by the e-learning teams nor solicited by the deanships. In line with this, Alblassi (2016) identified positive attitudes towards Blackboard among teachers at Hail University, Saudi Arabia; however, he evidenced that it was not sufficiently activated to cover all the features. Overall, the acceptance of technology brings about positive attitudes and satisfaction and plays a crucial role in the promotion of teaching methodology.

#### **2.4 Teachers' perceptions**

Among the influential factors that should be primarily considered about TAM are teachers' perceptions. Without their positive attitudes, the fate of any technological tool would be doomed to failure (Al-Drees et al., 2015; Heirdsfield et al. 2011). However, some researchers revealed some reluctance among practitioners towards using Blackboard for many reasons. Initially, Bradford et al. (2006) diagnosed that the difficulty in using any system such as Blackboard represents a major constraint. Similarly, Hoq (2020) found that 86% of instructors expressed positive attitudes; however, they required more training (p. 462). In line with this, Kilpatrick (2019) admitted that Blackboard's efficiency depends on how instructors create an online community that enhances students' virtual learning experience. Overall, teachers' positive attitudes about the utility of technological tools should be given due consideration before any implementation.

### **3. Methodology**

To achieve the aim of the current study a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design was used. This design was used to interpret and clarify the results obtained from quantitative data analysis (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). The data collected from both the quantitative and qualitative stages were combined into a single mixed-methods research design for collecting, analyzing, and consecutively integrating data (Othman et al., 2020). The main tool was a survey that included closed-ended questions in addition to a specific section for instructors to write their suggestions. The items included in the survey sections were used to identify the Blackboard features and their impact on teachers' experience (See Appendix 1). The survey was administered online, the data were analyzed, and the results were reported and compared with previous research works.

#### **3.2 Participants and the study context**

This study was conducted in the preparatory year of the English Department, Dammam University, Saudi Arabia. Institutional ethics approval was required, therefore official permission was requested from the Deanship which provided them with an official letter of acceptance to conduct the current study. The randomly selected size was 63 out of a population of 73 teachers in the English Department during the second semester of the academic year 2021-2022 (Table 1). The sample size calculator is used to determine the size of the sample that represents the target population.

**Table 1: Demographics of English teachers (N=63)**

Variables	Group	Participants	Percentage
Gender	Male	30	%47.6
	Female	33	%52.4
	All	63	%100

### 3.3 Research instrument and procedure

The survey was developed for teachers of both genders with quantitative data being collected using mainly closed-ended questions. The eleven items included in the first section sought to collect data about what the participants considered as effective features of Blackboard in learning English. The seventeen items included in the second section were to identify teachers' extent of acceptance and satisfaction in using Blackboard. The thirteen items included in the third section aimed to detect teachers' challenges in the utilization of Blackboard. The final section consisted of an open-ended question that solicited teachers' additional suggestions regarding the usage of Blackboard. A five-point Likert scale was used to gauge various perceptions regarding this web tool. For the analysis, statistical operations were performed on the collected data to determine the various averages. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was then calculated to verify stability, while the Pearson correlation coefficient was used to check the internal consistency. The frequencies and percentages were calculated to describe the participants. Arithmetic averages and standard deviations were also calculated to monitor trends in the participants' responses, following which the relative weight of the estimates of the participants' responses was adjusted from a five-point Likert scale to a continuous scale. Finally, the stability of the survey was calculated using Cronbach's alpha equation. Table 2 shows the value of the reliability coefficient for each section of the survey.

**Table 2: Cronbach's alpha coefficients**

Themes	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
Effective features of Blackboard in learning English	0.947	11
The extent of satisfaction in using Blackboard in teaching and learning English as a foreign language.	0.976	17
Teachers' challenges in the utilization of Blackboard	0.917	13

It is clear from Table 2 that the values of the reliability coefficient for each section are between (0.976-0.917). This indicates that the teachers' survey has a high degree of reliability as well.

