

The Role of Blackboard in Improving EFL Writing: Perspectives of Saudi Instructors and Students

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Abstract—This study explores the impact of using Blackboard on improving the English writing skills of Saudi EFL learners. The research employs a qualitative approach, implementing semi-structured interviews with eight participants—four instructors and four students. A comparative analysis between online instruction via the Blackboard platform and traditional face-to-face methods revealed a variety of preferences among the participants. The findings indicate that most instructors and students prefer a blended-learning approach, combining online learning through Blackboard with in-person sessions. Furthermore, the instructors highlighted several challenges associated with online teaching, including issues such as limited student engagement, reduced feedback opportunities due to large class sizes, and diminished interpersonal interaction. Conversely, online platforms were recognized for their strengths in preventing plagiarism, facilitating efficient content delivery, and ensuring continuous access to educational resources. Students particularly valued the immediate feedback on grammar and spelling provided by the Blackboard platform, which they believe significantly contributes to ongoing improvement in their writing skills. The study suggests that integrating Blackboard as a supplementary tool for teaching English writing could optimize EFL instruction. This approach acknowledges and addresses the diverse preferences and challenges encountered in online learning environments. Moreover, it provides valuable insights into effectively leveraging online platforms to enhance EFL writing, navigating the variations in educational preferences among instructors and students alike.

Index Terms—Blackboard, distance learning, EFL writing, English learning, second language writing

I. INTRODUCTION

The teaching of academic writing in higher education has been changing quite rapidly recently, mostly due to the even more rapidly advances in technology. In universities, for example, academic writing education now includes varying levels of blended learning in an effort for language learning to benefit from the prudent integration of both classroom and online learning. Indeed, technology can improve the ability of foreign language writers to communicate and interact with their readers, feel a sense of the audience, write to the expectations of this audience, and effectively use peer reviews. These aspects are especially critical when teaching academic writing for non-native speakers of English at the university level (Motlhaka, 2020).

Even though Learning Management Systems (LMSs) have the advantage of facilitating instructor and learner access to educational materials, records, and recordings, some researchers, such as Affouneh et al. (2020), highlighted that adoption of the online learning approach during crises had disadvantages that discouraged students from learning online through LMSs. Within this context, Al Meajel and Sharadgah (2018) maintain that adoption of new technology while teaching can negatively impact the success of the students and their educational institutions. In agreement with this, some researchers reported that students faced varying technical difficulties during online learning that impeded the learning process (Favale et al., 2020; Hoq, 2020) and reduced, to a great extent, direct communication between the instructors and learners. Within this context, Moawad (2020) underlined that the students' perceptions of the Blackboard platform were influenced by worries and the difficulties they experienced during the sudden, rapid, and complete shift from the offline to the online mode of teaching and learning. Based on this, Saïdy and Sura (2020) recommended that universities worldwide start certain supportive actions like providing suitable online academic advisers and psychological counseling. Moawad (2020) recommended assessments of students' attitudes and perceptions of online learning through the Blackboard LMS in various contexts during the COVID-19 crisis because perceptions influence students' adoption and use of technology and affect their performance. Consequently, researchers are in the position to assess the efficiency of LMSs such as the Blackboard platform, particularly because students' attitudes toward online learning play a critical role in determining their intention to use LMS in learning, which, in turn,

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controls actual and efficient use of the online learning platforms and tools.

Pushed by the necessity of shifting to online education during the COVID-19 pandemic, Saudi Arabian universities tended to integrate interactive, computer-mediated learning in language instruction through the Blackboard platform to help EFL learners master the language skills and achieve language proficiency, especially in writing. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the students faced challenges in adapting to the abrupt and unplanned transition from traditional classroom learning to online education. Accordingly, researchers, educational leaders, and educational planners are now concerned about the impact of educational technology in general and distance learning in particular on students' knowledge and skill acquisition, skill development, and academic achievement. This is because the effective and efficient use of the technology requires substantial investments in infrastructure, educational software, hardware, staff training, student training, and technical support. Thus, it remains unclear how much students have been helped by this shift and how much they have benefited from online education. Nevertheless, interest has grown among academic leaders and planners in exploring students' perceptions of online education so as to develop successful interventions and fix the associated deficits in learning. Examining students' and instructors' perceptions of online learning helps in developing understanding of the potential and limits of this mode of education and in enhancing its adverse impacts on student motivation, academic achievement, and skill development.

