E-Learning in the English Classroom: Comparing Two E-Learning Platforms Impacting Preparatory Year Students' Language Learning

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Abstract

This study compares two e-learning platforms, namely: Blackboard and Oxford iQ Online used by students at Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University (IAU) in Dammam, Saudi Arabia. A survey investigating both e-learning platforms was sent to 1364 students to gauge their interest, satisfaction and overall approval as EFL learners with regard to using the platforms in tandem with traditional classroom practices as a way of enhancing their language proficiency and communicative competence (Bachman, 1990). Specifically, one group of 533 students (male and female) participated in a survey about Blackboard, and an additional group of 831 students (male and female) answered questions relating to the Oxford iQ Online platform. All students were part of the Deanship of the Preparatory Year for the 2017 - 2018 academic year. Data collected from the survey were analyzed quantitatively. The findings of this research indicate that students welcome the benefits of incorporating e-learning opportunities to learn and communicate more effectively. In particular, they demonstrated positive viewpoints toward e-learning platforms as a multi-purpose means of strengthening their language development.

Introduction

The exponential rate of technological advancement has not only transformed human life but has also paved the way to a modern utopian society in which diverse facets of education are open to all. Indeed, the permeation of the Internet, from immovable personal desktop computers, through to portable laptops, tablets, mobile phones, smartphones and phablets (Bradley, 2015) into our daily lives has changed the entire paradigm of information availability and accessibility. More strikingly, 'at one's fingertips' is now an outdated phrase, since wearables (such as smart watches and smart glasses) and augmented reality allow access to information at the command of a mere gesture or through voice recognition.

It seems almost obvious that current methods of education, in terms of teaching and learning, should evolve to take advantage of these resources. No doubt, growing numbers of educators use electronic devices to aid teaching and learning; they name this new practice *electronic learning* or e-learning which is defined as the delivery of a learning, training or education program by electronic means (Garrison, 2011). It may take the form of self-study lessons, simulations and virtual worlds, virtual classrooms, online resources and online collaboration to be used for exposition, instructions, guided discovery and exploration (Martin, Parker, & Deale, 2012). It presents a versatile

medium of learning content and opens a new pedagogical channel of interaction and collaboration.

Focusing mainly on the e-learning experiences of students at Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University, the present study is structured into three main sections. The first part presents a succinct account of the advantages of e-learning. The second section describes the methodology pursued to examine learner experiences and the final section presents and discusses the results.

Background: A Case for *e-learning*

Current tertiary pedagogy (i.e. classroom/lecture learning), albeit functional and practically feasible and successful, thus far, is inefficient in terms of time, cost-effectiveness and quality of output (in this case, the holistic quality of student learning), especially when compared to newer, updated systems of e-learning. In order to examine what makes traditional pedagogy relatively inefficient, it is first necessary to outline some of the more common features associated with a lecture model of teaching. Typically, the instructor tends to be the focal point of the session - a form of delivery commonly referred to as teacher-centered learning. The teacher delivers the lesson orally, and the students exclusively listen and take notes. It is what many learners have experienced throughout their academic lives and what many continue to observe throughout a multitude of educational institutions in the world today.

Traditional classroom teaching focuses on several elements, which include, for example, lecturing, team projects, case studies and assignments. Learning occurs in a synchronous environment, meaning that the learning events occur in specific locations and time slots where teachers and students come together at the same time. The lecture model, central to the traditional style, exists in many schools and colleges (Alghamdi & Ahmed, 2018). Indeed, content-driven higher education programs, which are discipline-specific, often ignore the relevance of constructing knowledge through active learning (Baeten, Struyven, & Dochy, 2013). Nonconstructive models, such as lecturing, tend to limit face-to-face interactions between the students and educators as well as between the students themselves (Loyens & Rikers, 2011). It is this belief in the *human contact* element of teaching that leads many skeptics to also discount the effectiveness of online learning as an effective platform. Yet this is not the case, as discussed below.

