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The Effectiveness of Using Blackboard in Improving the English Listening and Speaking Skills of the Female Students at the University of Hail

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Abstract

The use of Learning Management Systems (LMSs) in Saudi universities has brought about significant changes in the academic environment. Therefore, the effectiveness of these systems deserves a careful examination. The current study investigates female students' perceptions on the accessibility, usability and effectiveness of using Blackboard (Bb) in a web-enhanced listening and speaking course at the University of Hail (UoH). The study was conducted during the first semester of the academic year 2015-16. Data were collected from 37 female students at the Department of English using an attitudinal questionnaire and Semi-structured interviews in order to validate the study and elicit elaborate responses regarding the benefits of Bb, the challenges the participants' faced and the suggestions they have for change and improvement. Statistical analysis of the data revealed that students generally had positive attitudes towards using Bb particularly because they found it helpful in improving their language skills and the student-instructor communication. Still, issues such as improving student-student communication and course design on Bb need further attention.

Keywords: (Web- enhanced learning; Learning Management System; Blackboard; Listening and Speaking; University of Hail, Saudi Arabia)

INTRODUCTION

The widespread availability of the internet has encouraged many educational institutions to integrate internet based technology with face-to –face modes of education in order to optimize learning outcomes (Colis & Moonen 2001 Delialiouglu and Yildirim, 2007; Malikowski, et al., 2007; Mitchell and Honore 2007; Mohsen & Shafeeq 2014). Bonk and Graham (2006) argue that this integration is done by combining four critical dimensions: space, time, fidelity and humanness. Allen and Seaman (2005) classified courses into different types according to the proportion of content delivered online: the traditional course has 0%, the web-facilitated has 1 to 29%, the hybrid/blended has 30% to 79%, while an online course has 80% or more of the content delivered online. Indeed, significant changes have been brought about by the integration of technology in education. Roblyer (2003) identifies the increase in the amount and type of technology resources that are available to instructors and learners and the shift in learning strategies brought about by the flexibility of computer technology as most important changes. In recent years, the integration of technology in education has increasingly been achieved through the use of LMSs such as WebCT Vista, Bb and Moodle especially in higher education. LMSs were first used in higher education in the 1990s and have since become increasingly popular.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Implementation of LMSs in Education

While there are several definitions for the term, there is an agreement that, in essence, an LMS is a web-based system which allows instructors and students to access and share instructional

materials, submit and return assignments, and communicate online. LMSs are said to support and enhance flexibility, accessibility and convenience to all users as they allow management, distribution and sharing of learning contents, student tracking, assignment management, and online peer collaboration (Yacef, 2003).

Institutions worldwide are enthusiastically venturing into digital learning by launching online courses and by encouraging instructors to incorporate online material into their traditional teaching methods. A strong indication for the rapidly growing popularity of LMSs is an informed prediction that their global market, which was worth $2.55 billion in 2013, will reach over $7 billion in 2018 (Gaddu, & Kaur, 2015). The phenomenal, and at times reckless, swiftness of this adoption process of LMSs led Oblinger and Kidwell (2000) to question whether the vast number of these institutions has in fact any rationale for integrating these systems other than competitive pressure among institutions summarized in the statement: "everybody else is doing it."

A considerable body of research details the positive impact of the adoption of LMSs and technology-enabled learning in higher education. Still, the number of studies cautioning against the consequences of ill-planned uses of these systems is also growing. Supporters often cite improving and expanding access to education, reducing cost, increasing flexibility, and increasing student-instructor and student-student interaction as the most important benefits (Monsakul, 2007; Tinio, 2002). Moreover, Morris (2004), Allen and Seaman (2005) argue that LMSs help institutions properly organize content, courses, sections, faculty, students and grades.

