

# EFL Teachers' Perceptions and Experiences on Incorporating Blackboard Applications in the Learning Process with Modular System at ELI

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Blackboard is one of the most popular LMSs being used in higher education institutions. The current study aims to investigate teachers' perceptions on blackboard applications in the context of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL, henceforward). As some previous studies have viewed that positive perceptions played a vital role in adopting new technologies, this research project aims to investigate teachers' perceptions on blackboard applications in the context of teaching EFL and its effect on each Module in a periodic manner. In order to collect data, 80 EFL teachers from English Language Institute, KAU were surveyed and interviewed about their perceptions and experience towards the use of the blackboard. Most teachers viewed Blackboard as a structured e-learning platform that helps improve the teacher-student relationship in a course and aids to make teaching English more successful. The results of the current study would certainly be of use to all stakeholders involved in the implementation of Blackboard in KSA in general and KAU in particular.

**Keywords:** *teachers' perceptions, blackboard, CALL, language teaching, blended learning*

## Objectives of the Project

The aim of the study is three-fold;

1. To gauge the success level of the students after implementing the blackboard as a blended e-learning tool in the EFL context.
2. To monitor the students' level of language learning after implementing the Blackboard in learning process with Modular system at ELI.
3. To investigate teachers' perceptions on implementation of blackboard applications in the EFL context.



## **Introduction**

Blackboard, as a component of Learning Management System (LMS), has been adopted by many institutions due to its ubiquity, easiness, and accessibility. The rapid practices of online technology in everyday life, such as social network sites, motivate learners to get involved in the online learning environment such as running discussion forums, writing assignments, and getting feedback from teachers and peers. On the other side, teachers' perception, whether positive or negative, to the use of Blackboard in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), may play an important role in customising students to be a part of the online learning environment. Teachers' beliefs about the technology affect their decision to adopt it in classrooms. A survey conducted in 2007 on the use of technology by teachers in the US indicated that though teachers used technology in classrooms, their use of technology was limited to administrative purposes rather than pedagogical tasks (Ottenbreit-Leftwich, Glazewski, & Ertmer, 2010). Research points out that technology has not been leveraged to its key resources to foster effective learning and teaching, because the major task of using technology by most teachers is still to search for the material, notify students to write assignments, and use drill and practice (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010; Koc, 2013). Currently, the increasing demand is to shift the use of technology, particularly the Blackboard and Moodle, from a communication use to instructional tasks as to promote student-centred learning, which is meant to prioritise students' interest, abilities, and learning style. Considering the teachers role in making this shift, this paper aims to investigate teachers' perceptions on Blackboard applications in the English as a foreign language (EFL) environment.

## **Learning Management Systems (LMSs) in Education**

The widespread use of the Internet has enhanced the adoption of learning management systems (LMSs) in educational institutions. It is because of the availability of technological infrastructure, mainly of the Internet (Levy & Stockwell, 2006; West, Waddoups, & Graham, 2007). The web-based learning environment has created rich learning sources for all kinds of learners, interactive learning environments among students, teachers and course materials, and cross-cultural collaborative learning opportunities. This web-based learning system allows students and teachers to interact with each other anywhere and anytime for their own needs (Cavus, 2007; Levy & Stockwell, 2006). The most popular LMS currently available to most institutions are Blackboard, WebCT, Moodle, LAMS, and SAKAI. Founded in 1997, Blackboard is a commercially licensed LMS, and is one of the most popular marketable LMSs adopted in higher education institutions (Chang, 2008; West, Waddoups, & Graham, 2007). The tools in Blackboard have the potential to change the way teachers teach and learners learn (DeNeui & Dodge, 2006). They offer a highly interactive medium of learning that can be customised to meet the individual needs of students (Levine & Sun, 2003). These systems may influence the selection and development of online resources and affect traditional teaching practices, while also introducing a new layer of complexities into the management of teaching programs (Coates, 2007).

