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Hail University Learners' Attitudes towards Blended Learning (BL)

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Abstract As online learning environment is growing among universities worldwide including developing countries; still, there are some difficulties that might interrupt the implementation of this environment; such as: Technological difficulties and/or Skills lacking. The aim of this research is to identify the usage of Blackboard as a blended learning tool by which the faculty members and students recognize the perceptions and scope of e-learning programs and get trained to use the technology like blackboard in Education. The sample surveyed in this study was 35 faculty members and instructors at University of Hail (UOH), College of Computer Science and Software Engineering and 150 students. A descriptive methodology has involved analysis of the implemented online system at the college CCSE of UOH and how faculty members and students are interacting with it. The main obstacles found in the study were: Lack of needed training and experience in using ICT (Information & Communication Technology), lack of continuous internet connection and smooth communication, lack of encouragement and restricted rules. Faculty members are invited to develop their technological skills and the experience in using ICT especially in producing electronic materials such as: recording lectures via Echo application, upload videos on YouTube channel, slide share etc.

Keywords Higher Education, University Of Hail, Blackboard, E-learning, Educational Technology, Distance Learning and Instruction

Introduction

The impacts of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) on the higher education sector have increased the awareness of many staff about the need to improve teaching and learning. This has lead to the development of new teaching strategies to accompany new technology. Online learning is one outcome of the rapid improvements in ICT. At its most basic it provides students with better access to traditional teaching materials. But online learning offers much more, it can enhance learning processes and teaching experiences by offering new learning strategies.

One of the most significant of these technological improvements is e-learning which has expanded opportunities for when and where learning takes place [1-2]. There is a variety of definitions of e-learning. For Sun et al., [3] E-learning is simply "the use of telecommunication technology to deliver information for education and training". Yucel [2] defines e-learning slightly more restrictively as "a web-based educational system on a platform with Internet, Intranet or computer access".

The advantages of enhanced communication between students and between students and lectures are commented upon by Mapuva [6]. Sife et al. [7] suggest the educational possibilities of e-learning by stating that it is "an essential complement to the traditional way of teaching (i.e. face-to-face)".

And currently The Blackboard platform is one of the most educational systems used globally and specifically in Saudi University helping in Blended learning.

The Blackboard Learning System is a virtual learning environment and course management system developed by Blackboard Inc. It is a Web-based server software which features course management, customizable open architecture, and scalable design that allows integration with student information systems and authentication

protocols. It may be installed on local servers or hosted by Blackboard ASP Solutions. Its main purposes are to add online elements to courses traditionally delivered face-to-face and to develop completely online courses with few or no face-to-face meetings. It was founded in 1997 in USA as a power online education for wider institutional application. It provides users with a platform for communication and sharing content. These two ways includes: (Blackboard)

1. Communication

• Announcements: where faculty members can post an announcement for students which facilitate the process of communication with students announcement can be found under the announcement tab, or can be made to pop-up when student access blackboard.

• Discussions: which allow students to create a thread of discussion and make a reply for these discussions.

Chat: this feature allows students to online chatting to their classmates.

Mail: this function will facilitate sending e-mail between faculty members and students, also students to each others.

2. Content

• Course content: this feature allows faculty members to post tutorials, labs, tests, quizzes, and videos.

• Calendar: this feature allows faculty member to post their announcements due dates.

• Learning modules: this function support online classes by allowing faculty members to post their tutorials for their students.

• Assessments: this feature allows students to do their quizzes online and get their results once they finish their assessments.

• Assignments: students can submit their assignment online by this feature.

• Grade Book: grades can be posted through this feature for students by faculty member.

• Media Library: faculty members can post videos or any other media by this feature.

Methodology

The rapid growth technology specifically in the fast growing field of learning and teaching, particularly mentioning the usage of the web based technologies and communications in educational sector, have offered educators with many more opportunities to explore and investigate the most suitable learning environments for their students' learning styles.

The purpose of the present study was to examine the faculty's teaching methodology and student's learning styles and their combined views on blended learning.