A. *Statement of the Problem*

A review of recent educational and linguistic literature has revealed that the implications of online teaching on university instructors and EFL students using the Blackboard LMS have been the subject of research both in the KSA (e.g., Almekhlafy, 2021; Fageeh & Mekheimer, 2013; Kassem, 2018; Sheerah et al., 2022; Ta'amneh, 2020) and elsewhere (e.g., in Indonesia by Mayasari et al., 2020; in South Africa by Motlhaka, 2020). However, these studies obtained inconsistent results.

The positive effects of teaching English writing online have been reported by a number of researchers. For instance, Nappu et al. (2022) found that the English writing skills of EFL students at Indonesia's University of Muhammadiyah Makassar improved after learning online. Similarly, Ta'amneh (2020) found that Blackboard teaching was effective in improving and developing the writing skills of EFL students at Taibah University in Saudi Arabia. In addition, Kassem (2018) reported a significant positive impact of online teaching of writing using the Blackboard platform on the writing proficiency of English majors at Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University in Saudi Arabia.

Other effects of the online teaching of English writing have been reported by several studies. For instance, Bani Hani (2021) reported that faculty members at the University of Hail (Hail, KSA) were reluctant to use the Blackboard LMS. Within this context, Alturise (2020) cited statistics of the Deanship of E-Learning and Distance Learning in the University of Hail that reveal only 37.0% of the faculty members in this university were using the Blackboard platform in teaching. Ahmed and Mohammed (2020) found that many EFL students at Al-Jouf University in Sakakah, Saudi Arabia, have difficulties using the functions and features of Blackboard LMS. Likewise, the students showed concerns about the effect of this LMS on learning English, despite the findings that online teaching via this system improved student performance in English. In another example, the instructors in the study of Nguyen et al. (2016) expressed difficulties in motivating the students and evaluating their level of understanding, particularly with large groups, and in dealing with their misbehavior.

Taking into consideration these inconsistencies in research findings, in addition to the challenges that students face when learning online, it remains unclear how much EFL students have benefitted from this shift and whether their English writing skills were improved by learning online. Hu and Raman (2024) in a systematic literature review stated that effective e-learning implementation remains challenging due to factors such as technological progress, pedagogical methods, institutional policies, and learner needs, with persistent uncertainties driven by technological evolution, diverse educational contexts, and complex human interactions. Therefore, the role of teaching writing online and using the Blackboard platform to improve the writing skills of EFL students is unknown, creating a knowledge gap that the researchers of this study made an attempt to fill.

B. *Purpose of the Study*

The main objectives of this study were:

1. To identify the role of online teaching of writing using the Blackboard platform in improving the writing skills of EFL students.
2. To determine the challenges (difficulties) which EFL students face in online teaching of writing using the Blackboard platform.

C. *Research Questions*

This study was intended to provide answers to two major research questions:

1. What is the role of the online teaching of writing using the Blackboard platform in improving the writing skills of EFL students?
2. What are the challenges that EFL students face in the online learning of writing using the Blackboard platform?

D. *Significance of the Study*

The significance of this study emerges mainly from the fact that it explores the role of the online teaching of writing using the Blackboard platform to improve the writing skills of EFL students, bearing in mind that one of the implications of the COVID-19 crisis is that it was sudden and a complete shift from traditional to online education. The study also derives significance from that it explores the challenges and difficulties that EFL students face in online teaching of writing using the Blackboard platform. Additionally, the study probes perspectives on the future mode of delivery of the English writing courses from the viewpoints of both EFL instructors and students. Consequently, the results of the study may provide the EFL instructors and students with ideas about the potential of the Blackboard LMS for contribution to improved English writing skills.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Blackboard Learning Management System (LMS) represents a transformative tool in education, particularly in its influence on the writing skills of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. By integrating digital technology with traditional educational methods, Blackboard provides a dynamic platform that enhances grammar, coherence, and stylistic development in writing. This literature review discusses the definition of learning management systems, the Blackboard learning management system, and the effect of Blackboard on the writing skills of EFL students.