However, a growing body of literature on the issue argues that a full realization of the potential educational benefits of these systems is not automatic. Hamish et al. (2005) warn that since online LMSs have the potential to "affect the core business of teaching and learning in unanticipated ways," the ramifications of incorporating LMSs into university educational programs must be carefully investigated and researched. Numerous studies caution against over-enthusiasm and unchecked optimism recalling similar enthusiastic reactions to the use of previous breakthroughs which did not live up to the sweeping expectations of those who were enthusiastic about them (Salaberry, M.,2001). Salaberry, argues that "a healthy dose of skepticism about the effectiveness of many current technological tools appears to be well justified." Other studies claim that enthusiasm to the use of LMSs is already dwindling and criticism is growing because of their high cost and the fact that a greater use of the administrative tools rather than the tools which encourage students' discussion, interaction and collaboration is made. Consequently, these studies call for the need "to look seriously at alternatives to the learning management system, not only to save money but also to provide a more appropriate learning environment" (Bullen, 2014).

LMSs and Learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

In the field of language teaching and learning, empirical research shows that the use of technology helps motivate EFL learners to develop strategies for successful language learning (Al Zumor, 2013; Bahrani, 2011; Beatty, 2003; Kessler, 2010; & Sanpraset, 2009). According to Greenfield (2003), the reported positive effects on learning language skills caused the use of technology in education to increase phenomenally in the last two decades. Bulut and Abuseileek (2007) maintain that Saudi EFL learners generally have positive attitude towards technology integrated learning, but that their attitude is most favorable for listening skills with writing, speaking and reading skills respectively ranking lower.

On the practical side, Aborisade (2013) describes the initial phase of using Moodle VLE in teaching EFL at the University of FUTA as "the blind [i.e. the instructors] leading the blind [i.e. the students]." Aborisade, therefore, labels the decision as "ad hoc" maintaining that the best instructors could venture in such a situation is "experiment and hope things would work." It took five years for the "experimentation" to pay off as faculty members were eventually able to overcome some of the technical and academic challenges they have initially encountered.

To sum up, it is possible to say that LMSs can be of great benefit to educators and students in the field of EFL provided that: (a) institutions have clearly defined rationales and objectives for making use of these systems, and (b) LMSs are appropriately managed. The appropriate management of LMSs necessitates belief in, commitment to and continuous assessment of and improvement to the use of these systems as well as adequate technical and pedagogical training to all those involved in this fast-moving field.

E-learning in Saudi Arabia

In The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), e-learning has come a long way since 1993, the year King Fahad University became the first Saudi institution to connect to the internet. To promote e-learning in the country, the Saudi government established a well-funded National Center for e-learning and Distance Learning (NCeDL) in Riyadh in the year 2005. Entrusted with the job of helping Saudi universities switch to a system of e-learning, the NceDL describes its mission not only as "'an added value' to facilitate and accelerate traditional education," but as "an evolving environment integrated with various elements of the educational process, in order to be enriched from within." The NceDL seeks to achieve this goal by organizing the change, launching relevant projects and preparing the e-learning material. Of the NceDL numerous projects, the inauguration of the Saudi Digital Library (SDL), currently holding 310 thousand e-books, in 2010 is often considered the most significant.

In 2008, the Saudi government called for a national plan to adopt information technology across the country in order to implement e-learning in higher education and to "empower people through creative e-learning in lifelong education" (Al-Asmari & Khan, 2014). Consequently, most Saudi universities launched their own e-learning deanships and signed cooperation agreements with leading international institutions and providers of e-learning logistic services. In addition, the Saudi Electronic University was launched in 2011 to become the only specialized university in distant learning in KSA that offers undergraduate and graduate degree programs.