Teachers' Perceptions on Technology Integration: Though we live in the digital age, there is a slow change in instructional practices using technologies due to various levels of teacher's acceptance of e-learning tools. Still many teachers view technology as a supplementary teaching tool, and not as an essential component of a successful teaching-learning process of our time. Some teachers even fear that online interaction between teacher and students replaces face-to-face interaction (Walker, 2004). Some others do not have the motivation or time to become expert users of online systems and limit their use of innovative pedagogies. The barriers to the use of innovations are understandable. However, teachers need to be convinced of the value of LMSs and other tools of online learning. It is becoming a reality that today's effective teaching requires effective technology use. However, research suggests that we have yet not achieved high levels of effective technology use even in technologically advanced countries (Kozma, 2003; Mueller, Wood, Willoughby, Ross, & Specht, 2008; Smeets, 2005; Tondeur, van Braak, & Valcke, 2007). Further, technologies used in many parts of the world are not capable of facilitating student learning, as they simply support lecture-based instruction and do not enhance student-centred pedagogy (Cuban, Kirkpatrick, & Peck; 2001; Law-less & Pellegrino, 2007; Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 2005). It is high time that we focus further on thinking about more creative ways to use the innovation to improve teaching and learning (West, Waddoups, & Graham, 2007). The above realities show that teachers' perceptions on technology integration play a vital role in successful integration of technology to language learning and teaching. As Kagan (1992) noted, teachers' beliefs appear to lie at the heart of teaching and tend to be associated with a congruent style of teaching. Hence, changes to teaching style with technology necessitate changes to teachers' beliefs. Further, teaching beliefs have an impact on institutional practice and policy (Kane, Sandretto, & Heath, 2002). Since technology has become a key component in our lives, understanding its implications, utilising its potential and becoming comfortable with its effect are necessary skills in today's workplace. New technologies do not necessarily cause a change in pedagogical practice; instead, it may reinforce existing pedagogical foundation and outlook (Zurita & Ryberg, 2005). However, successful use of computer technology requires an instructional change to constructivist teaching (Strommen & Lincoln, 1992; Jonassen, Peck, & Wilson, 1999) that is student-centred learning (Pedersen & Liu, 2003; Sandholtz, Ringstaff, & Dwyer, 1997).

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

80 EFL teachers at ELI-KAU in Saudi Arabia have been selected as a sample of this study. They are teaching English at ELI for Saudi students placed in varying levels. The participants' age varies between 28-50. The participants have been using the Blackboard for at least 1 year and most of them had been trained in Blackboard use by their institution.

The researchers circulated the survey to all the participants via emails and to some by hand. As the number of EFL instructors was limited, we selected all the population as a sample of our study. Table 1 depicts the demographic information about the participants.

**Table 1:** Demographic data of the participants:

	Range	Number	Range	Number	Range	Number
Age group (Years)	27-35	10	35-45	50	45-55	20
Experience (Years)	Less than five years	10	5-10	40	10-20	20

### Assessment Methods

Two assessment methods were used to gather data from the participants: (1) a survey and (2) an interview.

The survey was constructed by the researcher, containing two unfold sections: demographic information about the participants and their perceptions towards the use of the Blackboard (see appendix A). The aim of the questionnaire was to measure how teachers perceived the use of Blackboard in language teaching settings. The statements of the questionnaire contained either positive or negative attitudes towards implementing the Blackboard in the EFL environment. Using a 5-Point Likert-scale, the questionnaire scaled from 1-5 (ranging from 1 which means “strongly disagree” to 5 which means “strongly agree”). On the other hand, the scale for the negative statements was 1 “strongly agree” and 5 “strongly disagree”. To ensure the validity of the survey, it was first piloted by 10 EFL instructors; their feedback was useful for modifying some items. The survey, containing 25 statements, was distributed via email as well as by hand to all the 80 study participants. The percentage of returned questionnaires is sufficient at 61%. A reliability analysis was calculated for the survey. The reliability results were (Cronbach’s alpha) 0.884 for all the survey items, indicating the items were very high and acceptable. 35 EFL teachers were interviewed to support the data obtained from the survey and to further give the respondent an opportunity to express his/her perceptions orally. The interview questions were semi-structured and focused on EFL teachers’ perceptions of Blackboard applications. During the interviews, participants described their views regarding the benefits of Blackboard from the perspective of pedagogy of teaching English, its contributions in improving students’ language competencies, and practical barriers in effective Blackboard integration in EFL.

