# IS BLENDED LEARNING THE KEY FOR FUTURE EDUCATION? A CASE STUDY OF SAUDI VOCATIONAL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS

## *A APRENDIZAGEM COMBINADA É A CHAVE PARA A EDUCAÇÃO FUTURA? UM ESTUDO DE CASO DAS PERCEPÇÕES DOS ESTUDANTES PROFISSIONAIS SAUDITAS*

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## ABSTRACT

The current study has endeavored to explore the level of perception and attitude within ESP Saudi learners toward the application of Blackboard blended based learning. The obtained data included quantitative questionnaires and qualitative semi-structured interviews to reach the aim of the study. In general, questionnaires have revealed students' positive perception and attitudes toward blended learning as a leaning technique experience. This was accompanied by some level of boredom, social isolation, teachers' late response and technical issues in the students' responses. However, semi-structured interviews displayed students' relatively positive perception toward blended learning. Although, they thought it should be used in limited circumstances such as severe weather conditions. The reported issues by students were confronted, investigated, and provided with suggestions and recommendations to be overcome by the educational authorities.

**Keywords:** Blended learning, EFL, ESP, Technical, Perceptions, Attitudes.

## RESUMO

O presente estudo tem se esforçado para explorar o nível de percepção e atitude dos alunos sauditas do ESP em relação à aplicação do aprendizado combinado do Blackboard. Os dados obtidos incluíram questionários quantitativos e entrevistas qualitativas semiestruturadas para atingir o objetivo do estudo. Em geral, os questionários revelaram a percepção e as atitudes positivas dos alunos em relação à aprendizagem combinada como uma experiência técnica de aprendizagem. Isto foi acompanhado por algum nível de tédio, isolamento social, resposta tardia dos professores e problemas técnicos nas respostas dos alunos. No entanto, as entrevistas semiestruturadas mostraram uma percepção relativamente positiva dos alunos em relação à aprendizagem combinada. Embora eles pensassem que deveria ser usado em circunstâncias limitadas, como condições climáticas severas. Os problemas relatados pelos alunos foram confrontados, investigados e acompanhados de sugestões e recomendações a serem superadas pelas autoridades educacionais.

**Palavras-chave:** Aprendizagem combinada, EFL, ESP, técnica, percepções, atitudes.

## Background

The learning models and designs used in education have altered globally due to the rapid advancement of communication and data innovation. However, the rapid changes in education systems are not solely attributable to technological advancements; COVID-19 and other viruses also lead to quick change. Therefore, the education system has rapidly changed and been heavily concentrated due to the consecutive changes that have occurred. The world's educational systems have completely changed due to the sudden and quick transition from traditional face-to-face instruction to entirely online instruction (Dhawan, 2020).

Since the pandemic spread, numerous educational systems have faced challenges related to resources for learning, affordability, tractability, accessibility, quality control, and preparedness. Martin et al. (2020) focused on how crucial it is for online learning to be successful that the management program be of high quality and to provide regular updates so that everyone would be prepared for any crisis. The World Economic Forum (WEF) claimed that individuals should be prepared for difficult circumstances ((Dhawan, 2020). Educational institutions should handle these situations by granting safe accessibility to online learning management system (LMS) platforms (Yen, 2020).

## Literature Review

Following the COVID-19 outbreak, Saudi colleges and universities likewise suddenly and quickly shifted from face-to-face online learning options to fully online learning (AlKhunzain & Khan, 2021; Hakim, 2020; Khafaga, 2021). They create an environment that is comparable to actual classrooms by using the Blackboard platform as a virtual learning method, replete with all features and modifications (Al Thaqafi, 2020). Thus, unlike traditional face-to-face education, a new drive towards widespread e-learning and using Blackboard LMS through Saudi public colleges and universities has become increasingly popular recently and is no longer limited to long-distance education (AlKarani & Al Thobaity, 2020; Almogren, 2022; Alturki &

Aldraiweesh, 2021; Ibrahim et al., 2019; Khalid Mustafa & Hama Saeed, 2023). The e-learning approach is defined as courses delivered online to locations other than face-to-face classrooms, where lecturers can conduct sessions in a virtual setting and students can communicate and engage with each other (Farrah & Al-Bakri, 2020). On this account, the influence of the online learning has been a subject of many studies (e.g., Dhawan, 2020; Farrah & Al-Bakri, 2020; Khalid Mustafa & Hama Saeed, 2023; Li & Che, 2022; Martin et al., 2020; Rapanta et al., 2020).

**Blended Learning**

While we should preserve optimism, it's crucial to keep in mind that extreme care and scenario-planning exercises are essential tools to provide learners with (Powell, 2021). By combining in-person instruction with online learning options, blended learning offers one way to give teachers and students interesting learning opportunities in post-vaccine and post-pandemic environments (Singh et al., 2021). To transfer to a blended teaching/learning practice means the teaching method that combines traditional face-to-face classrooms with the digitally enriched studying opportunities of the virtual mode of delivery as Dziuban et al. (2004) defined blended learning. According to (Sharma, 2010), the conventional understanding of blended learning combines traditional in-person language instruction with sessions that provide additional online course materials. Following COVID-19, blended learning is understood to involve both in-person interactions between students and instructors as well as synchronous and asynchronous learning through virtual classroom environments. Activities, including tasks, assignments, and tests, are posted online and completed using learning management systems (LMS) like Blackboard (Alowedi, 2020; Siegelman, 2019).