A further limitation of the lecture model of teaching and learning is the assumption that all students understand and learn languages at the same pace – a point that has caused considerable discussion among experts (Richards, 2002). Formal lecturing methods that have a lesser regard to the importance of interactive models have been questioned, especially in higher education contexts where learning concepts and principles are determined by learners' needs rather than the information itself (Kumaravadivelu, 2006; Cercone, 2008).

Lecture-based methods of teaching also greatly limit the quality of assessment practices, and as a result, practitioners have searched for options that offer valid measures of formative assessment. In recent times, tertiary institutions have initiated functional mechanisms to ensure that students are intellectually engaged in the study of materials. Many have introduced digital education platforms that offer challenging learning environments (Aparicio, Bacao, & Oliveira, 2017). Certainly, employing technology

meets "the needs of digital learners"(Gamble, 2018, p.23) - an entire generation of modern learners Hockley & Dudeney, 2018). Lecturing alone fails to address various strategies tech-driven learners wish to focus on. The development of higher-order thinking skills, such as application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation also go hand-in-hand with current trends in knowledge sharing.

Technology-based solutions for learning also allow more room for individual differences in learning styles (Kia, Aliapour, & Ghaderi, 2009; Saeed, Yang, & Sinnappan, 2009). Freedom to pace, review and revise course materials is, for example, facilitated by emerging computer-assisted language learning (CALL) technologies. Moreover, since students can customize study material according to their own needs, they have greater control over their learning process and can obtain better understanding of the material (Bradley, 2015). Some learners, for instance, prefer to concentrate on certain parts of the course, while others are prepared to review the entire course. The delivery of content in smaller units, (chunks), further contributes to a deeper learning effect. The average content retention rate for an instructor-led class is only 58%, while the more intensive and active e-learning experience enhances the retention rate by 25 - 60%. Overall, an asynchronous method of learning permits each student to study at his/her own pace and speed, increases satisfaction and decreases stress (Amer, 2007; Algahtani, 2011).

Convenience of Time and place

Although some of the challenges associated with e-learning include technical difficulties, obstacles—such as access, standards, infrastructure, and bandwidth are quickly diminishing. The growth of the World Wide Web, high-capacity corporate networks, and high-speed desktop computers is moving learners toward an abundance of readily available content. Academic institutions are able to distribute study material and critical information to multiple locations easily and conveniently. Students can access training whenever it is convenient for them and have the luxury of choosing the location for learning that suits them. According to Smedley (2010), the adoption of e-learning provides institutions as well as their learners the much-needed flexibility of time and place of delivery to learn information.

Instant access to timely information

Internet-based products further allow instructors to update lessons and course materials across entire networks instantly and give students immediate access to the latest data. Information can be retrieved repeatedly. Ultimately, due to easy access to vast amounts of information, technology-based training enhances the acquisition of knowledge and the achievement of qualifications (Jones, 2018). In addition, e-learning is cost effective in the sense that there is no need for students to spend any time and/or money on travel. It is also cost effective in a sense that it offers opportunities for learning for a maximum number of learners without spatial constraints (Cidral, Oliveira, Felice, & Aparicio, 2018). Moreover, it can compensate when staff numbers are limited, including, for example, academic instructors, facilitators or lab technicians.

Research has also pointed out the potential of e-learning in continually assessing students as they learn, and, at the same time, it can enhance their educational experience through interactivity—a form of learning suitable to community education, cultural

diversity and globalization (Holmes & Gardner, 2006; Hassanzadeh, Kanaani, & Elahi, 2012). To these researchers, the most vital characteristics and advantages of e-learning in education reside in putting students or learners at the center of the learning process. Through e-learning, objectives can be accomplished in the shortest time with the least amount of effort. Both learners and instructors can participate in invaluable experiences that are provided by numerous specialists in various fields of knowledge. According to Khan (2005), e-learning environments are intrinsically non-discriminatory, so they are relatively good ways of offering equal access to the information world irrespective of the locations of the users, and promote tolerance of diversity in terms of age, ethnicity and other dimensions of variation amongst learners.