### 3.4 Data collection tools and procedures

After completing the preparation of the instrument, it was transferred to an electronic link through the Questionpro.com platform. Then approval was obtained from the university authorities to dispatch the link to all participants through their e-mails. Their responses were tracked to verify the completion of the required number for the study sample for one month in 2021. The data were

extracted in a raw image and then processed statistically using the SPSS program. The data were collected from a survey, teachers' reflections, and online records.

## 4. Findings and discussion

### 4.1 EFL instructors' perceptions of Blackboard in terms of ease of use, usefulness, and satisfaction

The following Table 3 showed that EFL instructors' perceptions of Blackboard in terms of ease of use, usefulness, and satisfaction

**Table 3: EFL instructors' perceptions of Blackboard in terms of ease of use, usefulness, and satisfaction**

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
9. Blackboard facilitates student-student feedback.	3.27	1.232
14. Blackboard helps students to learn English efficiently.	3.47	1.198
10. Blackboard is my preferred teaching tool.	3.49	1.014
11. Blackboard helps me apply my ELT style.	3.49	1.121
5. Blackboard boosts students' motivation.	3.49	1.199
4. Blackboard promotes active learning among students.	3.62	1.154
7. Blackboard encourages student-teachers contact.	3.64	1.151
3. Blackboard deepens students' understanding.	3.67	1.108
6. Blackboard increases students' autonomy.	3.67	1.108
12. Blackboard provides sufficient ELT support.	3.71	1.121
15. Blackboard supports the pedagogical principles of English language teaching with technology.	3.76	1.069
17. Blackboard gives students the ability to organize themselves better.	3.76	1.090
13. Blackboard helps me gain more online teaching experience.	3.82	1.211

#### 4.1.1 Perceptions of EFL instructors about Blackboard in terms of ease of use

The findings showed that instructors agreed on Item 1 that Blackboard does not contain any difficulty with an average of 2.24 and 1.111 degrees of significance. They also voiced a neutral stance towards the items, indicating Blackboard in terms of time consumption, pressure exertion, curriculum burden, and training requirement. The perceived ease of use is considered a sine qua non for the acceptance and adoption of any technological tool (Brett et al., 2006; Davis, 1993; Lin et al., 2014; Opoku & Enu-Kwesi, 2019). The results of this study corroborate previous works indicating that instructors favoured Blackboard because of its easiness, flexibility, and accessibility (Alsuhaibani, 2021; Heirdsfield et al., 2011; Missula, 2008). Teachers supported Blackboard because it is a flexible tool that can be accessed at any time from any place (Alzahrani & Aljraiwi, 2017; Eldridge, 2014; Krалеva et al., 2019).

#### 4.1.2 Perceptions of EFL instructors about Blackboard in terms of usefulness

Perceived usefulness is considered as the main contributor to the acceptance of any technological tool (Opoku & Enu-Kwesi, 2019). The results demonstrated that the following Blackboard features are regarded as very effective in learning English, namely emails, learning resources and related activities, course materials, reading comprehension activities, listening comprehension activities, recorded presentations, assessments, quizzes, assignments, practice tests, and announcements. In sum, Blackboard's usefulness registered an overall average of

4.02 with 0.945 degrees of significance. These results upheld previous research on Blackboard appreciation compared to traditional classes (Ahmed & Mohammed, 2020).

The findings of this study are consistent with those of many studies which demonstrated the usefulness and efficiency of Blackboard in teaching (Alkhalaf, 2021; Alsuhaibani, 2021; Khafaga, 2021; Krалеva et al., 2019). The fact that Blackboard ensures effective teaching is strongly supported by many researchers (Baig et al., 2020; Eldridge, 2014; Elsayy & Ahmed, 2019; Francescucci & Rohani, 2019; Koc, 2013; Moonsamy & Govender, 2018). The results of this study confirm those found in previous studies; however, they differ from other studies which indicated more teacher training is required (Hoq, 2020). Moreover, the findings firmly contradict the studies which demonstrated negative reactions toward Blackboard (Almekhlafy, 2020). Instructors testified that all the above Blackboard features without exception are very effective with an overall average of 4.02 and 0.945 degrees of significance. This corresponds to the findings of many studies attributing the contribution of the Blackboard features to the enhancement of the teaching profession (Ahmed & Mohammed, 2020; Martin, 2008; Tseng, 2020).

