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# Promoting EFL Learning Outside the Classroom Through the Use of Web-based Technologies After the Adoption of Blackboard in a Saudi University

Ahmed Saad Al Shlowiy

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**Promoting EFL Learning Outside the Classroom  
Through the Use of Web-based Technologies After the  
Adoption of Blackboard in a Saudi University**

by

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy, Ph.D.  
Educational Linguistics**

The University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

**July, 2016**

## DEDICATION

**To my beloved mother**

**To the soul of my father**

**To my very glamorous wife**

**To Saad, Arwad, and Tameem**

**To my siblings, relatives, and friends**

This dissertation was compiled in various places across houses, cities, states, countries, and continents sometimes even in cafes and restaurants.

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

*In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful*

First, all praise is due to Allah, my God. I praise him, seek his aid, and seek his forgiveness. Allah graces me with countless blessings, inspiration, patience, time, and strength throughout my life. With His will and mercy, I have been able to complete this Ph.D. dissertation. His last messenger, Prophet Mohammed—peace be upon him—said: “He will not be thankful to Allah, he who would not be thankful to people.” Therefore, I would like to sincerely express my thanks and appreciation to all those who helped me through my doctoral studies. Many people have contributed directly or indirectly to the outcome of this dissertation, although only my name appears under its title.

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### ABSTRACT

Many Saudi universities recently have used different technologies including a learning management system (LMS) to establish their blended learning systems. Faculty and students are encouraged to use online resources in their courses. I was interested in learning if English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers used Blackboard as a LMS to promote English learning outside the classroom and to extend limited opportunities of using English in Saudi Arabia. This study is important for EFL teaching and learning because it describes how web-based learning platforms are used to promote learning of English. It also sheds light on the teachers' approaches, suggestions, and perceptions as well as on the students' experiences and perceptions. It helps policymakers in Saudi Arabia to understand the role of web-based technologies (WbTs) in students' learning of English outside the classroom. This study is motivated by one main research question: How does the adoption of Blackboard in this university help teachers provide web-based opportunities and employ online resources to support students' English learning outside the classroom? This question is explored through three sub-questions.



This qualitative study collects data from EFL teachers and students at a Saudi university through questionnaires, interviews, and follow-up questions. These multiple methods enabled me to find four teachers and nine students who richly experienced the implementation of Blackboard and other WbTs. The data analysis process produces descriptive codes and themes. It shows that the adoption of Blackboard at SSU was a fundamental change that had many consequent changes. The findings reveal that these changes were related and worked together to provide many learning opportunities and to expose students to English in real-life situations. Using WbTs reshapes EFL teaching approaches (Chapelle, 2009) and offers blended learning experiences as optimal learning environments for EFL students to learn by themselves. Participants were enthusiastic, confident, and highly motivated to utilize more WbTs in their course work. Curriculum developers and teachers are encouraged to choose more meaningful activities to meet many students' needs, interests, and learning styles. I conclude by requesting the Saudi policymakers to adopt in the near future LMSs in Saudi educational institutions.

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## Chapter 1

English is the leading global language in today's world. It is the "requirement for decent employment, social status, and financial security in various parts of the world" (Gue & Beckett, 2007, p. 121). The status of English in the world's economy, politics, and communication has largely affected its dominance in the world's educational systems. English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is a major component of most of the educational systems in countries that teach EFL. Therefore, educators everywhere are giving increasing attention to improving the quality of EFL instruction in their educational systems.

Saudi Arabia is one of the countries that needs to develop and improve EFL instruction in its educational systems in order to take advantage of the changing role of English in today's world that affects teaching materials, learning settings, and the relationship between teachers and learners. English holds an important position as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia. English is the language of communication in many professions, such as medicine and aviation (Al-Shammari, 2007). English is also used in various areas of society and becomes a major part of education in the country. In all governmental public schools, English is the only foreign language that is taught as a compulsory subject. In higher education, English is the medium of instruction in scientific and medical programs in Saudi universities. Therefore, the teaching of English now is a major component of the educational system in Saudi Arabia.

In Saudi Arabia, EFL learning and teaching require more effective ways and supportive opportunities regardless of place and time. EFL learners and teachers need to look at English as a language to use in their daily lives rather than as only a compulsory

subject at school. Public life in Saudi Arabia does not support learning and teaching of EFL because English is rarely used among the Saudi society (Alshumaimeri & Alzyadi, 2015; Liton, 2013). Limited classroom instruction and few opportunities in Saudi public life do not support EFL teaching and learning. In addition to the attitude towards English as a classroom-subject, few pedagogical implications or beneficial uses engage English in practices outside the classroom. Students are neither prepared nor encouraged to use English to participate in online activities outside the school.