The e-learning environment also encourages students to depend on themselves for the reason that instructors are no longer the solitary knowledge source. Teachers instead become advisers and guides (Alsalem, 2004). Similarly, e-learning also supports global communication and provides a greater opportunity to converse (Zaitoun, 2008). For these reasons, according to Algahtani (2011), the likely benefits of e-learning are greater than the benefits of traditional learning if e-learning is used and applied in appropriate ways.

The perceived usefulness of e-learning and the impact of it on students have been the focus of many research studies. Researchers have stressed that tech-based infrastructure, used in producing online courses, permits students to explore more flexible methods of learning (Alsabawy, Cater-Steel, & Soar, 2016). As shown in one study, e-learning interactive video facilities allow learners to watch all sessions conducted in the classroom and to listen to instructors as many times as needed (Zhang, Zhou, Briggs, & Nunamaker, 2006).

In a similar way, research has shown how e-learning offers teachers several ways of interacting with learners and how it can facilitate instantaneous feedback (Amer, 2007). These studies also emphasize the need to embrace advanced technology during the process of teaching and learning so as to expose students to a variety of skills in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) (Saeed, Yang, & Sinnappan, 2009). According to Singh (2001), e-learning systems enable improved communication among students' instructors and faculty officials. Similarly, Hemsley (2002) stated that both full-time and part-time students could participate in their degree courses from any location, and access resources for learning and experience. He also noted that the implementation of e-learning provided disabled people the chance to further their education from any location.

Given the many advantages of e-learning, particularly in comparison with more traditional methods of teaching, this study seeks to investigate the perceptions of preparatory year students as they navigate the university's major e-learning program which consists of two e-learning platforms: Blackboard and Oxford iQ Online. At the time of the study, the e-learning program had been in use for five years. The e-learning objectives are consistently communicated to students through the following methods: (1) two hours weekly are dedicated for the e-learning program; (2) teachers guide students through in-class activities in the computer lab; (3) e-learning objectives and the grade breakdown of the e-learning activities are mentioned in the program's leaflet; (4) the student orientation session and seminars are given by the e-learning coordinator who gives detailed presentations on all e-learning activities and their assessment criteria; (5) the e-learning objectives are also mentioned in the syllabus.

This empirical study sets to achieve the following objectives:

(1) to shed light on shifting trends in teaching and learning styles and their effect on Saudi students;
(2) to explore Saudi students' interest in technology towards learning English as a foreign language;
(3) to gauge Saudi ESL learner's level of interest in, satisfaction with and interaction with e-learning platforms;
(4) to expose students to the most popular Blackboard and iQ Online learning platforms from a purely academic and professional perspective;
(5) and to examine the impact of modulating traditional teaching methodologies by incorporating new online learning strategies.

Based on these objectives, the present study seeks to provide answers to the following questions:

- To what extent are students satisfied with the e-learning program?
- To what extent are students able to use the e-learning program?
- To what extent are the e-learning objectives achieved?
- What are some of the challenges/difficulties students face when using the e-learning program?
- To what extent does the e-learning program meet the preferred skills of the students?
- Which, if any, of the two platforms in this study do students prefer to learn from?
- Are there significant differences in students' responses in relation to each platform?
- Are there any significant differences in students' responses due to gender differences?

Methodology

Participants

The 1364 participants in this study were male and female students registered in the preparatory year English language program at Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University during the 2017-2018 academic year. The students came from three tracks: Health, Science and Engineering. Table 1 shows the proportion of participants by gender. Of the 533 students who participated in a survey about Blackboard, 239 (45%) were male, and 294 (55%) were female. Of the 831students who participated in the survey about Oxford, 394 (47.4%) were male, and 437 (52.6%) were female. The participants' ages ranged from 19 to 25 years. The survey was conducted over a period of three weeks. It was designed to be completed in 6-8 minutes.

