# The Efficiency of Technological EFL Writing Assignments Delivered through University Blackboard Platform

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**Abstract**

The need for a rapid transition to technology learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the implementation of a number of technological educational tools, including the Blackboard platform. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia implemented a number of distance learning systems, including the Blackboard Platform, which was implemented at King Abdulaziz University, specifically in the English Language Institute during the pandemic and continues to be in use after face-to-face classes resumed. When a new teaching practice is implemented, it is vital to obtain feedback on the effectiveness of that practice. This quantitative study explores the post-pandemic perspectives of 42 EFL female teachers and 99 female students through data collected through two modified online surveys utilizing a five-point Likert scale; one was conducted on a sample comprised of EFL teachers, the other on EFL foundation year students. SPSS version 24 was used to analyze the data, which is presented through descriptive statistics. Results show that both teachers and students have some positive perceptions of the use of Blackboard for writing tasks, but both also report some challenges. It is recommended that higher education

institutions provide targeted training and pedagogical support for both EFL teachers and students to maximise the effective use of Blackboard for writing instruction while addressing the reported challenges.

**Keywords:** English as a foreign language (EFL), English language teaching (ELT), Learning Management System (LMS), Technological writing assignment, Technology-mediated learning

## 1. Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia implemented a number of learning management systems to facilitate the transition to technological learning; one such system was the Blackboard Platform, which provides students with access to scientific content and other means to enhance the educational process. The Blackboard Platform was implemented during the pandemic to facilitate technological EFL learning. Blended learning has become the norm in most institutions of tertiary education (Chuanzhen, 2020). In the post-pandemic blended learning EFL classrooms, Blackboard is utilized for teaching EFL writing to foundation year students. Foundation year students at The English Language Institute receive a weekly writing assignment via Blackboard to provide writing practice before the final exam. These assignments, which total 6 or 7 over the term, are given a grade of 1 based on a rubric provided by the institution. Students are provided with weekly writing lesson packets at the beginning of each week that contain assignments to be submitted at the end of each week. The assignment is returned at the beginning of the following week with the teacher's feedback, which Salami & Khadawardi (2022) found students prefer in an electronic format.

When a new teaching technology such as the Blackboard Platform is implemented as a LMS, it is vital to obtain feedback on the users' perceptions of the effectiveness of that system for both teaching and learning (Dayag, 2018; Elfaki et al., 2019; Almekhlafy, 2020; Almelhi, 2021) since user perceptions can influence the effectiveness of the technology as a learning tool (Dayag, 2018; Almelhi, 2021). The Blackboard system was implemented during the pandemic, but the post-COVID return to blended learning means that foundation year EFL teachers' and students' perspectives on the efficiency of Blackboard for writing practice and enhancing writing skills in a blended classroom have not been explored. Insight into user perceptions will provide knowledge that can be applied to improving the user experience and the effectiveness of Blackboard for writing tasks.

However, although a number of studies have been conducted to gain insight into attitudes and perspectives on the use of the Blackboard Platform for EFL teaching in the Saudi context before (Al Zumor et al., 2013; Fageeh & Mekheimer, 2013; Mohsen, 2014) and during the pandemic (Almekhlafy, 2020; Almelhi, 2021; Albargi, 2022), there is a lack of studies that have been conducted post-pandemic. In addition, the previous studies on teachers' and students' perspectives on the use of Blackboard for EFL teaching and learning present mixed and sometimes conflicting results; the majority of studies reported findings of positive or mixed perspectives (Almekhlafy, 2020; Almelhi, 2021; Albargi, 2022, whereas Alamer (2020) reported negative user perceptions. Therefore, research in this area could contribute to

understanding the attitudes and perceptions of teachers and students and suggest ways to improve the user experience and learning outcomes.

This study seeks to fill these gaps by examining the attitudes and perspectives of EFL teachers and students related to the use of the Blackboard Platform for teaching EFL Foundation Year students writing in the post-pandemic tertiary level classroom.

The study will seek answers to the following questions:

1) What are the learners' attitudes and perspectives towards the use of the Blackboard Platform for technological writing and the challenges they face?

2) What are the teachers' attitudes and perspectives towards the use of the Blackboard Platform for technological writing and the challenges they face?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework

The conceptual framework of this study underpins social cognitive theory and the e-learning technology-mediated learning framework proposed by Aparicio, Bação, and Oliveira (2016).

The Social Cognitive Theory proposes that an individual's beliefs, knowledge, practices, and environment influence one another in a social context, and this has an influence on the outcomes of the learning system (Bandura, 2001). Therefore, people are not objects passively shaped by their environments they are proactive and engage in making make judgments about the interplay among environment, personal factors, and behavioral consequences (Bandura, 2001). This study seeks to gain insight into the teachers' and students' attitudes toward and perceptions of Blackboard Platform as a support for EFL writing, and an individual's attitudes and perceptions will be influenced by beliefs, knowledge, practices, and environment.

The technology-mediated learning framework is computer assisted learning (CAL), or when applied specifically to language learning CALL (computer-assisted language learning) (Gupta & Bostrom, 2009). The theory of technological mediation provides a framework for analyzing the roles technologies play in education. The e-learning technology-mediated learning framework comprises three dimensions: users (teachers and students), technology (Blackboard), and services (writing practice assignments and technological feedback) related to e-learning (Aparicio, Bação, & Oliveira, 2016), all of which are the focus of this study.

### 2.2 Blended Learning for EFL

Blended learning, which is the combination of technology and offline traditional classroom teaching has become prevalent in tertiary education (Chuanzhen, 2020). Blended learning can be defined as a formal education program in which content and instruction are delivered in part via digital and technological media and students have a degree of control over time, place, path, or pace (Sheerah, 2020). Chuanzhen (2020) proposes that the blended learning model facilitates the three-step learning process of pre-class preparation, in-class study, and after-class review.

Several studies have argued for the implementation of blended learning for teaching EFL (Sheerah, 2020; Albiladi & Alshareef, 2019). Albiladi and Alshareef (2019) conducted an empirical study and concluded based on the review that blended learning has the potential to positively impact the learning process and learning outcomes of language learners. However, they also identified a number of potential challenges revealed in the literature, including keeping students focused and the need for student self-regulation. In a study conducted in the Saudi context at Taif University to explore the use of blended learning for EFL teaching and learning, Sheerah (2020) argued the potential of blended learning to support EFL learning and maximize EFL learners' control over what, when, and how they learn. Menggo and Darong (2022) concluded that while blended learning does enhance learner competence, learning autonomy, learning motivation, and ICT literacy, empirical research findings do not suggest that blended learning improves EFL students' language proficiency or learning autonomy.

