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The perception of blackboard collaborate-based instruction by EFL majors/teachers amid COVID-19: A case study of Saudi universities

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Abstract

This paper investigates the perception of using Blackboard Collaborate-based Instruction (BCI) by Saudi EFL majors and teachers during the crisis of COVID-19 pandemic. The paper's main objective is to explore the extent to which modern technologies contribute to the process of teaching and learning English at Saudi universities. This is conducted by probing the benefits and challenges of using Blackboard Collaborate as a digital platform through which the different university courses are taught. The study, therefore, seeks to highlight the role of a computer-based instruction, by shedding light on the opportunities and challenges of incorporating latest technologies into the pedagogy of learning and teaching English as a foreign language in the Saudi universities. Two methodological instruments are used to collect data: the first is electronic questionnaires to test both students' and teachers' attitudinal perception towards the use of Blackboard in the learning/teaching process; and the second is an interview conducted with 29 staff members affiliated to 5 different Saudi universities concerning the use of Blackboard as a digital platform of teaching various university courses. Results reveal that despite the challenges that encounter both students and teachers in managing the process of learning and teaching via Blackboard Collaborate amid COVID-19, which are ascribed to some technical and academic reasons, this digital platform proves useful and conducive to better learning outcomes as it offers a bendable learning environment through which participants can flexibly manage their learning, both synchronously and asynchronously, by attending their classes, accessing their courses materials, participating in discussions, and sitting for examinations.

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Keywords: blackboard collaborate; COVID-19; EFL learners/teachers; e-learning; Saudi universities

1. Introduction

With the emergence of COVID-19 pandemic, face-to-face instruction becomes a challenge because of the various protective procedures applied to the whole world. These procedures impose a state of social distance that prevents any gatherings and enforces partial and total lockdown of the population to the extent that face-to-face instruction is totally suspended in many countries. The crisis of COVID-19

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necessitates the use and application of modern technological methods in education institutions all over the world. Here arises the role of a computer-based instruction to replace the traditional one, and to fulfil in part the gap between the commitment to the precautionary measures to combat the emerging COVID-19 and the proper continuation of the learning and teaching process.

The Blackboard Collaborate is one of the digital platforms adopted in almost all educational institutions in Saudi Arabia during COVID-19 crisis due to its ubiquity, easiness, and accessibility. Saudi universities are no exception; they replace traditional instruction and textbooks-based learning/teaching with a computer-based one. This allows for much integration between the targeted pedagogical objectives of the learning/teaching process and the technological movement, which in turn serves to reformulate and reshape the image of education at all levels. Virtual classroom teaching is adopted and digital platforms such as Blackboard Collaborate-based instruction start to operate effectively. This study, therefore, attempts to investigate the perception of using and applying Blackboard Collaborate-based Instruction (BCI) by EFL learners/teachers at Saudi universities. In so doing, the paper scrutinizes to explore learners' and teachers' perceptions on blackboard applications in the Saudi EFL context; and whether or not the use of recent technological methods of teaching and learning is relevant to both teachers and learners, particularly in time of crises and emergencies.

The significance of the current study, therefore, lies in its attempt to shed light on both the relevance and impact of using Blackboard-based instruction onto teaching and learning process during COVID-19 pandemic. As such, the paper is anticipated to contribute, both theoretically and pedagogically, to the field of teaching and learning English as a foreign language. Theoretically, it aims to shed light on the incorporation of emerging technologies in teaching/learning process; and, pedagogically, it highlights the effective contribution of applying recent technological tools of teaching/learning on learners'/teachers' performance.

1.1. Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following two overarching research questions:

1. How do Saudi EFL majors/teachers perceive the Blackboard Collaborate-based instruction as a digital platform that substitutes the traditional way of instruction?
2. What are the advantages/benefits disadvantages/challenges of using Blackboard Collaborate based instruction in the Saudi EFL contexts?

1.2. Research Objectives

Two research objectives are sought to be achieved in this paper:

1. To explore the perception of Blackboard Collaborate-based instruction by Saudi EFL majors/teachers amid COVID-19 crisis.
2. To shed light on the benefits and/or challenges of using Blackboard Collaborate-based instruction on the part of both learners and teachers in the Saudi EFL context.

