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Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language Speaking Skills through Blackboard during COVID-19

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Abstract
The COVID-19 pandemic has shifted English teaching to online platforms, such as Blackboard Collaborate, but whether online platforms affect the acquisition of core English language skills like speaking has yet to be studied extensively in the Saudi context. This study addressed and analyzed the perceptions of English as a foreign language instructors and students at the University of Jeddah, Saudi Arabia concerning the use of Blackboard Collaborate to develop speaking skills through an explanatory sequential mixed-method design. In the first phase, participants completed an online cross-sectional questionnaire for the quantitative approach. Data analysis revealed positive perceptions of speaking skill development through Blackboard Collaborate among both students and instructors. Female students and less experienced instructors reported more satisfaction with learning English through Blackboard Collaborate than male students and experienced instructors, respectively. In Phase 2, the researcher conducted in-person interviews with 10 instructors and 10 students, focusing on three areas: the Blackboard Collaborate user experience, instructors' and students' beliefs, and the challenges of and suggested improvements for Blackboard Collaborate. Instructors and students were fully aware of how to use the platform, and their motivation to use it was very high. This study further uncovered how Saudi students have shifted their learning style from passive to active learning following the student-centered approach. It also highlights the benefits Saudi women gained, as they were more comfortable practicing conversation through Blackboard Collaborate and the avoidance of cultural barriers. Studying the effects of culture on language learning through technology is a necessary direction for future research.
Keywords: Blackboard Collaborate, COVID-19, distance learning, educational technology, English as a foreign language, online teaching, speaking skill, English language teaching

Introduction

The University of Jeddah was established in 2014 in the Makkah region of Saudi Arabia. It contains 16 colleges on the main campus in Jeddah, with two branches in Al Kamel District and Khulis District. Each branch has three colleges, for a total of 22 colleges. The main university has one female college for language and translation and an English language center, and Khulis and Al Kamel each have an English department. The COVID-19 pandemic brought about global changes, and to fight the spread of the virus, the Saudi government enforced a curfew and soon shifted education online, instead of continuing physical attendance in schools. These circumstances led the University of Jeddah to use Blackboard Collaborate (BB) as the main online platform to deliver education to students during the pandemic.

Every prescribed course for the English language major program is now taught on BB. First-year students are required to attend a preparatory program with intensive courses in English before joining English language departments. In their second year, students must take extra courses such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. English as a foreign language (EFL) instructors now have to deliver all these skills through BB, and they face certain challenges.

Most Saudi students join universities with low English proficiency (Hamouda, 2013). Because many EFL public school teachers lack the proficiency to communicate effectively in the target language (Al-Hazmi, 2008), focusing on the speaking skills of students who join Jeddah University is essential. Some researchers have stated that learning through BB is an effective tool to improve EFL students' achievements (Aldosari, 2013; Almelhi, 2021), with others confirming the positive impact of BB on student performance (Ali, 2017; Almoeather, 2020; Hamad, 2017); however, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, no research has investigated the practice of teaching or learning speaking skills using BB.

Thus, in this study the researcher investigated the effectiveness of teaching and learning speaking skills through BB, to determine both instructor and student perspectives and explain current teaching practices. The current research addressed the following main questions:
- What are EFL instructors' perceptions of their teaching practice of English-speaking skills using BB?
- What are EFL students' perceptions of their learning practice of English speaking skills through BB?
  These two main questions can be divided into the following questions:
- How do EFL instructors teach English speaking skills through BB?
- How do EFL students learn English speaking skills through BB?
- Are there any statistical differences between EFL students' responses across their gender?
- Are there any statistical differences between EFL instructors' responses across their working experience, qualifications, or gender?

Literature Review

EFL researchers have stated that learning English is essential. Alqarni (2015) mentions three main reasons for this; English has become an international language, is the language of science and technology, and of modern inventions and discoveries. In particular, speaking has been

shown to be a crucial skill in learning a foreign language (Bahadorfar & Omidvar, 2014; Leong & Ahmadi, 2017; Tuan & Mai, 2015; Zyoud, 2016).

Challenges to Teaching and Learning Speaking

Learning to speak a foreign language is not an easy task for many educators (Aleksandrzak, 2011; Namaziandost & Nasri, 2019), but teachers and learners alike face multiple challenges, including an emphasis on teaching literacy skills (reading and writing), grammar, and vocabulary over speaking (Bahrani & Soltani, 2012). Other studies have observed psychological obstacles, lack of topical knowledge, low participation, finding suitable words or expressions to speak in the target language, focus on the mother tongue, low self-confidence, inadequate practice, and less exposure to the target language (Azlan et al., 2019; Leong & Ahmadi, 2017; Tuan & Mai, 2015). Madbouly (2004) identified reasons behind Arabic government schools in the Arab world neglecting EFL speaking skill acquisition including an emphasis on teaching reading and writing, teachers who lack speaking proficiency, a lack of real-life speaking materials in course books, and the practice of preparing students not to be fluent speakers of English but to be good at written exams. Al-Sobhi and Preece's (2018) study at a Saudi school in Malaysia indicated that teachers faced challenges such as absence of listening and speaking tests, non-communicative methodology, student attitudes toward speaking, and a lack of necessary facilities. Meanwhile, students faced challenges such as a lack of linguistic knowledge, low motivation and confidence, and excessive use of their native Arabic language.