*2.3 The Blackboard Platform*

The Blackboard Platform is a learning management system designed to support and facilitate teaching and learning (El Zawaidy, 2014). El Zawaidy (2014) describes the Blackboard Platform as "… a Web-based server software which features course management, customizable open architecture, and a scalable design that allows integration with student information systems and authentication protocols."

As for LMS, Blackboard Platform has mixed reviews. Some propose that it is an effective learning management system, noting improved language proficiency, increased engagement, and improved learning outcomes (Al-Otaibi, 2017; Al-Zahrani & Al-Jraiwi, 2017). Others have disagreed, arguing that the use of the Blackboard LMS for EFL can present challenges for students due to poor adoption and negative perceptions of the Blackboard LMS, which have a negative impact on learner outcomes (Alamer, 2020).

*2.4 Effectiveness of Blackboard Use for EFL Writing*

A number of studies have explored user perspectives on the effectiveness of Blackboard as an LMS. In a study conducted at King Khalid University prior to the pandemic, Al Zumor et al. (2013) examined EFL students' views regarding merging face-to-face language instruction and technological language learning via the Blackboard Platform and reported that the students noted a potential for blended learning using Blackboard to enhance their writing. In contrast, a study conducted at Qassim University pre- and post-pandemic to compare the effectiveness of Blackboard and face-to-face teaching in enhancing writing proficiency found that students performed better in face-to-face writing classes than they did via Blackboard. Others have noted the potential for plagiarism and cheating when writing tasks are undertaken on an online platform (Albargi, 2022). In a study conducted during the pandemic to explore teachers' perspectives on the challenges and opportunities of technological writing assessments, Albargi (2022) noted that teachers perceive several advantages of teaching L2 writing online, but the majority also express concerns about the efficacy of conducting technological writing assessments in relation to being a fair and accurate assessment of student writing skills. The literature shows that students have positive perceptions of the effectiveness of Blackboard for writing practice, but that some teachers found face-to-face

writing classes more effective. In addition, some of the teachers have concerns related to the potential for plagiarism and teaching.

*2.5 The Importance of Users' Perspectives*

A number of studies have noted the impact of user perceptions on the effectiveness of learning technology (Mohsen, 2014; Elfaki et al., 2019; Almekhlafy, 2020; Almelhi, 2021) and the need to gain insight into user perceptions to enhance LMS effectiveness (Mohsen, 2014; Dayag, 2018; Almelhi, 2021).

Teachers' positive or negative perceptions will influence their willingness to adopt a LMS or a technology and the students' motivation to participate (Mohsen, 2014). Gumusoglu and Akay (2017), in their study using the unified theory of acceptance and use of technology to explore teachers' acceptance of Blackboard, proposed that teachers will be likely to use Blackboard if they perceive it as beneficial and adding value to their teaching. However, if they are not convinced of its value, then they will be reluctant to use it. Elfaki et al. (2019) found that students' negative or positive perceptions had a correlating effect on their performance and use. Almekhlafy (2020) proposes that students' perceptions of and attitudes toward the LMS influence their intention to use it. Almelhi (2021) argues the need for insight into teachers' and students' perceptions and attitudes towards technology such as the Blackboard, to provide the knowledge required to enhance the learner's experience and learning outcomes. Since positive teacher and student perceptions and attitudes have a correlated positive impact on teaching and learning performance, it would be beneficial to develop ways to encourage positive teacher and student perceptions and attitudes. Thus, there is a need for research that provides knowledge and understanding of both teacher and student perspectives to provide insights into ways to develop positive attitudes and perspectives and, in consequence learner outcomes.

Studies have explored the perceptions of teachers about the implementation of the Blackboard Platform for EFL both prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic (Albargi, 2022; Almekhlafy, 2020; Almelhi, 2021). In his 2014, mixed-methods study, Mohsen found Saudi EFL teachers to have positive perceptions of the use of Blackboard for ELT. Participants cited improved teacher-student relationships and support for interactive lessons; however, the study sample was small. In a study conducted at Taif University to explore teachers' perceptions of the Blackboard LMS, Tawalbeh (2017) found that although 75% of the EFL teachers in the sample had no prior university experience with Blackboard and reported rarely or never using many of its functions, they had a positive attitude toward its potential impact on learning. In a study conducted during the pandemic, Almelhi (2021) found EFL teachers to have positive perceptions of Blackboard, citing efficient teacher-student communication and increased rapport, facilitation of students' comprehension, increased student motivation, and students' active engagement in interactive learning.

Studies conducted during the pandemic explore students' perceptions of Blackboard as a LMS report varying results. Almelhi (2021) found positive student attitudes towards using Blackboard related to ease of use, platform availability, system quality, quality of learning, reduced cost, effort, and time. AlTameemy et al. (2020) explored the perceptions of 660

Saudi university students towards e-assessment on Blackboard and found that the students had mainly positive perceptions. Almekhlafy's (2020) study found the L1 student with no prior experience of using Blackboard had more positive perceptions and attitudes towards its effectiveness than L2 students who had prior experience using it. Al-Oqaily, Hj Salam, & Kew (2022) concur that prior student experience with Blackboard impacts their perceptions, but propose that it has a positive impact on the students' perceptions. Other studies found that the challenges faced by students when using Blackboard resulted in negative student attitudes and perceptions and poor learning outcomes (Alamer, 2020). Moawad (2020) proposed that negative student perceptions toward Blackboard were founded on the challenges and stress stemming from the rapid transition to technological learning during the pandemic and that students' perceptions should be more positive in the post-pandemic period. Altuwairesh (2021) reported that female Saudi University students reported face-to-face classes as being more convenient than the Blackboard Platform for learning.

## 2.6 Blackboard use for EFL in the Blended Post-Pandemic

The overwhelming majority of tertiary educational institutions are now using blended learning for teaching EFL, including EFL writing skills. The effective use of the Blackboard LMS for teaching and learning EFL writing has not been explored in depth, as few studies focus specifically on the platforms used for teaching and learning writing. Some studies suggest that students prefer doing EFL writing tasks via Blackboard. In their 2022 study on EFL students' perceptions and preferences related to writing feedback, Salami and Khadawardi (2022) found that students prefer receiving electronic feedback, such as that given on the Blackboard Platform on their writing assignments, suggesting that blended learning for writing is successful. Almelhi (2021) noted that learners were willing to continue learning via Blackboard. However, some concerns have been raised. Abargi (2022) reported the teachers' recommendations for universal standards and controls of technological writing tasks and the need for onsite writing examinations to prevent cheating and/or plagiarism. This study can provide insight into the Blackboard LMS user perspectives and contribute to the development of effective strategies for using the Blackboard LMS for EFL writing tasks.

