



EXPLORING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF BLACKBOARD IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING AT THE AMERICAN COLLEGE OF HIGHER EDUCATION, SRI LANKA

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The integration of Learning Management Systems (LMS) in English Language Teaching (ELT) is becoming increasingly important in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) environments. This integration was especially vital during the pandemic and continues to be significant, due to the growing demand for accessible and flexible education. This study examines how Keiser University's Blackboard (BB) LMS supports ELT for international students, such as those in Sri Lanka, through various technological tools designed to enhance language learning beyond the traditional classroom environment. Accordingly, the current study investigates the effectiveness of using Blackboard at this institution, which serves as an off-campus instructional site of Keiser University. The study involved a mixed method approach. Questionnaires were administered to 45 students and 04 English lecturers at the American College of Higher Education. All 45 students are required to use BB to complete their English course assignments, quizzes, and discussions. Engagement with BB is mandatory, so all students must log in to access learning resources, submit quizzes, and participate in discussion activities. The IBM SPSS 27.0 was used to analyze data and it revealed that BB enables access to English language resources, including multimedia content, reading materials, and grammar tutorials, which support students in developing comprehensive language skills. Moreover, interactive features such as discussion forums and video conferencing tools allow students to practice both written and spoken English, enhancing meaningful communication and peer collaboration. Additionally, the BB platform supports individualized learning through self-paced modules, quizzes, and downloadable exercises, thereby promoting learner autonomy. Continuous feedback through online assessments ($SD = 0.447$) and instructor comments ($SD = 0.694$) enables students to monitor their progress and make improvements. Furthermore, instructors' presence through announcements, feedback, and virtual office hours was highly rated by students, with a mean score of 1.33 ($SD = 0.640$), indicating strong agreement that these features support motivation and engagement. While technological barriers such as network connectivity and digital literacy may pose challenges for students in Sri Lanka, the support available within BB helps mitigate these issues and fosters a productive online learning environment. Overall, Keiser University's use of BB demonstrates how well-integrated digital platforms can facilitate effective and inclusive ELT in a global ODL setting.

Keywords: Blackboard (BB), English Language Teaching (ELT), Learning Management Systems (LMS), Open and Distance Learning (ODL).

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INTRODUCTION

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has emerged as a crucial educational approach as it allows flexibility, accessibility, and inclusiveness, for quality education without the constraints of time or location. According to Andersson (2019), Learning Management Systems (LMS) are a widespread information system used in many Higher Education Institutes to facilitate educational efforts. This study was set out to investigate how far LMS platforms increased the effectiveness of English Language Teaching (ELT) and learning at American College of Higher Education, Sri Lanka. Previously, the American College of Higher Education (ACHE) was an International Center of Broward College, Florida, USA, from 1995 until August 2024. In September 2024, the college became an International Center of Keiser University, Florida, USA. Keiser, through its off-campus instructional site at ACHE in Sri Lanka, uses Blackboard (BB) LMS to support international students pursuing an associate degree. This study explores how BB facilitates ELT in an ODL environment by fostering interaction, providing access to resources, supporting learner autonomy, and ensuring instructional continuity. Once registered for the Associate in General Arts Degree at Keiser University, enrollment in English courses is compulsory. The effective use of LMS platforms is therefore critical for language acquisition in ODL. While LMS platforms like Blackboard are widely used globally, their effectiveness in supporting ELT within the Sri Lankan context remains underexplored, with limited studies highlighting adoption challenges.

Unlike open-source LMS platforms, BB is commercialized software offering integrated tools for course delivery, assessment, and communication. It allows organized uploads of multimedia materials, tutorials, and resources, supporting flexible access and self-directed study. Features like quizzes and assignments provide immediate feedback. Discussion forums enable peer collaboration, and announcements with virtual office hours maintain instructor guidance. Structured modules let students progress at their own pace. Therefore, this study examines the effectiveness and affordances of Blackboard LMS in supporting ELT at ACHE, focusing on access to resources, interactivity, feedback, learner experience, instructor presence, and technological challenges.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a mixed-methods approach. Data were collected through structured questionnaires distributed to 45 undergraduates and 4 English lecturers at ACHE, selected via purposive sampling. All students were required to



