

Utilizing Online Platforms in Teaching and Learning English in the Preparatory Year Program at IAU

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Abstract The purpose of this paper is to present a study on the utility of online e-learning platforms for teaching and learning English in the Preparatory Year Program in Imam Abdurrehman bin Faisal University, Dammam, Saudi Arabia. To investigate the utilization of online e-learning platforms, the researcher mainly used questionnaires. The participants of the study were 74 English language teachers and 1533 students of the PYP. The findings of the study imply that online e-learning platforms help teachers interact with their students. The study also suggests that the online written feedback tool is helpful in improving students' writing skills. The study also implies that the more students use online platforms, the better they are engaged in language learning. The study also suggests that teachers' in-class teaching practices are further supported by utilizing the online activities and continuous assessment tools. The study concludes that there should be a fully operational online support system and information communications technical team in order to facilitate the online learning and teaching English in PYP.

Keywords: E-learning; Blended-learning; Languaging; Preparatory Year Program; Learning Management Systems

1. Introduction

E-learning is “a broader concept [than online learning], encompassing a wide set of applications and processes which use all available electronic media to deliver vocational education and training more flexibly” (Australian National Training Authority. 2003, p. 5). The term “e-learning” is now used...to capture the general intent to support a broad range of electronic media (Internet, intranets, extranets, satellite broadcast, audio/video tape, interactive TV and CD-ROM), to make vocational learning more flexible for clients.” (ANTA, 2003, p. 5)

One of the E-learning objectives is to extend the learning process outside the classroom. This type of learning helps to reduce class load for students by decreasing contact hours and substituting it with interactive means that students can use wherever and whenever they want (Mohammadi, N. Ghorbani, V. & Hamidi, F. 2011). Whether students are on campus or at home, they can make

use of their free time with E-learning, which is flexible enough to add interaction to learning, by using modern technologies that attract all students. In addition, E-learning helps students to be self-dependent in gaining experience and knowledge and in using active learning tools (Mohammadi, N. Ghorbani, V. & Hamidi, F. 2011).

E-learning is becoming more and more attractive for those willing to study without conflict with family or work. Present adult students share the active learning culture, are positively motivated and prefer getting knowledge and skills at a time and in a manner that makes sense for them. Hoskova, S. Rosicka, Z. (2015) E-learning with clever supplementary tailored explanations can enrich conventional educational lessons and training programs and teaching methods used link directly to learning outcomes. (Contini R. & Maturo, A. 2011; Hoskkova, S. and Mokra, Z. 2010; Maturo, A and Paone, F. 2012).

Some key advantages of E-learning in English teaching (Cai, H. 2012) are abundant teaching resources, easy access to information, teaching and students in accordance with their aptitude. It has been observed that e-learning fosters interaction among students and instructors (Mohammadi, N. Ghorbani, V. & Hamidi, F. 2011). E-learning at the present time is transforming the traditional concept of teaching and learning and entails many advantages.

The role of the teacher in e-learning is that of a facilitator while the students learn with freedom of choice, place and time (Carrolaggi, P. 2006). E-learning fosters effective communication between students and teachers and contributes positively to language learning. One of the most notable advantages of e-learning activities is that the learning management systems are designed to provide instant feedback with accuracy of answers. According to Davies, N. (2015) automatic marking can save significant amount of time and provide instant feedback to students. Listening, speaking, reading and writing activities along with practice quizzes provide instant feedback and supported by mark-up tools, grading rubrics, media files and resource materials which play a motivational role for students to learn, without getting passive and disinterested. As most of the e-learning activities are deadline-oriented, these help students with learning and train them to adhere to deadlines and submit assignments on time. The aim of this study is to investigate the utility of digital platforms in teaching and learning English in PYP.

2. Literature Review

Technology is very much part of English language learning throughout the world at all different levels. We are as likely to find it in the primary sector as much as in adult education (Motteram, G. 2013). E-learning in education, especially in English language learning has gained much momentum and significance for higher educational universities and colleges. Several research studies and authors have listed benefits and advantages derived from the adoption of e-learning technologies into language learning schools (Klein, D and Ware, M. 2003). Some studies give advantage of e-learning as its ability