The remainder of this paper runs as follows. Section II provides the literature review relevant to the topic under investigation. Section III offers the methodology of the study, wherein the analytical procedures adopted for data analysis, the collection and description of data, and the analytical instruments used in the study are presented. Section IV is demonstrates the results of the study. Section V discusses the results obtained from the research instruments adopted in this paper. Section 6 concludes the article and recommends some ideas for further research.

1.3. Literature Review

Blackboard Collaborate is one of the emerging technologies in education that is widely used by many educational institutions. This digital platform offers a type of an online learning environment that helps learners and teachers to attend their virtual classes, download their assignments, involve in an online discussion, get in-time feedback, and sit for their examinations (Mohsen, & Shafeeq, 2014; Hismanoglu, 2012). According to (Farooq, Alasmari & Javid, 2012), Blackboard-based instruction guarantees a more flexible and equal participation in the learning process. Some researchers (e.g., Almelhi, 2014a; Mekheimer, 2012; Martin, Parker & Oyarzun, 2013; Aljabry, Salahuddin & Alshazly, 2014) postulate that unlike traditional instruction, wherein participation within classrooms may be confined to only two or three students, with the use of Blackboard-based instruction, participation in discussions is controlled and satisfactorily circulated among all students involved in the same virtual class. Participants are monitored, directed, and summoned for discussion.

Blackboard-based instruction is a type of blended learning. Blended learning has been approached and defined by many EFL researchers (e.g., Sharma, 2010; Alsowayegh, Bardesi, Garba & Sipra, 2019; Bukhari & Basaffar, 2019; Gulnaz, Althomali & Alzeer, 2020, among others. These scholars come to terms that blended learning is a combination of both traditional methods of learning with technological ones. This type of learning, Albataineh, Banikalef and Albashtawi (2019) argue, requires students' and teachers' involvement in online platforms that allow a complete management to the process of learning. In recent researches, other terminologies, such as "hybrid learning", "technology-mediated instruction" (Martyn, 2003), and "e-learning" (Ja'ashan, 2020), have been used to refer to blended learning and are employed interchangeably in previous literature pertaining to blended learning. For Bersin (2004), one of the advantages of blended learning is that one teacher can easily deliver his/her courses to a large number of students regardless of time and place. Blended learning can be exercised by various digital channels, such as Blackboard, Zoom, webcasting, and online videos.

Some previous studies have approached the effectiveness of the use of modern technology in learning (e.g., Shih, Lin & Yang, 2007; Maslamani, 2013; Fageeh & Mekheimer, 2013). However, these studies have casted their emphasis on the theoretical dimension of the use and application of technology in the process of learning and teaching. A second group of researchers (e.g., Kashghari & Asseel, 2014; Alelaiwi & Hossain, 2015) perceive Blackboard Collaborate-based instruction as a digital tool which offers educational assistance to both teachers and learners; others perceive the term as it embraces a learning management system whereby participants can participate live discussion and can attend live classes (Aljabre, 2012; Almelhi, 2014b); and a fourth party focuses on the benefits and challenges of using this online-learning source, such as its accessibility, its ability to provide both synchronous and asynchronous forms of communication, and its ability to create an interactive environment of learning among participants (Malikowski, Thompson & Theis, 2007; Liaw, 2008; Heirdsfield, Walker, Tambyah & Beutel, 2011).

According to Mohsen and Shafeeq (2014), Blackboard Collaborate, being one of the digital platforms of blended learning, offers learners and teachers the opportunity to interact communicatively with each other. This type of digital communication constitutes the various steps of the learning process, which include an easy access to course material, assignments, discussions, etc. By using Blackboard system, learners are provided to work individually and in groups. This in turn emphasizes flexibility in the learning process. All academic tasks can easily be fulfilled within Blackboard Collaborate because this digital platform offers so many options that can be carried out online during learning and teaching process. This further strengthens the mutual relationship between the process of learning, with all its involved parties (i.e., teachers, learners, courses, etc.) and one of the recent technologies in learning: Blackboard Collaborate.