Table 1.
Gender representation of participants in both surveys

Gender	Blackboard		Oxford iQ Online	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Male	239	45%	344	47.4%
Female	294	55%	437	52.6%
Total	533	100%	831	100%

Instrument and Analysis

The data collection instrument consisted of an anonymous survey containing key constructs designed to reveal students' level of: satisfaction with the e-learning environment; knowledge of the e-learning platforms; related technical issues; and skills and preferences (Appendix 1). A further element of the survey was included to discover the level of technical support available to students. The students were sent either the Blackboard survey or the Oxford iQ Online survey, through email and text messages, and participation was optional. Both surveys consisted of the same ten questions. Quantitative data analysis included percentage and mean scores in response to each item. T-tests were also conducted to delineate differences in views between male and female participants about e-learning in general, and with regard to Blackboard and Oxford iQ Online, in particular.

Results

Based on the research questions above, findings are grouped into six parts: (1) student satisfaction with and acceptance of the program; (2) student familiarity and readiness to engage with the program; (3) perceived achievement of the e-learning objectives; (4) challenges and difficulties; (5) learner preference with respect to skills and choice of platform; (6) statistical significance with regard to differences between platforms and gender groups.

Student Satisfaction with the e-learning Program

Question 1 asked: To what extent are students satisfied with the e-learning program? Table 2 presents the percentage and mean scores of three questionnaire items investigating students' overall satisfaction with the Blackboard and Oxford iQ Online platforms respectively.

Table 2.
Students' satisfaction with and acceptance of the program

	Program			
	Blackboard		Oxford iQ Online	
	Gender (f=533)		Gender (f=831)	
	Female (f=294)	Male (f=239)	Female (f=437)	Male (f=394)

		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
1. In general, are you satisfied with the e-learning program in the Prep Year?	Bad (1)	12	4.08%	7	2.93%	37	8.47%	24	6.09%
	Average (2)	62	21.09%	38	15.90%	107	24.49%	75	19.04%
	Good (3)	112	38.10%	98	41.00%	153	35.01%	126	31.98%
	Excellent (4)	108	36.73%	96	40.17%	140	32.04%	171	43.40%
	Mean	**3.07**	**77.00%**	**3.18**	**80.00%**	**2.91**	**73.00%**	**3.12**	**78.00%**
6. I find help and support when I face an issue related to the program.	Disagree (1)	41	13.95%	45	18.83%	64	14.65%	54	13.71%
	Neutral (2)	97	32.99%	73	30.54%	95	21.74%	85	21.57%
	Agree (3)	105	35.71%	75	31.38%	167	38.22%	150	38.07%
	Strongly Agree (4)	51	17.35%	46	19.25%	111	25.40%	107	27.16%
	Mean	**2.56**	**64.00%**	**2.7**	**67.60%**	**2.74**	**68.60%**	**2.78**	**69.70%**
10. I believe that learning English in a conventional classroom is better than e-learning.	Disagree (1)	31	10.54%	28	11.72%	59	13.50%	40	10.15%
	Neutral (2)	79	26.87%	65	27.20%	147	33.64%	114	28.93%
	Agree (3)	81	27.55%	66	27.62%	104	23.80%	99	25.13%
	Strongly Agree (4)	103	35.03%	80	33.47%	127	29.06%	143	36.29%
	Mean	**2.87**	**71.80%**	**2.83**	**70.70%**	**2.68**	**67.10%**	**2.87**	**71.80%**

With regard to the Blackboard platform, on a Likert scale of bad, average, good and excellent, both female (M=3.07) and male (M=3.18) groups indicated an average 'good' level of satisfaction with the platform. Although lower than the Blackboard platform for the female students, the mean scores for the female (M=2.91) and male (M=3.12) groups also came close to a 'good' level of satisfaction with the Oxford iQ Online program. On average, however, neither the female (M=2.56, M=2.74) or male (M=2.7, M=2.78) groups agreed that they could find help and support when they faced issues related to the Blackboard and Oxford iQ Online platforms respectively (see item 6). The female group, in particular, indicated less support with regard to Blackboard. Results also show (see item 10) that neither group indicated a strong preference for the conventional classroom over the Blackboard or Oxford iQ Online platforms respectively, with the female (M=2.87, M= 2.68) and male (M= 2.83, 2.87) mean scores falling between neutral and agree.

Familiarity and Readiness

Question 2 asked: To what extent are students able to use the e-learning program? Table 3 presents the results of two items aimed at exploring student familiarity and readiness to use the platforms.