To support learning and teaching of EFL in Saudi Arabia, I argue that students need to be exposed to English in real-life situations outside the classroom, and teachers need to promote learning opportunities by using online resources. Today, students can independently progress in their learning, use different learning resources, and take advantage of learning opportunities available to them if their teachers direct them. In such a context, I argue that EFL learners have more opportunities to use English outside the classroom more than inside the classroom.

This study describes whether EFL teachers provide web-based opportunities and employ online resources to support language learning outside the classroom after the adoption of Blackboard, as a learning management system, in a small Saudi university (SSU). While this study does not focus on Blackboard itself as a system, this study attempts to determine how Blackboard is used at SSU by EFL teachers and whether these uses impact teaching approaches that support English learning outside the classroom through web-based technologies and online resources.

This study explores teachers' perceptions of using web-based technologies and online resources to promote learning of English outside the classroom as well as students'

perceptions of their uses of these technologies and resources to learn English outside the classroom. Understanding their perceptions helps to improve teaching approaches in the Saudi EFL context in the 21st century and to empower students to participate in and take advantage of the widespread use of English in online settings outside the school.

This first chapter has three parts. First, it introduces a brief overview of the use of web-based technologies in education and English education and defines a research domain including related terminologies such as online learning, blended learning, and learning management systems. Second, it presents the study topic that includes research background, problem statement and purpose of the study, research questions, and significance of the study. Third, it describes the status of the English language in Saudi education, which is the research context, and discusses the teaching of English in public education and tertiary education in Saudi Arabia. It specifically presents the setting of this study in an intensive English program at SSU. The chapter ends with a short description of the organization of the following chapters.

### **Overview of Web-based Education**

#### **Web-based Education**

In the 21st century, the Internet and technologies influence people's life, education, and communication. These technologies play a role in many changes in learning environments, including reforming the curriculum and new pedagogy designs, and changing in how people build new knowledge, either formal, non-formal, or informal (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). For example, these technologies are used in formal classrooms, in out-of-school non-formal online courses and materials, and in lifelong



personal learning efforts as informal learning. Yang (2011) stated that these technologies influence not only the context of learning but also the learning process itself.

These technologies create “rich learning sources for all kinds of learners, interactive learning environments among students, teachers and course materials, and cross-cultural collaborative learning opportunities” (Mohsen & Shafeeq, 2014, p. 108). These technologies meet the needs of the 21st century, which is variously known as the digital age, computer age, or information age (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). To accommodate these needs, many educators realize the importance of including online learning and virtual communication in their educational curricula (Hubbard & Levy, 2006), using the innovation to improve teaching (West, Waddoups, & Graham, 2007), and changing teaching trends and pedagogical applications (Mazman & Usluel, 2010).

### **Web-based English Education**

The use of these technologies to teach the English language increases dramatically around the world. Because the English language is the global language, online English teaching and learning increase with the growth of the Internet and the proliferation of computers at home and in many educational institutions (Hubbard & Levy, 2006). This development leads these institutions to adopt hybrid approaches to teach language by blending face-to-face instruction with online activities and computer-based practices (Comas-Quinn, 2011; Compton, 2009). Therefore, technologies and English learning are linked to each other in the current digital age to produce advanced practices that facilitate language-learning progress (Yang, 2011). In addition, the appearance of digital resources and Internet tools reshapes views of how to teach and learn a foreign language and of the proficiency of it (Blake, 2008; Chapelle, 2009).

## **Connections to Current Study**

The existence of mainframe computers in the mid-1900s launched the emergence of computer-assisted language learning (CALL). CALL is currently substituted by specialized terms such as MALL, which stands for mobile-assisted language learning; TELL, or technology-enhanced language learning; and TBLL, or technology-based language learning (Bax, 2003; Thorne, 2008). Therefore, CALL is a growing field that includes new learning theories and pedagogical applications, such as educational technology, e-learning, and mobile learning. CALL is adaptable to any new technologies from personal computer to laptops, to handheld devices, to touchable mobile devices, and then software, applications, and online websites. CALL also evolves immensely to include different learning environments, including face-to-face, online, and a blend of the two.