Based on the literature review and to the best of the researcher's knowledge, few studies have been conducted to examine EFL teachers' and students' post-pandemic attitudes toward and perceptions of the Blackboard LMS in general, or on their attitudes and perceptions of the platforms' use for teaching and learning writing in particular. This research aims to explore the attitudes and perceptions that EFL teachers and students at King Abdulaziz University in the Foundation Year Program have towards the efficiency of technological writing assignments delivered through the Blackboard Platform in the post-pandemic classroom. This quantitative study utilizes two online survey instruments: one instrument distributed to EFL teachers and the other to EFL foundation year students. An online survey instrument was chosen as it provided a cost-effective way to approach the sample and gather data from the participants.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Research Design

This research aims to explore teachers' and students' perspectives regarding the use of the Blackboard platform for teaching and learning EFL writing. Therefore, for this descriptive research study, a quantitative design was determined to be the best approach to answering the two research questions. Online questionnaires were used as they facilitate contact with a large number of sample participants and provide design tools for ease of use (Young, 2015). Anonymity and confidentiality were assured.

### 3.2 Participants and Procedures

The study used non-probability sampling, as is used by the vast majority of student questionnaire research undertaken at the undergraduate, postgraduate taught, and postgraduate research levels (Young, 2015), specifically convenience sampling (Dörnyei, 2007), as the participants were chosen based on their status as an EFL teacher or student at English Language Institute in the Foundation Year EFL Program and their accessibility, availability, and willingness to participate regardless of demographic factors other than identification as either an EFL teacher or an EFL student. The sample consists of 99 students and 42 teachers.

### 3.3 Data Collection Tools

Data was collected through two modified online surveys utilizing a five-point Likert scale; one was conducted on a sample comprised of EFL teachers in service at the English Language Institute, the other on EFL foundation year students.

### 3.4 Data Collection Procedure

The survey instrument used to gather data on EFL teachers' perspectives was adopted from the one used by Al-Bargi (2022). It comprised 21 statements, with which teachers were asked to provide a degree of agreement on a five-point likert scale. The questions were grouped into five sections or themes: teachers' reflection of technological assignments, teachers' perspectives of students receiving unauthorized help, teachers' perspectives of the technological writing assignments, advantages of writing assignments, and plagiarism and cheating by students.

The survey instrument used to gather data on EFL students' perspectives was a combined modification of those used by AlTameemy, Alrefaee, and Alalwi (2020) and Al Zumor, Alrefaai, Bader, and Al-Rahman (2013). It comprised 24 statements, with which students were asked to provide their degree of agreement on a five-point Likert. The questions were grouped into six sections or themes: students' perspectives of the bb platform in terms of its convenience (advantages), students' perspectives of the blackboard platform in terms of its convenience (disadvantages), students' perspectives of writing experience via blackboard in general, students' beliefs towards weekly writing assignments via blackboard (advantages), students' beliefs towards weekly writing assignments via blackboard (disadvantages), and responses of students regarding the impact of the blackboard in assessing writing abilities and

skills.

A link to the appropriate survey will be sent digitally to foundation year EFL teachers and students via WhatsApp and/or via barcodes distributed in classes; responses were received from 99 students and 42 teachers. The surveys were conducted, and the data was collected digitally via Google forms.

*3.5 Data Analysis*

Statistical techniques are used to analyze the data collected through the survey questionnaires. The Statistical Product and Service Solution (SPSS), originally known as the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software version 24, is used to analyze the data. The data is then presented through descriptive statistics. The descriptive statistical procedure includes frequencies and percentages to describe the participants' responses to the survey questions. Mean values and standard deviations were calculated to interpret teacher and student responses to each statement. SPSS was chosen as it allows for a full range of complex inferential statistical tests to be run (Young, 2015). Frequency, Percentage, Mean and standard deviation are used to answer research questions, with a p-value <0.05 considered statistically significant. Also, Microsoft Excel is used to make pie charts for each table.

The two survey instruments (questionnaires), which were based on ones used in previous studies (Al-Bargi, 2022; AlTameemy, Alrefaee, & Alalwi, 2020; Al Zumor, Alrefaai, Bader, & Al-Rahman, 2013), were reviewed and approved by the research supervisor and an experienced EFL teacher. The teacher was not a participant in the survey. Pearson correlation coefficient was used to examine the construct validity of the questionnaires.

The reliability of both questionnaires is tested using Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient as a measurement of the internal consistency of the ordinal data (participant responses on the five-point Likert scale) to the statements on the two questionnaires. Cronbach's alpha is widely accepted as a tool to test the reliability and internal consistency of surveys; a correlation can be drawn between the level of the Cronbach alpha coefficient and internal consistency, and a value of 0.6 or above is deemed to denote survey reliability (Almelhi, 2021).

## 4. Results

The validity of a questionnaire is the ability of the questionnaire to measure what is intended to measure (Hair et al., 2006). The researchers used the Pearson Correlation Coefficient between the score of each statement and the total score of the dimension it belongs to in each questionnaire (students and teachers).

Table 1 shows the construct validity of the students' questionnaire by method of Pearson correlation by calculating the correlation coefficients between the score of each statement and the total score of the dimension. It is found that all Pearson correlation coefficients between each statement and the total score of the dimension it belongs to were in the range (.472 – .871) which are positive and significant at the level of significance (<0.01). These results indicate acceptable construct validity for students' questionnaire in its dimensions.

Table 1. Construct validity by method of pearson correlation for students' questionnaire

| Dimensions | Items | Correlation Coefficient | Items | Correlation Coefficient |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Advantages of BB platform in term of convenience | Q1 | .824** | Q3 | .705** |
| | Q2 | .827** | | |
| Disadvantages of BB platform in term of convenience | Q4 | .629** | Q6 | .729** |
| | Q5 | .799** | | |
| Writing experience via BB in general | Q7 | .811** | Q9 | .825** |
| | Q8 | .871** | | |
| Advantages of weekly writing assignments via BB | Q10 | .796** | Q12 | .802** |
| | Q11 | .812** | Q13 | .743** |
| Disadvantages of weekly writing assignments via BB | Q14 | .736** | Q17 | .734** |
| | Q15 | .751** | Q18 | .781** |
| | Q16 | .725** | | |
| Impact of the Blackboard in Assessing Writing Abilities and Skills | Q19 | .556** | Q22 | .596** |
| | Q20 | .559** | Q23 | .491** |
| | Q21 | .472** | Q24 | .640** |