The current study is descriptive in nature. It aims to examine and explore the college at two sides:

- UOH faculty members and instructors perceptions regarding the use of Blackboard in teaching or e-learning in terms of effectiveness, perceived advantages and disadvantages, helpfulness of training programs in using this technology, and the obstacles presented in the utilization of it. The sample of the study consisted of (35) faculty members within the College of Computer Science and Software Engineering. These members are involved in blended learning were randomly selected and invited to participate in a survey prepared by the researchers and designed to obtain responses about teaching using the online learning management system: Blackboard. Faculty members were advised that their involvement in the project was voluntary. They could withdraw from participation at any time. A questionnaire was developed to assess examining and exploring faculty (members and instructors) perceptions regarding the use of Blackboard in teaching after reviewing the theoretical literature. The questionnaire consisted of (30) items. It was sent to a specialist in instructional technology to review the items and to establish the validity of the questionnaire.
- UOH students in College of Computer Science and Software Engineering, 150 students will participate in this study. A 20 items questionnaire was developed by the researchers. The student's responses for this instrument were marked directly on the survey. The questionnaire instrument was designed to help the researcher for identifying student's perceptions toward the use of blackboard. Also, questions were intended to gather information about student's difficulty and satisfaction toward the use of Blackboard software to deliver course materials as a communication tool.

The data from the two questionnaires were analyzed by using SPSS. Descriptive analysis and (T-Test) were used.

Utilization of Expected Results

Based on the findings and results, researchers may recommend the following:

- Training and Education about the Blackboard system should be increased and efficient in Computer Science and Software Engineering College at the University of Hail (UOH).
- Motivate to use the Blackboard as a worldwide e-learning system.
- Improve the internet connection (University network) in order to encourage using blackboard system and develop technical skills.
- Consider the blackboard system as the main e-learning system and increase the skills level of faculty members by providing the appropriate training and orientation.

Results and Discussion

Regarding the student perceptions were positive for the blended learning systems; students' response rate was 85 % about their satisfaction for using blackboard. So Satisfaction has been widely used as one of the important parameter to evaluate learning effectiveness in academic institution [8].

Higher student satisfaction is the results of good learning and related to the student's response, it has found from the result of questionnaire that high positive student's satisfaction above 80%). On the other side, 10 % of the students found difficulty for submitting their quizzes and assignments on Blackboard.

Learning resources in blended learning settings provide the contents and course materials are a facilitated technology, 86% agreement on blended methods because it is effective on course delivery.

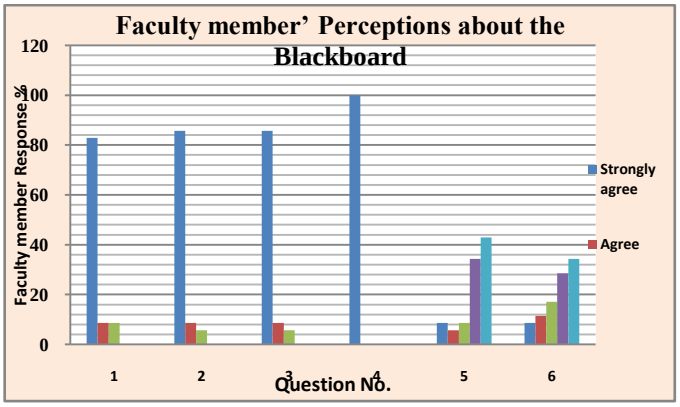
Students' Views on Blended Learning Environment

Student's Views	Percentage
Ease of use of Web Environment	82 %
Online Environment	83 %
Content	84 %
Face-to-face environment	89 %
Evaluation	85 %
Blended Learning Method	83 %
General	84 %

Related to the result of questionnaire desired for staff members, there is a high positive quality of teaching (above 80%) has been reflected for using blended methods.