Suggestions to Improve Teaching and Learning Speaking

Several researchers and educators in the field have offered suggestions for improving and developing speaking skills education. Madbouly (2004) suggests using authentic materials, providing oral exams, changing teachers' attitudes toward speaking as a skill, and motivating students to develop oral skills. Aleksandrzak (2011) emphasized that productivity, purposefulness, and interaction should be considered when preparing speaking tasks for EFL classes. Leong and Ahmadi (2017) suggested having a friendly and cooperative environment for speaking, and more speaking activities to increase students' participation in the classroom. Azlan et al. (2019) noted that Instagram and task-based activities motivate students, boosting interest in English speaking practice. Mantra and Maba (2018) indicated that EFL learners enjoy the use of folktale-based instruction, and found that such instruction improved learners' speaking skills in the second cycle of teaching sessions. Namaziandost and Nasri (2019) showed that frequent use of social media has a significant impact on teaching and learning speaking. Nazara (2011) suggested the need to create a friendly environment to improve speaking. Zyoud (2016) suggested methods to develop speaking such as dialogues, role-plays, conversation groups, and foreign language clubs.

Technology Usage in Teaching Speaking Skills

Some educators show interest in the use of classroom technology for language teaching, specifically speaking. Bahadorfar and Omidvar (2014) suggested tools such as the Internet, podcasts, video conferencing, and speech recognition software to improve EFL learners' speaking skills. Jalaluddin (2016) also supported the use of technology, suggesting the use of YouTube videos inside and outside the classroom to improve learners' speaking skills in the target language. Alqarni (2016) asserted that educators must adopt new language-learning strategies and appropriate technology.

Some researchers suggest that using appropriate technology is not enough, citing factors such as technology availability and teacher training. In Saqlain et al.'s (2013) study in Saudi Arabia on teachers' readiness to integrate technology for language learning, most participants complained about a lack of funding, scarcity of technology at schools, and lack of proper user training.

BB Usage in Language Learning

Although many studies have been conducted on technology-mediated language learning, more recent studies have focused on using BB for language learning. BB is a web-based learning management system that provides users with opportunities to manage courses, and assisting with assignments, projects, and evaluations (Ali, 2017; Almoeather, 2020). The system helps teachers deliver instruction online, including live sessions, asynchronous modes of delivery, and interactive tools (Hussein, 2016). Students also benefit from the system by viewing recorded lectures, participating in live discussions, and interacting with instructors and peers (Tawalbeh, 2018).

BB Usage in Tertiary Education Institutions in Saudi Arabia

BB is used extensively in Saudi universities. Although most studies have been conducted in EFL teaching and learning, some focused on areas other than BB. Almoeather's (2020) quantitative study at Princess Nourah Bint Abdulrahman University showed that both BB and Edmodo are effective in improving students' self-regulated learning. In Hamad's (2017) study, Saudi students agreed that BB helped them in a blended learning environment, as they had regular contact with their instructors and received prompt feedback from them. In contrast, Al-Drees et al.'s (2015) study showed minimal BB use by undergraduate medical students at Taibah University because of technical difficulties. The same study indicated a dire need for training staff and students in BB use. Using semi-structured interviews, AlKarani and Thobaity (2020) found that most medical staff at Taif University are satisfied with BB, regardless of disadvantages, such as teaching only practical subjects. Students also emphasized the need for BB use training.

Researchers at Saudi Arabian universities have studied the effects of BB on EFL teaching and learning. Ali's (2017) mixed-method study at the University of Bisha showed that BB was a more motivating factor among English department students compared to traditional methods. In a similar study by Al-Jabry et al. (2014) at King Khalid University, Abha, participants agreed that BB helps make coursework accessible, flexible, and teachable, and is more student-centered than teacher-based.

In terms of academic writing, Fageeh and Mekheimer (2013) showed that students who used BB for communication had a more positive attitude toward productivity, collaboration, and participation. Another study (Hussein, 2016) found that female students at Hail University have a positive attitude toward using BB to improve their language skills.

Perceptions of the BB Learning System

Researchers have also investigated students' and teachers' perceptions of BB learning systems. Mohsen and Shafeeq (2014) confirmed EFL teachers' positive attitudes toward BB usage in language teaching. In Pusuluri et al.'s (2017) study, students from the Department of English at Al Jouf University liked the flexibility of learning through BB and stated that it provided them with learning variety in their courses. Tawalbeh's (2018) study at Taif University found that most

instructors had not used BB in the past but were interested in using it because of its effectiveness. Basabrin (2019) also noted positive attitudes toward the use of BB from both EFL instructors and students. In a study at Hafr Al-Batin University, Ibrahim et al. (2019) also identified positive attitude toward BB implementation among faculty.