#### *4.1.3 Perceptions of EFL instructors about Blackboard in terms of satisfaction*

Table 4 reveals the extent of the participants' satisfaction with the use of Blackboard in teaching. Item 9 indicates an average of 3.27 with a neutral degree and less than the general average of all items, namely 3.68. This demonstrates the degree of approval. In items 14, 10, 11, 5, 4, 7, 3, and 6, the responses of the faculty members ranged between 3.47 and 3.64 with a degree of agreement and less than the general average of 4.68. In addition, the averages of items 12, 15, 17, 13, 16, 8, 2, and 1 ranged from 3.71 to 4.11 with a degree correspondingly higher than the general average of 3.68.

The user acceptance principle is regarded as a requirement for the acceptance of any technological tool (Brett et al., 2006; Davis, 1989, 1993; Opoku & Enu-Kwesi, 2019). Concerning the extent of satisfaction among instructors in using Blackboard in TEFL, the findings revealed that Item 9 which surmises that Blackboard facilitates student-student feedback, contrary to all the items in this section, was neutral with a mean of 3.27 and 1.232 degrees of significance. Nevertheless, the means for the rest of the items ranged between 3.68 and 0.944, agreeing about their satisfaction. They showed that Blackboard is a preferred teaching tool that helps them apply their own ELT style and gain more online teaching experience. This tool is believed to provide sufficient support to English language teaching following recent pedagogical principles based on technology. It is also found to be easy and enables them to save time by providing quick teacher feedback and grading. Teachers also believe that this mechanism boosts students' learning efficiency, motivation, active learning, understanding, student-teacher contact, autonomy, better organization, and exposure to the English language. The results also underscored the importance of Blackboard acceptance in ensuring the success of the teaching process. The degree of satisfaction with Blackboard among instructors is very high because of its noticeable effects on improving achievement, interaction, communication, autonomy, feedback, grading,



motivation, contact, and active learning. These favourable pedagogical impacts were supported by previous research (Al-Drees et al., 2015; Barnes, 2021; Bawaneh, 2021; Henrik & Jaworska, 2018; Krieg & Henson, 2016; Malkawi et al., 2021; Shakil et al., 2021; Tonsmann, 2014; Vrielink, 2014).

#### 4.2 Perceptions of EFL instructors about Blackboard in terms of challenges and difficulties encountered

Regarding the challenges in using Blackboard, the following Table 4 showed that instructors agreed that Blackboard does not present any degree of difficulty.

**Table 4: Perceptions of EFL instructors about Blackboard in terms of challenges and difficulties encountered**

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. Blackboard e-learning platform is difficult to use.	2.24	1.111
13. Blackboard does not enhance the quality of teaching.	2.49	1.272
9. Blackboard does not improve students' performance in EFL	2.53	1.272
8. Language teaching via Blackboard is not efficient.	2.64	1.282
3. Blackboard increases the curriculum burden.	2.71	1.290
7. Blackboard does not encourage teacher-student interaction.	2.71	1.218
2. Blackboard use is time-consuming.	2.71	1.290
5. I face technical difficulties with the use of Blackboard.	2.73	1.232
4. There is a lack of training on the use of Blackboard.	2.87	1.272
10. Giving feedback on Blackboard is burdensome.	2.89	1.247
11. Giving feedback is not taken seriously by students.	2.91	1.203
6. I have problems with the internet connection.	3.02	1.076
12. Blackboard helps me manage my course documents.	3.49	1.100
Overall	2.77	0.867

In Item 13, instructors rejected the contention that Blackboard does not improve the quality of teaching. Likewise, in Item 9, the instructors refuted the idea that Blackboard does not improve the performance of students in EFL, with averages ranging between 2.24 and 2.53. On the other hand, the instructors agreed on Item 12, with an average of 3.49, which stipulated that Blackboard has a crucial role in helping instructors in managing the subjects of the course. Notwithstanding, in each of the items 8, 3, 7, 2, 5, 4, 10, 11, and 6, the averages ranged from 2.64 to 3.02 with a neutral degree. Generally, the results indicated neutrality with an average of 2.77.