to focus on the needs of individual learners. For example Rosenberg, M. J. (2001). in his book review on e-learning strategies for delivering knowledge in the digital age noted that one of the advantages of e-learning in education is its focus on the needs of individual learners as an important factor in the process of education rather than on the instructors or educational institutions' needs. According to Smedley, J. (2013), the adoption of e-learning provides the institutions, as well as their students much flexibility of time and place for delivery of receipt of knowledge according to learning needs. Wagner (2008) reports that e-learning makes available extra prospects for interactivity between students and teachers during content delivery. The use of e-learning allows self-pacing (asynchronous). For instance the asynchronous way permits each student to study at his or her own pace and speed whether slow or quick. It therefore increases satisfaction and decreases stress (Klein, D and Ware, M. 2003). The above-mentioned advantages of e-learning have been summed up by Holmes, B and Gardner, J. (2006) by noting that the ability of e-learning to assess students or learners as they learn, and at the same time increase their experiences in education, by way of interactivity suitable to community education, cultural diversity, globalization, and eradicating boundaries of place and time. To them the most vital characteristics as well as advantage of e-learning in education is that it centres on the students or learners (Holmes, B and Gardner, J. 2006). Through e-learning, according to Raba, M. (2005), objectives can be accomplished in the shortest time with the least amount of effort. Both learners and instructors are able to accomplish and keep up with developments as they obtain experience that is provided by numerous specialists in various fields of knowledge. In his most recent book for the British Council: "Innovations in Learning Technologies for English Language Teaching" Motteram, G. (2013) reported that digital technologies are ideally placed to help teachers working with learners and learners working independently to do the necessary 'languaging' (Swain, M. 2006) that makes their language development possible. Languaging, according to Swain, is the process of "input" and "output" in language learning production. Reading Swain's study about the concept of languaging is interesting in terms of

why the author found a new word “*linguaging*” instead of “*input*” and “*output*” in second language learning. According to Swain, *linguaging* is a “means to mediate cognition” (Swain, M. 2006, p. 96)...“and a process of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language” (p. 98). As Swain reports, the approach is to link the word “*linguaging*” to the project/s to have students use their *linguaging* in learning English by using digital technology as a tool and resource. Swain also suggests that students may learn and improve their language skills through interacting with each other via e-learning. (Swain, M. 2006). The implication here is to show that language learning and production process is supported by online activities and assessment tools.

Arkorful, V. & Abaidoo, N. (2014) report a very comprehensive yet concise conclusion for the benefits and importance of e-learning: “E-learning involves the use of digital tools for teaching and learning. It involves training, delivery of knowledge and motivates students to interact with each other, as well as exchange and respect different point of views.” (2014, p. 403). According to Arkorful the adoption of e-learning in institutions has increased the access of faculty and learners to information and has provided a rich environment for collaborative learning among students which have improved academic standards and excellence in learning.

Kelm, O. R. (1992) observed a second language classroom where non-native speakers of Portuguese participated in class discussion via a real time computer network. He reported that computer-assisted class discussions may promote student participation and reduce anxiety. The implication here is that computer assisted classroom activities support students’ active engagement and lead to further learning.

Ariew, R. & Ercetin, G. (2004) conducted research regarding whether different types of hyper media annotations facilitate reading comprehension for intermediate and advanced ESL students. They reported that hypermedia reading had a positive impact on the participants’ attitudes towards reading on the computer. The critical stance here is that reading comprehension

is developed by using the hypermedia annotations and has a positive impact on the students.

Jones, Z. (1993) and Kauffmann, R. A. (1996) both found strong positive effects on students’ reading achievement. Therefore, it is beneficial for educators, English language learners and researchers to know the actual effectiveness of internet-supported language instruction and e-learning digital platforms by conducting a systematic review of the research study regarding the e-learning program. The critical implication here is to ensure that the e-learning programs are systematically planned, designed and implemented.

Cai, H. (2012) conducted research exploring the application and advantages of e-learning in English teaching and analysis of appropriate pedagogical strategies so as to improve students’ learning efficiency and enable students to master English as a second language. Cai, H. observed that “language ability is a kind of mental skill, which needs the right pedagogical strategies and training methods. E-learning will liberate the heavy labor of teachers and also enable students to easily master English.” (2012, p. 846). The implication here is that e-learning activities, once carefully analyzed, make the learning and teaching process easy for teachers and students alike.

Hubackova, S. (2015) conducted a research study to demonstrate the effectiveness of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in teaching. The purpose of the research study was to identify how often students use ICT to study the English and German languages. Hubackova, S. observed that “Blended learning is considered to be the most suitable method for students. Students of both the English and German languages like to work with audio and video recordings. They find them advantageous and a suitable complement of study that could partially compensate for not having native speaker.” (2015, p. 529) According to Hubackova, S. blended-learning is a very good method to provide a substitute for native speakers to students who are non-native speakers of English. It is noteworthy at this point that in contrast with blended-learning, e-learning is a method of a wider scale and more productive in

terms of its impact on learning and teaching practices.