In the Saudi EFL context, Mohsen and Shafeeq (2014) maintained that Blackboard-based instruction has very constructive results when applying to the teaching of EFL at Najran University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In their study, they found out that the use and application of Blackboard-based instruction helps both learners and teachers affiliated to Najran University to maintain a satisfactorily academic relationship, which in turn facilitates the whole process of teaching the English courses pertaining to the different academic levels at the department of English. This study further clarified that teacher perceive Blackboard as a well-structured and organized digital platform that helps guarantee a successful learning/teaching process.

In another study, Alzahour (2013) argued that blended learning in general and Blackboard-based learning in particular contribute academically to the improvement of the skill of reading and vocabulary building on the part of learners. This study was conducted on students and teachers affiliated to King Khalid University, KSA. The study demonstrated the effective role of applying Blackboard-based instruction at the university level. It showed also that this digital platform provides participants with many online options that prove useful in studying EFL courses, particularly reading and vocabulary.

A further study by Kashghari and Asseel (2014) at King Abdul Aziz University highlighted the positive contribution and the benefits of using Blackboard to enhance students' listening skills. Their study also emphasized that Blackboard-based instruction is more effective in improving the skill of listening than any other language skills. From a different dimension, Almaqtri (2014) pointed out that there is some sort of discrepancy between male and female students concerning the use of Blackboard-based learning. Almaqtri maintained that applying such a digital platform of learning perceived more positive attitudes on the part of the female students than those expressed by their male counterparts. The study further revealed that there are some challenges encounter students when they use Blackboard-based learning. Some of these problems are related to technical reasons, while others are due to some cultural, academic and even economic ones.

2. Method

2.1. Design

The design of this study comprises a precise choice of one digital platform that provides online learning/teaching during COVID-19 pandemic, namely, Blackboard Collaborate. Five Saudi universities were selected to be the field of the study. These are: (i) Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, (ii) Shaqra University, (iii) King Faisal University, (iv) Qassim University, and (v) King Khalid University. The choice of these universities among other Saudi universities is due to the availability of delivering and circulating the questionnaires among the participants, either teachers or students, as well as the acceptance of participants to hold individual interviews with them, which are conducted electronically and by personal phone contacts.

2.2. Research Instruments

This paper drew on both quantitative and qualitative methods. Therefore, two research instruments were adopted here. The first is electronic questionnaires; two electronic questionnaires were designed, one for teachers and one for students. These questionnaires were intentionally directed only to the selected universities. The second instrument was interviews. A number of interviews were conducted only with teachers affiliated to the five selected universities. Each participant was interviewed individually. Significantly, the application of the quantitative and the qualitative methods enabled the researchers to

arrive at tangible results and meticulous understanding of the extent to which participants perceive Blackboard applications during COVID-19 crisis.

2.3. Participants

To report comprehensive results on the perception of Blackboard-based instruction by EFL students/teachers in Saudi universities, the researchers find it necessary for the study not to be confined to teachers or students. However, involving both parties to participate in the study is anticipated to come out with more wide-ranging results than is the case with only one type of participants. Consequently, with regard to students' questionnaire, 311 students from the five universities responded to the questionnaire statements. Some of them are male students, others are females. All of them are Saudi that are majoring English, and come from different academic levels (i.e., from 1-8 levels). Participants were assigned to complete their seven-week academic year study by means of the Blackboard Collaborate-based instruction because of the emergent situations enforced by COVID-19 pandemic. Table I displays the description and distribution of student participants.

Table 1. Data of respondent students

University	Gender	No. of participants	Academic Level	Total
Prince Sattam Bin Abdelaziz University	male	23	3 to 8	68
	female	45	2 to 8	
Shaqra University	male	31	1 to 8	50
	female	19	6 to 8	
King Faisal University	male	47	2, 4 to 8	71
	female	24	6 to 8	
Qassim University	male	42	3 to 8	65
	female	23	1 to 8	
King Khalid University	male	33	6 to 8	57
	female	24	5 to 8	
(5) universities	(176) male participants		(135) female participants	311

As indicated from Table I, the total number of student participants is 311; among them are 176 male participants and 135 female participants. Both male and female participants are from different academic levels, ranging from level 1 to level 8.