Method

As this research used mixed methods, the researcher used two different instruments: a survey, and face-to-face interviews. The researcher conducted the quantitative analysis by distributing the survey among the assigned sample. After collecting the quantitative data, the researcher analyzed the data, and moved onto the second phase. During the qualitative second phase, the researcher interviewed 20 participants to investigate the findings from the survey and gain a better understanding of the practices behind teaching and learning speaking skills. This study followed an explanatory sequential design. It started with the quantitative phase as a cross-sectional questionnaire-based study on a selected cohort of EFL teachers and students using an online portal to collect data. This was followed by the qualitative face-to-face interviews phase.

Setting

The study included a convenience sample of English language teachers and students.

Research Participants

The researcher invited EFL instructors and students at the University of Jeddah to participate. Participants were chosen randomly from the English language departments at the College of Languages and Translation, the College of Arts and Science at the Khulis and Al Kamel branches, and the English language center at the main campus. The survey was distributed among 25% of the target population, for a total of 864 students and 67 teachers included in the first phase. After the quantitative data was collected and analyzed, 10 students and 10 instructors were chosen through purposive sampling to be interviewed face-to-face.

Instruments

The questionnaire was divided into two sections and sent to the participants electronically. One survey was created for instructors, and the other for students. The first section of each survey collected data on teacher and student perceptions of teaching and learning practices through BB. The second section collected data related to issues with and obstacles to teaching and learning speaking through BB. A 5-point Likert scale was used throughout the questionnaire (1: extremely agree, 5: extremely disagree).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted immediately following survey completion and analysis. Thirty instructors and students participated in the interviews.

Data Analysis

The researcher used R-Statistical Software version 3.4.1 (R Core Team, 2020) to analyze survey data. Manual coding was used to analyze data collected from interviews. Categorical data (i.e., educational level, sex, and work experience) were summarized using frequencies and displayed using tables and bar graphs. Negatively worded questions such as "My teacher doesn't give us a chance to practice speaking through BB" had their results recalculated before summation. Numerical continuous data, such as the sum of the survey results levels, were summarized using

means and standard deviations and displayed using box-and-whisker plots. The adjusted effect of categorical variables on the outcome variable (sum of the survey results) was determined using multiple Poisson generalized linear regression modeling (Hayat & Higgins, 2014). The level of significance was set at $p < 0.0027$. This was because we needed to use the Bonferroni correction to allow for multiple statement-by-statement comparisons between students and instructors (Francis & Thunell, 2021).

Results
Phase 1: Quantitative Research
The quantitative data showed that students and instructors held positive perceptions of using BB. There was also a significant difference in the overall score between men ($M = 64.5$) and women ($M = 64.7$), and $p = 0.00006944$ using Poisson regression analysis. There were 36 female instructors (53.7%) and 31 male instructors (46.3%). Fifteen participants were PhD holders (22.4%), 44 were M.S. holders (65.7%), and 8 were B.S. graduates (11.9%). Twelve (17.9%) participants had less than 5 years of experience, 14 (21%) had 6–10, and 16 (23.9%) had 16 or more.

Students' Characteristics
The total number of students included in the study was 864, with a response rate of 100%. Female students were 439 (50.8%), and male students were 425 (49.2%). See Table 1 for a detailed account of students' baseline characteristics.

Table 1. *Baseline Demographics of the Student Participants*

Factor	Male students mean	Female students mean	t-test value	P value
Total Learning Experience	64.5	66.7	3.978	<0.0001
My teacher uses different strategies to teach us speaking skills through BB	3.89	4.10	2.811	0.0051
My teacher uses the virtual lab to teach us speaking	3.69	3.92	2.823	0.0049
I participate effectively during speaking session through BB	3.847	3.852	0.069	0.9448
I engage in live discussion with my virtual classmates easily and regularly	3.77	3.91	1.653	0.0987
My teacher does not give us a chance to practice speaking through BB	2.01	1.65	4.991	<0.0001
I participated in group activities to practice speaking skills through BB	3.66	3.67	0.137	0.8912
My teacher does not encourage us to participate in the speaking session through BB	1.85	1.69	2.159	0.0312
I participated in peer activities to practice speaking skills through BB	3.38	3.55	1.922	0.0549
I have received proper training on how to use BB to learn English language speaking skills	3.52	3.59	0.865	0.3874
I face technical problems while learning through BB.	3.67	3.53	1.557	0.1199
I do not like to participate in speaking virtual classes through BB	2.93	2.87	0.621	0.5351
I think it is difficult to learn English speaking through BB.	2.88	2.82	0.549	0.5829
I think BB offers a lively and interesting way to learn English speaking skills.	3.58	3.54	0.529	0.5973

I feel anxious when the teacher is recording my voice while I am participating in conversation lessons	2.89	2.79	1.072	0.2841
I believe learning English speaking through BB is NOT useful.	2.35	2.11	2.636	0.0086
My teacher ignores teaching us speaking skills through BB	1.95	1.79	2.031	0.0426
I get bored of participating in speaking sessions with others through BB	2.58	2.46	1.405	0.1603
My teacher speaks more than the students in the class	3.06	2.76	3.423	0.0006

A scale of 18 items was used to quantify the experience of learning speaking through BB. It has excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.89, 95% CI: 0.87–0.90). The mean overall score for students was 3.65 (indicative of a somewhat favorable learning experience).