A. Learning Management Systems

A learning management system (LMS) has been defined by Ta'amneh (2020) as an electronic learning (e-learning) system that helps the students to communicate and learn effectively in a virtual learning environment, ultimately to enhance and develop their overall learning capabilities, skills, and outcomes. Machika and Dolley (2018) defined an LMS as a virtual, collaborative teaching and learning environment that is designed to focus on the learning activities of students and deliver educational material using the internet. To date, there are multitude of common LMSs available, including Blackboard, Blackboard Vista (known formerly as WebCT), Desire2Learn (D2L), Microsoft Teams, the Learning Activity Management System (LAMS), Moodle, Skillsoft, and Net Dimensions (Almekhlafy, 2020; Uziak et al., 2018).

These LMSs provide many useful functions for instructors and students alike such as registration (enrolling and managing online web-based activities and actions); scheduling (setting and publishing timetables for various activities and subjects); delivery of educational material, including synchronous and asynchronous virtual courses; tracking of students' activities; communication (e.g., through webinars, discussion rooms or forums, real-time chat, conferences, and e-mails); and evaluation of student performance, such as testing and evaluating students' performance and competency (Dhir et al., 2017; Uziak et al., 2018). Tracking, recording (i.e., documenting), and analyzing activities on the platform are other functions of LMSs (Uziak et al., 2018). Further, audio and video recording of lectures and discussion sessions is a valuable function and advantage of these systems. For instructors, LMSs provide varying online course management functions and features that allow them to post grades and announcements and manage assignments, exams, and quizzes (Chang, 2014). For students, there is accumulating, though controversial, evidence; for example, Hoq (2020), Kawinkoonlasate (2019), and Radianti et al. (2020) agree that these systems have improved their communication with instructors and their peers by motivating them to play active roles in the learning process.

B. The Blackboard Learning Management System

The Blackboard LMS has been defined by Ismail and Salih (2018) as a Web-based server education management system that offers convenient course management, customizable open architecture, and scaleable design that enables integration with students' information systems and authentication protocols. Tawalbeh (2018) described it as a computerized, Internet-based system for learning that facilitates online teaching and learning. This LMS has functions for instruction, audio and video recording, communication, chatting, e-mails, and assessment (Tawalbeh, 2018). Communication between students and instructors in this LMS can be practiced through announcements, discussion rooms, virtual classrooms, and e-mails (Kashghari & Asseel, 2014).

Using the Blackboard LMS in teaching and learning has several advantages, like ease of access to any educational material, simplicity of the Blackboard instructions, and the higher convenience of using mobile phones and computers in teaching and learning than using the conventional exam sheets (Ta'amneh, 2020). This LMS also helps in promoting several skills, such as organization and time management, which assist students in carrying out their assignments and other tasks efficiently (Kashghari & Asseel, 2014). In other respects, Blackboard-based instruction underpins the constructivist and learner-centered learning principles, and owing to that, it warrants equal participation of the students in learning (Motlhaka, 2020). In the context of English language teaching and learning via the Blackboard LMS, Kashghari and Asseel (2014) found that the listening skills of students improved in online education. However, the students were unsure whether their speaking skills had improved or not. The students in their study highlighted the Blackboard LMS advantages of ease of access to course material and the LMS being easy to use and effective. As far as English writing is concerned, researchers such as Ahmed and Mohammed (2020), Kasseem (2018), Kawinkoonlasate (2019), Ta'amneh (2020), and Valverde (2020) found that online teaching of English writing through the Blackboard LMS improved the writing skills of EFL students. Indeed, the Blackboard LMS provides EFL writers with tools for editing, improving, and revising their academic writing (Motlhaka, 2020).

On the other hand, LMSs have certain disadvantages, like being sensitive to technical problems (Internet disconnection, weak Internet signal, and lack of technical support) and the limited training of students on their efficient use (Ta'amneh, 2020). Generally, drawbacks of online teaching through the Blackboard platform include that it usually takes more time to prepare lectures using the Blackboard LMS than in traditional teaching and that the educational content must be constantly reviewed and updated (Tawalbeh, 2018). In the context of English writing teaching, Sheerah et al. (2022) stressed that disadvantages of the online teaching of writing are that students do not have training on satisfactory use of LMSs and that physical interaction with the instructor is absent in the virtual setting. They added that the instructors are used in traditional education to interact with their students to give quick feedback on the submitted works. However, giving instant feedback burdens the instructors in online teaching. Chen (2024) also found out that the most common challenge highlighted by teachers was the intense effort required to prepare for online classes. Despite the challenges, teachers acknowledged the advantages of distance learning, including the ability to record, archive, and revisit different aspects of instruction and the learning process (Chen, 2024).