A number of key factors have made the introduction of e-learning in KSA an urgent need: first is the massive population growth, especially with more than half the population under the age of 20 which has led enrollment, in institutions of higher education to rise from 432,000 in 2001 to 604,000 in 2005 and to reach approximately 1.5 million in 2014 (Habibi, 2015). This rapid increase caused over-crowdedness in institutions of higher education, on the one hand, and denial of admission to a growing number of students, on the other. Combined, these two reasons have made the capacity growth rate of existing Saudi universities inadequate to meet current growth rate in enrollment demand (Clark, 2014; Ali, et al.). Second, there is a shortage of faculty members (especially females as education in KSA is completely segregated) in both quantity and quality (Ali et al; Al-Asmari & Khan 2014). Third, there is a need to be cost effective in order to deal with the rising cost of higher education (at US$56 billion, the overall 2014 budget for higher education is among the highest in the world and the largest line item on the national budget (Clark, 2014)). Fourth, the vast distance between cities where

universities are located and suburban villages makes accessibility of on-campus education difficult, particularly to female students.

A viable and inevitable e-Learning system (Al-Shehri, 2010) is perceived as an excellent cost-effective solution to these problems. Currently, and through coordination with NceDL, most Saudi universities are integrating e-learning modes into their curricula either to offer fully online, blended or simply web-enhanced courses. This is often achieved through the use of comprehensive LMSs, and in most cases the LMS of choice in KSA universities is Bb.

Implementation of Bb in EFL in Saudi Arabia

Bb is a Web-based LMS with many types of tools and features which provide support to both fully online as well as technology enhanced traditional courses. To stay competitive, institutions of higher education invest considerable amount of money, time, and resources into Bb (Halawi & McCarthy, 2008). Bb allows faculty to post course material, communicate with students synchronously and asynchronously, assess students, set up group discussions, and post students' grades. Arguably, the ubiquity, easiness, and accessibility of this system have made it one of the most popular marketable LMSs adopted in higher education institutions (Mohsen & Shfeeq, 2014). Indeed, Bb has dominated the higher education LMS market since 2002 and it continues to have a greater market share than any other LMS company today.

Among the important and often cited benefits for Bb in education are: cost efficiency, extension of the boundaries of the physical classroom, increase of staff productivity, improvement in two-way interactions, accommodation of multiple learning styles, and incorporation of technology (Heirdsfield, et al., 2011). Other potential benefits include increased availability, quick feedback, tracking, and building skills such as organization, time management and communication (Bradford et al., 2006-2007).

In the field of EFL, Kashghari & Asseel, (2014) reported that the adoption of a Blended Learning model via Bb to teach EFL communication skills at King Abdulaziz University in Saudi Arabia has been effective in improving students' language skills especially listening. The findings of Al-Jabry et al. (2014) show that students were generally satisfied with a literature course delivered via Bb at King Khalid University as it increased accessibility and flexibility. Another study by Mohsen & Shafeeq (2014) indicates that EFL teachers at various Saudi universities have positive pedagogical perceptions towards the integration of technology into language courses primarily because it increases students' motivation to learn and helps improve the teacher-student relationship. The findings of a study by Fageeh & Mekheimer (2013) on the use of Bb show that students had positive attitudes towards using the system to improve their writing and critical thinking skills. The study also pointed out that students with longer experiences with the system had stronger positive attitudes towards the experience than those with relatively shorter exposure.

The difficulty of learning how to use LMSs such as Bb (Al-Jabry, et al., 2014; Bradford, et al, 2006-2007) as well as teachers' inadequate technical experience, time and motivation (Heirdsfield, et al., 2011) have been identified as key limitations. Aborisade (2013) adds that poor technology infrastructure, inadequate facilities, large student enrollments exert great pressure even on the most willing students and staff.

THE STUDY

The Setting/Context

This study was conducted on the female campus of the UoH during the first semester of the academic year 2015-6. UoH is one of 25 government universities in the KSA located in Hail, a city in the northwest of the country. Established in the year 2005, the university currently has more than 30 thousand students. Due to cultural and religious considerations, male and female students are taught in totally separate campuses by male and female staff members respectively. Instructors on both campuses are expected to strictly adhere to the course descriptions approved by the university and to use the textbooks and educational material specified in these descriptions.