(Mohammadi, N. Ghorbani, V. & Hamidi, F. 2011) conducted research exploring the effects of e-learning and sub-categories such as the internet; web-based English learning and computer-assisted language learning (CALL) on learning and teaching (LL/LT). The research paper concluded that “As the world progresses, the use of e-learning, electronic devices, internet, computers in the teaching and learning process increase too and we have to synchronize ourselves with it and increase our abilities to be able to work with technologies to increase our knowledge.” (2011, p. 467). According to Ghorbani, V. these modern tools and technologies provide teachers with practical and creative ideas and help them in creating their own eclectic teaching methods. The critical stance here in order to learn from state-of-the-art e-learning tools like Moodle and Blackboard, it is a must for the users to learn the technological advancements and develop their abilities to work with e-learning softwares and online assessment tools.

Gluchmanova, M. (2015) in a research study tried to evaluate the work of a research team at the Department of Humanities and the Department of Manufacturing Management at Technical University, Slovakia. The study aimed at finding the most appropriate methodology in the teaching of foreign language material and preparing the most suitable study material for courses at the university. Gluchmanova, M. observed that “teachers will be familiar with the prepared methodical-didactic processing of various foreign language topics. Moodle thus provides a large amount of resources and opportunities by which we can create a modern and efficient e-learning courses.” (2015, p. 3148). The implication here is to provide students with a hub and digital platforms for a 24 hour availability of learning resources and assessment activities. These activities should be user-friendly and productive in their results.

Similarly, Rymanova, I. Baryshnikov, N. and Grishaeva, A. (2015) conducted research on an e-course based on the LMS Moodle for English language teaching. The study aimed at

development and implementation of results for the Moodle based e-course. Rymanova concluded that “blended learning is a form of learning that combines the traditional full-time form of teaching with modern forms of e-learning.” (2015, p. 240). According to Rymanova, I. the e-course utilizes significant on-line tasks and activities to further enhance the face-to-face (F2F) learning in class. According to Rymanova, I. blended-learning supports the traditional teaching practices with online activities where learning is asynchronous. In contrast to this study of blended-learning, this study reports digital online platforms as more dynamic, user-friendly hubs of learning resource materials and pools for continuous assessment.

Hoskova, S. and Rosicka, Z. (2015) in a research study explored e-learning experiences and approaches from 3 different universities. Sarka reported that “E-learning or e-education programs can offer wider content on a topic than the conventional education lesson. In e-education, the more important issue to be addressed is actually the teaching method embedded in the training programs because the teaching methods link directly to the learning outcomes.” (2015, p. 961) The critical stance here is to carefully plan the e-learning activities in alignment with the teaching methods taught and deployed in the classroom face-to-face environment. Only this will ensure a result-oriented e-learning program for the students and teachers in an educational institution.

This paper investigates the utility of digital e-learning platforms in teaching and learning English language in PYP and presents implications and recommendations per the results and findings of questionnaires conducted in this regard. It is noteworthy that the study strives to examine the utility and implications of “e-learning” and not “blended-learning”. This study is different from the research citations referred to above as it is comprehensive and is not limited to a single skill development for students’ learning via the online learning tools. Rather it examines four integrated skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) development via e-learning platforms. This research study is unique as it reports the wide scale implementation of two e-learning LMS tools: Blackboard & Oxford IQ

across PYP. It is also significant as it reports the Oxford IQ Online learning in integration with Blackboard learning management system through a single sign-in. Furthermore the study investigates the utility of Blackboard with Oxford IQ as one serve for the other as an available back-up and support platform for students and teachers alike. The study aims to focus on the satisfaction of teachers and students with the e-learning activities; positive utility of Blackboard and Oxford IQ as online e-learning tools; appropriate assistance and training for the teachers and students for smooth implementation and management of the e-learning program in PYP; amount of work required from teachers and students per the assigned weekly e-learning hours; continuous assessment activities and e-learning platforms for bridging the communication gap between the teachers and the students. It is noteworthy that this paper presents in light of the findings, viable and practical recommendations for future improvement of the e-learning program and suggests areas in the domain of e-learning digital platforms and technical support for further investigation.