In the post-pandemic era, blended learning is a broadly used tool intercontinentally in certified training and instruction settings (K. Smith & Hill, 2019). With the augmented acceptance of virtual learning, the notion of "blended learning" has been described as controlling a combined education activity by combining in-person interface with interactive online courses in a comprehensive

educational setting (Jost et al., 2021). Concurrently, most educational institutions worldwide, including Saudi Arabia, offer immense prospects and qualified training on digital and blended learning through seminars and workshops (Al-Kahtani et al., 2022; Bamoallem & Altarteer, 2022). It would be essential to note the fact that blended learning is "not a one-size-fits-all" (Shantakumari & Sajith, 2015; Tabor, 2007); instead, it must be modified to accommodate the various learning preferences of the students. In a similar vein, (So, 2006) contends that students' dissatisfaction is the primary obstacle to successfully implementing blended learning classes. This demonstrates the notion that the execution of blended courses is significantly influenced by the learners' views, attitudes, choices, and satisfaction. Therefore, (Al-Fadhli, 2008; Elshami et al., 2021) stress that the adequate perception and interaction of teachers and students in the learning setting are critical to the success of digital learning. However, eliminating barriers and optimizing learning outcomes in the instructive system varies from examining teachers' and students' perspectives, experiences, and attitudes regarding blended learning.

**The case of blended learning in Saudi context**

Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, the Saudi higher education sector had distance learning and online education deanships, only a certain number of instructors participated in this process because the majority lacked prior experience with or had no knowledge of online teaching (Tanveer et al., 2020). Undoubtedly, teachers were obliged to adapt new teaching practices throughout the pandemic in order to offer the remaining classes online, and educational institutions provided help to them. However, this was an extraordinary circumstance for both the teachers and the students, who would have sensed inaccessible and had their educational knowledge compromised.

In a webinar attended by the deans of online and distance learning from leading Saudi Arabian universities, it has been proposed that the current confront is altering the philosophy of both teachers and students and that this novel practise

has broken the inner obstacle to accepting such an educational approach. Additionally, they stated that higher education must take this opportunity to examine implementing various online learning modes seriously (ibid.). As a result, after COVID-19, blended learning has developed more and more mutual in Saudi Arabian higher education compared to traditional face-to-face instruction (Alotaibi, 2022; Riaz et al., 2023). However, the idea of blended learning is still relatively innovative in Saudi Arabia, where only few studies have been done to determine its efficacy in the Saudi higher education system. Little is known about teachers' and students' perceptions and attitudes toward this type of learning (Alnahdi, 2019; Bamoallem & Altarteer, 2022; Saifuddin, 2019).

**Studies on blended learning**

After reviewing earlier research on blended learning, it was discovered that most of it focused on how teachers and students perceived and felt about online and blended learning before or during COVID-19 (e.g., (Alaidarous & Madini, 2016; Ali, 2017; Almekhlafy, 2020; Al-Mutairi & Elsawy, 2022; AlNajdi, 2015; Alowedi, 2020; Erliza & Septianingsih, 2022; Khashaba et al., 2022). (Ja'ashan, 2015) for instance, was one of earliest studies concerning Saudi undergraduate students' perceptions on studying English major courses using blended learning method via Blackboard. Results have revealed positive attitudes toward the novel method with areas to be concerned such as slow internet connectivity plus delay on receiving reply or feedback from the teachers and when and how to use resources provided. All factors mentioned and more have led to some level of frustration within examined students. (Albishi, 2015), has shed light over the possible factors to influence the productivity of blended learning some of them would rely on, motivational and psychological factors. Moreover, (Ali, 2017) has pointed to a very essential issue or obstacle toward the implication of blended learning in education, this was much related to appropriate time spent in training and educating students on platforms used for blended learning. This was also the case with undergraduate students at the Saudi Electronic University (SAU), the sole Saudi university providing bachelor's degrees

in an entirely obligatory blended learning mode of education. (Alowedi, 2020) has indicated that besides general positive attitudes toward the style of blended learning education, students are still overwhelmed with applicable techniques to apply when using Blackboard system.

Concerning Technical and Vocational Training Corporation Colleges (TVTC) in Saudi Arabia, only one study has investigated the usage of blended learning to deliver target educational materials conducted before the outbreak (Alaidarous & Madini, 2016) and examined the attitudes and perceptions of female Saudi students toward learning English using blended learning by a learning management system called Doroob. This platform is old and was issued to deliver online courses available to everyone, not just students. Whereas a study was done during the pandemic to investigate e-learning experience by (Aljedaani et al., 2021) who looked at the e-learning experiences during COVID-19 of deaf students who enrolled in a special education program. The study found that the content was not accessible, leading to increased stress and ineffective teacher-student communication. Also, a lack of support regarding sourced interpreters impedes the learning experience. However, (Alaidarous & Madini, 2016) outcomes pointed out that students perceived their language learning positively with combined learning. This optimistic perception is built on numerous factors, such as the paybacks of blended learning, the lenience of the method, the teacher's effectiveness, the fortune of content, and the appropriateness of learning activities. In contrast, (Aljedaani et al., 2021) findings of e-learning experience were challenging and barrier to deaf pupils because of the limited assets.