C. The Effects of Blackboard on the Writing Skills of EFL Students

A number of previous studies indicated the positive effects of teaching English writing online on the writing skills of EFL learners (Pusuluri et al., 2017; Nappu et al., 2022; Almekhlafy, 2020). For instance, Nappu et al. (2022) analyzed the effect of online learning of writing via the Google Meet platform on the academic writing abilities of English language students at the Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar, Indonesia. The study found that the writing skills of the participants improved after learning English writing online. Hence, the study concluded that learning English writing online through the Google Meet platform had significant, positive effects on the writing skills of students. In another example, Sheerah et al. (2022) explored the perceptions of students and instructors toward the emergency online learning process initiated during the COVID-19 crisis, particularly for intensive English writing courses at King Khalid University, KSA. During the interviews, the sample students expressed that learning English writing online via the Blackboard LMS led to improvement of their English writing skills. Furthermore, Almekhlafy (2020) examined students' perceptions of learning the English language in online courses using the Blackboard LMS in Najran University, KSA, and found that the EFL instructors and students agree that the Blackboard LMS improved all aspects of their learning of the English courses (e.g., listening, speaking, and writing). Moreover, Motlhaka (2020) investigated the use of Blackboard collaboration instruction at the University of Limpopo in South Africa to improve the academic writing skills of second language writers. The results showed that this instruction provided these writers with an online learning community through which they could collaborate on editing, improving, and revising their writings and thus improve the quality of academic essays through peer feedback. The findings support that learning academic writing is facilitated by peer-peer interaction and feedback and that the Blackboard LMS serves as a mediator in the learners' academic writing development.

Further evidence has been found in published literature. For instance, Ta'amneh (2020) looked into the effects of the Blackboard LMS on the development of the English writing skills of EFL students at Taibah University, KSA, and found that Blackboard learning was quite effective in improving and developing the writing skills of the experimental group of students. Comparable results were obtained at the Universidad ESAN in Lima, Peru, by Valverde (2020), who found students' descriptive writing skills were very much improved when taught through the Blackboard LMS rather than when taught through the face-to-face approach. Additionally, Ziegler and Lehner (2020) underscored the pivotal role of Blackboard in facilitating the delivery of instructional materials, collaborative writing tasks, and assessment tools, which significantly enhanced student engagement and interaction. Through research findings and statistical analysis, the study demonstrates significant improvements in writing scores among students using POA-based teaching via Blackboard. This highlights the platform's role in supporting effective language teaching education. In another example, Kawinkoonlasate (2019) compared the writing abilities of Thai students at Huachiew Chalermprakiet University, Thailand, who were taught English writing online with those who were taught the same course traditionally. She found that the English writing abilities of the students who studied English writing online were significantly higher than those of their peers who studied the same course traditionally. Likewise, Kassem (2018) reported that using the Blackboard LMS in English writing teaching helped improve the writing proficiency of English language students in Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, KSA.

To conclude, investigations into the effects of online teaching and learning of English writing using an LMS like the Blackboard LMS support that this approach to teaching, learning, and delivery of educational material improves the English writing skills of EFL students significantly and far beyond the improvement achieved via face-to-face teaching and learning.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study is a cross-sectional, descriptive, qualitative case study that was intended to identify the role of the online teaching of writing using the Blackboard platform to improve the writing skills of EFL students and determine the challenges that those students face under this mode of learning delivery. As this study explores a social phenomenon in its natural setting, the researchers followed the qualitative research design and the case study strategy of research (Nguyen, 2019). The study used primary data that were obtained from informants during semi-structured interviews

(Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

A. Participants

The study focused on a specific population comprised of Saudi instructors and students enrolled at a Saudi university, all involved in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education. The participants were selected based on a specific criterion: each had completed at least one writing course that utilized Blackboard, an educational technology platform. The study aimed to gather insights and perspectives from four Saudi EFL instructors and four Saudi students who had experience using Blackboard in their academic writing courses. This ensured that the participants had practical experience with the platform, allowing for a focused exploration of their experiences and perceptions regarding its impact on their learning and teaching processes. The demographic information of the participants is shown in Tables 1 and 2 below:

TABLE 1
INSTRUCTORS' INFORMATION

Participant (P) number	Gender	Years of Experience (At Time of Research)
PI-I	Male	5
PI-II	Male	6
PI-III	Female	8
PI-IV	Female	10

TABLE 2
STUDENTS' INFORMATION

Participant (P) number	Gender	Level (At Time of Research)
PS-I	Male	Sophomore
PS-II	Male	Sophomore
PS-III	Female	Sophomore
PS-IV	Female	Sophomore

B. Materials and Instruments

This study used primary, qualitative data that were drawn from semi-structured interviews with the participants. Some questions were directed solely to instructors, some were related to only students, and others were directed at both. These questions were formulated by the researchers with reference to relevant literature in such a way as to address the research questions and objectives. Other research material included a computer, videoconferencing software, and video-recording software.

C. Data Collection, Processing, and Analysis

The data were gathered through structured interviews with informants and analyzed using both qualitative and thematic analyses (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis enables the researchers to identify the participants' experiences with using Blackboard in improving writing skills (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researchers analyzed the words of the participants and reported their viewpoints on the research questions. After completion of the data collection, the interview data were transcribed and then integrated. The transcripts were double-checked with the original recordings and then analyzed. After that, they were coded and compiled into themes, which were categorized to organize informants' feedback. Categorization was based on theme similarities and relatedness of their content to the research questions. Thereafter, the themes were interpreted to obtain the analysis results.

D. Ethical Assurances

The study strictly adhered to ethical guidelines by obtaining written consent from all participants prior to conducting interviews. Each participant acknowledged their informed consent in writing, understanding that their involvement was voluntary. To protect anonymity, participants were assured that their identities and personal information would remain confidential. Participants were assigned codes (e.g., PI-I, PS-II) to distinguish between instructors and students, facilitating comparison of their perspectives on research themes. Data collection methods, including email, telephone, and multimedia documents, ensured confidentiality, with audio recordings and transcripts securely encrypted and stored in password-protected folders on researchers' computers to prevent unauthorized access.

IV. FINDINGS

This section presents the findings of the analysis of the research data, which are qualitative primary data. The results are organized according to the themes that had been extracted from the interviewees' feedback on the interview questions. These themes are the role of the Blackboard platform in improving the writing skills, the challenges that learners of English writing skills face, and the teaching approach that improves EFL students' writing skills. In addition, since the participants were four instructors and four undergraduate students, the results are organized under each theme by separating the feedback of instructors from that of students.

A. Role of Blackboard Platform in Improving Writing Skills

(a). Instructors' Perspective

The four interviewed instructors have varying viewpoints on the role of online teaching and learning of English writing through the Blackboard platform. For example, the first participant instructor (PI-I) stressed different roles, which include ease of assignment submission, getting feedback, and checking for plagiarism. He also highlighted that when using this platform, the students cannot copy and paste from the Internet. The second participant instructor (PI-II), in addition to highlighting the role of the Blackboard platform in reducing plagiarism, pointed out record and educational material keeping and ease and continued access to the teaching/learning material as manifestations of the role of this platform in improving the writing skills of EFL students. The female instructors (PI-III) emphasized that utilizing Blackboard greatly enhanced students' EFL writing skills by offering continuous access to resources and timely feedback. She valued the platform's collaborative features, which encouraged peer reviews and interactive discussions, creating a more supportive learning atmosphere. Furthermore, the participant (PI-IV) added that the organized structure of Blackboard allowed her students to manage their writing assignments more effectively, boosting their confidence and proficiency.

(b). Students' Perspective

The opinions of EFL students about learning writing skills online through the Blackboard platform were somewhat different from those of their instructors. For example, the first participating student (PS-I) shed light on the role of the Blackboard platform in facilitating the recording of lectures and classes, text writing and correction, and ease of access to the educational material. The second participating student (PS-II) believes that the role of online teaching of English writing in improving the EFL students' writing skills is that it allows document sharing, early evaluation, and feedback through the Learning Management System (LMS), which in the current study is the Blackboard. The female participants (PS-III) and (PS-IV) noticed another role – the LMS as a text editor, or indirect instructor, through the text-editing function that is available in the Blackboard LMS. This option contributes to instant language learning because any grammatical or spelling mistake is highlighted instantly, and the students can fix it accordingly before submission of their writing work to the instructor.