The second group of participants constitutes 29 teachers affiliated to the selected universities; 6 out of the 29 participants were females and the rest were males. Data description of respondent teachers is demonstrated in Tables 2a-2c.

Table 2a. Data of respondent teachers: University, gender and education

University	No.	Gender	No.	Education	No.
Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University	9	male	7	PhD	3
		female	2	MA	6
Shaqra University	5	male	4	PhD	3
		female	1	MA	2
King Faisal University	7	male	5	PhD	6
		female	2	MA	1
Qassim University	5	male	4	PhD	4
		female	1	MA	1
King Khalid University	3	male	3	PhD	2
		female	0	MA	1

Table 2b. Data of respondent teachers: Academic position, experiences and courses taught

Academic Position	No	Teaching Experiences	No	No. of Courses Taught via Blackboard	No
Lecturer	11	1-3 year	6	6	11
Assistant Professor	13	3-5 years	13	5	13
Associate Professor	3	5-10 years	7	4	3
Professor	2	More than 10 years	3	4	2

Table 2c. Data of respondent teachers: Nationality

Nationality	No.
Egypt	9
Saudi Arabia	5
Sudan	4
Jordan	3
Yemen	3
Pakistan	2
Tunisia	2
India	1

Tables 2a, 2b and 2c show the detailed data description of the respondent teachers in the current study. As demonstrated from the above tables, the participants came from different cultures and nationalities, held various academic positions, and enjoyed a variety of teaching experiences. All of them utilized Blackboard Collaborate-based instruction to teach various courses at the departments of English during COVID-19 pandemic.

Participants were asked to complete two different electronic questionnaires, whereas the second group (teachers) is dedicated also to conduct an oral interview with the researchers. The interviews took place during second semester of the Academic Year 2019-2020, particularly in April, 2020. The main theme of both questionnaires and the interviews was the perception of Blackboard Collaborate-based instruction by EFL students/teachers in the selected universities. The interviews revolved around 6 main questions as follows:

1. How can you evaluate the use of Blackboard-based instruction during COVID-19 crisis?
2. What are the benefits of using Blackboard Collaborate in teaching your courses?
3. What are the challenges you encounter in the process of teaching via Blackboard Collaborate?
4. How can you evaluate the performance of your students before and after the application of Blackboard-based instruction?
5. Did you use Blackboard Collaborate in teaching EFL courses before COVID-19?
6. Do you have the desire to continue using Blackboard Collaborate in teaching when COVID-19 crisis ends?

2.4. Data Collection and Procedures

As alluded earlier, data in this study were collected in two ways: questionnaires and interviews. Both instruments were electronically-based due to COVID-19 precautionary measures that banned face-to-face interaction. One of the questionnaires was designed for students and the other was assigned to teachers. The interviews were confined to teachers.

The procedures adopted for data analysis comprised four phases: designation, delivery and distribution, gathering results, analyzing results and discussion. The designation stage was concerned with writing down the statements of the teachers' and students' questionnaires, as well as determining the questions

intended to be asked in the teachers' interviews. In the delivery and distribution stage, to guarantee the participation of only EFL students and EFL teachers in the selected universities, the questionnaires were sent electronically via e-mails to some colleagues affiliated to the selected five universities. They were kindly asked to circulate them among their students (students' questionnaire) and colleagues who are teaching English courses in the departments of English at these universities (teachers' questionnaire). The circularity process was basically conducted via WhatsApp groups that were activated during COVID-19 pandemic to guarantee fast teachers-to-students and teachers-to-teachers communication. As for teachers' interviews, they were accomplished by personal phone contacts, during which notes and remarks were written down in order to be used in data analysis. In the third stage, results were gathered to start the last procedural stage, which was dedicated to analyzing the collected results, offering discussion, and highlighting some pedagogical implications.

3. Results

This part exhibits the results obtained from the two questionnaires and the teachers' interview concerning the teachers' and students' perception of the impact of Blackboard-based instruction during COVID-19 crises in the five universities under investigation.