**Significance of the study**

This research is significant and beneficial because there aren't many studies examining how EFL (English as a Foreign Language) and ESP (English for Specific Purposes) students perceive and experience learning English in blended learning, particularly in the Technical and Vocational Training Corporation Colleges (TVTC) using the Blackboard learning management system (LMS), as well as variables

influencing their attitudes and perceptions. Additionally, prior research examined students' attitudes and perspectives regarding blended learning either before or during COVID-19. As a result, this study will explore how students feel about blended learning after enough time has passed for it to become popular and experienced by many students worldwide. Moreover, the current study will investigate the blended learning method from three distinctive angles concerning: general overview, in the context of teachers and in the context of LMS Blackboard. Each aspect should be investigated through an autonomous questionnaire followed by qualitative data designed as semi-structured interviews to seek justifications and further discussions by aimed participants.

This study shall provide recommendations on addressing the identified attitudes and perceptions. Results from this study will also inform implications for educational practice regarding relevant strategies that higher education, specifically TVTC, needs to embrace to optimize uptake, including the blended learning approach and the Blackboard platform in facilitating the teaching of English language courses.

**Research Questions**

This study attempted to explore the subsequent research questions:

1.      What are the attitudes and perceptions of the learners toward their learning experiences in the blended learning of English courses?

2.      What are the attitudes and perceptions of the learners toward blended learning in the context of teachers?

3.      What are the attitudes and perceptions of the learners toward blended learning in the context of the LMS Blackboard?

## Research Methodology

### *Participants:*

The study seeks responses from 204 students who have experienced EFL blended learning while learning and teaching English subjects. The study's target population is diploma-degree learners at the Alrass College of Technology (ACT) in Qassim, Saudi Arabia, who completed three general English courses in blended learning at the college. Regardless of their major at ACT (computer technology or business), ACT students must complete three English courses as a prerequisite for completion of a diploma degree.

All the participants are male students aged between 18 and 25 years old. Almost 85.3% of the participants were between 18 and 25, only 12.7% were between 26 and 35, and the rest 2% were 36 and above (see chart 1). They are linguistically homogeneous; prior to enrolling in the diploma program, the participants completed nine years of elementary, intermediate, and secondary English language instruction in public schools. The students were expected to manage their courses, follow the lesson materials, and complete group projects, quizzes, and follow-up class activities using Blackboard. In addition, they were also expected to take further feedback on topics covered during in-person classes. In the event that in-person classes could not be held, Blackboard LMS was utilized for both synchronous and asynchronous online training.

**Chart 1. Age range for study participant**



Legend:
- 18–25
- 26–35
- 36–45

Values shown: 85%, 13%, 2%
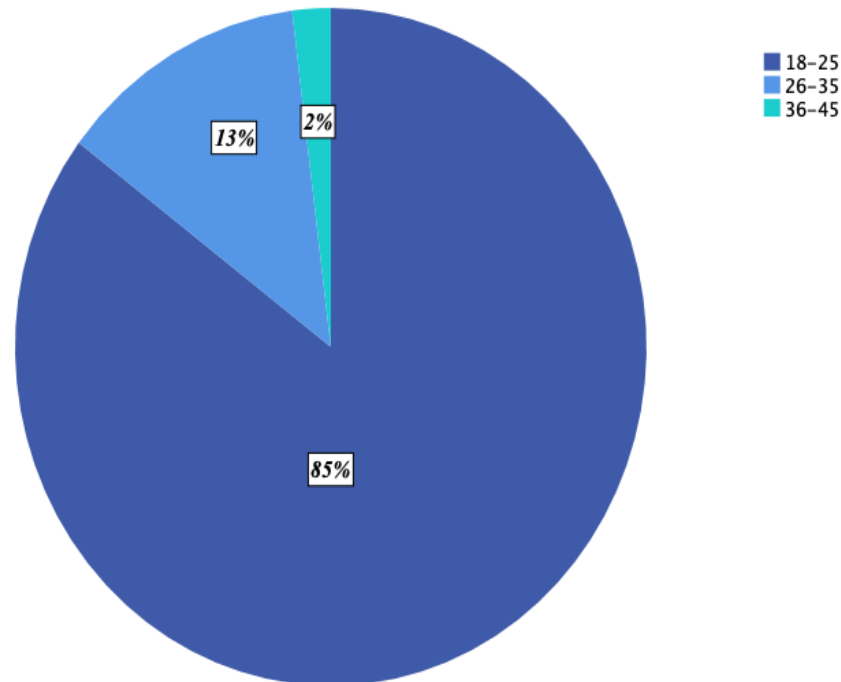
***Instruments:***

The study employs a mixed-methods approach, which implicates two stages of data collection. The quantitative stage employs a questionnaire that concerns students' and teachers' perceptions. As for the qualitative stage, semi-structured interviews were managed with 16 students. The researcher selected 16 students erratically and enquired them to freely express their perceptions, attitudes, and opinions about the English blended learning they had experienced via three questions. The questionnaire enclosed 27 closed-ended Likert scale items; the neutral item marked the midway point, and the items ranged from strongly agree to disagree strongly. Online surveys were created using Google Forms. As a result, a link to the questionnaires was created and sent to the students.

**Reliability and Validity of the Study Instrument**

Regarding the qualitative approach, the interview questions were taken from several studies after a thorough analysis, and the underlying items were determined to address the study questions ( see, for example, (Al-Mutairi & Elsawy, 2022; Alaidarous & Madini, 2016; Albatti, 2023; Aldosemani et al., 2019; Ali, 2017; Alowedi, 2020; Eldeeb, 2019; Farrah & Al-Bakri, 2020; Gulnaz et al., 2020; Ibrahim et al., 2019; Pham et al., 2022) and the underlying items were identified to answer the research questions. Additionally, we requested two experts to double-check the interview questions to ensure they addressed the study's theme. The significance of this approach stems from (Fox, 2009), who claimed that because respondents could precisely articulate their ideas about their experiences, semi-structured interviews were an efficient tool for researchers to get data about perceptions, attitudes, and personal sentiments. Three professional translators translated the Arabic-language interviews into English after taping and transcribing them.