The decision of UoH to adopt the use of Bb fits in with a worldwide interest to move away from the traditional and didactic teaching approaches towards more innovative and technically supported ways of learning. Blackboard Learn 9.1, as the LMS of choice, was adopted by UoH during the first semester of the academic year 2014/5. According to the officials of UoH, the introduction of Bb is an important step towards a complete digitization of the university.

To help faculty members and students use the system, two user- friendly guides were made available. In addition, at the beginning of the second semester of the year 2014-5, a 10-hour training program was held for all members of the Faculty of Arts including faculty members at the Department of English over the period of three days. The primary goal of this program was to familiarize instructors with the most important features of Bb and to encourage an effective utilization of the system. Students, on the other hand, received no such training.

The Course

Students majoring in English at the UoH are required to take two listening and speaking courses: Listening and Speaking1 (L&S1) and Listening and Speaking 2 (L&S2). Each of these courses is worth two credit hours, and both courses are intended for freshmen (students typically take L&S1 and L&S2 during their first and second semesters respectively). Prior to the introduction of Bb at UoH, these two courses were fully taught in a traditional face-to-face setting with instructors playing the audio material using their personal laptops or smart phones and speakers. Since the students' version of the textbook does not have a CD, students typically had no access to the audio material beyond the classroom setting. To increase students' exposure to English spoken by natives, a number of instructors supplemented the course material with audios from the internet. Few instructors reported assigning speeches, documentaries, interviews and presentations to be watched at home and then discussed in class. Some of these instructors reported positive results to this approach. However, these efforts remained individualistic, uncoordinated and unsystematic.

According to the course description of L&S2, the key objectives for the course are to:

- expose students to discussions on concrete topics presented by native speakers
- improve students' note-taking skills.
- train students to communicate on concrete topics related to social relations, current events and study matters.

The Project

(Peachey, 2013) argues that the greatest advantage of using online technology in a language course is the possibility of extending the period of learning over a far greater timescale than would be possible with face-to-face teaching. In this study, technology-enhanced learning is

defined as face-to-face teaching and learning supplemented by an online component delivered through Bb without reducing the face to-face class time. Bearing in mind the course objectives listed above, the researcher embarked on integrating an online component into the course via Bb for four specific goals:

1. extend students' exposure to English spoken by native speakers (via the audio material made available on Bb)
2. improve students' note taking skills
3. encourage student-instructor interaction via email, discussion board and blog
4. encourage student-student interaction and collaboration by creating groups and assigning weekly collaborative assignments

To achieve these goals, the supplementary course material (including the audios and videos) was sectioned into weekly modules and incrementally made available to students through Bb. Students were alerted to the presence of new material and assignments via the announcement tool.

The class met face-to-face for two hours once a week in a computer lab with internet connection. Only one student reported an earlier use of Bb and for the sole purpose of accessing the course material. Therefore, during the first meeting, students were introduced to the features of Bb which were to be used: announcements, blogs, discussion groups, file sharing, email as well as how to access course material from content area. Students were encouraged to check their Bb regularly (at least every Monday and Wednesday). At the beginning of the early face-to-face meetings, the instructor allowed a few minutes to the discussion of problems students faced while using Bb.

At the time of research, UoH faculty members were only expected to use Bb as an enhancement and supplement to face-to-face classes, and no online replacement of class time was allowed. Therefore, the researcher opted to conduct two 2-hour synchronous sessions with each section in addition to, and not in replacement of, any of the face-to-face classes. The primary goal of these sessions was to expose students to the synchronous mode and explore their opinions on the benefits and pitfalls of this mode of learning.