3. Description of the E-learning Program in PYP

This paper presents an investigation into the e-learning digital platforms of Blackboard and Oxford IQ that can significantly help in improving the e-learning program in PYP in the coming years. The PYP has been making every effort to transform the university from a conventional one using conventional teaching methods into a modern university that aspires to advancement and excellence. This excellence can be measured in terms of teaching methods, utilizing state-of-the-art technology in education, and reaching a high position of quality education. Being fully aware of the significance of the role of technology in modern education, the PYP has decided to give priority to learning through digital platforms in all courses at the first year learning program. All the way through, there have been technical challenges and also there have been successes, but this is expected under certain circumstances. Soon after the lapse of the preliminary stage of implementation, most of the obstacles were overcome through the collaboration and efforts of

all participants. Teachers were given several training sessions so they could guide their students through the registration process and learn how to navigate and learn from two digital learning platforms: *Blackboard*, *Oxford IQ*. Ever since the e-learning move was triggered, and over the course of several months of application, students have actively engaged in Blackboard discussion boards, submitting quizzes, practice tests, writing portfolio assignments as well as recorded presentations. Students improved their listening and reading skills by solving Oxford IQ listening & reading comprehension as well as their writing skills via writing tutor and interactive feedback by their teachers.

3.1. E-learning Program Objectives

The objectives of the E-learning Program are to enable students to actively participate in online discussions and express their ideas and opinions; feel confident studying and being assessed online; become autonomous learners and take responsibility for their learning and explore the advantages and benefits of online study.

3.2. E-learning Course Curriculum & Organization

The E-Learning program is part of the General English (101) and English for Academic and Specific Purposes 102 courses at PYP. It provides students with an opportunity to engage in interactive online activities which can be accessed from anywhere at any time. The program relies on two digital e-learning platforms: Blackboard and Oxford Learn, and through their adoption exposes students to a range of assessment methods which include, quizzes, practice tests, discussions and recorded presentations. The program is worth 5% of the overall grade for General English (101) and ESP/ EAP (102) respectively. It includes content and activities that are graded and ungraded, both of which seek to enhance the learning outcomes of students. The E-learning activities are completed by students in the e-learning hour, at home or in computer labs or facilities available at the university. In order for students to successfully complete this course, they will need to have

computers/laptops/tabs with good speed and stable internet access.

3.3. Evaluation and Grading Policy

The E-learning program represents 5% of the grade for the General English (101) and 5% for the 102 courses. The e-learning components constitute Blackboard quizzes (1.5%); Oxford IQ quizzes (1.5%); Blackboard discussions & recorded presentations (1% each) while the Blackboard practice tests (mock exams) are graded per the participation of the students.

3.4. E-learning Course Policy

PYP has standardized policies governing implementation, assessment and evaluation of the e-learning course. All writing portfolio assignments and other writing tasks submissions must only be made in the Blackboard. No emails or printed submissions will be accepted in order to promote a paper-less environment. Assignment deadlines must be followed according to the E-learning schedule to ensure acceptance and grading by the class teacher. Students are expected to complete all E-learning activities by scheduled deadlines. Students who are not participating will receive warnings by their instructors and academic coordinators. Students are expected to respect other students in all types of online communication, particularly when discussing topics in forums or providing feedback for presentations. Students should be encouraged to complete activities by themselves. Class teachers and Blackboard coordinators ensure that students strictly adhere to this e-learning policy and standard operating procedures.

3.5. Blackboard and Oxford IQ - Digital E-learning Platforms

Students will complete two quizzes (vocabulary and grammar) in the Blackboard after each completed unit in the Q: Skills textbook. Students will get 0.5 points for getting between 0-50% correct and 1 point for getting between 51%-100%. The student's grade will depend on the number of points obtained at the end of the year.

Students will be asked to participate in two discussions during the academic year; one in Term 1 and the other in Term 2. These discussions are

worth 0.5% each. All students will be required to discuss a topic and will receive a grade based on their participation.

Students will be asked to record two presentations during the academic year in the Blackboard; one in Term1 and the other in Term 2. These presentations are worth 0.5% each. Students will be required to record audio presentations on assigned topics by the class teacher.

Students will have a total of four practice tests throughout the academic year. Each test is worth 0.25% of their final grade. The purpose of these tests is to familiarize students with course contents and test students' understanding before they sit for their exams. These tests will be conducted via Blackboard and the mark will be based on their participation.

Students will complete two quizzes (Oxford IQ listening comprehension and reading comprehension) after each completed Q Skills unit on Oxford IQ. Students will get 0.5 points for getting between 0-50% correct and 1 point for getting between 51%-100%.

4. Research Questions

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent do English language teachers at PYP, perceive the two e-learning digital platforms of Blackboard and Oxford IQ effective in improving English language?
2. To what extent do English language teachers at PYP, perceive Blackboard and Oxford IQ Online activities effective and integral in English language teaching practices.