Table 3.
Students' ability to use the program

		Program							
		Blackboard				Oxford			
		Gender (f=533)				Gender (f=831)			
		Female (f=294)		Male (f=239)		Female (f=437)		Male (f=394)	
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
2. I completely have the know-how of the program (accessing the system, the required tasks, grades distribution, etc.)	Disagree (1)	50	17.01%	24	10.04%	62	14.19%	38	9.64%
	Neutral (2)	63	21.43%	60	25.10%	88	20.14%	62	15.74%
	Agree (3)	129	43.88%	104	43.51%	191	43.71%	174	44.16%
	Strongly Agree (4)	52	17.69%	51	21.34%	96	21.97%	122	30.96%
	Mean	**2.62**	**65.60%**	**2.76**	**69.00%**	**2.73**	**68.40%**	**2.95**	**73.90%**
5. I would like to have more e-learning hours in order to achieve a better advantage.	Disagree (1)	106	36.05%	74	30.96%	183	41.88%	143	36.29%
	Neutral (2)	111	37.76%	74	30.96%	118	27.00%	108	27.41%
	Agree (3)	55	18.71%	50	20.92%	73	16.70%	73	18.53%
	Strongly Agree (4)	22	7.48%	41	17.15%	63	14.42%	72	18.27%
	Mean	**1.98**	**49.40%**	**2.24**	**56.10%**	**2.04**	**50.90%**	**2.19**	**54.70%**

With regard to the degree to which students felt they were able to successfully access and navigate the Blackboard and Oxford platforms respectively (Item 2), both the female (M=2.62, M=2.73) and male (M=2.76, 2.95) mean scores fell between neutral and agree. The male group indicated their highest level of confidence when using Oxford (M=2.95), and the female group showed least confidence using Blackboard (M=2.62). In total, 17% of the female students indicated that they did not completely have the 'know-how' of the Blackboard platform.

Across both genders and platforms, mean scores indicate that students on average took a neutral position when asked if they would like to have more e-learning hours in order to achieve a better advantage (Item 5). For both the Blackboard and Oxford platforms respectively, the male group (M=2.24, M=2.19) showed slightly higher mean scores in comparison with the female group (M= 1.98, 2.04).

Overall, 36% of the female group, and 31% of the male group disagreed that they would like more e-learning hours on Blackboard. By comparison, 26% of the female group and 38% of the male group agreed or strongly agreed that they would like more e-learning hours on Blackboard. Similarly, with Oxford iQ Online, 42% of the female group, and 36% of the male group disagreed that they would like more e-learning hours, and 31% of the female group and 37% of the male group agreed or strongly agreed that they would like more e-learning hours on Oxford iQ Online. Overall, both groups showed interest in increasing hours spent on online learning with the male group showing slightly more interest.

Achievement of e-learning objectives

Question 3 asked: To what extent are the e-learning objectives achieved? Table 4 presents the mean and percentage scores in response to the prompt, 'I believe that the program achieves its learning objective.' (Item 3).

Table 4.
Achieving the program's objectives

		Program							
		Blackboard				Oxford iQ Online			
		Gender				Gender			
		Female (f=294)		Male (f=239)		Female (f=437)		Male (f=394)	
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
3. I believe that the program Learn achieves its objective	Disagree (1)	25	8.50%	21	8.79%	61	13.96%	46	11.68%
	Neutral (2)	77	26.19%	46	19.25%	122	27.92%	83	21.07%
	Agree (3)	132	44.90%	115	48.12%	186	42.56%	178	45.18%
	Strongly Agree (4)	60	20.41%	57	23.85%	68	15.56%	89	22.59%
	Mean	**2.77**	**69.30%**	**2.87**	**71.80%**	**2.6**	**64.90%**	**2.78**	**69.60%**

Results show that for both the Blackboard and Oxford iQ Online platforms respectively, both groups, female (M=2.77, M=2.60) and male (M=2.87, M=2.78), did not entirely agree that the platforms entirely achieved what they believed to be the learning objectives.