The question that comes to mind from this improvement is this: Do these technologies help to support language learning outside the classroom in EFL contexts, such as Saudi EFL? Many researchers found that EFL learners experience limited opportunities to use English outside the classroom (Alshumaimeri & Alzyadi, 2015; Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003; Liton, 2013; Nation, 2003), as I discuss about EFL learners in Saudi Arabia below. This study attempts to provide some ways to answer this question by looking at the impact of Blackboard adoption at SSU on English learning outside the classroom. The product of language-learning courses focuses on the learner's ability to continue learning and to communicate outside the classroom (Warschauer, 2002), not only in the classroom.

## Research Domain

This section introduces the research domain and defines the principal terms used in this study, such as *learning management systems*, *online learning*, and *blended learning*. Before defining the main terms, I use the term *web-based technologies* (WbTs) to mean all Internet-related technologies, tools, applications, resources, social media networking, software, motion video, images, sound, animations, graphics, e-mail, blog, wiki, podcast, video, audio-video conference, online discussion, chat, e-portfolio, mobile applications, written and pictorial annotation, SMS, voice-message, text-message, video-recording, voice-recording, hyperlinks, digital resources, electronic dictionaries, online learning management systems, and web-pages. Therefore, in this study, WbTs mean any form of online technology or practice through which users convey information, share ideas, learn independently, seek entertainment, collaborate with others, send personal messages, and communicate with other individuals and/or groups (Wankel, 2010).

This study uses the term *outside the classroom* frequently to mean any activity—undertaken outside the classroom—in any other locations or in online settings. This includes formal, non-formal, or informal activities used to learn English outside the classroom. Below are short definitions of the main terms used in this dissertation: learning management system, online learning, and blended learning.

**Learning management system.** A learning management system (LMS) is a software application used to administer, document, track, report, and deliver educational materials in virtual learning environments. Alias and Zainuddin (2005) defined LMS as a web-based technology that assists in the planning, distribution, and evaluation of a specific learning process. It is defined as an online system that allows users to share

information and collaborate online (Lonn & Teasley, 2009) in which teachers and learners can design more desirable, accessible, and meaningful learning activities than in traditional classroom. LMS offers a wide variety of tools to make valued courses. It provides an easy way to upload and share materials, hold online discussions and chats, give quizzes and surveys, gather and review assignments, and record grades (Cole & Foster, 2008).

LMS allows teachers to create a web-based course for their enrolled students. Coates, James, and Baldwin (2005) stated that the main advantage of using LMS is the freedom of teachers to add, change, or utilize the system according to the individual learning styles and learning needs. LMS enables the teacher to design, track learning, report students' activities, and deliver electronic course events. In addition, it generates opportunities to deliver the course material in a flexible way by adding links or uploading files. LMS allows teachers and administrators to track, document, and report students' activities. It also allows students to track grades, submit their assignments, and access the course syllabi. LMS is often used to build different learning systems that exist under several names such as online learning, e-learning, digital learning, mixed-mode learning, and blended learning. I define these learning systems below. LMS supports different learning theories and pedagogical applications including *educational technology*, *multimedia learning*, *technology-enhanced learning*, *computer-based instruction*, *computer-based training*, *computer-assisted instruction*, *Internet-based training*, *web-based training*, and *online education*.

**Online learning.** Online learning, e-learning, virtual learning, Internet-enhanced learning, and distance learning are different names for the same learning process (Moore,

Dickson-Deane, & Galyen, 2011). This process relies on technology-mediated methods of interaction and communication. It happens in an online environment with no physical interaction. It is a digital version of the previous distance learning system, which did not include face-to-face instruction. It takes place completely in digital learning contexts. It includes any activity delivered by electronic mails, posted on websites, or used in web-based materials. This activity might be synchronous or asynchronous. Khan (2005) defined e-learning as:

Innovative approach for delivering well-designed, learner-centered, interactive, and facilitated learning environment to anyone, anyplace, anytime by utilizing the attributes and resources of various digital technologies along with other forms of learning materials suited for open, flexible, and distributed learning environment.  
(p. 3)