Table 2. Construct validity by method of pearson correlation for teachers' questionnaire

| Dimensions | Items | Correlation Coefficient | Items | Correlation Coefficient |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Teachers' Reflection of Online Assignments | Q1 | .412** | Q4 | .780** |
| | Q2 | .744** | Q5 | .406** |
| | Q3 | .858** | | |
| Teachers' Perspectives of Students Receiving Unauthorized Help | Q6 | .331* | Q10 | .501** |
| | Q7 | .367* | Q11 | .666** |
| | Q8 | .307* | Q12 | .674** |
| | Q9 | .492** | Q13 | .470** |
| Advantages of Writing Assignments | Q14 | .699** | Q16 | .792** |
| | Q15 | .801** | | |
| Plagiarism and Cheating by Students | Q17 | .751** | Q20 | .694** |
| | Q18 | .562** | Q21 | .691** |
| | Q19 | .834** | | |

Table 2 shows the construct validity of the teachers' questionnaire by method of Pearson correlation by calculating the correlation coefficients between the score of each statement and the total score of the dimension. It is found that all Pearson correlation coefficients between each statement and the total score of the dimension it belongs to came in the range (.307 – .858) which are positive and significant at levels of significance (<0.05) & (<0.01). These results indicate acceptable construct validity for teachers' questionnaire in its dimensions.

Table 3. Reliability test by method of cronbach's alpha for students' questionnaire

| Dimensions | No of Items | Cronbach's Alpha |
|---|---|---|
| Advantages of BB platform in term of convenience | 3 | .689 |
| Disadvantages of BB platform in term of convenience | 3 | .639 |
| Writing experience via BB in general | 3 | .784 |
| Advantages of weekly writing assignments via BB | 4 | .795 |
| Disadvantages of weekly writing assignments via BB | 5 | .800 |
| Impact of the Blackboard in Assessing Writing Abilities and Skills | 6 | .619 |
| Overall | 24 | .808 |

Table 3 shows the results of the reliability test for the students' questionnaire by the method of Cronbach's Alpha. The values of Cronbach's Alpha for dimensions came in the range (0.619 – 800) and for the overall questionnaire is (.808). These values are acceptable (>.60) according to (George & Mallery, 2003) for the researcher, so it indicates that the students' questionnaire is reliable.

Table 4. Reliability test by method of Cronbach's Alpha for Teachers' questionnaire

| Dimensions | No of Items | Cronbach's Alpha |
|---|---|---|
| Teachers' Reflection of Online Assignments | 5 | .680 |
| Teachers' Perspectives of Students Receiving Unauthorized Help | 8 | .700 |
| Advantages of Writing Assignments | 3 | .644 |
| Plagiarism and Cheating by Students | 5 | .754 |
| Overall | 21 | .786 |

Table 4 shows the results of the reliability test for the teachers' questionnaire by method of Cronbach's Alpha. The values of Cronbach's Alpha for dimensions came in the range (0.644 – 754) and for the overall questionnaire is (.786). These values are acceptable (>.60) according to (George & Mallery, 2003) for the researcher, so it indicates that the teachers' questionnaire is reliable.

Table 5. The advantages of BB platform in term of convenience from students' perspectives (Items 1 –3)

| S.N | Statements | Mean | SD | Response Level | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Blackboard is more convenient to me than face-to-face learning. | 3.47 | 1.37 | Agree | 3 |
| 2 | Communication through BB makes teaching and learning more useful and effective. | 3.76 | 1.14 | Agree | 2 |
| 3 | Blackboard assignments help me to share my work with my classmates and to obtain their feedback. | 3.86 | 1.06 | Agree | 1 |
| | Overall total | 3.70 | 1.19 | Agree | |

Mean and standard deviation were used for the statements in each dimension in the students' questionnaire, in addition to frequency and percentage for each statement. Results show the overall mean a (3.70) out of (5.0) with standard deviation (1.19). The mean value falls within the second range according to the five-points Likert Scale (3.40 -< 4.20) and corresponds to the level (agree), i.e., the students agree to the advantages of the BB platform in terms of convenience.

Table 6. The disadvantages of BB platform in term of convenience from students' perspectives (Items 4 –6)

| S.N | Statements | Mean | SD | Response Level | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4 | I feel isolated when I use Blackboard | 3.30 | 1.13 | Neutral | 2 |
| 5 | I face technical problems when I use Blackboard, such as difficulty in connecting to the BB system | 3.16 | 1.33 | Neutral | 3 |
| 6 | Face-to-face learning is more convenient to me than Blackboard | 3.49 | 1.36 | Agree | 1 |
| | Overall total | 3.32 | 1.27 | Neutral | |

Results, as seen in Table 6 show the disadvantages of the BB platform in terms of convenience from students' perspectives, they show the means and standard deviations of students' answers toward each statement in the second dimension of the students' questionnaire. It is found that the overall mean is (3.32) out of (5.0) with standard deviation (1.27). The mean value falls within the third range according to the five-points Likert Scale (2.60 -< 3.40) and corresponds the level (neutral), i.e., the students are neutral about the disadvantages of the BB platform in terms of convenience.
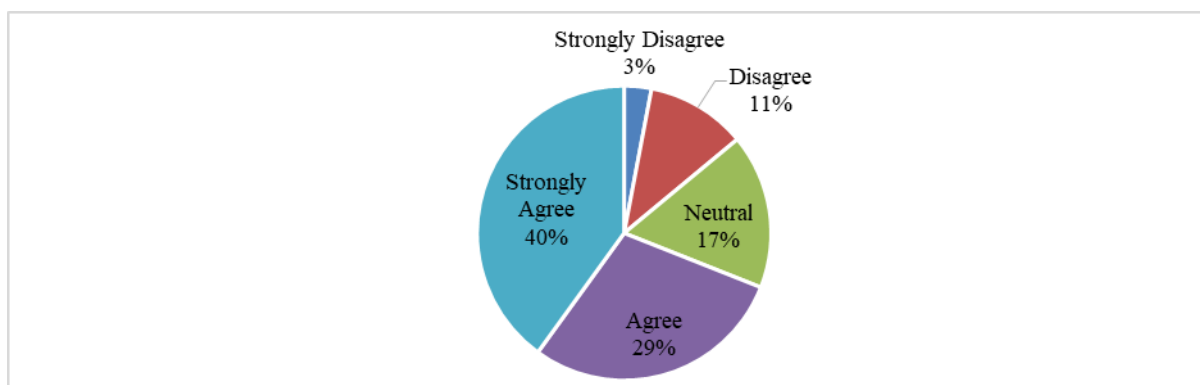
Figure 1. Writing experience via BB in general gained by students form their perspectives
(Items 7 –9)

From Figure 1, it is found that 40% of students strongly agree that they gained writing experience, 29% agree, while 11% disagree and only 3% strongly disagree.