Male students agreed with "My teacher doesn't give us a chance to practice speaking through BB" more often than female students (M estimates were 2.01 and 1.65, respectively, $p < 0.0001$). Furthermore, male students scored "My teacher speaks more than students in the class" higher than their female counterparts (M scores were 3.06 and 2.76, respectively, $p = 0.0006$). There was a significant difference in the total overall score between men ($M = 64.5$) and women ($M = 66.7$), $p = 0.00006944$ using Poisson regression analysis.

Teachers' Characteristics

The total number of teachers included in the study was 67. A scale of 18 items was used to quantify the experience of teaching speaking skills through BB. The scale had excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.84, 95% CI: 0.79–0.90). The mean overall teaching score for teachers was 3.29 (indicative of a somewhat favorable teaching experience). The total number of female teachers in the current study was 36 (53.7%), with 31 (46.3%) men. See Table 2 for a comprehensive display of the teachers' baseline characteristics.

Table 2. *Baseline Demographics of the Study Participants*

Factor	Male teachers (%)	Female teachers (%)	t-test value	P value
Count	31 (46.3%)	36 (53.7%)		
Work experience				
1-5 years	3	9	X2 = 7.239	0.2035
6-10 years	4	10	(DF=5)	
11-15 years	5	3		
16-20 years	8	8		
21-30 years	6	3		
31-40 years	5	3		
Qualification				
B.S.	2	6	X2 = 6.3836	0.0411
M.S.	18	26	(DF=2)	
PhD	11	4		
Total Teaching Experience	60.38	58.22	0.3751	0.3751
I teach speaking easily through BB	3.45	3.39	0.2362	0.8141
I use different strategies to teach speaking skills through BB	3.52	3.61	0.4331	0.6664
I use different teaching methods to teach speaking skills through BB	3.71	3.22	2.1345	0.037
I believe BB does not support the student-centered approach	2.80	2.94	0.5615	0.5765

I use group activities to teach speaking skills	3.55	3.44	0.3680	0.7141
I use peer activities to teach speaking skills	3.48	3.61	0.4883	0.627
I speak most of the time during the speaking session and the students speak less	2.65	3.08	1.6006	0.1146
I do not focus on teaching speaking through BB	2.23	2.64	1.5916	0.1164
I engage in live discussion with my students easily	3.55	3.19	1.3245	0.1901
I think my students do not participate in my speaking sessions for technological difficulties	2.74	3.00	0.9846	0.3285
Students do not engage effectively during the speaking classes	3.03	3.44	1.4593	0.1499
I believe teaching speaking through BB is beneficial for students	3.23	3.17	0.2277	0.8206
I think BB offers a vital and interesting way of teaching and learning speaking skills	3.13	3.44	1.1957	0.2364
My students feel free and safe to participate through BB	3.548	3.556	0.0271	0.9784
I found some difficulties to convince my students to participate in my class through BB	3.06	3.17	0.3432	0.7325
I believe my students do not have the culture of learning online especially through BB	3.033	3.028	0.0188	0.9851
I have received proper training on how to use BB to teach speaking skills	3.42	3.39	0.1264	0.8998
I face technical problems while using BB	2.65	2.50	0.5700	0.5706

Only work experience of 6–15 years was associated with a statistically significant reduction in teaching experience through BB. The incidence rate ratio (IRR) was 0.8913 (i.e., a reduction of 10.8% in teaching experience score compared to newly appointed teachers with < 5 years of experience); $p = 0.0288$ for the 6–10 years of experience category and $p = 0.0036$ for the 11–15 years of experience category. Conversely, only the 21–30 years of experience category was associated with a statistically significant increase in teaching experience through BB. The IRR was 1.1498 (i.e., a rise of 15% in teaching experience score compared to the newly appointed teachers with < 5 years of experience), and $p = 0.0219$. See Table 3 for the adjusted estimates of the background effects on teachers' BB experience.