B. Challenges Learners of English Writing Skills Face

(a). Instructors' Perspective

The second principal theme drawn from the interview feedback was the challenges that EFL university students face when learning English writing skills via the Blackboard platform. In this section, these challenges are pointed out from the views of EFL instructors and students. Several challenges and difficulties have been emphasized. For instance, an issue raised by (PI-I) and (PI-IV) is the limited attendance of online sessions and the limited participation of the students in these sessions. They also pointed out that it is difficult for the instructor to know for sure whether the students are paying attention or not. Additionally, they emphasized the challenge of communication embodied in the absence of direct contact and interaction with students and the lack of eye contact with them, which is necessary as it enables the instructor to evaluate students' comprehension of the lesson and tailor delivery of material accordingly. The second instructor (PI-II), however, counted the large number of students in the online session as a challenge to teaching and learning, especially when it comes to feedback and follow-up on students' writings. The same, as he mentioned, applies to the peer review sessions. The female instructor (PI-III) also noted challenges in using Blackboard, including technical difficulties that sometimes disrupted the flow of teaching and learning. She also found that students occasionally struggled with navigating the platform's more advanced features, which hindered their ability to fully engage in collaborative activities. Additionally, she pointed out that the lack of face-to-face interaction made it harder to provide immediate feedback and support, which could delay student progress.

(b). Students' Perspective

The participating students also underscored a few challenges and difficulties. The first student (PS-I) stressed the lack of interaction with the instructor and peers in the online sessions as a challenge, which reveals that the online English writing sessions did not follow an interactive teaching approach and, accordingly, did not cater to interactive learning. The second student (PS-II) also highlighted the lack of interaction as a challenge in learning English writing online through the Blackboard platform. The third participating student (PS-III) did not mention any challenges faced in the online learning of English writing and, therefore, provided no relevant feedback on this point to cite. The fourth student (PS-IV), however, raised a different concern, emphasizing technical difficulties, particularly with internet connectivity and navigation of the Blackboard platform. She noted that these issues disrupted her ability to fully engage with the course content and maintain consistent participation in writing exercises, which added to her frustration with the online learning experience.

C. The Teaching Approach That Improves EFL Students' Writing Skills

(a). Instructors' Perspective

During the interviews, the English writing instructors and students were asked their opinions on the teaching approach (traditional or online) that better develops EFL students' writing skills. The first instructor (PI-I) supports the traditional teaching approach as being the most effective for developing EFL students' writing skills. However, he acknowledged that the Blackboard LMS is valuable in certain aspects, particularly in providing students with additional resources and practice opportunities outside of class. For example, he noted that Blackboard's assignment submission feature allows students to revise and resubmit their work based on detailed feedback, which helps reinforce writing skills. The second instructor (PI-II) holds a similar belief, emphasizing the advantages of traditional classroom settings for teaching EFL writing. He mentioned that Blackboard is a useful supplementary tool, especially for tracking student progress and providing continuous access to course materials, which can be revisited by students as needed. He provided an example of how the platform's discussion board enabled students to reflect on their writing and peer review outside of class.

The female instructor (PI-III) expressed a mixed preference between online and traditional classrooms for teaching EFL writing. While she appreciated the flexibility and resources provided by online platforms like Blackboard, she recognized its value in certain areas, such as offering students access to a variety of writing resources (e.g., grammar tools, sample essays, and research materials) and allowing them to receive asynchronous feedback, which can be more thoughtful and comprehensive. However, she also acknowledged that the face-to-face interaction of traditional classrooms allows for more immediate feedback and personalized support. Ultimately, she believed a blended approach, combining the strengths of both online and in-person teaching, would be most effective in enhancing students' writing skills. The fourth instructor (PI-IV) strongly supported the use of Blackboard, emphasizing its potential to improve students' writing skills. She highlighted Blackboard's tracking and analytics features, which allow both instructors and students to monitor progress over time. As an example, she pointed out that Blackboard's ability to store multiple drafts of student work helped students reflect on their development and allowed instructors to provide tailored feedback at different stages of the writing process. Despite her strong preference for online tools, she also acknowledged that a hybrid model—where Blackboard supplements face-to-face interactions—could optimize student outcomes by combining the flexibility and accessibility of online learning with the personal engagement of traditional teaching.