Table 8. The advantages of weekly writing assignments via BB from students' perspectives (Items 10 –13)

| S.N | Statements | Mean | SD | Response Level | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10 | Doing home assignments through Blackboard is better than the traditional ways | 4.28 | 0.94 | Strongly agree | 1 |
| 11 | The writing assignments used in Blackboard are clear to understand | 4.25 | 0.82 | Strongly agree | 2 |
| 12 | Online writing assignments help me to develop knowledge of the writing process | 4.02 | 0.86 | Agree | 4 |
| 13 | I benefit from the feedback given by my teacher via Blackboard | 4.17 | 0.92 | Agree | 3 |
| | Overall total | 4.18 | 0.89 | Agree | |

Table 8 shows the advantages of weekly writing assignments via BB from students' perspectives; it shows the means and standard deviations of students' answers toward each statement in the fourth dimension of students' questionnaire. It is found that the overall mean is (4.18) out of (5.0) with a standard deviation of (0.89). The mean value falls within the second range according to the five-points Likert Scale (3.40 -< 4.20) and corresponds to the level (agree), i.e., the students agree to the advantages of weekly writing assignments via BB.
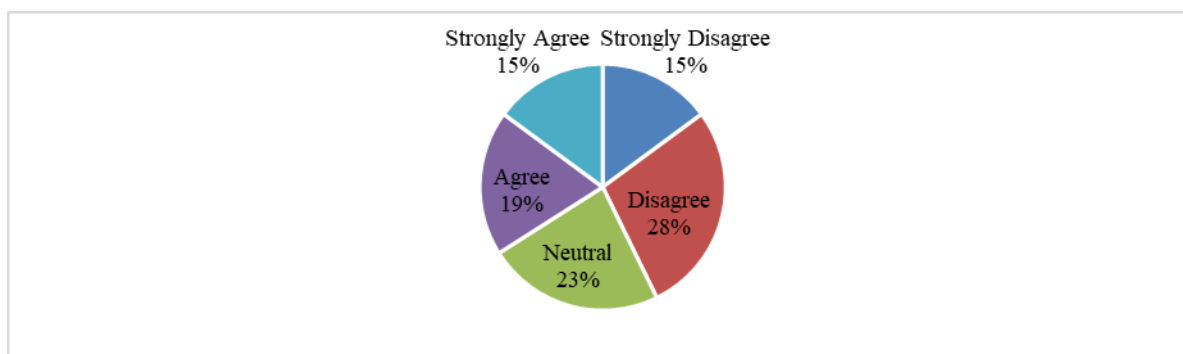
Figure 2. The disadvantages of weekly writing assignments via BB from students' perspective

From the previous figure (2), it is found that 15% of students strongly agree to the disadvantages of weekly writing assignments via BB, while 19% do agree, 28% disagree, and 15% strongly disagree.

Table 10. The impact of the Blackboard in Assessing Writing Abilities and Skills from students' perspectives (Items 19 –24)

| S.N | Statements | Mean | SD | Response Level | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 19 | Doing writing through Blackboard is more effective than using the traditional way. | 4.12 | 0.95 | Agree | 1 |
| 20 | My scores in writing improved after practicing these weekly assignments. | 3.87 | 1.10 | Agree | 3 |
| 21 | My scores in writing did not improve after practicing these weekly assignments. | 2.85 | 1.30 | Neutral | 5 |
| 22 | Using Blackboard is important for improving Writing skills. | 3.79 | 1.08 | Agree | 4 |
| 23 | Using keyboard to write my paragraph/essay question affects negatively on my performance in writing. | 2.85 | 1.29 | Neutral | 6 |
| 24 | Using keyboard to write my paragraph/essay question affects positively on my performance in writing. | 3.91 | 0.97 | Agree | 2 |
| | Overall total | 3.57 | 1.12 | Agree | |

Table 10 shows the impact of the Blackboard in Assessing Writing Abilities and Skills from students' perspectives; it shows the means and standard deviations of students' answers toward each statement in the sixth dimension of students' questionnaire. It is found that the overall mean is (3.57) out of (5.0) with standard deviation (1.12). The mean value falls within the second range according to the five-points Likert Scale (3.40 -< 4.20) and corresponds to the level (agree), i.e., the students agree to the impact of the blackboard in assessing their

writing abilities and skills.

*Teachers' Attitudes and Perspectives Towards the Use of the Blackboard Platform for Writing*

To answer this question, mean and standard deviation were used for the statements in each dimension in the teachers' questionnaire, in addition to frequency and percentage for each statement, and the results are as follows:

Table 11. Teachers' Reflection of Technological Assignments (Items 1 –5)

| S.N | Statements | Mean | SD | Response Level | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Our institute provides full rubrics for online writing assignments. | 4.05 | 1.03 | Agree | 1 |
| 2 | Students' written work submitted via Blackboard reflects their true language proficiency. | 2.29 | 1.09 | Disagree | 5 |
| 3 | Online un-proctored writing assignments can be as authentic as onsite assignments. | 2.43 | 1.11 | Disagree | 4 |
| 4 | Online proctored writing assignments can be as authentic as onsite assignments. | 2.69 | 1.20 | Neutral | 3 |
| 5 | It is difficult to verify the authenticity of writing assignments tasks if they are done online via Blackboard | 3.55 | 1.27 | Agree | 2 |
| | Overall total | 3.00 | 1.14 | Neutral | |

The previous table (11) shows the teachers' reflection of technological assignments; it shows the means and standard deviations of teachers' answers toward each statement in the first dimension of the teachers' questionnaire. It is found that the overall mean is (3.00) out of (5.0) with standard deviation (1.14). The mean value falls within the third range according to the five-points Likert Scale (2.60 -< 3.40) and corresponds to the level (neutral), i.e., the teachers are neutral about the reflection of technological assignments while students use the BB platform for writing.
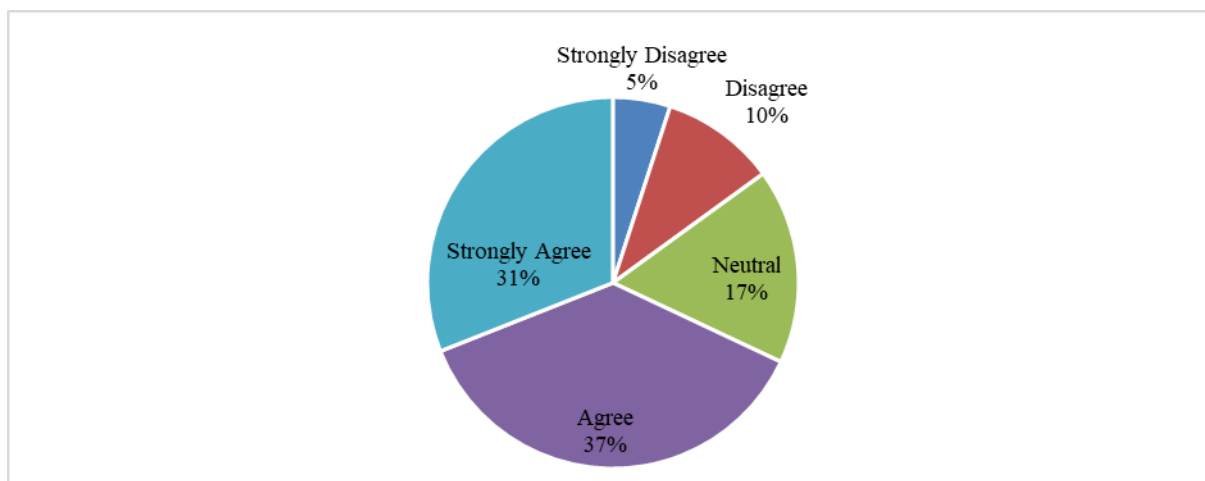
Figure 3. Teachers' Perspectives of Students Receiving Unauthorized Help (Items 6 –13)