Table 3. *Estimates for the Effects of Background Demographic Factors on Teachers' Blackboard Collaborate Experience*

Factor	IRR	95% CI IRR	Estimate	SE	T value	P value
Gender: Male	1.0390	0.9707 to 1.1121	0.038241	0.034692	1.1023	0.270328
Education: M.S.	1.0249	0.9216 to 1.1396	0.024557	0.054158	0.4534	0.650232
Education: PhD	0.9288	0.8226 to 1.0487	-0.07385	0.061935	-1.1924	0.233096
Work Experience: 6-10	0.8913	0.8039 to 0.9881	-0.11509	0.052637	-2.1865	0.028781
Work Experience: 11-15	0.8295	0.7315 to 0.9407	-0.18693	0.064179	-2.9126	0.003584
Work Experience: 16-20	1.0781	0.9677 to 1.2011	0.075221	0.055115	1.3648	0.172317
Work Experience: 21-30	1.1498	1.0204 to 1.2955	0.139559	0.060895	2.2918	0.021916
Work Experience: 31-40	0.9726	0.8642 to 1.0946	-0.02778	0.060302	-0.4607	0.645034

Note. IRR = incidence rate ratio; CI = confidence interval; SE = standard error.

Sections of the Teacher Questionnaire
Section One

The first section included teachers' perception of the teaching practices through BB, which consisted of ten statements above; the mean score was 33.6 points (out of a maximum score of 50 points). The median score was 36 points, ranging from 12 to 45 points. Male teachers scored a mean of 34.2 points, only marginally higher than female teachers, whose mean score was 33.1 points. This difference was not statistically significant ($t = 0.6378$, $p = 0.5261$). Axis one was substantially lower (regarding teachers relatively new to the profession) in those with shorter work experience of 6–10 years (IRR = 0.8678, $p = 0.0436$) and 11–15 years (IRR = 0.8125, $p = 0.0154$). Other factors were not significantly affected.

Section Two

This section included issues with and obstacles to teaching speaking skills through BB, which consisted of eight items; the mean score was 25.7 points (out of a maximum score of 40 points). The median score was 25 points, ranging from 13 to 35 points. Male teachers scored a mean of 26.2 points, only marginally higher than female teachers, whose mean score was 25.2 points. This difference was not statistically significant ($t = 1.0362$, $p = 0.3052$). None of the background factors were significantly associated with the second axis of issues with and obstacles to teaching through BB.

See Tables 4 and 5 for a detailed display of the adjusted estimates for background factors on both axes 1 and 2 in terms of teachers' experience with BB.

Table 4. *Estimates for the Effects of Background Demographic Factors on Teachers' Axis One*

Factor	IRR	95% CI IRR	Estimate	SE	T value	P value
Gender: Male	1.0345	0.9453 to 1.132	0.0339	0.0460	0.7365	0.4614
Education: M.S.	1.0055	0.8747 to 1.1559	0.0055	0.0711	0.0772	0.9385
Education: PhD	0.9068	0.7730 to 1.0639	-0.0978	0.0815	-1.2002	0.2300
Work Experience: 6-10	0.8678	0.7561 to 0.9960	-0.1418	0.0703	-2.0176	0.0436 *
Work Experience: 11-15	0.8125	0.6869 to 0.9611	-0.2076	0.0857	-2.4224	0.0154 *
Work Experience: 16-20	1.0988	0.9527 to 1.2673	0.0942	0.0728	1.2936	0.1958
Work Experience: 21-30	1.1410	0.9735 to 1.3373	0.1319	0.0810	1.6285	0.1034
Work Experience: 31-40	0.9931	0.8498 to 1.1606	-0.0069	0.0795	-0.0870	0.9307

Note. IRR = incidence rate ratio; CI = confidence interval; SE = standard error.
* $p < .05$

Table 5. *Estimates for the Effects of Background Demographic Factors on Teachers' Axis Two*

Factor	IRR	95% CI IRR	Estimate	SE	T value	P value
Gender: Male	1.0448	0.9421 to 1.1586	0.0438	0.0528	0.8300	0.4066
Education: MSc	1.0521	0.8932 to 1.2392	0.0508	0.0835	0.6079	0.5432
Education: PhD	0.9596	0.7960 to 1.1569	-0.0412	0.0954	-0.4321	0.6657
Work Experience: 6-10	0.9220	0.7891 to 1.0773	-0.0812	0.0794	-1.0222	0.3067
Work Experience: 11-15	0.8517	0.7045 to 1.0298	-0.1605	0.0969	-1.6571	0.0975
Work Experience: 16-20	1.0510	0.8909 to 1.2399	0.0497	0.0843	0.5898	0.5553
Work Experience: 21-30	1.1610	0.9687 to 1.3915	0.1493	0.0924	1.6160	0.1061
Work Experience: 31-40	0.9457	0.7890 to 1.1337	-0.0558	0.0925	-0.6032	0.5464

Note. IRR = incidence rate ratio; CI = confidence interval; SE = standard error.

Sections of the Student Questionnaire
Section One

The first section included students' perceptions of teaching practices through BB, which consisted of nine items; the mean score was 29.98 points (out of a potential maximum score of 45 points). The median score was 31 points, ranging from 9 to 45 points. Male students scored a mean of 29.7 points, only marginally lower than female students, whose mean score was 30.2 points. This difference was not statistically significant ($t = 1.6153$, $p = 0.1066$).