Challenges and Difficulties

Question 4 asked: What are some of the challenges/difficulties students face when using the e-learning program? Table 5 presents the results to two prompts specifically aimed at measuring the level of difficulty students had with regard to technical issues (Item 4) and lack of knowledge using the Internet and e-systems (Item 7).

Table 5.
Challenges/ difficulties of the program

		Program							
		Blackboard				Oxford iQ Online			
		Gender				Gender			
		Female (f=294)		Male (f=239)		Female (f=437)		Male (f=394)	
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
4. I think there are technical issues that hold me back from making use of the program.	Disagree (1)	73	24.83%	52	21.76%	97	22.20%	111	28.17%
	Neutral (2)	101	34.35%	81	33.89%	110	25.17%	116	29.44%
	Agree (3)	78	26.53%	76	31.80%	137	31.35%	95	24.11%
	Strongly Agree (4)	42	14.29%	30	12.55%	93	21.28%	74	18.78%
	Mean	2.3	57.60%	2.35	58.80%	2.52	62.90%	2.33	58.30%
7. I am having problems due to lack of knowledge in using Internet and e-systems?	Disagree (1)	183	62.24%	133	55.65%	290	66.36%	273	69.29%
	Neutral (2)	57	19.39%	53	22.18%	84	19.22%	49	12.43%
	Agree (3)	31	10.54%	37	15.48%	44	10.07%	45	11.42%
	Strongly Agree (4)	23	7.82%	16	6.69%	19	4.35%	29	07.36%
	Mean	1.64	40.10%	1.73	43.30%	1.52	38.10%	1.57	39.30%

With regard to the Blackboard program, the female (M=2.30) and male (M=2.35) groups indicated little concern with regard to technical issues impeding the use of the program. The male group (M=2.33) similarly indicated little concern with regard to Oxford iQ Online. However, the female group (M=2.52) indicated a slightly higher level of technical difficulty when using the Oxford iQ Online platform.

In relation to problems that occured due to a lack of knowledge in using the Internet and e-learning systems for the Blackboard and the Oxford iQ Online platforms respectively (Item 7), results show that mean scores for the female (M= 1.64, M=1.52) and male (M=1.73, M=1.57) groups fell between disagreement and neutrality. Overall, any challenges and difficulties faced by the learners did not appear to stem from a lack of knowledge or experience in using the Internet.

Learner Preference

Question 5 asked: To what extent does the e-learning program meet with the preferred skills of the students? Table 6 presents the results of item 8 which asked students to

indicate which of the four key strands (reading, writing, listening, speaking) they prefer to have in each of the e-learning programs.

Table 6.
Students' preferred skills in the e-learning program

		Program							
		Blackboard				Oxford iQ Online			
		Gender				Gender			
		Female (f=294)		Male (f=239)		Female (f=437)		Male (f=394)	
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
8. The skills I prefer to have in the e-learning program:	Reading	58	19.73%	45	18.83%	47	10.76%	58	14.72%
	Writing	19	6.46%	14	5.86%	40	9.15%	24	6.09%
	Listening	61	20.75%	39	16.32%	117	26.77%	118	29.95%
	Speaking	27	9.18%	18	7.53%	52	11.90%	35	8.88%
	All the above skills	129	43.88%	123	51.46%	181	41.42%	161	40.86%

The female group for the Blackboard (43.88%) and Oxford iQ Online survey (41.42%) indicated preference for all four skills. Of the four strands, however, the female students preferred listening (20.75%) and reading (19.73%) on the Blackboard platform, and listening (26.77%) on the Oxford iQ Online platform. In comparison, the male students also preferred to use all four skills together on the Blackboard platform (51.46%) and Oxford iQ Online platform (40.86%). Of the four skills, however, the male group showed preference toward reading on Blackboard (18.83%) and listening on Oxford iQ Online (29.95%).

In addition to the type of content learners preferred, question 6 asked: What program do students prefer to learn from? Table 7 presents the results of the prompt, 'I prefer to use:', where students were asked to indicate Blackboard, Oxford iQ Online, Both or Other.