## Results and Discussion

### Analysis of the Survey

To answer the research question, “How do teachers perceive the use of blackboard in EFL environment?”, descriptive statistics have been calculated to indicate the means, standard deviation, and frequency of the participants’ responses to the survey. Table 2 reports the descriptive statistics for the positive points indicated by the survey. The means, standard deviation, and frequency for the negative elements provided by the survey are summarised in Table 3.

**Table 2:** Descriptive statistics of the survey’s positive statements

<i>Statement</i>	Percent %						
	SA	A	N	D	S D	M	SD
1 I believe that teaching English via BB will increase students’ motivation to learn a language	16	56	3	25	0	4.8	0.7
2 I like BB because it is a structured e-learning platform	18.8	62.5	18.8	0	0	4.12	1.1
3 BB helps improve the teacher-student relationship in a course	12.5	78.1	9.4	0	0	4.12	1.1
4 BB helps make teaching English more successful	21.9	59.4	15.6	3.1	0	4.00	0.7
5 BB facilitates the way I teach	15.6	53.1	31.3	0	0	3.84	0.7
6 I believe students’ use of bb would reinforce self- study learning	25	53.1	6.3	12.5	3.1	3.84	1.1
7 I think BB has enough functionality for managing my course documents	9.4	71.9	9.4	9.4	0	3.81	0.7
8 BB is user friendly	12.5	71.9	9.4	3.1	3.1	3.8	0.8
9 BB supports the pedagogical principles that I want to use for teaching English with technology	6.3	68.8	21.9	3.1	0	3.78	0.6
10 I think students get more exposure to language learning via online activities available in BB	18.75	40.6	37.5	3.1	0	3.75	0.8
11 The use of BB tools focus on students-centred learning	12.5	4.6	18.8	28.1	0	3.73	1.0

1 2	BB is a good platform for students to learn a foreign language	12.5	62.5	9.4	15.6	0	3.71	0.9
1 3	I think using BB will promote students' use of English to communicate with peers and instructors	12.5	53.1	21.9	12.5		3.65	0.9
1 4	My perception of BB changed as I have gained more online teaching experience	9.4	50	34.4	6.3	3.1	3.53	0.9
1 5	BB helps students improve their Language competencies	3.12	56.3	40.6	0	0	3.62	0.6
1 6	Using BB would augment working collaboratively in peers as well as in groups	9.4	46.9	34.4	6.3	3.1	3.53	0.9
1 7	I believe learning English via BB would make student feel autonomous	6.3	50	34.4	3.1	6.3	3.46	0.9
1 8	The rate of students' interaction with materials provided in BB is encouraging	12.5	34.4	34.4	12.5	6.3	3.43	1.1
1 9	The interface of BB would draw students' attention to learn English efficiently	3.1	37.5	50	9.4	0	3.34	0.7

The results from the descriptive statistics reveal that EFL teachers showed a positive attitude towards the application of Blackboard to English language teaching. To interpret the level of means, the authors applied Siti Rahaya and Salbiah's (1996) model of explaining means. It is summarised in Table 4. Examining the results from Table 2, the teachers show significant perceptions to the positive statements they surveyed. The results from the descriptive statistics reveal that EFL teachers showed a positive attitude towards the application of the blackboard to English language teaching. Almost all the items obtained high/very high scale except item 19 which is related to technical issues (i.e., The interface of Blackboard would draw students' attention to learn English efficiently). One item got 4.84 which is rated as very high, 17 statements obtained between 3.43-4.12, which are rated as high, and one item rated as moderate, obtaining 3.34. The total mean of the 19 statements is 3.78, indicating that the overall mean of the positive statements is high.