Faculty member' Perceptions about the Blackboard

No.	Question	No. of answers					Percentage					Mean	Comment on Mean	Total no of samples
		Strongly agree	Agree	True sometimes	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Strongly agree	Agree	True sometimes	Disagree	Strongly disagree			
		5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1			
1	Blackboard is easy to use	29	3	3	0	0	83	9	9	0	0	4.74	Strongly Agree	35
2	I would recommend Blackboard to others	30	3	2	0	0	86	9	6	0	0	4.8	Strongly Agree	35
3	Blackboard is the best e-learning system I ever used	30	3	2	0	0	86	9	6	0	0	4.8	Strongly Agree	35
4	Blackboard is an efficient system to interact with students	35	0	0	0	0	100	0	0	0	0	5	Strongly Agree	35
5	I prefer to use a different e-learning tool	3	2	3	12	15	9	6	9	34	43	2.02	Disagree	35
6	Blackboard doesn't make a difference in e-learning	3	4	6	10	12	9	11	17	29	34	2.31	Disagree	35

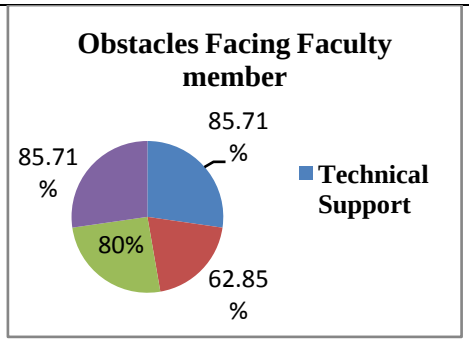


The table below shows a high agreement level by the faculty member towards the Blackboard using and preferring and the mean ranged between (4.7–5). However, the question "I prefer to use a different e-learning tool" was the lowest with a mean of (2.02).

There are a second part of questions related to the difficulties facing the faculty members to use the blackboard.

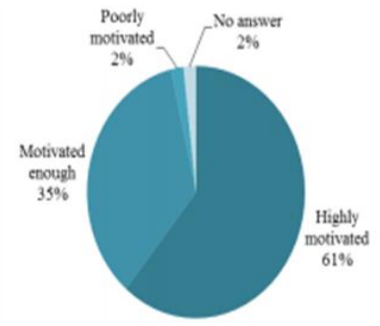
Obstacles Facing Faculty members

Obstacle	Number	(%)
Technical Support	30	85.71 %
Technical Skills	22	62.85 %
Low Internet Connection	28	80 %
Knowledge/Training	30	85.71 %



According to the response of faculty members for this item, we found that they faced technical support and knowledge and training problems (85.71 %), so it seems that the study sample is facing difficulties using the Blackboard system due to low

Background knowledge in technology (computer and software especially in producing electronic materials such as: recording lectures via Echo application upload videos on YouTube channel, slide share, flicker...etc. And (80%) faced Low Internet Connection problems during handling with BB platform.



Learners' motivation level during the learning experience

Conclusion and Recommendations

Facing challenges of rapid technological changes in higher education, we have shown that a blended learning approach can mitigate some of these challenges. Blended learning will combine traditional classroom learning with online and mobile learning in order to maximize the understanding of theoretical principles, gaining knowledge and development of technical, practical and professional skills.

Some examples were presented of blended learning in surveying education and information on some key concepts in blended learning. Both provide some insight into blended learning that is likely to become the standard in education in the coming years. In fact, many higher education institutions are already in a transition from traditional classroom teaching to some form of blended learning, by increasing the use of e-learning and e-assessment components.

Based on the findings and results, we recommend the following:

- Training and Education about the Blackboard system should be increased and implemented among all universities in the Kingdom.
- Improve the efficiency of network connectivity i.e. University LAN and internet network in order to encourage the usage of blackboard system among the faculty and enhance the technical skills.
- Provide timely technical support and make it more efficient: Fast communications and skilled maintenance, and to fix any issue that may prevent the faculty member from using the Blackboard, because sometimes Blackboard user (Teacher) cannot deal with technical difficulties by herself e.g.: Blackboard system is not responding – Slow processing or no response from the Bb system, Audio/Visual problems … etc
- Consider the blackboard system as the main e-learning system and increase the skills level of faculty member by providing the appropriate training and orientation.

Student responses suggest ensuring a guide on the use of Blackboard in digital as well as booklet form from the university, also providing appropriate technical assistance for the students to face the breakdowns that may occur on the system.

Acknowledgements

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