3.1. Teachers' Questionnaires

The teachers' questionnaire displays the results indicated in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Teachers' perception of BCI on EFL teaching

No.	Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	M
		Percent %					
1	I did not use blackboard in teaching before COVID-19 crisis.	25	53.1	6.3	12.5	3.1	3.84
2	I know how to use blackboard in teaching.	18.8	26.5	18.8	22	13	4.12
3	COVID-19 enforces me to use blackboard in teaching.	15.6	56.3	3.1	19	6	4.84
4	I do not have enough technological experience to use blackboard.	21.9	59.4	15.1	3.6	0	4.00
5	I have the intention to continue using blackboard after COVID-19 ends.	9.4	71.9	9.4	9.4	0	3.81
6	There is no enough credibility in the evaluation process.	12.5	78.1	9.4	0	0	4.03
7	Blackboard-based instruction allows me to communicate easily with my students during COVID-19 pandemic	14.5	54.2	30.3	1	0	3.84
8	I managed to cover all courses syllabi in the allocated time by using blackboard.	3.1	24.5	43.8	4.2	28.1	3.00
9	I face some technical problems while using blackboard.	3.12	35.5	14.5	6.3	4.6	2.9
10	I can solve any problems that encounter me during teaching via blackboard.	21.5	9.37	4.6	12.5	15.6	2.75
11	Blackboard-based instruction fulfils the role played by face-to-face traditional teaching.	6.2	68.7	21.8	3.2	0	3.77
12	Blackboard-instruction enables me to better assess my students' performance.	4.1	36.5	49	10.4	0	3.33
13	I always apply technology to my teaching.	11.5	35.4	34.4	12.5	6.3	3.43
14	I can manage all types of courses I teach via blackboard	12.6	4.4	18.7	27	1.1	3.73
15	Some courses are difficult to be delivered via blackboard, and need face-to-face teaching	9.3	50	34.4	6.3	0	3.62

Note: SA (Strongly agree)- A (Agree)- N (Neutral)- D (Disagree)- SD (Strongly disagree)- M (Mean)

Table 3 demonstrates positive attitude towards the use of blackboard-based instruction during the crisis of COVID-19. The respondents show very high attitudinal propensity in only one statement (No. 3);

that is, they are enforced to use and apply blackboard collaborate instruction to their classes during COVID-19 pandemic. High attitudes are also registered in statements No. 2, 5, 6, 7, 11, 13, 14, 15. These statements, as indicated in table V, measure teachers’ perception concerning their ability to use blackboard-based instruction to teach all their courses, to assess their students, and to acknowledge that the blackboard-based instruction fulfils in part the role played by the traditional way of teaching (i.e., face-to-face instruction). Further, teachers express their agreement that they do not use the blackboard-based instruction before the COVID-19 pandemic (Statement No. 1), that they suffer technological experience in dealing with blackboard-based instruction (Statement No. 4), and that they find some sort of difficulty in terms of delivering specific courses via BCI (Statement No. 15). The teachers’ questionnaire further shows moderate mean concerning statements 9 and 10, wherein they express their agreement that they encounter some technical problems, but they have the ability to solve these problems during the process of teaching via BCI.

3.2. Students’ Questionnaire

The students’ questionnaire displays the results indicated in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Students’ perception of BCI on EFL learning

No	Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	M
		Percent %					
1	I know how to use blackboard platform to attend my courses amid COVID-19 crisis.	12.5	34.4	34.4	12.5	6.3	3.43
2	I find no difficulty in accessing blackboard.	6.3	50	34.3	3.2	6.2	3.46
3	I used to apply technology in learning before COVID-19.	18.6	40.75	37.5	3.1	0	3.75
4	It is easy to communicate with my teachers via blackboard.	12.5	71.9	9.4	3.1	3.1	3.8
5	Blackboard helps me overcome my fears concerning COVID-19 pandemic.	3.1	37.5	50	9.4	0	3.34
6	Courses are delivered flexibly during COVID-19 via blackboard.	9.4	50	34.4	6.3	0	3.62
7	I overcome the problem of time and place by using blackboard.	6.3	50	34.4	3.1	6.3	3.46
8	I can access blackboard system anytime and anywhere amid COVID-19.	12.5	34.4	34.4	12.5	6.3	3.43
9	I can easily do my assignment, download it and receive a feedback from my teachers via blackboard.	3.12	37.5	12.5	4.6	6.3	2.9
10	The time allocated for online tests is insufficient.	15.6	65.2	3.2	25	0	4.84
11	I can overcome technical problems encounter me while using blackboard.	9.4	71.9	9.4	9.4	0	3.81
12	Blackboard-based instruction enhances my understanding as it enables me to listen to the same lesson more than one time.	18.7	62.6	18.8	0	0	4.12
13	Blackboard helps me overcome my shyness when I participate with my teachers in discussions.	21.8	59.5	15.6	3.1	0	4.00
14	Using blackboard in teaching allows me the opportunity to experience new trends in learning.	15.6	53.1	31.3	0	0	3.84
15	Blackboard fosters my e-learning experiences.	9.37	21.5	15.6	4.6	12.4	2.75