**Table 3:** Descriptive statistics of the survey’s negative statements

Statement	Percent %						
	SA	A	N	D	SD	M	SD
1 I don’t think that learning via BB is efficient because some teachers may find it difficult to handle	0	25	34.4	31.3	3	2.75	1.0
2 BB lacks customization	3.1	25.5	43.8	25.0	3.1	3.00	0.9
3 I do not think using BB will improve overall student performance in EFL	3.1	28.1	15.6	43.8	9.4	2.71	1.1
4 I would not recommend using BB because it has several technical problems	9.37	21.5	15.6	4.6	12.5	2.75	1.2
5 I find it too time consuming to use BB	12.5	21.9	25.0	34.4	6.3	3.00	1.1
6 The technical aspects of BB discourage me from using it more frequently	3.12	37.5	12.5	4.6	6.3	2.9	1.1

Concerning the negative statements, outlined in Table 3, the descriptive statistics show fewer frequencies than the positive points shown in Table 2. The means of the negative statements are less than those in the positive statements. In addition, teachers’ responses were not significant. As indicated in Table 3, the mean varies between the scale ‘moderate’ and ‘low’. None of the negative statements scaled high or very high, all of them scaled as moderate. The overall mean for the negative statements is 2.8, demonstrating that the overall mean of the negative statements is moderate (Faraji, 2017).

**Table 4:** Score category breakdown adopted from Siti Rahaya and Salbiah (1996)

Means	Corresponding level
0-1.80	Very low
1.81-2.60	low
2.61-3.40	Moderate
3.41-4.20	High
4.21-5.0	Very high

### Analysis of the Interview

The interview data were analysed based on the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), and the coding process followed the analysis of the grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Any words or sentences relating to the teachers’ perceptions and expectations of the role of Blackboard and it’s contribution to language learning were coded,

conceptualised, and categorised using the constant comparative approach until the categories were saturated.

**Question 1. What are the benefits of Blackboard from the perspective of pedagogy of teaching English?**

Three categories emerged from the data regarding the benefits of Blackboard from the perspective of pedagogy of teaching English: innovative methods in Blackboard, interactive lessons in Blackboard, and motivation in Blackboard use. Innovative methods in Blackboard: During the interviews, the teachers frequently mentioned that innovative methods of Blackboard applications help to make teaching of English lively. Use of IT skills for language learning help to get immediate feedback from instructors. In addition, multimedia aids and other materials (audio/video/text) make the possibility of a rich experience. Online drills and quizzes help to check the progress of linguistic acquisition. Some teachers also said that linguistic skills were encouraged with technology. One respondent felt that it was a good platform to practice writing with the help of teacher's feedback. Interactive lessons in Blackboard: Almost all respondents were of the view that Blackboard supported interactive lessons by allowing the students to interact with teachers anywhere at any time. One of the respondents kept the view that online assignments help to build teacher-student rapport using computer-mediated communication. Motivation in Blackboard use: Commonly, the teachers assumed that Blackboard's motivational feature was high. It's interactive features like chatting, discussion forums etc. allowed considerable amount of peer learning. One of the teachers opined that as there were no time-constraints to access the materials on Blackboard, and it helped the students to cover up the missed classes. Some others viewed that a fear-free environment as compared to the real classrooms was another motivational factor for students to involve themselves. As one of them noted, providing autonomy is the key factor that makes Blackboard justifiable in language teaching-learning scenario. "No more monotony of traditional system" was the comment made by another teacher.

**Question 2. How can Blackboard help students improve their language competencies?**

The responses to this question were divided into two main categories: (1) pragmatic practice in Blackboard and (2) exposure to language in Blackboard. Pragmatic practice in Blackboard: Most teachers assumed that Blackboard was a platform for pragmatic practice. It could help to improve linguistic skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Group discussions enabled them to construct their own sentences. Vocabulary and grammar exercises helped to understand grammatical structures and language use. Exposure to language in Blackboard: This point was endorsed by many teachers. They assumed that blended learning using Blackboard allowed more time to access information. It was also assumed that IT use led to language exposure. Many teachers believed that group conferencing and chatting were beneficial to develop communicative English. Putting interesting materials maximised student-teachers interaction, as one observed.