The findings showed that teachers disagreed on items 1, 9, and 13 in Table 8 related respectively to the fact that Blackboard is difficult to use and it neither enhances the quality of teaching nor students' performance in EFL. Teachers agreed on Item 12, which stipulated that Blackboard had a crucial role in helping them in managing the subjects of the course with an average of 3.49. However, teachers voiced their neutrality on all the other items such as Blackboard's non-efficiency in language teaching, as well as its being a curriculum burden, time consuming, and a non-interactivity. They do not see that giving feedback on Blackboard is burdensome nor that it is not regarded seriously by students. Most teachers did not report any technical difficulties due to a lack of training or internet connection. These results corresponded closely with the positive

outcomes revealed by most studies in the field (Alkhalaf, 2021; Alsuhaibani, 2021; Anas, 2020; Khafaga, 2021). However, they contradicted some studies that reported that teachers confronted difficulties because they lacked background knowledge about technological skills (Brett et al., 2006; El Zawaidy, 2014).

#### 4.3 Usefulness or effective features of Blackboard that are not customarily exploited by teachers

Table 5 shows the teachers' responses about the Blackboard's effective features for teaching English. The features are ordered from the least to the most effective ones. The arithmetic averages in each of the items 10, 5, 3, 9, and 1 ranged between 4.09-4.33 with an impact degree (Very effective) and higher than the general average of all items reaching 4.02. Nevertheless, the arithmetic averages of items 2, 11, 4, 8, 7, and 6 ranged between 3.73-3.98 with an impact degree (Very effective), and it is noted that it is lower than the general average of 4.02.

**Table 5: Effective features of Blackboard for teaching English**

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
2. E-mails	3.73	1.321
11. Learning resources and related activities	3.89	1.172
4. Course materials	3.89	1.191
8. Reading comprehension activities	3.93	1.232
7. Listening comprehension activities	3.93	1.232
6. Recorded presentation	3.98	1.215
10. Assessment (feedback & grading)	4.09	1.164
5. Quizzes (grammar & vocabulary)	4.11	1.191
3. Assignments (discussion board)	4.11	1.027
9. Practice tests	4.18	0.984
1. Announcements	4.33	1.087
Overall	4.02	0.945

Overall, Blackboard has many valuable features that have not been used by teachers to boost teaching efficiency. Some teachers reported that some features are neither utilized by teachers nor required by the Deanship. Among these features are the following: the electronic library, the evaluation system including course analytics, course reports, performance dashboard, retention centre, customization, tool availability, voice messages, I-Learn platform, and the packages including course links, course cartridge, LTI links, calendar, blogs, and Wikis. Other instructors also admitted that additional features are overlooked such as writing tutor, Blackboard mock tests, course content, teachers' forum, group conferencing, peer-to-peer assessment, unit tests, interactive lessons, uploading/sharing supplementary materials with students, giving feedback on WPs by using enhanced tools, entering test results, and contacting specific students. Then, Blackboard video presentations should be used instead of audio presentations. Furthermore, intelligence quotient (IQ) online interactive games should be explored for consolidating students' vocabulary and grammar.

All the above suggestions that are advanced by the English Department teachers seem to correspond with recent research findings that provided evidence that the

Blackboard features are not activated enough (Alblassi, 2016; Aldubaibi, 2018; Kilpatrick, 2019). Undoubtedly, the implementation of all the Blackboard features will help teachers not only to diversify their teaching techniques but also to meet students' needs and enhance their academic performance. Blackboard has proved to be an essential digital platform in the field of education in the preparatory year in the Department of English Language, Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University Dammam University, Saudi Arabia. It has spawned revolutionary changes in language methodology mainly at this university level. In sum, the full exploration of Blackboard functionalities seems to be indispensable for the sake of boosting teaching with the use of recent technology as well as equipping the new generations with twenty-first-century learning skills.