The total of 14 interactive assignments was designed for the course. With the exception of oral presentations, all assignments were done using Bb. On average, students were expected to spend two hours a week on Bb: an hour for the speaking-related activities and another for the listening assignments. However, students were encouraged to listen to the audios and watch the visuals for as many times as they thought it necessary. The instructor randomly assigned students to groups on Bb. While most listening assignments were designed to be performed individually, the speaking assignments required collaboration via the blog tool and/or the discussion board. For example, following a class discussion on presentation skills, students were asked to watch two specified presentations on You Tube and to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses by responding to a set of questions using the discussion board. In another assignment, students were asked to post the topics they intended to work on along with brief summaries of the main points using the blog tool and to comment on each others' entries in terms of relevance originality, researchability and feasibility. To keep track of the time they spent on Bb, they were required to fill out log sheets on a weekly basis. These log sheets were collected two weeks before final exams and data was analyzed. It was found that on average, students spent 2 hours 7 minutes per week using Bb.

METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

The five pillars established by Lorenzo & Moore (2002) to assess online, blended and technology-enhanced learning are: learning effectiveness, student satisfaction, access, faculty satisfaction and cost effectiveness. This study investigates the first three of these aspects from students' perception. The research questions this study attempts to address are:

1. How accessible and usable (degree of ease of use and learnability) is Bb?
2. How effective is Bb in learning language skills, especially listening and speaking?
3. To what extent does the use of Bb help student-student and student-instructor communication?
4. What attitude do students have towards using Bb?
5. What suggestions do students have for the improvement of delivery and implementation of a course which utilizes Bb?

Research Participants

The participants in this study were 37 undergraduate female students majoring in English and enrolled in the two sections of L&S2 course during the first semester of the academic year 2015-16. Both sections were taught by the researcher in a computer lab with internet connection. The students' age ranged between 19 and 27. Of the 37 participants, 34 were Saudi and 3 were citizens of other Arab countries and all had completed a one-year preparatory program at UoH which focuses on Math and English as well as courses intended for the first level in the study plan of the English Department; all had smart phones; and 76% had desk/laptops.

Research Instruments and Data Collection

The research instruments included a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The questionnaire consisted of four sections and was delivered to the students by hand two weeks prior to final exams. The first section collected data related to the students' accessibility to the internet and usability of Bb. The second section explored the students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the integration of technology in improving their language and study skills, while the third section explored their opinion on the system's effectiveness in enhancing student-student and student-teacher communication. The last section investigated students' attitudes towards the integration of Bb. Likert's five-scale of extremity was employed to indicate the degree of acceptance with 5 for strongly agree unto 1 for strongly disagree.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted right after the questionnaire was completed in order to elicit more informative answers concerning the benefits students have gained from using Bb and the challenges they have faced. In addition, students were asked for their suggestions for improvement. Of the 37participants, 16 expressed willingness to, and did, participate in the semi-formal interviews.

Data Analysis

Data gathered from questionnaire items were analyzed using Minitab 17 and Item Analysis method. In order to increase the readability of the mean scores, the following score category breakdown was adopted:

Means	Corresponding level
1.0-1.80	Very low
1.81-2.60	Low
2.61-3.40	Moderate
3.41-4.20	High
4.21-5.0	Very High

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

Questionnaire

The results are presented according to the questions of the study in Tables 1 through 5.2.

Accessibility and Usability of Bb

The first section of the questionnaire had ten (five positive and 5 negative) items and was concerned with the research question "How accessible and usable do students find Bb to be?" Table 1.1 below reports the descriptive statistics for the positive points, while Table 1.2 summarizes the statistics for the negative points.

Table 1.1 Accessibility and Usability of Bb (Positive statements)

	Statement	SA		A		N		D		SD		Mean	STDEV
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
1	I was able to use Bb with ease	11	29.7	16	43.2	6	16.2	2	5.4	2	5.4	3.86	1.08
2	I always have access to an internet-connected computer	11	29.7	20	54.1	5	13.5	1	2.7	0	0	4.11	0.74
3	Course material was well organized on Bb	3	8.1	6	16.2	11	29.7	11	29.7	6	16.2	2.7	1.18
4	The training I received on how to use Bb was adequate	14	37.8	12	32.4	8	21.6	1	2.7	2	5.4	3.95	1.1
5	I was able to participate in synchronous activities with ease	8	21.6	12	32.4	5	13.5	7	18.9	5	13.5	3.3	1.37