In the meantime, the researcher has examined a number of related studies to ensure the content validity of the questionnaires and the quantitative approach and to develop a suitable tool to record the participants' perceptions of this survey (see, for instance, (Akkoyunlu & Soylu, 2006; Alaidarous & Madini, 2016; AlNajdi, 2015; Hosseini & Shokrpour, 2022; Kenney & Newcombe, 2011; Nurmasitah et al., 2019; Shantakumari & Sajith, 2015; Siegelman, 2019; So, 2006). To confirm the questionnaire's content validity, the first draft was distributed to five senior linguistics lecturers for review. Their comments have improved the questionnaire regarding its divisions and some elements of the chosen questions, and the questionnaire was divided into three sections. Furthermore, the questionnaire was translated into Arabic so participants with various English levels could clearly understand and answer the questions. The translated version was checked for accuracy by three expert translators.

Additionally, an open-ended interview question set has been created to get student responses that reflect the qualitative aspects of the project. The surveys were also piloted. The instrument's reliability was evaluated by calculating the

reliability coefficient using Cronbach's alpha using the SPSS software. The result in Table 1 below, shows strong internal consistency of the reliable blended learning questionnaire, was 93. (Fraenkel et al., 2012) state that a study outcome must be accurate, relevant, suitable, and meaningful. This highlights the significance of validity and reliability. Consequently, the researcher gave these processes extra careful thought.

Table 1 – Cronbach alpha score for the designed questionnaire

| Cronbach's Alpha | Number of Items |
| --- | --- |
| 0.93 | 27 |

**Data Analysis**

SPSS Statistics was used to evaluate quantitative data. Using NVivo 14, qualitative data from open-ended questions were examined. The responses were first translated and then arranged in accordance with open-ended questions. Then, open-coding techniques found participant-defined concepts (Patton, 2002). The researcher developed kinds and themes through ongoing comparison, documented these concepts in a codebook, and produced representative code samples (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002).

**Results**

*Quantitative results*

A decent volume of data was assembled. The quantitative results obtained from the questionnaire indicated that, with the exception of a few levels of social isolation and boredom that participants expressed, the majority of students generally revealed favorable attitudes and perceptions toward using blended learning in an English context. Table 2 shows that most students, 169 in total, or 82.9%, learn more in the blended learning background. It is worth noting that about

half of the students, 90 (44.1%), agreed that an English blended learning environment is boring, compared to those who chose neutral, 45 (22.1%), and 69 (33.8%), who disagreed. Most students supported applying blended learning 152 (74.5%), as it could increase their possibility to ask questions 156 (76.5%). Additional outcome displayed that 155 (76%) of students agreed that blended learning allowed them to be self-motivated and independent in their learning, and they agreed that they could do English tasks anywhere and anytime 152 (74.5%). Other than that, most students responded positively that a blended learning environment makes them more active 151(74%), and they will choose an English blended learning style in the future 148 (72.6%). Interestingly to mention, by looking at the students' choices to item 9 that blended learning makes them socially isolated, to some extent, the students agreed 86 (42.1%), chose neutral 51 (25%), and disagreed 67 (32.9%). Next, 160 (78.40%) of the students agreed that they were fairly assessed through the online testing, and 151 (74.10%) of the students' English competence improved significantly. Moreover, the students agreed that blended learning helps reduce the workload in class and that its environment is more convenient 151 (74%) and 143 (70.10%), respectively.

Table 2 – Perceptions and attitudes of Students to blended learning

| Statement | Strongly agree | | Agree | | Neutral | | Disagree | | Strongly Disagree | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | No. % | | No. % | | No. % | | No. % | | No. % | |
| 1-In the blended learning setting, I could learn more. | 85 | 41.7 | 84 | 41.2 | 21 | 10.3 | 5 | 2.5 | 9 | 4.4 |
| 2-Studying English in a blended learning setting is dull. | 48 | 23.5 | 42 | 20.6 | 45 | 22.1 | 40 | 19.6 | 29 | 14.2 |
| 3-I am in favor of applying blended learning in English courses. | 75 | 36.8 | 77 | 37.7 | 31 | 15.2 | 9 | 4.4 | 12 | 5.9 |
| 4- Blended learning courses escalate the probability of asking questions. | 62 | 30.4 | 94 | 46.1 | 31 | 15.2 | 11 | 5.4 | 6 | 2.9 |
| 5- I can become more autonomous and self-motivated in my learning by studying English through blended learning. | 69 | 33.8 | 86 | 42.2 | 37 | 18.1 | 8 | 3.9 | 4 | 2 |
| 6- With blended learning, I can finish my English tasks anywhere and anytime. | 69 | 33.8 | 83 | 40.7 | 44 | 21.6 | 5 | 2.5 | 3 | 1.5 |
| 7- Using a blended learning approach to study English increase my level of activity. | 67 | 32.8 | 84 | 41.2 | 36 | 17.6 | 7 | 3.4 | 10 | 4.9 |
| 8-If I have the opportunity in the future, I will study English courses in blended learning environment. | 65 | 31.9 | 83 | 40.7 | 42 | 20.6 | 6 | 2.9 | 8 | 3.9 |
| 9-Blended learning makes me socially isolated. | 39 | 19.1 | 47 | 23 | 51 | 25 | 45 | 22.1 | 22 | 10.8 |
| 10-My learning outcomes were fairly assessed through the online testing. | 70 | 34.3 | 90 | 44.1 | 32 | 15.7 | 8 | 3.9 | 4 | 2 |
| 11-The blended learning improves my English competence significantly. | 66 | 32.4 | 85 | 41.7 | 36 | 17.6 | 10 | 4.9 | 7 | 3.4 |
| 12-Learning in blended learning helps me to reduce the workload in class. | 58 | 28.4 | 93 | 45.6 | 38 | 18.6 | 7 | 3.4 | 8 | 3.9 |
| 13- Learning English in a blended learning environment is more convenient. | 63 | 30.9 | 80 | 39.2 | 46 | 22.5 | 8 | 3.9 | 7 | 3.4 |