Section Two

The second section included issues, problems, and obstacles of teaching and learning speaking through BB, which consisted of nine statements above; the mean score was 31 points (out of a potential maximum score of 45 points). The median score was 32 points, ranging from 10 to 45 points. Male students scored a mean of 30.4 points, substantially worse than female students, whose mean score was 31.7 points. This difference was statistically significant ($t = 12.5657$, $p = 0.01047$).

Inferential Statistics

The researcher used the Poisson generalized linear regression analysis to explore the effect of teacher-related background factors (gender, experience, and qualification) on their BB English teaching experience. The researcher summed all the scores for their survey results and modeled the sum per the basis of Poisson regression (Table 3).

Only work experience of 6–15 years was associated with a statistically significant reduction in teaching experience through BB. The incidence rate ratio IRR was 0.8913 (i.e., a reduction of 10.8% in teaching experience score compared to the newly appointed teachers with < 5 years of experience); $p = 0.0288$ for the 6–10 years of experience category and $p = 0.0036$ for the 11–15 years of experience category. Conversely, only the 21–30 years of experience category was associated with a statistically significant increase in teaching experience through BB. The IRR was 1.1498 (i.e., a rise of 15% in teaching experience score compared to the newly appointed teachers with < 5 years of experience) and $p = 0.0219$.

Figure 1 shows that overall teaching experience through BB did not differ substantially according to background qualification. The mean scores were 60.1, 58.8, and 59.9 for B.S., M.S., and PhD holders, respectively; $p = 0.893$.
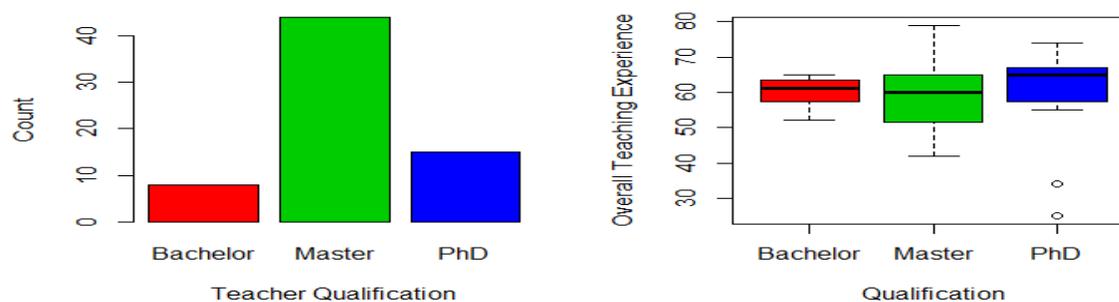

Figure 1. Distribution of teachers' Blackboard Collaborate according to qualification

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Figure 2 shows that teaching experience was significantly impactful in terms of BB teaching. The < 5 years of experience group scored 60.5, compared to 6–10 years of experience ($M = 54.2$) and 11–15 years of experience ($M = 49.8$); $p = 0.000348$.
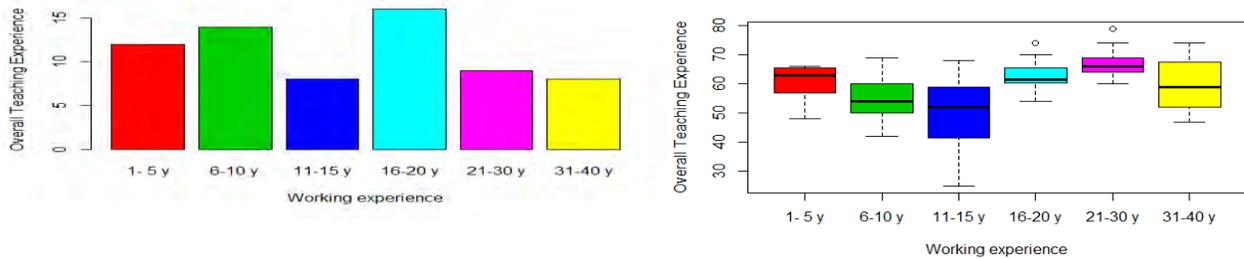

Figure 2. Distribution of teachers' overall score according to work experience

As shown in Figure 3, there were 439 female students (50.8%), and 425 male students (49.2%). There was a significant difference in the overall score between men ($M = 64.5$) and women ($M = 64.7$); $p = 0.00006944$ using Poisson regression analysis.
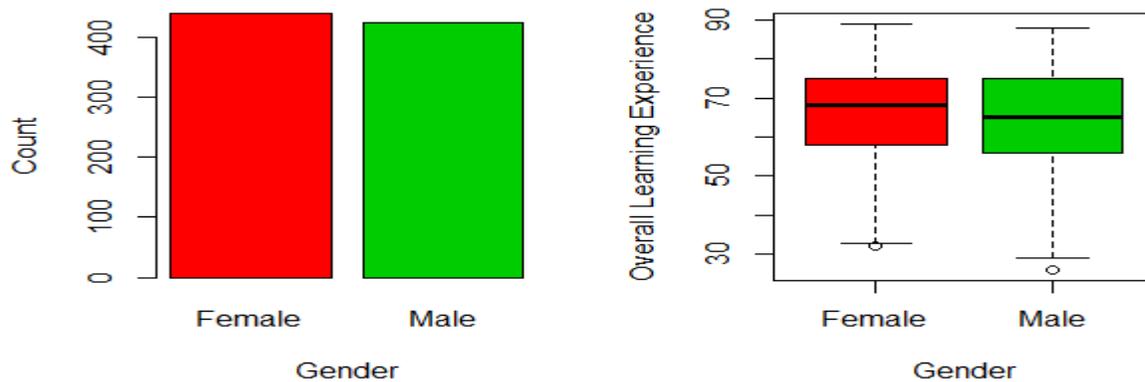
Figure 3. Distribution of students' learning experience by gender