From the previous figure (3), it is found that 31% of teachers strongly agree that students receiving unauthorized help while using blackboard platform for writing, 37% do agree, while 10% disagree and only 5% strongly disagree.
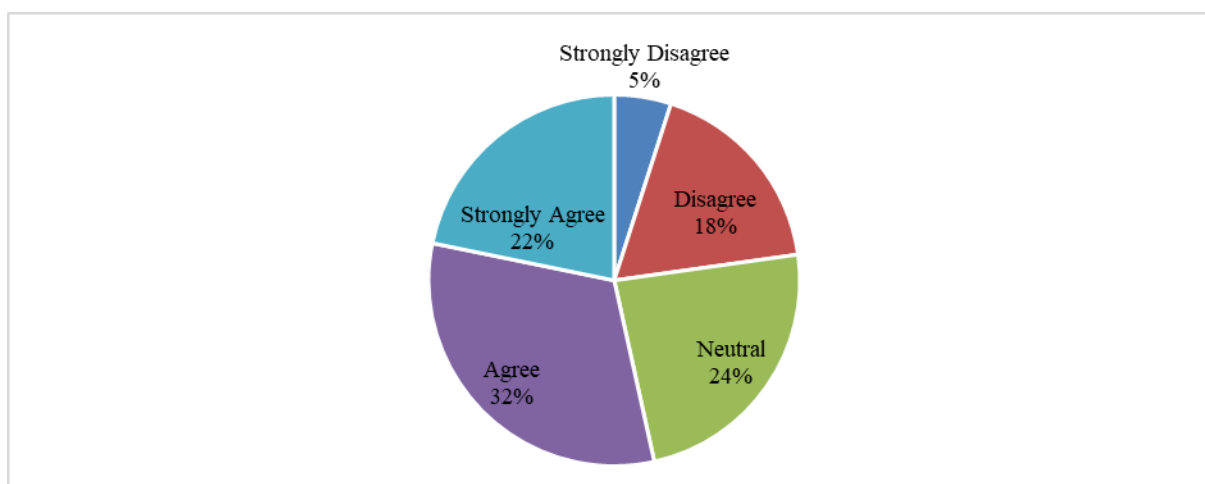


Figure 4. Advantages of Writing Assignments from Teachers' Perspectives (Items 14 –16)

From the previous figure (4), it is found that 22% of teachers strongly agree to the advantages of writing assignments while students use blackboard platform for writing, 32% do agree, while 18% disagree and only 5% strongly disagree.

Table 14. Plagiarism and Cheating by Students from Teachers' Perspectives (Items 17 –21)

| S.N | Statements | Mean | SD | Response Level | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 17 | Students are aware of what constitutes plagiarism and cheating. | 3.83 | 0.99 | Agree | 4 |
| 18 | Our institute provides students with plagiarism and similarity reports on their submitted work. | 4.12 | 0.94 | Agree | 1 |
| 19 | I am ready and encouraged to give zero in plagiarism cases in online assignments when detected. | 4.05 | 1.19 | Agree | 3 |
| 20 | Our institute has a strict zero-tolerance policy towards plagiarism on online writing assignments | 4.07 | 1.02 | Agree | 2 |
| 21 | Our institute has now developed effective ways to mitigate cheating in online assignments. | 3.79 | 0.95 | Agree | 5 |
| | Overall total | 3.97 | 1.02 | Agree | |

The previous table (14) shows the plagiarism and cheating by students from the teachers' perspectives, it shows the means and standard deviations of the teachers' answers toward each statement in the fourth dimension of teachers' questionnaire. It is found that the overall mean is (3.97) out of (5.0) with a standard deviation of (1.02). The mean value falls within the second range according to five-points Likert Scale (3.40 -< 4.20) and corresponds the level (agree), i.e., the teachers agree that there are plagiarism and cheating by students while they use blackboard platform for writing.

## 5. Discussion

The findings of this study are interpreted through Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 2001) and the technology-mediated learning framework (Aparicio, Ba ção, & Oliveira, 2016), both of which emphasise the interaction between users, technology, and the learning environment. Students' generally positive perceptions of Blackboard-based writing tasks reflect the reciprocal relationship between personal beliefs, learning behaviours, and the technological environment. The convenience of online writing, ease of revision, and electronic feedback appear to support students' engagement and self-efficacy, key components of Social Cognitive Theory. However, students' preference for face-to-face writing instruction highlights the continued importance of social interaction and instructional presence in supporting motivation and focus.

Teachers' mixed perceptions can also be explained by these frameworks. While teachers acknowledged the efficiency of Blackboard for managing and grading writing assignments, concerns about plagiarism and unauthorised assistance negatively influenced their trust in the platform as an assessment tool. From a social cognitive perspective, these beliefs shape

teachers' attitudes and instructional decisions. Within the technology-mediated learning framework, this indicates a misalignment between the technological service (online writing assessment) and assessment integrity. Overall, the findings suggest that Blackboard can effectively support EFL writing in a blended learning context, but its perceived efficiency depends on pedagogical design, assessment controls, and the alignment between user beliefs, technology, and learning practices.

This study revealed several findings about the perceptions of female EFL teachers and students at King Abdulaziz University in the Foundation Year Program on the use of the Blackboard Platform for writing tasks. One major finding is that the students had mostly positive perceptions of Blackboard's use for writing tasks, which concurs with the findings reported by Mohsen (2014), AlTameemy et al. (2020), and Almelhi (2021). However, the teachers had mixed perspectives due to some reported challenges that concurred with findings reported in other studies (Abargi, 2022).