Table 7.
Students' preference between Blackboard and Oxford iQ Online

		Gender (f=533)			
		Female (f=294)		Male(f=239)	
		Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %
9. I personally prefer to use:	Blackboard	113	38.4%	62	25.9%
	Oxford Learn	77	26.2%	79	33.1%
	Both	74	25.2%	89	37.3%
	Other	30	10.2%	9	3.7%

Results show that overall, the female students preferred Blackboard (38.4%) above any other platform or platforms combined. The male students, however, indicated a slightly higher preference for Oxford iQ Online (33.1%) over Blackboard (25.9%), and a higher preference overall for using both platforms in tangent (37.3%).

Statistical Significance

Questions 7 asked: Are there any significant differences in student responses in relation to the individual platforms? Table 8 shows the mean scores and standard deviations for student responses to both e-learning programs, and Table 9 presents the results of a Levene's Test for Equality of Variances and a t-test for Equality of Means.

Table 8.
Means and standard deviations for students' responses depending on e-learning program (Blackboard, Oxford iQ Online):

Program	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Blackboard	2.5294	0.45370	0.11343
Oxford	2.5206	0.47308	0.11827

Table 9.
Independent sample tests according to e-learning programs

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	0.001	0.982	0.053	30	0.958	0.0088	.16387	-0.326	0.3432
Equal variances not assumed			0.053	29.948	0.958	0.0088	.16387	-0.326	0.3434

As shown above, there is no significant difference in students' responses with regard to either program where Blackboard (M= 2.53, SD=0.45) and Oxford (M=2.52, SD=0.47) obtained similar results. Because the p-value (0.958) is higher than the significance level ($\alpha \geq 0.05$), there is no significant difference between the two platforms.

In addition to researching whether there were any significant differences between the platforms, Question 8 asked: Are there any significant differences in students' responses due to gender differences? To answer this question, mean scores and standard deviations for students' responses were calculated, and a t-test was conducted to identify if there were any significant differences between the gender groups.

Table 10.
Means and standard deviations for students' responses according to gender

Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Male	2.5781	0.46702	0.11676
Female	2.4719	0.45339	0.11335

Table 11.
Independent samples test for gender (Male, Female)

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Average	Equal variances assumed	0.062	0.805	0.65	30	0.519	.10625	.16273	-.22608	.43858
	Equal variances not assumed			0.65	29.974	0.519	.10625	.16273	-.22609	.43859

Table 10 shows the mean scores for both males and females, and Table 11 indicates whether there is any statistical difference between them. As shown above, there were no significant differences between the students' responses due to gender where the male group (M=2.58, SD=0.47) obtained similar results to the female group (M=2.47, SD=0.45). Because the p-value (0.519) is higher than the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$), there is no statistical significance between the groups.

Discussion and Implications

The use of technology in language teaching and learning has become an integral part of curriculum transaction. Blended learning, podcasts, and mobile-technology, in particular, have become part of language learning outside the classroom. Other e-learning platforms such as the Blackboard and Oxford iQ Online have not only become portals of learning, but also organized, structured learning spaces that make the stakeholder accountable for their learning.

The aim of this study was to identify if the Blackboard and Oxford iQ Online tools used in the context of IAU were viable pedagogical tools that facilitated language learning. The students, who responded to the anonymous survey questionnaire, certainly indicated that the Blackboard and Oxford platforms were useful in their language learning. They specifically appreciated the opportunity to work on novel exercises that helped them relate their classroom experiences with their learning outside the classroom. In particular, activities that supported the learning of vocabulary and grammar were found to be very useful for intermediate and beginner level learners.

Similarly, many students indicated that the amount of time spent on Blackboard and Oxford iQ Online increased as they became more familiar with the tools. More than 65% of the students expressed their interest in working more hours on the mentioned tools. However, a significant percentage of students (between 55% and 58%) mentioned that the tools were challenging to work with. This could be due to a lack of familiarity with how the tools functioned. No doubt, students, who have never been exposed to technology-based tools in language learning, might find their initial period of exposure difficult and confusing.