Figure 4 demonstrates the results of multiple regression modeling of the adjusted background factor effects on the overall English teaching experience score using BB. Only work experience of 6–15 years was associated with a statistically significant reduction in teaching experience through BB. The IRR was 0.8913 (i.e., a reduction of 10.8% in teaching experience score compared to the newly appointed teachers with < 5 years of experience); $p = 0.0288$ for the 6–10 years of experience category and $p = 0.0036$ for the 11–15 years of experience category. Conversely, only the 21–30 years of experience category was associated with a statistically significant increase in teaching experience through BB. The IRR was 1.1498 (i.e., a rise of 15% in teaching experience score compared to the newly appointed teachers with < 5 years of experience) and $p = 0.0219$.
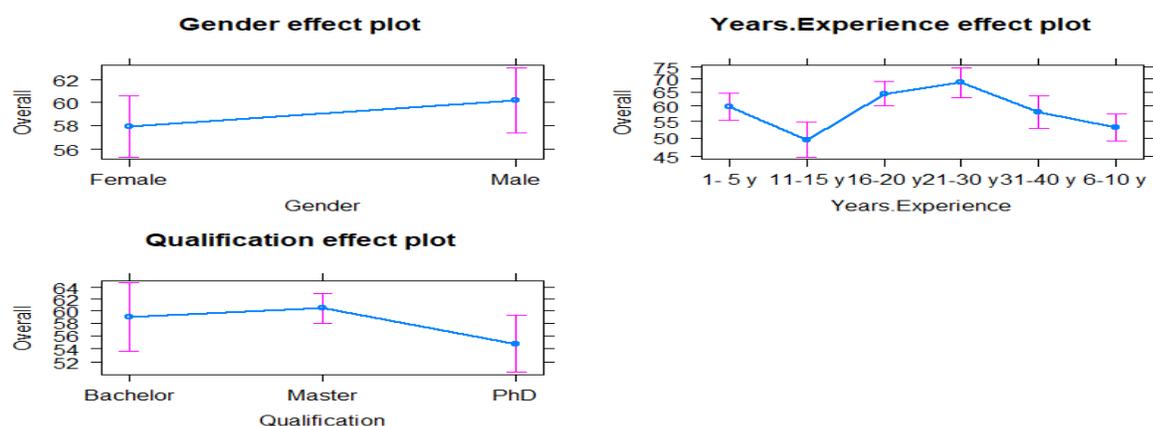
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Figure 4. Multiple regression results for the effect of gender, qualification, and work experience on teacher Blackboard Collaborate experience

Figure 5 shows that regarding Axis 1 students' perception about teaching practice through BB, male students scored a mean of 29.7 points, only marginally lower than female students whose mean score was 30.2 points. This difference was not significant statistically ($t = 1.6153$, $p = 0.1066$). However, in terms of Axis 2 issues, problems and obstacles of teaching and learning speaking through BB, male students scored a mean of 30.4 points, substantially lower than female students whose mean score was 31.7 points. This difference was statistically significant ($t = 12.5657$, $p = 0.01047$).
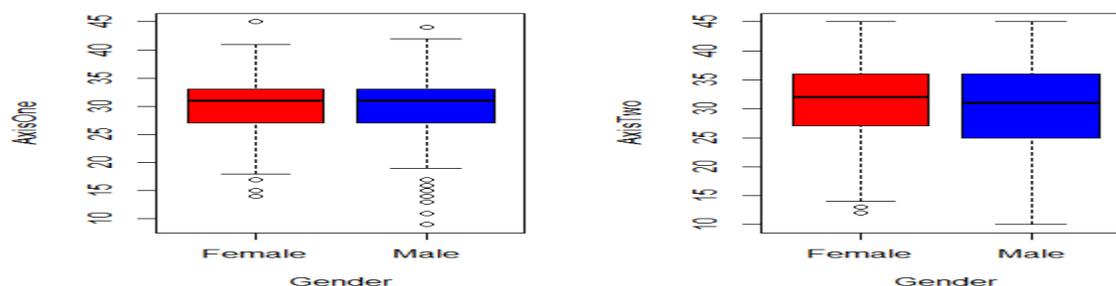

Figure 5. Axis 1 and 2 of students' Blackboard Collaborate experience divided by gender

Discussion

This study identified positive perceptions of teaching speaking skills through BB. Different studies share similar results and approaches of using different methods as positive prescriptions for using online learning tools (Alqarni, 2017) and BB in particular (Mohsen & Shafeeq, 2014; Tawalbeh, 2018). Both students and instructors favored the overall learning and teaching experience, consistent with Basabrin's (2019) findings.