use BB to access materials, submit assignments, and participate in forums. The questionnaires for both groups had three sections: Part A (Demographic Information), Part B (Closed-Ended Questions), and Part C (Open-Ended Questions). Part A gathered background and usage data. Part B covered aspects of BB's effectiveness. Part C invited detailed experiences and opinions. Data collection was online via Google Forms in May 2025. Quantitative data from closed-ended questions were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 27.0.1 (descriptive statistics). Qualitative data from open-ended questions were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results from both quantitative and qualitative data provide comprehensive insights into the use of BB LMS in supporting English language learning at ACHE. Qualitative findings were derived from open-ended questions completed by students and lecturers. The discussion is structured around the study's key objectives: access to learning resources, interactivity and communication, feedback and assessment, learner autonomy and satisfaction, instructor presence, and technological challenges.

Part A: Demographic Information

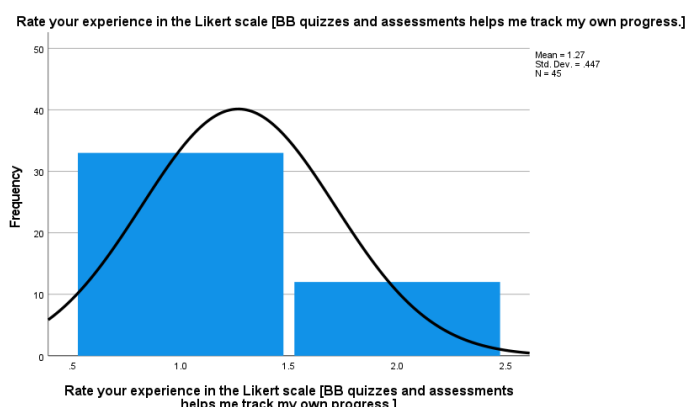
Of the 45 students, 22 (48.9%) were female, 21 (46.7%) were male, and 2 (4.4%) preferred not to state their gender. The mean age was 20.40 years (SD = 1.37). Regarding BB usage: 44.4% used it for 3-6 months, 42.2% for 6-12 months, and 13.3% for less than 3 months. For frequency, 46.7% used BB daily, 46.7% several times a week, and 6.6% less than once a week. Among lecturers, 75% had over 5 years of teaching experience, 25% had 2-3 years (Mean = 4.75 years, SD = 1.50). All four instructors reported using BB for approximately one year. Demographics suggest familiarity and experience may influence perceptions of the platform.

Part B: Closed-Ended Questions (Quantitative Analysis via IBM SPSS Statistics 27.0.1)

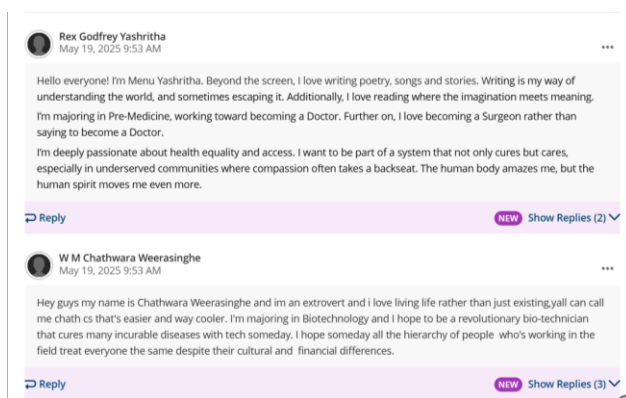
The quantitative analysis indicates the Keiser Blackboard platform is perceived as highly effective. Most Likert-scale items yielded low mean scores (generally below 1.5), indicating a high level of agreement. As indicated in the table and graph below, most students (73.3%) strongly agreed that BB quizzes and assessments help them track their progress (Mean = 1.27, SD = 0.447). This suggests these tools are effective in promoting self-monitoring and learner autonomy.

Rate your experience in the Likert scale [BB quizzes and assessments helps me track my own progress.]