Table 1.2. Accessibility and Usability of Bb (Negative statements)

	Statement	SA		A		N		D		SD		Mean	STDEV
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
1	More internet-connected computer labs are needed on campus	4	10.8	7	18.9	13	35.1	9	24.3	4	10.8	2.95	1.15
2	Further training on how to use Bb would have helped me benefit more from Bb	2	5.4	5	13.5	7	18.9	9	24.3	14	37.8	2.24	1.26
3	participation in synchronous activities was difficult due to time constrains	3	8.1	4	10.8	5	13.5	13	35.14	12	32.43	2.27	1.26
4	Technical aspects of Bb discouraged me from using it more frequently	5	13.51	4	10.81	6	16.22	10	27.03	12	32.43	2.46	1.41
5	I had to seek further help on how to use of Bb	3	8.11	2	5.41	3	8.11	12	32.43	17	45.95	1.97	1.24

Table 1.1 shows that access to an internet-connected computer rated the highest (M = 4.11) followed by satisfaction with the Bb training (M = 3.95) and students' perception of the degree of ease of using Bb (M = 3.86). The means for these three areas were unequivocally high. Students' perceptions of the level of ease of participating in synchronous activities (M = 3.3), and the organization of course material on Bb (M = 2.7) were moderate. On the other hand, the means for all the negative statements in Table 1.2, with the exception of statement 1 related to the need for more internet-connected computer labs (M =2.95), fall in the low category.

Together, Table 1.1 and 1.2 show that, in general, students found Bb easy to use and conveniently accessible. However, the moderate rates for the degree of ease with which they were able to participate in synchronous sessions, the organization of course material on Bb and the need for more on-campus computer labs show that these areas need serious consideration and significant improvement.

Bb and Language Skills

Table 2 below shows students' perceptions of the effectiveness of Bb in improving their language skills listed in descending order.

Table 2. Effectiveness of Bb in improving language skills

		Statement	SA		A		N		D		SD		Mean	STDEV
			N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
1	Q1	Pronunciation	12	32.43	13	35.14	7	18.92	3	8.11	2	5.41	3.81	1.15
2	Q2	Listening	10	27.03	14	37.84	8	21.62	3	8.11	2	5.41	3.73	1.12
3	Q3	Speaking	13	35.14	9	24.32	8	21.62	5	13.51	2	5.41	3.7	1.24
4	Q4	Reading	9	24.32	9	24.32	12	32.43	6	16.22	1	2.7	3.51	1.12
5	Q5	Vocabulary	10	27.03	9	24.32	8	21.62	7	18.92	3	8.11	3.43	1.3
6	Q6	Note taking	4	10.81	4	10.81	13	35.14	8	21.62	8	21.62	2.68	1.25
7	Q7	Writing	3	8.11	5	13.51	11	29.73	12	32.43	6	16.22	2.65	1.16

Table 2 above shows that students believed Bb to be most beneficial in helping them improve their pronunciation, listening and speaking skills (M = 3.81, 3.73 and 3.7 respectively).This order reflects the primary learning objectives for the course: to improve students' listening and speaking skills. The means for reading and vocabulary (3.51 and 3.43 respectively) also rated high, while students rated improvement in note taking and writing as moderate (2.68 and 2.65 respectively).

Effectiveness of Bb in improving student-student and student-instructor interaction

Table 3 below summarizes the participants' responses to statements concerned with the impact of Bb on improving student-instructor and student-student communication.