Table 3 indicates that most students had positive attitudes and perceptions toward blended learning in the context of teachers. According to the results, 167 (81.9%) of the students agreed that teachers in blended learning provide a wide variety of information (such as links to resources) for online learning. Roughly 171 (83.9%) agreed that blended learning can enrich interaction amongst students and lecturers both in person and virtually through online learning platforms. Likewise, an additional result displayed that 168 (82.3%) of the participants concurred that they can inquire their teachers about anything they do not realize through blended learning. Approximately 163 (79.9%) of the students are satisfied that teachers provide timely remarks on their work in blended learning. The majority of students concurred that lecturers can deliver engaging, interactive lessons on Blackboard, and they wanted more frequent engagement from their teachers on Blackboard 168 (82.3%) and 164 (80.4%). Finally, it is significant to note that the students responded to blended learning; our teachers do not reply to our emails promptly. In comparison to the previous items, the lowest percentage of students agreed—114 (55.8%)—was followed by neutrality—49 (24%), and the highest percentage of students disagreed—nearly 41 (20.1%).

Table 3 – Students' perceptions and attitudes regarding blended learning within the teachers' setting

| Statement | Strongly agree | | Agree | | Neutral | | Disagree | | Strongly Disagree | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| 1-In blended learning, instructors provide much information (such as resource links) for virtual learning. | 76 | 37.3 | 91 | 44.6 | 31 | 15.2 | 3 | 1.5 | 3 | 1.5 |
| 2-Through online learning systems, blended learning can enhance communication with instructors both in person and virtually. | 75 | 36.8 | 96 | 47.1 | 26 | 12.7 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 1.5 |
| 3- I can ask my teacher whatsoever I don't recognize via blended learning. | 79 | 38.7 | 89 | 43.6 | 24 | 11.8 | 9 | 4.4 | 3 | 1.5 |
| 4-In blended learning, my teachers provide me with assignment feedback on time. | 61 | 29.9 | 102 | 50 | 34 | 16.7 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 1.5 |
| 5- I believe my instructors are competent to offer dynamic, collaborative learning activities through Blackboard. | 81 | 39.7 | 87 | 42.6 | 26 | 12.7 | 4 | 2 | 6 | 2.9 |
| 6-I wish my teachers would involve me more frequently in Blackboard projects. | 71 | 34.8 | 93 | 45.6 | 31 | 15.2 | 3 | 1.5 | 6 | 2.9 |
| 7-In blended learning, my teachers do not reply to my emails quickly. | 47 | 23 | 67 | 32.8 | 49 | 24 | 27 | 13.2 | 14 | 6.9 |

By examining Table 4, it can be seen that the respondents' attitudes and perceptions toward blended learning in the context of LMS Blackboard are generally affirmative, except for one item that is comparatively less agreeable to the usefulness of learning English through Blackboard. Most respondents, nearly 161 (78.9%), concurred that learning English through Blackboard helped them understand the delivered information, and they showed acceptable responses regarding Blackboard helping to track our progress at around 166 (81.4%). Furthermore, the majority of students can use the Blackboard platform easily, reaching the highest recording of 172 (84.3%), whereas 169 (82.8%) of students were happy with the organization of courses on Blackboard and found it easy to navigate. Approximately 160 respondents, or 78.4%, concurred that using Blackboard permits them to study different course material at their own pace. However, it is interesting to highlight that the respondents gave the lowest score of 99 (48.6%) that learning English through Blackboard is useless; approximately 39 (19.1%) were neutral, and 60 (32.3%) disagreed with this statement. Lastly, most students, around 160 (52%), had technical issues when learning English on Blackboard; only 35 (17.2%) were neutral, and only 63 (30.9%) disagreed.