5. Methodology

In order to find answers to the above questions and the utility of e-learning platforms for teachers, a questionnaire was conducted across PYP. The participants of this research study were 74 (29 males + 43 females = 74) English language teachers at PYP, Imam Abdurrehman bin Faisal University. The total population of the study represents 120 teachers. The sample of the study represents 61% of the population. The participants (aged between 25-40) were teachers of different nationalities, mainly from USA, Canada, UK,

Australia, South Africa, Somalia, Jordan, India and Pakistan. The questionnaire was sent to all teachers via emails. A total number of 70 teachers across PYP completed the questionnaire. The average time to complete the questionnaire was 9 minutes. The completion rate turned out to be 94.59%. The questionnaire contained 12 questions and focused on the utility and implementation of the e-learning program, teachers' satisfaction with the e-learning program and the required training and the impact of the e-learning on the English language teaching practices. Following objectives were kept in mind while designing the questionnaire: level of satisfaction among teachers; teachers' opinions about the whole e-learning program; analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of the e-learning program; level of satisfaction about the required technical training for Blackboard and Oxford IQ; amount of work for the e-learning hours; the utility of the Blackboard and Oxford IQ online activities for students' skills development; problems that teachers faced during the implementation of the e-learning program; Blackboard as an effective tool for teacher-to-student effective communication and viable recommendations for the future improvement of the e-learning program.

In order to identify the utility of e-learning digital platforms for students' learning, two questionnaires were conducted across PYP, Imam Abdurrehman bin Faisal University. Out of the total population of the students, 1533 participants responded to the questionnaires (Oxford IQ: 907 – Blackboard: 626). The participants were mainly Saudi adult students (aged between 18-20). Other nationalities include Yemen, Syria, Egypt and Pakistan. These questionnaires were sent to all students via emails and text messages. During the first ten days, the questionnaires were sent to the first group that comprises 50% of students (equally among all tracks). Then, they were sent to the second group (50% of the remaining students) for the next ten days. The questionnaires were available for 20 days. Each questionnaire took about 6-7 minutes to complete. These questionnaires focused on LMS systems usage, students' preferences and opinions; satisfaction of students with the e-learning program; level of LMS support; solution to problems and utility of Blackboard and Oxford IQ online activities for

English language learning. The following objectives were kept in mind while designing the questionnaires: level of satisfaction among students; students' opinions about the whole e-learning program; analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the e-learning program; problems that students face during the implementation of the program and students' LMS usage preferences.

6. Results

6.1. Teachers' Questionnaire

Following results were acquired after conducting a questionnaire for PYP teachers:

Per the results shown below, just over 81% of the teachers who participated in the questionnaire, agreed or strongly agreed that the Blackboard and Oxford online activities were useful. In contrast, just over 11% disagreed or strongly disagreed whereas close to 7% were neutral. This shows that the majority of teachers held a positive attitude but further research is required to investigate the negative attitudes.

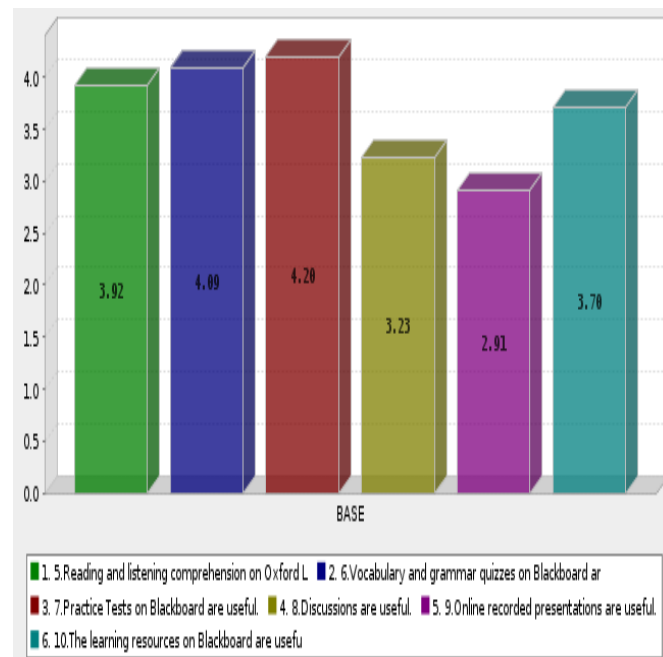


Fig.1. Teachers' Satisfaction with E-learning Digital Platforms: Blackboard & Oxford

In response to the questions of Blackboard and Oxford online activities' usefulness, the following

findings were reported: (1). Almost all teachers feel the reading and listening comprehension tasks on Oxford IQ are useful. (2). Almost all teachers feel the vocabulary and grammar quizzes on Blackboard are useful. (3). Almost all teachers feel the practice tests are useful. (4). There was a mixed reaction to the usefulness of discussions with 70 agreeing, 2 being neutral, and 2 disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. (5). There was also a mixed reaction toward the usefulness of online recorded presentations with most teachers having a positive opinion (65 agreed or strongly agreed, 5 were neutral and 4 disagreed or strongly disagreed). (6). There was also a relatively positive response to the learning resources on Blackboard with 65 teachers agreeing or strongly agreeing, 7 being neutral and only 2 strongly disagreeing.