The responses to the student surveys provided a number of significant findings related to Research Question I: "What are the learners' attitudes and perceptions towards the use of the Blackboard Platform for writing and the challenges they face?" The students agree that the Blackboard provides them with convenience, citing the most important advantage as "Blackboard assignments help me to share my work with my classmates and to obtain their feedback."   However, they are neutral about the convenience of the Blackboard Platform for learning in comparison to the convenience of face-to-face learning, which they found to be more convenient. These findings concur with the findings of Altuwairesh (2021), in which students reported that the lack of face-to-face interaction presented a challenge and negatively impacted their motivation and focus.

The students agreed that they gained writing experience via blackboard in general and reported the most important benefits gained as revising written work was easier on computer and that they could write better essays when they write them on the computer. The students agree to the advantages of weekly writing assignments via Blackboard, and the most important noted advantages are (Doing home assignments through Blackboard is better than the traditional ways) and (The writing assignments used in Blackboard are clear to understand).

The students are neutral about the disadvantages of weekly writing assignments via Blackboard citing the most important disadvantage as the technical problems faced when using Blackboard that can impact assignment submission. This also concurs with the findings of Altuwairesh (2021) in which students reported technical problems, particularly with internet connection, as being a major challenge with the Blackboard Platform. The students agree that having Blackboard assess their writing abilities and skills has had a positive impact, the most important of which is that writing on Blackboard is more effective than the traditional way of writing, and that using a keyboard and computer has a positive impact on their writing performance. Therefore, the answer to Research Question 1 is that the students have mainly positive perspectives, with the exception of the technical challenges they faced and their negative evaluation of the effectiveness of learning EFL writing via Blackboard

rather than face-to-face.

There are also several significant findings from the teachers' surveys which relate to Research Question II: "What are the teachers' attitudes and perceptions towards the use of the Blackboard Platform for writing and the challenges they face?" The teachers revealed mixed perspectives in their reflections, but they agreed that their institutes provide comprehensive rubrics for technological writing assignments. However, their reflections related to the authenticity of EFL learners' authorship of writing tasks that were not proctored were either neutral or negative. The teachers report some reservations related to writing assignments done on Blackboard accurately reflecting the learner's language proficiency and writing skills. They agree that the potential for students to receive unauthorized help while using the Blackboard platform for writing is a disadvantage, and they strongly agree that the students most likely do receive unauthorized help with their technological writing assignments. The teachers cite this as a reason why they prefer to conduct all EFL writing assignments assigned on Blackboard in class and limit the potential for unauthorized help rather than as out-of-class assignments during which the students have free access to unauthorized help. These findings concur with the researcher's own experience with out-of-class writing assignments in general, which often reflect disparate language proficiency and writing skills from those reflected in in-class assignments.

The teachers had positive perspectives on the advantages and convenience of assigning writing tasks on Blackboard, citing the most important of these as the greater ease in grading typed student assignments in comparison to grading handwritten assignments. Since the purpose of any tool is to facilitate the work is applied to, the teachers' perspectives on the function of Blackboard for writing tasks are positive. Therefore, the answer to Research Question II is that the teachers have mixed perspectives on the use of Blackboard for writing. They are positive about the convenience of Blackboard as a tool for writing assignments but reported challenges related to the ability of students to use unauthorized outside sources of help, which serve to misrepresent the learners' language proficiency and level of writing skills.

To facilitate the development of effective pedagogical practices, it is vital to have insight into the user perspective of any technology used for learning. Since both the EFL teachers and the students are users of the platforms, the perspectives of both must be considered to gain the knowledge needed to determine the most effective framework for the technology's use.

During the COVID pandemic, the educational process underwent an immense and rapid change caused by the shift to technological education and the coinciding introduction of a number of learning management technologies like the Blackboard Platform. The need for an immediate shift from face-to-face classrooms to technological learning required a transition period during which many of the learners faced a number of challenges. However, in the post-pandemic era, dynamic technological learning has transitioned to blended learning, in which technologies such as the Blackboard Platform have become integral components of the classroom.

The implications for EFL pedagogy of this study lie in the similarity between the study's

findings and those of previous studies conducted during the pandemic during the early period of the implementation of the Blackboard LMS and in the insight into teacher and student perspectives on writing assignments via Blackboard within the tertiary education Saudi context.

Studies have reported contradictory findings about the impact of prior experience using the Blackboard LMS on student perceptions. Almekhlafy's (2020) study found students with no prior experience had more positive perceptions and attitudes towards its effectiveness than those with prior experience, whereas Al-Oqaily, Hj Salam, and Kew (2022) found that prior experience had a positive impact on the student's perceptions. Therefore, it is interesting that this study's findings on the EFL teacher and student perspectives on the use of Blackboard are similar to those of studies conducted during the pandemic, which would suggest that prior experience, which the majority of learners should now have with either Blackboard or a similar technology, has not changed student perceptions. This suggests that the user perceptions have remained static and the need for increased user training and support. In addition, while teachers and students had some positive perspectives on the use of Blackboard for writing, both students and teachers had some reservations; the students found face-to-face writing classes more convenient, and the teachers had reservations about students receiving unauthorized help. These reservations suggest a need for educators to develop ways to alleviate them through a framework for Blackboard's use for writing.

Contradictory findings in previous research studies on the use of Blackboard for EFL writing can be systematically explained by differences in sample characteristics, research contexts, and instructional scenarios, as well as by variations in theoretical orientation. First, sample-related factors such as learners' gender, proficiency level, prior experience with learning management systems, and digital literacy have been shown to significantly influence attitudes and engagement with Blackboard, which helps explain why some studies report positive perceptions while others report resistance or dissatisfaction (Almekhlafy, 2020; Al-Oqaily et al., 2022; Altuwairesh, 2021). Second, contextual and scenario-based differences across studies—particularly the mode of delivery (fully online during the COVID-19 pandemic versus blended post-pandemic instruction), assessment conditions (proctored versus unproctored writing tasks), and levels of institutional and technical support—have resulted in varied user experiences and outcomes (Almelhi, 2021; Moawad, 2020; Albargi, 2022). From a Social Cognitive Theory perspective, such environmental and contextual variations directly influence learners' and teachers' beliefs, self-efficacy, motivation, and behavioural engagement, leading to divergent perceptions and learning outcomes across studies (Bandura, 2001). Similarly, within the technology-mediated learning framework, inconsistencies in research findings can be attributed to differing levels of alignment between users, technological affordances, and instructional services (Aparicio et al., 2016). Studies reporting positive outcomes typically reflect stronger alignment among these dimensions, whereas negative or mixed results emerge when technological tools are insufficiently supported by pedagogical design, assessment integrity mechanisms, or user training (Mohsen, 2014; Dayag, 2018; Almelhi, 2021). Situating the present findings within these interacting contextual and theoretical factors provides a clearer research context and

offers more robust theoretical support for understanding variations in perceptions of Blackboard-mediated EFL writing across settings and timeframes.