#### **4.4 Teachers' proposed solutions**

Teachers were also surveyed about whether they had any proposals that would contribute to finding solutions to their problems. Some teachers reported some technical problems such as program interruptions which lead to restarting the procedures related to the program access and which wasted time. They also blame the administration for not allowing all Blackboard features for users who have indicated they would like to be allowed to use such features. They also underscored that Blackboard has a significant impact on the validity and reliability of the electronic evaluation. Moreover, most instructors regard Blackboard as a highly interactive tool that should be used constantly to support the learning-teaching process. As such, it needs to be reinforced at the university level, especially in TEFL. Nonetheless, some teachers suggested minimizing the writing of portfolios to two assignments per semester on Blackboard instead of five, and at least two as in-classroom writing assignments. This would enhance a balance between students' participation in the classroom and on Blackboard. Teacher feedback in class is said to be extremely useful in improving students' academic progress.

Some instructors recommended that the Deanship should provide them with more training sessions to gain deep knowledge about the system. Others suggested checking related websites or reviewing YouTube videos as they could help them to become more familiar with this technology. Furthermore, some instructors preferred joining Blackboard communities where they could be in contact with all updates related to this field. Also among the proposed solutions was asking colleagues for help. This is regarded as the easiest recourse to solve any technical problem they might encounter. Nevertheless, some instructors found autonomous learning as the best method because managing problems on their own would provide them with a type of learning that they would never forget. Still, some of them stated that using alternative devices could be the model solution, especially when there is no hope of fixing the problems faced.

Among the solutions suggested was checking the Help Desk, especially if the answer to their technical problem was not available either online or through a colleague. In this case, they believed that checking the Help Desk could be the best solution as it could give them more examples. Other instructors encouraged attending online free webinars about Blackboard. In addition, exploring PD offerings and registering for free monthly series on Blackboard were among the

suggestions made by some instructors. In this case, they referred to the necessity of organizing various workshops on Blackboard as well as checking blogs and social media. Finally, instructors insisted on the importance of introducing pre-university students to Blackboard, believing that the university stage should not be the first one to apply to Blackboard. It should be adopted earlier to prepare students to use it at university level.

The present findings strongly support the principles for Blackboard good practice in facilitating teaching and initiating contact, cooperation, active learning, feedback, less time on task, communication, and diverse styles (Elsawy & Ahmed, 2019; Hoq, 2020; Moonsamy & Govender, 2018; Opoku & Enu-Kwesi, 2019). The results of the research also corroborate those studies that revealed positive impacts on student-instructor contact, quick feedback, formative assessment, real-time, achievement, and better grades (Alzahrani & Aljraiwi, 2017; Chen et al., 2020; Tunceren et al., 2015). The results substantiated those works that provided evidence of the positive effects of Blackboard on cooperation, interaction, active learning, communication, understanding, expertise, accountability, engagement, preference, and confidence (Anas, 2020; Epstein et al., 2013; Lopes, et al., 2020). Furthermore, using Blackboard is suggested for creating an online community that enhances students' learning experience and involvement.

## **5. Conclusion and recommendations**

The findings revealed that teachers admitted that Blackboard was easy, useful, appreciated, and not difficult to manage or manipulate. However, a few teachers reported experiencing some technical challenges, particularly program interruptions. This diagnosis could help stakeholders promote the teaching policy, not only at the university level but also at schools as well. The present researchers came up with a set of recommendations that are based on teachers' comments. First, owing to Blackboard's innumerable advantages for instructors, it is advisable to carry on using its available effective features for the benefit of all stakeholders. Second, school administrators and software administrators should do their best to integrate all the Blackboard potential features that are not open to being adequately explored. Third, the challenges that teachers encounter need to be considered by the Deanship to resolve all the potential impediments and pave the way toward efficacious use of this LMS. Fourth, intensive training on all the Blackboard features is deemed necessary to enable teachers to make use of all the available services and present their content following technological advancements. The unexplored features should become part of pedagogical practice. Lastly, teachers of other subject areas such as science, engineering, among others, are encouraged to explore the use of Blackboard. In sum, all these elements, if tackled adequately, could bring about fruitful results to teaching methodology based on scientific inventions and modern principles.