As indicated from Table 4, the students’ questionnaire reflects positive tendency towards the use and application of the BCI amid COVID-19 pandemic. The highest mean is shown in statement No. 10, wherein students express their contention that teachers continue using BCI in the process of teaching. Students also express positive attitude towards the use of BCI because it enables them to listen to the same lecture more than one time and, therefore, increases the understanding and the positive perception of the presented ideas in the course (statement No. 12). They further maintain that BCI helps them

overcome their shyness which they often encounter in face-to-face instruction (Statement No. 13). The above table also demonstrates that students have positive tendency towards the ability to use blackboard collaborate system, to solve any technical problems they may face, and to communicate easily with their teachers during teaching and learning processes.

3.3. Teachers' Interview

Results obtained from the teachers' interview exhibit a number of facts in terms of the use and application of BCI amid COVID-19 pandemic. These are reflected in Table 5.

Table 5. Teachers' response to the interview

	Interview question	Positive attitude	Neutral	Negative attitude	Total
1	How can you evaluate the use of Blackboard-based instruction during COVID-19 crisis?	23	2	4	29
2	What are the advantages and/or disadvantages of using Blackboard Collaborate in teaching your courses?	26	0	3	29
3	What are the challenges you encounter in the process of teaching via Blackboard Collaborate?	17	0	12	29
4	How can you evaluate the performance of your students before and after the application of Blackboard-based instruction?	19	3	7	29
5	Did you use Blackboard Collaborate in teaching EFL courses before COVID-19?	14	7	8	29
6	Do you have the desire to continue using Blackboard Collaborate in teaching after COVID-19 crisis ends?	26	0	3	29

Table 5 displays the results of the teachers' interview that show a positive attitude towards the use of BCI during COVID-19 crisis. In terms of question No. 1, the interviewees emphasize that using BCI amid COVID-19 is completely useful and relevant to continue the process of teaching and learning, as well as to meet the emergent crisis of the pandemic. They stress the crucial role of modern technologies in learning which guarantees a safe and continuous process of learning in a time when face-to-face instruction was totally banned. Regarding question No. 2, the majority of teachers acknowledge that BCI has many advantages as it facilitates an easy teaching and learning process with all its components, including courses delivery, examinations, discussions, and participation. In question No. 3, some teachers confirm that they face some problems when they come to apply BCI. However, they maintain that they managed to solve them without any technical, administrative or academic assistance. Other teachers have emphasized that they face some difficulties in using and applying BCI that need some sort of assistance from a third party, particularly the technical one. As for question No. 4, teachers express their satisfaction concerning their students' performance during the crisis; however, they accentuate their fear that there is no credibility in examinations on the part of students. Concerning question No. 5, 14 teachers state that they use BCI before COVID-19, arguing that the application of this technology helps them develop their teaching methods by introducing them to new trends in learning. 8 teachers, on the other hand, acknowledge that they did not use BCI before COVID-19, and 7 participants expressed neutrality concerning the same question. With regard to question No. 6, the majority of teachers (26 out of 29) express their desire to continue using BCI in teaching after COVID-19. This generally reflects the positive attitudinal perception of the use and application of BCI in learning and teaching process amid COVID-19 crisis.