## 6. Conclusion

### 6.1 Summary of the Study

There is a need for educators to identify the specific challenges experienced by Saudi EFL users when using the Blackboard platform for technological writing assignments in order to develop ways to alleviate them. Elfaki et al. (2019) Almekhlafy (2020) and Almelhi (2021) argue the need for insight into teachers' and students' perceptions and attitudes towards technology such as the Blackboard to provide insight to be used to develop means to enhance the user experience since users' perceptions impact their acceptance of and readiness to use a system (Fageeh & Mekheimer, 2013). This study finds that while the EFL teachers and students in the Foundation Year Program have some positive perspectives of the use of the Blackboard platform for technological writing assignments, both teachers and students have noted what they perceive as disadvantages. For the students, the challenges lie in their negative comparison of the convenience of Blackboard for writing tasks to face-to-face classrooms. However, their positive perspectives on the use of Blackboard for the actual task suggest a positive role for blended learning. They also noted challenges in the form of technical issues that prevented the submission of assignments, which suggests a need for a more efficient IT infrastructure. For teachers, their challenges lie in ensuring the authenticity of authorship for writing assignments done outside of the class; these reservations could be alleviated by the development of software that prevents this.

### 6.2 Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations. It was conducted at a single institution using convenience sampling and included only female teachers and students, which limits the generalisability of the findings to other contexts and populations. The study relied solely on self-reported questionnaire data, which may be subject to response bias and does not measure actual writing performance or Blackboard usage. In addition, the analysis was descriptive and did not examine causal relationships or the impact of variables such as prior experience or digital literacy. Finally, data were collected at one point in time, and participants' perceptions may change as they gain more experience with blended learning and technological writing practices.

These limitations reduce the generalisability and strength of the findings. Because the study involved a single institution, female participants only, and self-reported data, the results may not fully represent other EFL contexts or reflect actual writing performance. In addition, the descriptive design limits causal conclusions. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted as indicative and used as a basis for further, more comprehensive research.

### 6.3 Recommendations for Future Study

To advance research on technology-mediated EFL writing within blended learning environments, it is important to build on theory-driven insights drawn from Social Cognitive

Theory and the technology-mediated learning framework. In line with these frameworks, future studies should consider the following hierarchical directions to better understand the interaction between learners, teachers, technological tools, and instructional practices:

1) Expand Context and Participants

   Include multiple institutions and diverse participant groups to better capture social and environmental influences on technology use.

2) Incorporate Objective Measures

   Use writing performance assessments and behavioural data to complement self-reported perceptions.

3) Adopt Longitudinal Mixed Methods

   Examine how beliefs, engagement, and learning outcomes evolve over time in technology-mediated learning contexts.

4) Address Assessment Authenticity

   Investigate technological and pedagogical solutions that enhance integrity in online writing tasks.

5) Examine Mediating Variables

   Explore the roles of digital literacy, prior LMS experience, and institutional support in shaping effective technology use.

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**Appendix**

**Appendix 1**

**Table 7. Writing experience via BB in general gained by students form their perspectives (Item 7-9)**

| S.N | Statements | Mean | SD | Response Level | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7 | I can write better essays when I do them on the computer | 3.93 | 1.13 | Agree | 2 |
| 8 | Writing through a computer makes me less anxious | 3.82 | 1.17 | Agree | 3 |
| 9 | Revising my written work is easier when I write it on computer | 4.02 | 1.07 | Agree | 1 |
| | Overall total | 3.92 | 1.12 | Agree | |

**Appendix 2**

**Table 9. The disadvantages of weekly writing assignments via BB from students' perspectives (Item 14-18)**

| S.N | Statements | Mean | SD | Response Level | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 14 | Online writing assignments through Blackboard is time consuming | 3.01 | 1.24 | Neutral | 2 |
| 15 | If the assignment is not clear, I do not have a chance to ask for clarification directly | 2.92 | 1.26 | Neutral | 3 |
| 16 | The instructions of the assignments provided on Blackboard are difficult to follow | 2.77 | 1.19 | Neutral | 4 |
| 17 | Online writing assignments facilitate cheating and plagiarism | 2.75 | 1.33 | Neutral | 5 |
| 18 | I face technical problems when using Blackboard which affect my writing assignment submission | 3.10 | 1.36 | Neutral | 1 |
| | Overall total | 2.91 | 1.28 | Neutral | |

**Appendix 3**

**Table 12. Teachers' Perspectives of Students Receiving Unauthorized Help (Item6-13)**

| S.N | Statements | Mean | SD | Response Level | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6 | I feel that the students receive unauthorized help with their online writing assignments | 4.40 | 0.70 | Strongly agree | 1 |
| 7 | Evidence of cheating in un proctored online writing assignments can be provided via Blackboard platform. | 3.64 | 1.16 | Agree | 7 |
| 8 | I prefer conducting all writing assignments of English language in class | 4.05 | 1.15 | Agree | 2 |
| 9 | Teaching writing assignments are better to assess in class through group work. | 3.95 | 0.96 | Agree | 4 |
| 10 | Online writing assignments are more convenient to conduct via Blackboard than onsite assignments | 2.88 | 1.27 | Neutral | 8 |
| 11 | Online writing assignments are less stressful for students than writing assignments conducted on campus. | 3.88 | 1.02 | Agree | 5 |
| 12 | A blended style (onsite-online) writing assignments are a good approach to measure writing ability | 4.02 | 0.92 | Agree | 3 |
| 13 | Online writing assignments have increased students' digital literacy. | 3.71 | 1.07 | Agree | 6 |
| | Overall total | 3.82 | 1.03 | Agree | |

**Appendix 4**

**Table 13. Advantages of Writing Assignments from Teachers' Perspectives (Item 14-16)**

| S.N | Statements | Mean | SD | Response Level | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 14 | Online teaching has expanded my skills in teaching writing and assessing it online. | 3.45 | 1.13 | Agree | 2 |
| 15 | It is easier to grade typed student assignments than handwritten assignments. | 3.69 | 1.22 | Agree | 1 |
| 16 | Students can finish more writing exercises online than on a piece of paper in the same amount of time | 3.33 | 1.12 | Neutral | 3 |
| | Overall total | 3.49 | 1.16 | Agree | |

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