(b). Students' Perspective

Regarding the students, the first student (PS-I) did not provide a clear-cut answer to the question of which teaching approach better improves EFL students' writing skills. However, it may be inferred from his responses that he supports learning through the Blackboard platform because he stated that it is easier for students to continue writing on Blackboard due to the availability of applications that help correct grammar and spelling. The third student (PS-III) expressed a similar opinion, noting that the availability of automated tools and resources on Blackboard optimizes the revision process, making it easier to spot and correct mistakes. Both students emphasized the convenience of accessing materials and submitting assignments at anytime, allowing for more flexibility in managing their learning schedules.

Conversely, the second student (PS-II) expressed a preference for the traditional (face-to-face) teaching approach, arguing that it is more effective in developing EFL students' writing skills. He highlighted that immediate interaction and direct feedback from instructors in a classroom setting provide a deeper, more personal understanding of errors and areas for improvement. Additionally, PS-II raised concerns that over-reliance on online tools might limit the development of critical thinking and manual editing skills, which are crucial for refining writing techniques. The fourth student (PS-IV) also supported traditional learning, agreeing with PS-II's view that real-time instructor feedback is essential for improving writing. However, she acknowledged that Blackboard's accessibility and resources can still be valuable for supplementing in-class learning, especially for revising and reviewing outside of scheduled sessions.

In conclusion, this research highlights the varying perspectives of both instructors and students regarding the role of the Blackboard platform in enhancing EFL students' writing skills, the challenges they face, and the teaching approaches that most effectively improve writing proficiency. Instructors appreciate Blackboard's tools for assignment management, feedback, and plagiarism prevention but highlight challenges such as reduced student engagement and technical issues. Students value the platform's automated features but also point to similar challenges, particularly the lack of direct interaction. Both groups recognize the benefits of a blended learning approach, combining the flexibility of online tools with the personal engagement of traditional classroom instruction. The findings suggest that a hybrid model, which integrates both online and face-to-face methods, could optimize the development of EFL writing skills.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

A. The Findings of Research Questions in Relation to the Previous Studies

The findings of the current study were compared with the findings of some previous studies, and similarities and differences were observed. For instance, Kawinkoonlasate (2019) found that the English writing ability of the students who received online writing teaching was significantly higher than that of the control group students. The study also found that, after being taught writing online, levels of student satisfaction and autonomous learning were high. Furthermore, the results uncovered that students enjoyed the lessons more in online writing teaching than in traditional writing classes. Likewise, Kasseem (2018) reported significant positive influences that the use of the Blackboard

platform had on the writing proficiency of EFL learners in Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, KSA. Moreover, the students exhibited positive attitudes towards using this platform in teaching and learning English writing. Furthermore, Ta'amneh (2020) studied the impact of the Blackboard platform on the development of the English writing skills of students in Taibah University, KSA. Their results showed that teaching through the Blackboard platform was effective in improving and developing the writing skills of the students. In addition, the results unveiled the students' positive attitudes toward online learning through this platform. In line with these results, Valverde (2020) found that the levels of performance of the students who were taught English writing skills on descriptive texts through the Blackboard platform were significantly higher than those of their peers who were taught through the traditional, face-to-face approach. This indicates that the Blackboard platform was successful in improving the writing skills needed for descriptive texts. The control group, which did not use the Blackboard platform, improved their writing skills but to a much lower extent.

The discrepancies between the results of the present study and those in the literature are clear when considering the findings of Fageeh and Mekheimer (2013), who investigated the role of Blackboard in the development of academic writing among EFL learners. The results of their study highlighted the students' experiences in using computers, the Internet, and Blackboard varied and that the more experience students had, the more positive his/her attitude was toward the use of CMC for developing her/his academic literacy. Almekhlafy (2021) also found that students' prior experiences in online learning via Blackboard influence their perceptions. This is because the perceptions of first-level students of online English language learning at Najran University through this platform were higher than those of their second-level peers. In other respects, the researchers in the present study recall the argument of Motlhaka (2020), which states that Blackboard Collaboration-Based Instruction does not replace face-to-face communications among the students and instructors in higher-education communities and that, accordingly, the best practice can be a combination of computer-mediated and face-to-face communication. This is consistent with the viewpoint of Kawinkoonlasate (2019), who underscored that the new technological innovations enhance the traditional approaches and motivate the students to use technology for improvement of their writing skills for education and for future professional use, but they cannot replace them. In accordance with this, Fageeh and Mekheimer (2013) concluded that the best educational practice is the integration of CMC with face-to-face communication in the teaching/learning process.