In response to the question of e-learning assistance and technical support by the e-learning coordinator, all teachers felt they received appropriate information and trainings regarding the e-learning program whenever they needed it: Teacher (1): *(The e-learning coordinator has been very helpful and readily available at all times to assist with any queries; Teacher (2): the e-learning coordinator conducts training sessions, helps out new staff, responds to emails and deals with issues properly.)*

In response to the question of amount of work required for Blackboard and Oxford IQ, most teachers believe that the amount of work required for e-learning is too much: Teacher (3): *(The students are overwhelmed. They sometimes have other commitments which clash with the deadline set); Teacher (4): (we need to consider the workload of the students as well as the teachers.)*

In response to the question of deadlines of e-learning tasks, almost all teachers felt the deadlines for e-learning activities on Blackboard and Oxford were fair: Teacher (5): *(The students have plenty of time to complete the assigned work); Teacher (6): (a few students always missed the deadlines and that put extra load of work on both teachers and students alike). Teacher (7): (The students can complete the work easily within their assigned deadline on both the Blackboard and Oxford IQ.)*

In response to the question of utility of Blackboard, most teachers had a positive opinion on the usefulness of Blackboard as a communication tool: Teacher (8): *(I honestly believe that Blackboard is very useful tool for students to communicate with the teacher because it is an easy way to reduce time spent emailing multiple students.)*

In response to the question of improvements in the e-learning program, the participants recommended more marks to be allocated to the E-Learning program next year: Teacher (9): *(we need to allocate more marks to motivate students to use this tool.)*. It was suggested that more training sessions and support on specific elements of the program be provided to the teachers for further understanding of the e-learning program: Teacher (10): *(There should be workshops from the beginning of the year; teachers should be given a brief session of training.)*. An outline of e-learning activities with deadlines should be created and be distributed early in the semester: Teacher (11): *(It will really help if we could have an outline of e-learning activities with due dates well before the new terms starts.)* A hard copy of instructions should be provided in the training sessions when setting more complex tasks (like discussions and recorded presentations). This document should include the purpose, aim and grading policy: Teacher (12): *(There should be earlier provision of schedules to instructors, earlier completion of materials by relevant teams, clear and earlier instructions to students will be helpful.)*. A technical IT support center should be available to both the teachers and students. Internet speed and bandwidth should be increased to cater to the growing needs of the PYP: Teacher (13): *(Blackboard can be improved by providing appropriate training and additional IT support to the users, eliminating technical glitches and upgrading the learning systems periodically.)*

6.2. Students' Questionnaires

Following results were acquired after conducting two questionnaires for PYP students:

In response to the question of students' satisfaction with the e-learning platforms, 78% students say that they are happy with Blackboard: Student (1):

(Blackboard overall is a great tool to use); Student (2): *It is indeed a very beneficial platform to interact conveniently with students*. 70% students say that they are happy with Oxford: Student (3): *(I find it to be an extremely useful tool as I am able to upload assignments and submit online)*.

In response to the question of learning management system (LMS) usage preference, 27% students prefer to use Blackboard: Student (4): *(Blackboard is an efficient way of relaying information to students)*. 35% students prefer to use Oxford. Student (5): *(Oxford IQ is an effective tool for enhancing reading and listening comprehension skills)* 29% students prefer both systems: Student (6): *(For communication purposes BB is great)*; Student (7): *Oxford IQ allows students to keep up-to-date with important issues and also upload/share files*; Student (8): *Blackboard and Oxford are excellent tools if you know how to use them*.

In response to the question of in-class learning vs e-learning, 60% students say that learning in classrooms is better than e-learning: Student (9): *(e-learning is useful but I also think communicating with students face-to-face is more effective)*; Student (10): *I think we need more time in class learning than for e-learning*; 45% students want to practice all skills using e-learning activities and tools for assessment and skill development: Student (11): *(Blackboard has so far proven to be most useful e-learning tool as the practice tests and quizzes prepare students well for the comprehension skills)*.