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	33	73.3	73.3	73.3
	Agree	12	26.7	26.7	100.0
	Total	45	100.0	100.0	



Students reported BB effectively provides accessible English learning materials (Mean = 1.36, SD = 0.529) and enables self-paced learning (Mean = 1.44, SD = 0.659). Instructor feedback (Mean = 1.47, SD = 0.694) and interactive features like forums and video calls (Mean = 1.51, SD = 0.695) were found to boost confidence and engagement. Peer collaboration in discussion forums was also highly rated (Mean = 1.27, SD = 0.495). Forums foster collaboration and meaningful communication.



The screenshot from the pre-class self-introduction activity illustrates several key points: Students introduce themselves and respond to peers, creating a network of interactions. This exchange shows knowledge-sharing and mutual support, which strengthens collaboration. Learners practice written English in a purposeful context, rather than isolated exercises. By composing posts and replies, students develop clarity, coherence, and conversational skills, which are essential for real-world communication. The self-introduction forum illustrates how discussion boards enable peer collaboration, meaningful communication, and higher levels of engagement and motivation. It also aligns with the quantitative



finding that forums scored highly (Mean = 1.27, SD = 0.495) in boosting learner involvement.

Instructor support through announcements and feedback received favorable feedback (Mean = 1.33, SD = 0.640), ensuring students are guided and motivated.

Instructor Perspectives (Quantitative)

Instructor questionnaires indicated highly positive evaluations. Instructors unanimously agreed (Mean = 1.00, SD = 0.000) that BB offers a wide range of tools, assists in assessing progress, and enhances participation through forums. The provision of individualized feedback (Mean = 1.25, SD = 0.500) and support for diverse learning styles (Mean = 1.25, SD = 0.500) were also positively affirmed. Instructors expressed confidence in using BB for online instruction (Mean = 1.25, SD = 0.500).

Technological Challenges

A notable concern from both students and instructors was technical difficulties (students: Mean = 3.18, SD = 0.777; instructors: Mean = 3.25, SD = 0.500). Challenges like login issues, navigation problems, and device compatibility can disrupt learning flow and reduce engagement. This was the highest mean score, indicating a significant challenge that can limit the platform's full potential.

Part C: Open-Ended Questions (Thematic Analysis)

The analysis of open-ended responses from both students and lecturers revealed several key themes regarding the most beneficial features of Blackboard (BB) for English language learning. The five main features identified were:

1. **Assessment tools (quizzes, assignments)**
2. **Instructor feedback**
3. **Collaborative tools (discussion boards)**
4. **Learning resources (videos, tutorials)**
5. **Communication and structured modules (announcements, self-paced learning)**

Students emphasized quizzes and assignments for reinforcing skills and monitoring progress (Andersson, 2019; Ellis, 2009). Continuous instructor feedback was critical for improving grammar and writing (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Martin et al., 2017). Discussion boards were valued for peer interaction (Riyath & Rijah, 2022). Accessible videos and tutorials supported self-directed learning (Ellis, 2009; Creswell, 2017). Announcements and organized modules provided clarity and supported self-paced learning (Andersson, 2019; Martin et al., 2017).

However, recurring technical, usability, and emotional challenges reveal critical limitations (Mean = 3.18, SD = 0.777), as shown in the table below. These can hinder engagement and disrupt learning continuity.

CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings indicate that BB is a valuable platform for supporting English language learning in an ODL environment. Its features—quizzes, assessments,



discussion forums, instructor feedback, and multimedia resources—effectively enhance access to materials, foster interactivity, and promote learner autonomy. Students and instructors consistently reported these tools support skill development, self-paced learning, and meaningful engagement. However, several challenges constrain BB's full potential. Technical issues—platform errors, limited internet connectivity, and device compatibility—were the most critical barriers, directly affecting learning continuity and engagement. Navigation complexity and emotional barriers, such as fear of making mistakes in forums, further limited active participation. While support resources like tutorial videos mitigated some difficulties, these challenges highlight the importance of institutional scaffolding and infrastructure to ensure consistent and effective use of BB.

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