In conclusion, the findings of this study both align with and diverge from previous research on the effectiveness of the Blackboard platform in improving EFL students' writing skills. Several studies, such as those by Kawinkoonlasate (2019), Kassem (2018), Ta'amneh (2020), and Valverde (2020), have demonstrated that the Blackboard platform significantly enhances writing proficiency, promotes autonomous learning, and fosters positive attitudes toward online learning. However, discrepancies were noted in comparison to the present study, which may be attributed to the varying levels of students' experience with the platform. As highlighted by Fageeh and Mekheimer (2013), Almekhlafy (2021), and Butnaru et al. (2021), students with greater exposure to computer-mediated communication tools like Blackboard exhibit more positive attitudes and better academic outcomes. Moreover, these findings support the notion that while technological platforms like Blackboard offer considerable benefits, they cannot fully replace face-to-face communication in educational settings. Instead, an optimal approach would involve integrating online platforms with traditional classroom interaction, combining the advantages of both for improved learning outcomes.

B. Suggested Strategies to Overcome Challenges Voiced by Participants in Using Blackboard

This study provides evidence that the Blackboard platform can be used as a supportive educational tool to help in engaging the EFL learners into more active technological roles wherein they benefit from the anytime-anywhere feature of the virtual environment. A fundamental implication of online education is that solid computer and information technology literacy is a must. The results of this study imply that LMSs like the Blackboard platform can be used as a medium for teaching and learning that provides variability in instruction and which can help create a motivational learning environment and experience for the students.

The findings of this study have educational implications in selecting the medium for the interaction and employment of digital media and online platforms in teaching English writing for the instructors, their courses, and material developers. They show that, while the traditional approach to teaching and learning is still preferred by many instructors and students, the online teaching approach has advantages that allow it to be incorporated into the teaching process. The following blended learning and teaching strategies map addressed the challenges expressed by EFL writing instructors and students. For each challenge, a solution using face-to-face and Blackboard-based interactions has been proposed with an emphasis on the improvement of learning.

TABLE 3
MIND MAP: SUGGESTED STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME EFL WRITING CHALLENGES USING BLACKBOARD LMS

Challenge	Strategy	Face-to-Face Activities	Blackboard Activities	Focus/Purpose
Limited Attendance	Flexible Scheduling	- Flexible class times/ make-up sessions. - Encourage group work.	- Record lectures on Blackboard. - track attendance.	Improve attendance through flexibility and accessibility.
Limited Participation	Interactive and Engaging Activities	- Encourage In-class group discussions and debates. - Use interactive writing tasks	- Use discussion forums, peer reviews, Polls and interactive Q&A to engage students.	Engage students to Increase participation interactive tasks.
Large Number of Students	Splitting groups and Breakout Rooms	- Divide students into smaller discussion groups. - Rotating leadership roles	- Use breakout rooms on Blackboard for group discussions. - Setting up small group tasks and activities.	Manage large classes by providing personalized attention and interaction.
Absence of Direct Contact and Interaction	Increased Communication Channels	- Schedule in-person office hours and feedback sessions.	- Set up virtual office hours on Blackboard. - Use video conferencing tools for live interaction.	Bridge the gap between online and face-to-face interactions.
Peer Review Sessions	Structured Peer Feedback	- Conduct guided in-person peer review sessions with clear rubrics.	- Use Blackboard's peer review feature with clear guidelines and rubrics.	Improve writing structured peer feedback.
Technical Difficulties	Technical Support and Tools	- Offer in-class tech training and support workshops.	- Provide tutorials and FAQs for Blackboard use.	Help students with technical issues

This study calls for the instructors to better adjust the English teaching delivery methods to address the developing needs of the students. Within this context, other implications encompass motivating the students to use the Blackboard LMS to improve their writing skills, training them to use this platform purposefully and correctly, and providing them with technical guidance and support services.

In conclusion, this study has various implications for future research, one of which is to conduct similar investigations following the experimental approach whereby two groups of EFL students at the same educational level and enrolled in the same English writing course are divided into a treatment, or experimental, group (a group taught English writing through the Blackboard platform) and a control group that is taught English writing according to the face-to-face approach and then comparing the development of their English writing skills.

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