In response to the question of e-learning tools' understanding, 65% students say that they know what they are required to do on Blackboard: Student (12): *(There is no problem with the workload or understanding of BB e-learning hours/ activities)*. 69% say that they know what they are required to do on Oxford: Student (13): *(Oxford is easy to handle once you know the tool and its activities)*

In response to the question of benefits of the learning management systems 69% students say that Blackboard is beneficial for them: Student (14): *(The Blackboard is, undoubtedly, an effective tool for enhancing student-teacher communication and bridging the gaps which may be due to lack of time)*. 62% students say that Oxford is beneficial for them. Student (15): *(learning on Oxford is a great experience as it improved my English reading and listening skills)*.

In response to the question of technical issues in using e-learning platforms, 45% students say that technical issues are hindering their progress: Student (16): *(We have to be mindful of technological issues for example hardware and software related issues; Internet connectivity for both the student and the teacher should be stable)*. 60% students say that they can get technical support when needed. Student (17): *(The E-learning coordinator helped me when I needed him)*

In response to the question of the allocation of e-learning hours, 34% strongly agreed with allocating more hours to e-learning: Student (18): *(The students can complete the work easily within their allocated e-learning hours)* 36% don't agree with allocating more hours to e-learning: Student (19): *(The amount of e-learning work for students should decrease as they have other subjects to take into consideration)*, while 30% students remained neutral.

In response to the question of improvements in the e-learning program, students suggested the following recommendations: A comprehensive e-learning schedule should be designed and circulated for students' information: Student (20): *(students should be informed about all deadlines, physical schedules should be posted around the campus and schedules should be given to students)*. Technical issues should be resolved and online assistance should be provided whenever required: Student (21): *(Training and additional support to the users, eliminating technical glitches and upgrading it periodically)*. There should be increase in the percentage of the e-learning grades: Student (22): *(We should assign a higher weightage for the amount of e-learning work. Perhaps assign 15-20% of the overall grade to E-learning given the amount of work expected from students)*; Additional time should be assigned for completing online continuous assessment activities: Student (23): *(There should be more time for students to complete quizzes as it can clash with other writing assignments as they have deadline for other subjects)*. Access Blackboard with a single sign-in for Oxford IQ: Student (24): *(Blackboard should be accessed and integrated with Oxford IQ to avoid frequent access issues for users)*. E-learning labs should be prepared for students: Student (25): *(The E-learning program can be improved by preparing labs for students to be used in their free time)*.

Discussion

It is noteworthy that, according to the results of the questionnaires, Blackboard and Oxford IQ played positive roles for both students and teachers. Some key effects are identified as a direct result of utilizing the digital learning platforms on the teaching and learning of English in DPYSS: e-learning discussions promoted student participation, reduced anxiety and increased identification of language errors as reported by Kelm, O. R. (1992); Students find it advantageous to work with recorded audio presentations. Furthermore the Oxford IQ listening comprehension activities and quizzes provided them with a suitable complement of study that could partially compensate for missing native speakers as reported by Hubackova, S. (2015); e-learning training, orientation sessions and day-to-day e-learning usage has potentially contributed to computer skill development and e-learning awareness of teachers; blackboard and Oxford IQ discussion boards have served to bridge the communication gap between students and teachers; ENGL 101 text book activities are aligned with E-learning activities to reinforce the teaching and learning process; the reading comprehension activities on the Blackboard and Oxford IQ have positively impacted on the participants' attitudes towards reading on the computer as observed by Ariew, R. & Ercetin, G. (2004); Blackboard served as a reliable platform for grading and management of data for students' performance on E-learning activities; the writing quality and skill of the students improved significantly by utilizing the blackboard writing portfolio and Oxford IQ writing tutor assignments as reported by Owston, R. D. & Wideman, H. H. (1997). Oxford IQ listening and reading comprehension quizzes contributed in practicing and improving these skills; practice of e-learning in PYP facilitated the teachers in the day-to-day learning activities and enabled the students to comprehend English language learning more quickly and easily as observed by Cai, H. (2012). Active implementation of the E-learning program, intensive training sessions, rigorous monitoring and weekly follow-ups with the teachers and students potentially contributed in the building of an active E-learning Culture in the PYP; e-learning provided students with wider content on given topics than conventional education lessons as observed by Hoskova, S. and Rosicka, Z. (2015); Blackboard Practice Tests were created and made available via Blackboard to serve as mock-exams and helped in preparing students for