Table 4 – Students' perceptions and attitudes of blended learning within the framework of Blackboard LMS

| Statement | Strongly agree | | Agree | | Neutral | | Disagree | | Strongly Disagree | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| 1-Learning English through Blackboard helped me to understand the delivered information. | 89 | 43.6 | 72 | 35.3 | 34 | 16.7 | 4 | 2 | 5 | 2.5 |
| 2-Blackboard helped me to track my progress. | 83 | 40.7 | 83 | 40.7 | 30 | 14.7 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 2 |
| 3-I'm able to use Blackboard platform easily. | 105 | 51.5 | 67 | 32.8 | 23 | 11.3 | 6 | 2.9 | 3 | 1.5 |
| 4-The virtual portion of the course via Blackboard is well-ordered and easy to navigate. | 97 | 47.5 | 72 | 35.3 | 25 | 12.3 | 6 | 2.9 | 4 | 2 |
| 5-Using Blackboard, I may study different topics in my English classes at my own speed. | 80 | 39.2 | 80 | 39.2 | 36 | 17.6 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 2 |
| 6-Using Blackboard to learn English is not beneficial. | 44 | 21.6 | 55 | 27 | 39 | 19.1 | 36 | 17.6 | 30 | 14.7 |
| 7- While studying English with Blackboard, I faced technological challenges. | 50 | 24.5 | 56 | 27.5 | 35 | 17.2 | 45 | 22.1 | 18 | 8.8 |

Conhecimento & Diversidade, Niterói, v. 16, n. 43
jul./set. 2024.

32

**Qualitative results**

The semi-structure questionnaire was based on three questions;

1- Is blended learning a beneficial methodology at EFL environment? Why?

2- What features of blended learning do you believe contribute to your increased success in English courses?

3- What features of blended learning do you think hinder your success in English courses?

The results of the semi-structured interviews stressed the conclusions of the factor analysis and those of the descriptive statistics. In general, most students have a positive view of their blended learning English experience. Regarding answering the first question, "Is blended learning a beneficial methodology in an EFL environment? Why?" most students agreed with the profits of operating blended learning in the English environment, as they pointed out that sometimes the students cannot reach out to the colleges due to weather circumstances, and it is better not to limit it to classrooms only and take advantage of technology by applying diverse learning styles, and the curriculum is with you at any time. For instance,

Yes, sure, because it is easier for students who cannot come to the classroom for any reason, such as because they do not have a car, to attend college so they will not miss class. (Participant 1)

Of course, there will be different teaching styles, like introducing new topics in the class face-to-face, doing homework, and doing more exercises on the Blackboard. (Participant 2)

Very very useful because sometimes, if you are alone at home and attend class via distance learning, you are fully concentrated because there are no distractions as in the traditional classroom. And some classes should be face-to-face because you must interact with teachers to understand fully. If all the classes are only face-to-face, it's boring. (Participant 3)

On the other hand, two participants partially agreed with applying blended learning in the English environment. They primarily preferred face-to-face to fully

blended learning and applied blended learning in narrow circumstances such as no access to the college, weather conditions, and any condition that hindered face-to-face classes. They attributed no concentration to blended learning as there are many distractions and a lack of full interaction and body language, like in face-to-face classrooms.

Yes, but face-to-face is better, and if there is no face-to-face, like in heavy rain. The blended learning environment is an alternative to face-to-face learning. Because face-to-face is much more interactive, some students play the lesson on their laptops and work on other things distracting them from the class. (Participant 4)

For me, attending face-to-face classes is far better than blended learning. Blended learning is not my favorite choice for learning. From my own experience, in the blended learning environment, there is no concentration and a lack of body language compared to the face-to-face class. When I came to college, I only had one goal: to understand the lesson. (Participant 5)

Also, only one participant completely disagreed with blending learning in the English environment. He claimed that in blended learning, there is no interaction and concentration. (Participant 6)

No, applying blended learning in the English environment means neglecting the subject. Because I always fully concentrate when I attend face-to-face classes with interaction, I'm always silent and distracted in blended classes. (Participant 7)

Regarding the answer to the second question, "What features of blended learning do you believe contribute to your increased success in English courses?". The participating students stated various features, like increasing homework and exercises with distance learning saved online and more accessible anytime and anywhere, and new lessons being held in face-to-face classes. Also, they suggested that listening skills are better through entirely distant learning because it requires headphones and more quiet places, and one student proposed that when there is a distant synchronized lecture, it is better to open the camera for both students and teachers.

The e-book is with me everywhere, in the classroom or outside, and I can set the alarm for homework and do and send it electronically. For listening skills, I

prefer to do it at home using my own headphones; I can repeat the audio many times. (Participant 8)

With blended learning, I can improve my skills in and outside of college. The teacher sends resources and recorded lectures so I can see them anytime, and I can arrange a meeting with my teachers. Also, I can see all the lectures and resources electronically when I have a test. (Participant 9)

In terms of the answering the last question, "What features of blended learning do you think hinder your success in English courses?". Because many students agree with the blended learning environment, most answered that nothing hinders our success, apart from a few of them adding either challenges or suggestions. Their answers were varied, like the poor connection to the internet, the late response to their questions, better presenting the new topic in the classroom, and interaction like homework online. Only two students mentioned that the heavy use of online writing and reading skills would negatively impact their English proficiency, as these skills need direct and in-person communication between students and teachers in the classroom.

Only writing and reading are presented; most lectures are online, resulting in poor mastery. They need face-to-face interaction; especially writing requires handwriting. (Participant 10)

I think the biggest difficulty I face is that the teachers cannot reply quickly to my questions with online lectures, which decreases my learning progress and sometimes affects my marks. (Participant 11)

**Discussion**

The current study has endeavoured to identify attitudes, perceptions, and factors that could affect ESP Saudi students' experiences of studying English in a blended studying setting. In general, the study has examined students' attitudes and perceptions towards blended learning to discover their experiences with English courses (RQ1) in the context of teachers (RQ2) as well as in the context of LMS Blackboard (RQ3).