Another point acknowledged is that older teachers have difficulties using operating software, computer programs, and technology (Wang et al., 2018). In this study, a longer work experience of 6–15 years was associated with worse attitudes toward online teaching, which is in agreement with the aforementioned study.

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Seraji et al. (2017) found a statistically significant relationship between teacher age and attitude toward technology. Meanwhile, different research studies have shown that new teachers feel positively toward online learning. In this study, newly appointed teachers were similarly far more satisfied with online teaching.

Interestingly, the researcher found that female students were more satisfied with learning English through BB. This was related to cultural and social beliefs and attitudes. This was also supported by other studies, such as Dang et al. (2016). Female students had a significant effect on their perceived achievement and pleasure, and this effect had a significant effect on their learning satisfaction. However, for males, no significant effect on perceived achievement or enjoyment was seen in the computer's self-efficiency (Dang et al., 2016). Chudowsky and Chudowsky (2010) showed that female students' overall learning scores exceeded male students' scores. Alghazo (2006) explained that female students seemed to have more positive attitudes toward web-enhanced instruction than male students.

Phase Two: Qualitative Research
The information gathered through the interviews largely corroborated that gathered through questionnaires. The following discussion provides a well-informed overview of the key concepts. The researcher divided the topics based on the coding results from the collected qualitative data. The three areas are using BB to teach speaking, instructor and student beliefs, and the challenges of and suggested improvements to the platform.

Using BB to Teach Speaking
It was clear from the interview results that teachers used certain strategies to teach speaking through BB (Mohsen & Shafeeq, 2014). Students' motivation to learn English through BB is high (Mohsen & Shafeeq, 2014; Ali, 2017). The researcher found from the interview transcripts that teachers followed the student-centered approach, which is supported by Alqarni (2017). One teacher said, "The current situation [COVID-19] pushed us to let students learn by themselves." In addition, BB provided teachers with an excellent feature that allowed them to create student groups. A teacher explained that he was well trained in creating learning groups through BB. He said, "I can easily create groups and monitor their learning by supporting and correcting if necessary."

Instructors' and Students' Beliefs
Interestingly, the researcher found that 100% of the interviewed instructors and students held a positive belief in using BB in teaching English. Similar results have been found by Kinash et al. (2012), Ali (2017), and Khafaga (2021). Integrating technology in teaching and learning is an asset, but sometimes it has some obstacles (Kinash et al., 2012). Both students and instructors confirmed that they liked and enjoyed using BB in language teaching and learning. A student said, "I like to use BB in learning how to speak English because no one can see me when I speak." A teacher said, "I can see that we teach with joy and our students are really active participants." Importantly, a female student mentioned that "I prefer to continue using BB rather than physically attending class because I don't get shy when I participate online… Sometimes in real classes, students laugh at each other when they make mistakes." BB also removed the physical constraints

of space and time, as stated by some teachers and students. A teacher said, "I can teach from home or even another country at any time or any stage."

Challenges of and Suggested Improvements to BB

Some research shows that using technology in teaching and learning can bring about some challenges, including: Internet availability, speed, and connection; lack of IT skills and facilities; and training issues (Alqarni, 2015). However, most instructors and students in this study assumed that they could overcome those difficulties over time by receiving help from the IT department. IT departments at universities play a vital role in assisting both instructors and students with BB. Another way to improve the use of BB is to activate synchronous discussion to support learning outcomes (Hussein, 2016).

Conclusion

BB use in teaching and learning in Saudi universities is not new. However, few studies have focused on the use of BB and its effect on English speaking skill acquisition in a Saudi context. This research was conducted to fill that gap and gain a deeper understanding of the use of BB and its effect on student speaking proficiency. The results show that both instructors and teachers hold a positive attitude toward using BB for online lessons. Instructors also followed a student-centered approach because of mandatory BB use.

The researcher highly recommends that institutions train their instructors and students to use BB to achieve better EFL teaching and learning outcomes. Female students prefer to use BB while learning English language speaking due to cultural barriers. The BB platform allows these students to participate and get full credit. However, the researcher discovered some challenges that could hinder learning and teaching, such as Internet availability, speed, and connection. There is also a lack of IT skills and training facilities.

The researcher recommends that new universities in Saudi Arabia establish IT departments to follow up on BB platforms and provide immediate assistance to instructors and students. This study was conducted in the first term of 2020 in Jeddah University with male and female students. Therefore, the researcher recommends that researchers in language acquisition and related fields should conduct studies on similar topics in the university setting using other methods to validate these outcomes.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author reports no conflicts of scientific or financial interest that can be associated with this study.

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