grammar, vocabulary, reading and listening skills; Blackboard discussion boards played a pivotal part in reviewing the textbook contents and provided students a sharing platform to give comments and receive comprehensive feedback by teachers as reported by Rymanova, I. Baryshnikov, N. and Grishaeva, A. (2015). This enhanced students' thinking skills and improved their writing structures; recorded presentations provided students an optimum opportunity to plan, prepare and record well-structured and rubric-oriented audio presentations. Blackboard provided them a platform to upload the audio presentations wherefrom the teachers can easily download and grade these audios. Teachers provided feedback to their students via the Blackboard feedback option; Oxford IQ Online writing tutor tool helped students to plan, write and submit weekly writing assignments and receive teachers' feedback. This positively improved their reading comprehension and understanding of grammatical structures, spelling, mechanics of language and related aspects of language learning as reported by Jones, Z. (1993) and Kauffmann, R. A. (1996); Blackboard Practice Tests improved the comprehension of students and provided them the confidence to appear in the exams fully prepared; Blackboard served as an information hub and effective communication platform in terms of quizzes, practice tests, assignments announcements and emerged as a knowledge center for sharing and accessing reliable and up-to-date academic information and can be compared to Moodle in terms of large amount of resources and opportunities as observed by Gluchmanova, M. (2015); the teachers found digital e-learning platforms practical and potential tools for creative ideas and contributed in creating their own eclectic methods as reported by Mohammadi, N. Ghorbani, V. and Hamidi, F. (2011). It can be concluded that E-learning platforms in PYP proved immensely fruitful in terms of result-oriented English language learning and creativity of ideas for both the teachers and the students.

Conclusion and Implications

The implications per the results of this study highlight some areas for future planning and execution. The e-learning program implementation was a daunting challenge of a scale that required well thought-out planning, smooth execution, rigorous monitoring and a continuous follow up mechanism. Some important challenges are identified in light of the results and require further research in terms of

their workable and realistic solutions. For instance making Blackboard and Oxford iQ operational for the teachers and students in a given frame of time; error-free copying of contents onto the Blackboard; timely registration of students and teachers for Blackboard; registration of new teachers on PeopleSoft; creation of Blackboard emails for new teachers; enrollment of courses for old and new teachers; ensuring correct assignment of courses to teachers; adjusting Blackboard course assignment per the teaching time-table and ensuring up-to-date coordination with the e-learning team for smooth implementation and management of the e-learning program in PYP.

A number of practical steps are recommended to be taken to tackle the above challenges for smooth implementation of the e-learning program in PYP: For instance ensuring that Blackboard and Oxford IQ are integrated together and one serve for the other as an available back-up and support platform for the students and teachers alike; continuous coordination and discussions with the e-learning general supervisor for an error-free e-learning plan implementation; scheduling and conducting rigorous training sessions for teachers for e-learning and LMS tools awareness; updating the course enrollments of teachers in alignment with the teaching time-table; providing teachers with up-to-date e-learning guides and tutorials as provided whenever needed by the e-learning general supervisor; ensuring effective communication with teachers via contact emails; ensuring day-to-day monitoring for teachers' registration onto the Blackboard in collaboration with the registration unit; providing assistance to students and teachers for effective usage of Blackboard and Oxford iQ; addressing day-to-day Blackboard and iQ related issues in-person; creating announcements via Blackboard for smooth communication; ensuring activation of Oxford iQ for teachers and students; continuous use of the university official email for effective communication as required; explaining Blackboard and iQ tutorials and guides to teachers as required; resolving technical issues with reference to Bb and iQ; ensuring a result-oriented and an optimum productive e-learning program in PYP.

This study suggests that by utilizing the digital E-learning platforms of Blackboard and Oxford IQ Online in PYP, the quality of English language teaching and learning is improved. Both the teachers and the students alike actively participated into the

teaching and learning process respectively. It has also been observed that well thought-out and planned intensive training sessions contributed in preparing the teachers for smooth implementation of the E-learning program in its true spirit. As the Q:Skills text book activities were aligned with Blackboard learning management system and Oxford IQ Online Practice, students were provided with ample resource materials, quizzes, listening, speaking, reading and writing skills, assignments and practice tests. This has been recommended that as each day technology is growing at a rapid pace and e-learning digital platforms are being updated rapidly, there is a dire need to synchronize ourselves with technological advancements and increase our awareness of learning management systems, learning softwares, and related internet-based information. A 24/7 Technical and ICT UNIT is strongly recommended in PYP to cater to the assistance and needs of both the teachers and students alike. As E-learning has its pros and cons, the requirement to streamline the LMS with the growing needs of the teaching and learning process to contribute to the academic and professional developments of its participants.

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