### **Question 3. What are the barriers/technical problems of Blackboard integration in your EFL context?**

Though most of the teachers have positive perceptions on Blackboard, they point out some barriers or technical problems that hinder effective integration of Blackboard in the concerned EFL context. These barriers can be categorised into three: teachers' incompetency in IT, students' incompetency in IT, and technical problems. Teachers' incompetency in IT: As one of the teachers responded, some teachers who were new to Blackboard might find it difficult to shift their roles from a traditional face to face approach to a blended learning situation. This difficulty is partly because of their incompetency in handling technology. As many teachers noted, non-availability of technical staff deepened this difficult situation. Students' incompetency in IT: Low student response to the assignments on Blackboard was a matter of concern, as some teachers said. The reasons vary. One of the teachers said: "Some of the students are not well aware of using this technology" This happens because the Internet facility is not available to all students, especially those who come from rural settings. Another factor is the language barrier for beginners as Blackboard applications are in English and students may find it difficult to handle in the absence of adequate training. Interestingly, one of the teachers was of the view that students would be distracted towards other online activities such as social networking and YouTube. Technical Problems: Another barrier mentioned by some of the teachers was technology itself. Some teachers felt that it was not always reliable. The complex nature of some applications might discourage their use, as one of them observed. Too much emphasis on Blackboard applications discouraged real classroom attendance, one of them complained. Though most teachers support the benefits of online learning, there are some observations like this: "Well, it's not valid to apply on all of the language skills. Learning a language always needs more real normal interactions".

### **Conclusion**

The study reveals that EFL teachers have positive perceptions towards the application of the Blackboard to English language teaching. It is interesting to note that the item, which states teaching English via Blackboard, will increase students' motivation to learn a language got the highest mean (4.84). This shows that most teachers have positive pedagogical perceptions regarding the integration of technology in language teaching. Such positive perceptions play a vital role in adopting a new technology as mentioned by previous studies (Albion & Ertmer, 2002; Ertmer, Gopalakrishnan, & Rosse, 2001). Most teachers view Blackboard as a structured e-learning platform that helps improve the teacher-student relationship in a course and aids to make teaching English more successful. As some previous findings show, instructors' technological and pedagogical understandings help to successfully implement web-based teaching-learning activities (Comas-Quinn, 2011; Hauck & Stickler, 2006). As most of the participants mentioned that they could easily operate the tools, it determines that Blackboard is easy to use. Though some teachers have talked about their reservations on the practical aspects of using Blackboard, most teachers have not endorsed the ideas that some teachers may find it difficult to handle or Blackboard lacks customisation. In addition, it is a good sign that most teachers have endorsed



the view that Blackboard supports interactive lessons by allowing the students to interact with teachers anywhere at any time. Hence, the research question proposed for this research “How do the EFL teachers perceive the process of adoption of the Blackboard applications?” could be concluded that the teachers find it a beneficial tool that enhances student learning.

### **Suggestions**

For Future Research in the field EFL teachers’ perceptions on Blackboard applications, it would be interesting to study teachers’ perceptions by the use of suggested variables like age, gender, experience etc. Besides that, as this research is related to a limited geographical area, it is recommended to apply the same research context for other EFL or ESL areas, and compare the results for analysis of teachers’ opinions on Blackboard use. Additionally, it is suggested, for similar future research to gather a larger survey sample. A wide-scale survey shared with a more diverse sample and a larger case study would be helpful to strengthen the results. The LMS used in this study is Blackboard, and it is recommended to conduct a similar study using an LMS with a different pedagogical perspective, such as Moodle or any other, to compare the results from the current study. This research has specifically investigated EFL teachers’ perceptions toward technology and the data collection was done by a survey. However, in order to have a better interpretation the researchers did not make observations of actual practices, and it could be useful to apply this technique in further research based on what the teachers’ actual practises. It could be more practical and interesting to compare the perceptions and actual limitations regarding LMS in education.

Finally, the results of this study reflect that EFL teachers possess positive attitudes regarding blended learning. It is also imperative to know the perceptions of administrators involved in decision making regarding faculty development. Henceforth, it is vital to include decision makers in further research.



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