	Statement	SA		A		N		D		SD		Mean	STDEV
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
1	Bb helped me better communicate with my instructor	12	32.43	9	24.32	8	21.62	6	16.22	2	5.41	3.62	1.26
2	Bb helped me better communicate with my classmates	7	18.92	8	21.62	8	21.62	10	27.03	4	10.81	3.11	1.31
3	I found my instructor's feedback on my posts beneficial	12	32.43	9	24.32	10	27.03	3	8.11	3	8.11	3.65	1.25
4	I found my classmate's feedback on my posts beneficial	4	10.81	8	21.62	12	32.43	10	27.03	3	8.11	3	1.13
5	I benefited from reading material posted by other students	3	8.11	6	16.22	12	32.43	6	16.22	10	27.03	2.54	1.49
6	Responding to other students' posts improved my critical thinking	2	5.41	7	18.92	10	27.03	9	24.32	12	32.43	2.30	1.31

An important objective for the integration of Bb was to promote student-instructor communication on the one hand and student-student communication, on the other. Table 3 shows that students found the instructor's feedback on their Bb posts highly beneficial (M = 3.65) and that Bb was very effective in connecting them with their instructor (M = 3.62). On the other hand, the participants were clearly less satisfied with the student-student communication (M = 3.11) and the feedback they received from their peers (M = 3). Benefiting from reading peer's posts and from responding to these posts rated low (M = 2.54 and 2.30 respectively). A close look at the students' comments to posts made by their peers helps explain these responses: for the most part students' feedback was positive and rather brief. Quite often, students only responded with phrases such as "good topic," "nice work" and "I agree with you."

Students' attitude towards using Bb

Tables 4.1 and 4.2 present students' responses to positive and negative statements about their attitude towards Bb

Table 4.1 Students' attitude towards using Bb (positive)

		SA		A		N		D		SD		Mean	STDEV
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
1	Using Bb has made this course less stressful	8	21.62	9	24.32	8	21.62	8	21.62	4	10.81	3.24	1.32
2	Using Bb has made this course more enjoyable	11	29.73	9	24.32	7	18.92	6	16.22	4	10.81	3.46	1.37
3	Using Bb made me feel more confident to participate in class discussions	6	16.22	7	18.92	10	27.03	8	21.62	6	16.22	2.97	1.32
4	Bb should be used in all classes	13	35.14	12	32.43	7	18.92	2	5.41	3	8.11	3.81	1.22
5	Using Bb has motivated me to finish And submit my assignments on time	11	29.73	14	37.84	7	18.92	1	2.7	4	10.81	3.73	1.24

Table 4.2 Students' attitude towards using Bb (negative)

		SA		A		N		D		SD		Mean	STDEV
	Students' attitude towards using Bb (Negative)	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
1	Using Bb is a waste of time	3	8.11	5	13.51	4	10.81	12	32.43	13	35.14	2.27	1.3
2	Using Bb is boring	4	10.81	4	10.81	6	16.22	11	29.73	12	32.43	2.38	1.34
3	The challenges I faced in using Bb made it less helpful	6	16.22	7	18.92	9	24.32	8	21.62	7	18.92	2.92	1.36
4	Using Bb has made the course more frustrating	4	10.81	3	8.11	6	16.22	14	37.84	10	27.03	2.38	1.28
5	Bb did not help me improve my grades	3	8.11	5	13.51	4	10.81	12	32.43	10	27.03	2.19	1.26

Students' responses to the positive and negative statements included in Tables 4.1 and 4.2 reflect an overall positive attitude towards the integration of Bb in the course. The respondents were highly supportive of the idea of using Bb in all classes (M =3.81). Motivation to complete assignments on time and making the course more enjoyable were also rated high (M = 3.73 and 3.46 respectively). Decreasing stress (M = 3.24) and increasing confidence to participate in class discussions (M =2.97) were rated moderate.

Table 4.2 supports results represented in Table 4.1. With the exception of the participants' opinion on the statement "the challenges I faced in using Bb made it less helpful" (M = 2.92 i.e. moderate), the means to all other statements ranged between 2.19 and 2.38 i.e. low).