Generally, the results affirmed that learners showed positive perceptions and attitudes toward using blended learning in an English environment. In other words, most students agreed with teaching English subjects with blended learning technique, they thought it will enhance their self-motivation, independence, learning flexibility and possibilities to rise questions. However, this was besides a noticeable portion of reported boredom and social isolation. Hence, the current findings aligned with some previous studies (Gulnaz et al., 2020; Ja'ashan, 2015). Whereas, some studies have shown that BL fully benefits students (Abbas et al., 2022; Alaidarous & Madini, 2016; Hosseini & Shokrpour, 2022; Prawisanthi & Permana, 2022). Moreover, both (Abbas et al., 2022; Hosseini & Shokrpour, 2022) found that learners' perception of the blended learning method was positive, with a better post-test perception level toward blended learning than the prior enrollment period according to the pre-test. Additionally, (Prawisanthi & Permana, 2022) confirmed that students were very satisfied with implementing blended learning. It provides more opportunities for them to engage in learning, taking responsibility for their learning process. BL is just as beneficial as in-person instruction for enhancing and expanding knowledge and abilities. Also, both (Gulnaz et al., 2020; Ja'ashan, 2015) reached the same conclusion with the current study: blended learning has more benefits than drawbacks, with students reflecting destructive imprints in some themes as a waste of time and a way to isolate themselves from others. Whereas, (Febriani & Kuswardani, 2022) uncovered that students showed a neutral attitude toward applying blended learning. On the other hand, previous studies (Vaksalla et al., 2019), and (Mohamad et al., 2015) contradicted these results. According to (Vaksalla et al., 2019), students' opinions of blended learning were unfavourable since the assignments' instructions were not clear. Similarly, Mohamad et al. (2015) verified that students struggled to comprehend the materials when learning English. Such findings can be attributed to the lack of proper instructions and lower levels of infrastructure and equipment (Alowedi, 2020; Hosseini & Shokrpour, 2022).

The second finding, which was raised in the second study question, dealt with students' perceptions of their teachers in blended learning. The outcome confirmed

that throughout the blended learning experience, students' positive sentiments about their lecturers remained consistent. It is clear that the instructors have given the students adequate availability, accessibility, and attractiveness throughout the learning process. Interestingly and despite the level of positivity noted prior, the students reported the issue that their teachers do not reply to their emails quickly, as this item recorded the highest agreement rate. (Ja'ashan, 2015) noted similar results, in which the learners' attitudes and perceptions about blended learning for English courses were positive. However, a negative attitude towards blended learning was noticed, which was more connected to BL being time-consuming, like teachers not replying to emails and discussion boards that require more time than face-to-face classes. Another study, (Febriani & Kuswardani, 2022) showed that the students are have a neutral attitude toward communication between students and teachers in the blended learning setting. The prior drawback can be merely resolved through regular instructions and reminders to the teachers of their duty to respond as quickly as possible to students' questions and concerns to make the most from the tool of blended learning.

The third conclusion addressed the third research question, concerned how students felt about blended learning in relation to the LMS Blackboard element. The outcome demonstrated that students positively viewed LMS Blackboard and its usage during blended learning. Nonetheless, it has to be mentioned that students are comparatively less agreeable to the usefulness of learning English through Blackboard, and over half of them reported that they faced technical problems while using Blackboard. This finding was confirmed by previous studies (Ali, 2017; Almelhi, 2021; Üstün, 2023). According to (Al Zumor et al., 2013), the most significant drawback of Blackboard for over half of the students reported was the lack of internet connection, followed by inefficient synchronous and asynchronous activities. Furthermore, (Al-Nofaie, 2020) came to the conclusion that students' negative perceptions of Blackboard learning are a result of the challenges they encounter when taking online tests, which include technical issues that negatively impact their performance. Also, (Al-Mutairi & Elsawy, 2022; Mahyoob, 2020) revealed that the students negatively perceived using Blackboard in blended

learning due to technological issues like internet connection and the deficiency of technical support. The former technical issues should be delivered to the authorities of these institutions to be confronted or reduced in the worst scenarios.

Despite the prior issue, (Almelhi, 2021) concluded that most learners' attitudes and perceptions towards Blackboard LMS were positive, such as its ease of use, availability of the platform, and system quality, besides other reasons, including users' personal factors. Similarly, (Ali, 2017) found that students utilize Blackboard with motivation, put in more effort, and learn more effectively than they would have with traditional teaching techniques. Moreover, (Üstün, 2023) reached the conclusion that the satisfaction level of students who used the Blackboard environment was significantly higher than that of students who were taught in a traditional learning environment. Nonetheless, a lot of students expressed no preference for the Blackboard learning environment over in-person instruction (Pusuluri et al., 2017).

Furthermore, the findings from semi-structured interviews supported the quantitative results. Generally, the interviews with students showed that most students reported being more satisfied and responded positively to the blended learning experiences. Only very few numbers mentioned that BL has drawbacks like causing distraction, a lack of full interaction, getting late responses from their teachers, and heavy use of online writing and reading skills, which would negatively impact their English proficiency. This contracted with (Alebaikan & Troudi, 2010) qualitative study, which concluded that the students were affirmative with the blended learning experience. However, (Alaidarous & Madini, 2016) found that students mentioned some factors that affect their BL experience, like the course content, the quality of the instructor, and the types of activities. Further qualitative studies indicated the high satisfaction level of the students toward blended learning experiences. (Alvi, 2023; Cassidy, 2016; Han & Ellis, 2019; J. R. Smith et al., 2017; Weerasinghe, 2018).