4. Discussion

Based on the above results, the BCI, being one manifestation of e-learning, provides an educational interactive environment that serves to attract both students and teachers, and to create an effective teaching-learning environment. During COVID-19 crisis, BCI proves useful in offering a rich learning atmosphere that serves all aspects of the educational process and modelling education. This type of e-learning allows the exchange, transmission and classification of ideas beyond the limits of place and time. BCI also serves to facilitate a collaborative and flexible channel of teaching and learning. Such a collaborative context has previously been emphasized by studies that highlighted the effective contribution of BCI in activating and fostering a collaboratively educational atmosphere among participants (Blake, 2005; Malikowski, Thompson & Theis, 2007; Alelaiwi & Hossain, 2015).

Results further indicate a positive pedagogical perception of BCI on the part of EFL teachers. The majority of respondent teachers perceive Blackboard instruction, within Saudi EFL context, as a structured e-learning platform that serves to improve the relationship between teachers and students, as well as to facilitate the continuation of the process of teaching and learning amid the pandemic. This positive perception reflects a successful experiment in e-learning and predicts a complete shift towards a comprehensive digital learning in the near future. This seems to chime with Hauck and Stickler (2006) and Comas-Quinn (2011), who accentuated that the instructors' technological and pedagogical understandings in e-learning functions to implement a well-structured web-based teaching/learning activities.

Additionally, many respondent students emphasized that BCI improves their language and communicative competencies. The complete dependence on e-learning via Blackboard helps them improve their linguistic skills, particularly listening and speaking. Blackboard instruction allows them much time to access information, which in turn serves to develop their exposure to language via group conferencing and chatting that also proves useful in developing their communicative English.

The positive perception of teachers towards the use of BCI indicates the importance of integrating and applying modern technologies in teaching and learning process. This correlates with Mathew and Alidmat (2013) and also tallies with Mohsen and Shafeeq (2014), in the sense that both studies emphasized the effective role BCI play in teaching and learning process, which foregrounds for a total dependence on digital platforms as educational channels. The positive attitude of both teachers and students towards BCI reflects a possible continuation of the application of this computer-based instruction even after the end of COVID-19. It also predicts a revolutionary change in the system of education, not only within the Saudi EFL context, but also universally. Such an educational shift is anticipated to end various traditional aspects, particularly the geographically-based distribution of students' enrolment.

Furthermore, students' perception of the statements surveyed in the questionnaire reflects a positive attitude towards the use of BCI during COVID-19 crisis. Students perceive the use of BCI as a tool that fosters an independent learning process. This goes in conformity with both Larsen's (2012) and Demirer and Sahin's (2013) argument that e-learning via Blackboard Collaborate facilitates the concept of learning independence and helps students overcome their shyness during the process of learning. Students' positive attitude of BCI accentuates the existence of an interactive environment with their teachers during the pandemic, which also reconciles with Banditvilai's (2016) contention that e-learning serves to guarantee a healthy educational context on the part of students.

As for the challenges encountered by teachers and students when they use BCI amid COVID-19, they are represented in two things: technological problems and credibility in online examinations. In terms of the challenges pertaining to technology, the majority of the participants acknowledged that these

problems manifest themselves in the internet connection services, the quality of sound during virtual sessions, the inability of accessing material and/or participating in discussion, particularly on the part of students, absence of sound on the part of teachers, discontinuous session access, and students' inability to join the session in time. Concerning credibility of online tests, teachers expressed their fears that students' evaluation process lacks the credibility found in face-to-face instruction. Also, students reported their dissatisfaction with regard to the limited time allowed for the test, as well as their incapability to resume the test when their internet connection is weak or shuts down. Despite the fact that the results of the current study pertaining to the challenges of online tests contradict with the results approached by Hamad (2017) and Albataineh, Banikalef and Albashtaw (2019), who postulated that students favour online tests for the quick process of tests' corrections and the fast way they receive their grades in the different courses. A part of these results also correlates with Ja'ashan (2020), who emphasized the insufficiency of time allocated for online tests delivered by means of BCI.

Significantly, it is analytically clarified from the teachers'/students' questionnaires and the teachers' interview that the majority of participants perceive the BCI as a method that serves to enhance the self-learning process, to improve confidence on the part of the students, and to motivate students' participation. The BCI then can be said to contribute effectively to the process of learning and teaching in the Saudi EFL context amid COVID-19. The BCI opens new insights into the application of emerging technologies in learning and teaching, which in turn serves to support interactive communication between teachers and students and among students themselves.