While there were no significant differences between male and female students' preferences for specific platforms, students seemed to show interest in working on either platform depending on the skills they needed. For example, if students needed to improve their writing skills, they would use either the "Writing Tutor" which is a feature of Oxford iQ Online or "Writing Portfolio" which is a feature of Blackboard. Thus, the choice of the platform did not seem to be as important as enhancing particular targeted skill.

Certainly, e-learning is not a new phenomenon. What is interesting about e-learning is the way it is conducted. New sources and approaches have continued to influence the way e-learning is managed. Research that qualitatively describes different e-learning approaches to learning outside the classroom can be very useful for practitioners to devise learner-friendly activities. Also, a focus on the cognitive load of activities will inform pedagogues how best to organize and structure content, especially with regard to the nature of guidance that may be required. Students, who offered their responses in this study, for example, mentioned that some of the tasks on both Blackboard and Oxford iQ Online were beyond the difficulty level of their comprehension and production. Task complexity in relation to teacher support needs to be investigated.

Conclusion

The results and statistical analyses of this research have led to the conclusion that students are generally satisfied with the introduction of e-learning for language learning. This is the case even though they may choose any platform based on their preference, technical skills and knowledge of the platform. Their level of satisfaction with either platform is generally high making it an ideal tool for promoting language learning skills. Their experience with the platforms, however, could be enhanced by providing proactive technical support, single sign-on for the Oxford iQ Online system and the introduction of media intensive modules in either platform.

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Appendix 1

Oxford iQ Online Survey

1. **In general, are you satisfied with the e-learning program (Oxford) in the Prep Year?**
   Excellent
   Good
   Average
   Bad

2. **I completely have the know-how of Oxford (accessing the system, the required tasks, grades distribution, etc.).**
   Strongly agree
   Agree
   Neutral
   Disagree

3. **I believe that Oxford Learn achieves its objective.**
   Strongly agree
   Agree
   Neutral
   Disagree

4. **I think there are technical issues that hold me back from making use of the program.**
   Strongly agree
   Agree
   Neutral
   Disagree

5. **I would like to have more e-learning hours in order to achieve a better advantage.**
   Strongly agree
   Agree
   Neutral
   Disagree

6. **I find help and support when I face an issue related to the program.**
   Strongly agree
   Agree
   Neutral
   Disagree

7. **I am having problems due to lack of knowledge in using internet and e-systems?**
   Strongly agree
   Agree
   Neutral
   Disagree

8. **The skills I prefer to have in the e-learning program:**
   Reading
   Writing
   Listening
   Speaking
   All the above skills

9. **I personally prefer to use:**
   Blackboard
   Oxford Learn
   Both
   Other

10. **I believe that learning English in a conventional classroom is better than e-learning.**
    Strongly agree
    Agree
    Neutral
    Disagree

Blackboard Survey

1. **In general, are you satisfied with the e-learning program (Blackboard) in the Prep Year?**
   Excellent
   Good
   Average
   Bad

2. **I completely have the know-how of Blackboard (accessing the system, the required tasks, grades distribution, etc.)**
   Strongly agree

Agree
Neutral
Disagree

3. **I believe that Blackboard achieves its objective**
   Strongly agree
   Agree
   Neutral
   Disagree

4. **I think there are technical issues that hold me back from making use of the program.**
   Strongly agree
   Agree
   Neutral
   Disagree

5. **I would like to have more e-learning hours in order to achieve a better advantage.**
   Strongly agree
   Agree
   Neutral
   Disagree

6. **I find help and support when I face an issue related to the program.**
   Strongly agree
   Agree
   Neutral
   Disagree

7. **I am having problems due to lack of knowledge in using internet and e-systems?**
   Strongly agree
   Agree
   Neutral
   Disagree

8. **The skills I prefer to have in the e-learning program:**
   Reading
   Writing
   Listening
   Speaking
   All the above skills

9. **I personally prefer to use:**
   Blackboard
   Oxford Learn
   Both

Other

10. I believe that learning English in a conventional classroom is better than e-learning

Strongly agree
Agree
Neutral
Disagree