**Study Implications & further studies suggestions**

Our findings offer a deeper understanding of BL and its effectiveness in raising students' competency levels by illuminating their attitudes and perceptions toward the practice. This study acknowledges the usage of BL as a tool to improve teaching and learning practices. The results of this study can be used practically to develop best practices that will assist instructors in introducing and executing creative teaching strategies that support BL in higher education, as well as in advocating for government policies that will acknowledge and encourage student adoption. According to the study's findings, educators should use BL practices that were drawn from the literature. These practices include in-person activities, information, resources, evaluation, and feedback. Teachers should then use these practices to create appropriate learning policies that will help students learn more effectively. These results should offer some recommendations for creating and implementing BL practices. This study implies that user-friendly online platforms are necessary to implement BL practices successfully. Additional studies could explore the implementation of BL in a different context, gender and/or institutions for further investigation. Moreover, the perception and attitudes of instructors should be surveyed for a complete overview.

**Conclusion**

This study has investigated Saudi ESP students' perceptions and attitudes toward blended learning through the learning management system (LMS) known as Blackboard and the factors affecting their attitudes. This was highlighted in light of three angles concerning their general overview, in the context of teachers and the context of LMS Blackboard. Generally, students reported positive attitudes and perceptions of applying blended learning in an English learning environment. However, there were some levels of reported boredom, social isolation, delay in response by teachers, and technical issues. These were highlighted, explained, and

answered with suggestions and recommendations to the educational authorities to improve the blended learning experience and make the most of this technique.

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**Appendix I**

Blended learning for English language courses

Dear trainee:

This study aims to explore students' perceptions, experiences, and attitudes towards blended learning at the Technical and Vocational Training Corporation (TVTC), especially English language courses by applying the blended learning approach after the COVID-19 pandemic at Al-Rass College of Technology (ACT). branch of TVTC, and the factors that influence their attitudes. To accomplish the study's goals, the following research questions were presented.

Blended learning means combining conventional face-to-face education "in person in the classroom" with distance education via the Internet, through which complementary materials are provided in which students meet with their teachers either synchronously or asynchronously through virtual classroom spaces and participate in activities published online, for example, tests and assignments online. Assignments, seminars, and meetings using a learning management system (LMS) like Blackboard.

Your cooperation is of great value to the study and the field of English language teaching in Saudi Arabia.

Note that the identity of the participants in this study will not be disclosed to your college or any other party.

Your response with accuracy and credibility is our utmost hope.

Thank you for your time,

note

Participation in this study is optional.

By clicking "next" you agree to participate in the research

**First Section**

*Sex*

- Male
- Female
- Rather not to say.

*Age*

- 15-25
- 25-35
- 35-45

**Second Section**

The following questionnaires will take 5-10 minutes to complete.

Questionnaire One

| Perceptions and attitudes of Students to blended learning | Strongly agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1- In the blended learning setting, I could learn more. | | | | | |
| 2- Studying English in a blended learning setting is dull. | | | | | |
| 3-I am in favor of applying blended learning in English courses. | | | | | |
| 4- Blended learning courses escalate the probability of asking questions. | | | | | |
| 5- I can become more autonomous and self-motivated in my learning by studying English through blended learning. | | | | | |
| 6-With blended learning, I can finish my English tasks anywhere and anytime. | | | | | |
| 7- Using a blended learning approach to study English increase my level of activity. | | | | | |
| 8-If I have the opportunity in the future, I will study English courses in blended learning environment. | | | | | |
| 9-Blended learning makes me socially isolated. | | | | | |
| 10-My learning outcomes were fairly assessed through the online testing. | | | | | |
| 11-The blended learning improves my English competence significantly. | | | | | |
| 12-Learning in blended learning helps me to reduce the workload in class. | | | | | |
| 13- Learning English in a blended learning environment is more convenient. | | | | | |

Questionnaire Two

| **Students' perceptions and attitudes regarding blended learning within the teachers' setting** | Strongly agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1- In blended learning, instructors provide much information (such as resource links) for online learning. | | | | | |
| 2- Through online learning systems, blended learning can enhance communication with instructors both in person and virtually. | | | | | |
| 3- I can ask my teacher whatsoever I don't recognize via blended learning. | | | | | |
| 4- In blended learning, my teachers provide me with assignment feedback on time. | | | | | |
| 5- I believe my instructors are competent to offer dynamic, collaborative learning activities through Blackboard. | | | | | |
| 6-I wish my teachers would involve me more frequently in Blackboard projects. | | | | | |
| 7-In blended learning, my teachers do not reply to my emails quickly. | | | | | |

Questionnaire Three

| Students' perceptions and attitudes of blended learning within the framework of Blackboard LMS | Strongly agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1-Learning English through Blackboard helped me to understand the delivered information. | | | | | |
| 2-Blackboard helped me to track my progress. | | | | | |
| 3-I'm able to use Blackboard platform easily. | | | | | |
| 4- The virtual portion of the course via Blackboard is well-ordered and easy to navigate. | | | | | |
| 5- Using Blackboard, I may study different topics in my English classes at my own speed. | | | | | |
| 6- Using Blackboard to learn English is not beneficial. | | | | | |
| 7- While studying English with Blackboard, I faced technological challenges. | | | | | |

**Appendix II**

The semi-structure questionnaire interview questions:

1- Is blended learning a beneficial methodology at EFL environment? Why?

2- What features of blended learning do you believe contribute to your increased success in English courses?

3- What features of blended learning do you think hinder your success in English courses?