5. Conclusion

This study explored EFL teachers'/learners' perception of Blackboard Collaborate-based Instruction (BCI) in some Saudi universities amid COVID-19 pandemic. The study revealed that both teachers and students have shown positive attitudes towards the use and application of BCI to teaching and learning English language. It is analytically evidenced through the teachers' and students' questionnaires as well as teachers' interview that participants find it useful and relevant to integrate modern technology into the teaching and learning process during COVID-19 pandemic. The majority of the participants have also endorsed the view that BCI reinforces an interactive learning and teaching environment, by providing a reciprocal interactive relationship between teachers and students regardless of time and place. The respondents of the interview emphasized the benefits of BCI in managing the teaching-learning process amid COVID-19. The analysis further clarified that very few challenges face participants when they come to use BCI. These problems manifest themselves in technical factors, lack of training and lack of credibility in examinations. However, the general attitudinal perception reflects a positive proclivity of both teachers and learners towards not only the use of BCI amid COVID-19, but also a strong inclination towards the application and integration of the same digital instruction after the crisis.

The study recommends further research to answer the following questions: first, does a comparative study of the expected learning outcomes between face-to-face instruction and BCI reveal further results in the context of integrating modern technologies in learning? Second, are there any discrepancies in the expected learning outcomes when applying to the English courses with their different academic natures? Approaching these questions further could reveal similar and/or different results than those discussed in this paper.

6. Ethics Committee Approval

The author(s) confirm(s) that the study does not need ethics committee approval according to the research integrity rules in their country (Date of Confirmation: 22.01.2021).

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COVID-19 ortasında EFL ana dalları / öğretmenleri tarafından karatahta işbirliğine dayalı öğretim algısı: Suudi üniversiteleri hakkında bir vaka çalışması

Öz

Bu makale, COVID-19 salgını krizi sırasında Suudi EFL uzmanları ve öğretmenleri tarafından Blackboard Collaborate-based Instruction (BCI) kullanma algısını araştırmaktadır. Makalenin ana amacı, modern teknolojilerin Suudi üniversitelerinde İngilizce öğretme ve öğrenme sürecine ne ölçüde katkıda bulunduğunu keşfetmektir. Bu, farklı üniversite derslerinin öğretildiği dijital bir platform olarak Blackboard Collaborate'i kullanmanın faydalarını ve zorluklarını araştırarak gerçekleştirilir. Bu nedenle çalışma, Suudi üniversitelerinde İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenme ve öğretme pedagojisine en son teknolojileri dahil etmenin fırsatlarına ve zorluklarına ışık tutarak bilgisayar temelli bir öğretimin rolünü vurgulamayı amaçlıyor. Veri toplamak için iki metodolojik araç kullanılır: birincisi, hem öğrencilerin hem de öğretmenlerin Blackboard'un öğrenme / öğretme sürecinde kullanımına yönelik tutumlarını test etmek için elektronik anketlerdir; ikincisi, çeşitli üniversite derslerini öğretmek için dijital bir platform olarak Blackboard'un kullanımıyla ilgili olarak 5 farklı Suudi üniversitesine bağlı 29 personel ile yapılan bir röportajdır. Sonuçlar, bazı teknik ve akademik nedenlere atfedilen COVID-19'un ortasında Blackboard Collaborate aracılığıyla öğrenme ve öğretme sürecini yönetmede hem öğrenciler hem de öğretmenlerle karşılaşan zorluklara rağmen, bu dijital platformun daha iyi öğrenme çıktıları için yararlı ve elverişli olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. katılımcıların derslerine katılarak, ders materyallerine erişerek, tartışmalara katılarak ve sınavlara oturarak hem eşzamanlı hem de eşzamansız olarak öğrenmelerini esnek bir şekilde yönetebilecekleri esnek bir öğrenme ortamı sunar.

Anahtar sözcükler: karatahta işbirliği; COVID-19; EFL öğrencileri / öğretmenleri; uzaktan Eğitim; Suudi üniversiteleri

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