Analysis of Semi-Structured Interviews

The information obtained from the semi-structured interviews was mostly supportive of that obtained from questionnaires. The following discussion provides an informed summary of the important ideas:

What are the most important benefits for using Bb?

Almost all interviewees pointed out that the unrestricted availability of the audio and visual material was extremely helpful in allowing them to learn at their own pace and convenience: "I like to learn whenever and wherever I want," one participant remarked. A good number of participants also pointed out that using Bb made the course more enjoyable. In the words of one student "checking Bb always makes me excited to find what the teacher and the other students posted." Though students' ranked improvement in communication among peers as low, during interviews this issue was often mentioned as one of the important benefits of Bb: "I usually don't know students in my classes, but in this class I am happy because I make good friends." Another student maintained, "My classmates' comments on my posts are not helping me, and I did not know how to help them. But I am happy because I now know the girls in my Bb group very well." It seems that while the use of Bb helped students socialize with other classmates, it was not facilitated well enough to successfully utilize their academic interaction.

In line with the results from the questionnaire, improvement in language skills, particularly listening and pronunciation, were also viewed as important advantages. In addition, interest in searching the Web for material related to the course topics was also brought up a an important

benefit: "Whenever any of my group members posted something about her topic, I try to find more by reading on the net," one of the interviewees stated.

What challenges did you face in using Bb?

Though the mean for students' satisfaction with Bb training was high (M = 3.9), technical problems in using Bb often came up in the interviews as a major problem especially with synchronous discussions. This confirms results received to statement 3 in Table 4.2: "the challenges I faced in using Bb made it less helpful." It seems that students needed more through and continuous training on how to use the system. Another difficulty was related to the time restrictions for submitting assignments via Bb as some interviewees felt it puts the student under undesirable stress. One participant commented on this issue by saying "the first time was the worst. I knew that I was supposed to submit my assignment on that day, but things happen. I didn't submit my assignment on time, and I get zero. I was going to cancel (drop) the course."

What suggestions do you have for improvement?

One important suggestion students brought up is related to the way groups were assigned. Students preferred to be allowed to form their own groups instead of being grouped by the instructor. They also suggested having more open-access and internet-connected computer labs on campus. According to one student this is important because "sometimes I am ashamed [shy] to ask my instructor, and I don't have anyone to help me in home, so if I can go with my friend to computer lab, I can ask her to help me." As for the synchronous discussions, a number of participants said they needed better training: "I logged on to my Bb account," one participant said, "then I create a thread and said hi. No one answered. Then I read the instructions again, and found the discussion board. But, I was late." Students also expressed their desire to have more of the synchronous sessions provided that they replace some of the face-to face time. In the words of one student "Sometimes I don't feel like going to university. Why I can't stay home and take class?"

CONCLUSION

The integration of LMSs in higher education requires continuous planning, improvement and assessment. The purpose of this study was to report on the students' perceptions of integrating Bb into the learning of a listening and speaking course at the UoH. Results from both the questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews were generally consistent in revealing the participants' favorable opinion on the integration of Bb especially in terms of accessibility, extension of class time, connection with the instructor and improvement of target language skills. These results support previous research which has indicated that increased accessibility and availability of resources is a key feature of online environments appreciated by students (DeNeui & Dodge, 2006; Heirdsfield et al., 2007; Heirdsfield, A. et al., 2011). The study also revealed a pressing need for providing language teachers with more comprehensive training that goes beyond the technical and software-specific skills in order to be able to: a. efficiently organize learning material on Bb and b. skillfully generate peer-to-peer interactive activities in order to increase connectivity among students. In addition, the study also indicated the need for: better training for the students on how to use Bb; more on campus open-access computer labs. These outcomes support Salmon (2003) assertion that "Any significant initiative at changing teaching methods or the introduction of technology into teaching and learning should include effective e-moderator support and training, otherwise its outcomes are likely to be meagre and unsuccessful' (p. 80).

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