## **6. Limitations of the study**

This study is subject to some limitations. The study only focused on the Department of English Language teachers' perceptions of Blackboard for teaching English, hence the results may not be generalizable. Further research could benefit from various educational schools and colleges to avoid any bias and to consider

different culture-specific contexts that could generate thought-provoking findings and keep the door open for further debate on this issue.

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The article was written by five authors, and each one of them was responsible for doing specific tasks;

- 1) Assoc. Prof. Sami Mubaireek is the main author who participated in reviewing the first draft of the paper and suggested some modifications to be made.
- 2) Dr. Montasser Mahmoud is the main co-author who contributed to designing the tool of the study and writing some parts of the literature review, methodology, conclusion, and references (and cited all of them in the text according to APA 7th edition) of the first draft of the research paper. He also made all required changes for making the research paper considered for publishing in the journal. He wrote the final version of the research paper as well.
- 3). Dr. AbdulAziz AliEl-deen is the second co-author who participated in reviewing the final version of the research paper and suggested some modifications to be made.
- 4) Prof. Ahmed Moumene is the third co-author who suggested the study's idea and wrote the research paper's first draft.
- 5) Mr. Ahmed ben Younis is the fourth co-author who was responsible for doing all statistics required in the study.

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## Appendix 1

### Survey for Instructors

Dear Colleague

This questionnaire is designed to investigate your attitudes towards the use of Blackboard in teaching English in the Preparatory Year, IAU. Your answers will be taken into account for research purposes solely and will be treated with great confidence and anonymity.

Please fill in the following questionnaire by ticking the appropriate box or by providing the required information.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

#### I. General Information

- **Gender:**
  - Male
  - Female
  
- **Academic Rank:**
  - Instructor
  - Lecturer
  - Assistant Professor
  - Associate Professor
  - Professor
  
- **Teaching Experience:**
  - Less than 5 years
  - 5 to 10 years
  - 11 to 20 years
  - More than 20 years

- **Age Group:**
  - 20-30
  - 30-40
  - 40-50
  - 50 and above
- **Aptitude in using Blackboard**
  - Poor
  - Fair
  - Good
  - Excellent

**II. Please rate the effectiveness of the following features of Blackboard from the least effective (1) to the most effective (5).**

No.	Features	1	2	3	4	5
1	Announcements					
2	Emails					
3	Assignments (discussion board)					
4	Course materials					
5	Quizzes (grammar & vocabulary)					
6	Recorded presentation					
7	Listening comprehension activities					
8	Reading comprehension activities					
9	Practice tests					
10	Assessment (feedback & grading)					
11	Learning resources and related activities					
12	Other, please mention and rate					

**III. Extent of satisfaction in using Blackboard**

No.	Statement Blackboard .....	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	is easy to use.					
2	allows me to save time.					
3	deepens students' understanding.					
4	promotes active learning among students.					
5	boosts students' motivation.					
6	increases students' autonomy.					
7	encourages students-teachers' contact.					
8	helps provide quick teacher feedback and grading.					
9	facilitates student-student feedback.					

10	is my preferred teaching tool.					
11	provides sufficient support to English language teaching.					
12	helps me gain more online teaching experience.					
13	helps students to learn efficiently.					
14	supports the pedagogy of English language teaching technology.					
15	provides students with more exposure to English learning.					
16	gives students the ability to learn themselves better.					
17	helps me apply my English style.					

#### IV. Teachers' challenges in the utilization of Blackboard

No.	Blackboard challenges	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	Blackboard e-learning platform is difficult to use.					
2.	Blackboard use is time consuming.					
3.	Blackboard increases the curriculum burden.					
4.	There is a lack of training on the use of Blackboard.					
5.	I face technical difficulties with the use of Blackboard.					
6.	I have problems with internet connection.					

7.	Blackboard does not encourage teacher-student interaction.					
8.	Language teaching via Blackboard is not efficient.					
9.	Blackboard does not improve students' performance in EFL					
10.	Giving feedback on Blackboard is burdensome.					
11.	Giving feedback is not taken seriously by students.					
12.	Blackboard helps me manage my course documents.					
13.	Blackboard does not enhance the quality of teaching.					

**V. Further suggestions:**

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