Zhang, Zhao, Zhou, and Nunamaker (2004) compared face-to-face learning and online learning and presented the advantages and disadvantages of each setting. Learners and teachers are familiar with face-to-face learning. Face-to-face learning motivates learners, provides them with immediate feedback, and helps to cultivate social community. On the other hand, online learning supports a learner-centered approach and self-paced context because it is flexible in time and location, cost-effective for learners, available to a global audience, and has archival capability for knowledge reuse and sharing. Regarding the disadvantages, face-to-face learning is instructor centered, affected by time and location constraints, and more expensive to deliver. Online learning lacks immediate feedback in asynchronous learning, increases teachers' preparation time, is not comfortable to some people (Zhang et al., 2004), and can lead to more frustration,

anxiety, and confusion (Ryan, 2002). This comparison shows the advantages and disadvantages of face-to-face learning and of online learning. Both types of learning might be blended together to take advantage of the benefits in both types to support learning outside the classroom, provide online opportunities, and compensate for limitations in the classroom.

**Blended learning.** Blended learning exists in the literature in different terms, such as hybrid learning, mixed-mode learning, and flexible learning (Swan, 2009). Blended learning is the integration of online learning and face-to-face instructions (Mayadas & Picciano, 2007), as shown in Figure 1.1. The idea behind blended learning is to blend the best features, of the two environments: face-to-face learning and online learning (Kumar, 2007). Blended learning depends on reliable resources from the Internet, such as learning platforms, applications, or LMSs, to provide current knowledge and meaningful language learning. Osguthorpe and Graham (2003) found that designing a blended learning course can achieve six aims: pedagogical richness, access to knowledge, social interaction, personal agency, cost effectiveness, and ease of revision. Such aims are valuable for incorporating blended learning into language courses. The blended learning system supports the student-centered approach in which technology is not considered complementary to learning but is a defining fundamental part of it (Moore, Dickson-Deane, & Galyen, 2011).

Dodero, Fernández, and Sanz (2003) stated that blended learning is more effective than online learning in terms of students' participation because they can participate in two different learning environments. Using the blended learning system to teach language might contribute to improving learners' language use in terms of accuracy, fluency, and

appropriateness (Reeder, MacFadyen, Roche, & Chase, 2004) because it provides them with more opportunities to use English inside the classroom and also in online settings and exposes them to English in real-life situations outside the classroom. In addition, it enables students to participate in unlimited learning practices, to take advantage of the common use of English in online settings, and to modify their view of English as a live language rather than only as a classroom subject.

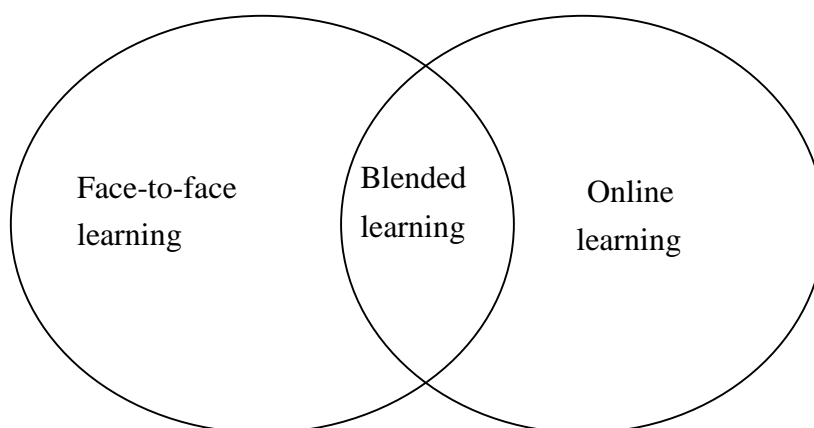


Figure 1.1 *A Diagram of Blended Learning (Alebaikan, 2010).*

English courses might be mediated by any LMS that helps to blend face-to-face instruction with online activities and computer-based practices (Comas-Quinn, 2011). Teachers of English can improve their teaching approaches and facilitate students' learning by using online resources to present any type of auditory or visual material, including text-to-speech, voice recognition, animation, music, sound effects, and linked cartoon videos to increase not only background knowledge but also vocabulary (Chen, 2008). Teachers of English may incorporate time (synchronous or asynchronous access); place (campus, home, or other place); ICT applications (CD/DVD, the Internet, or social networking); and pedagogy (student-centered or teacher-centered) (Allan, 2007).

## **Research Topic**

### **Research Background**

My interest in studying the role of WbTs, including Blackboard, in EFL teaching and learning was born in 2011, when I attended my Ph.D. studies at the University of New Mexico (UNM). During my doctoral coursework, I was exposed to different LMSs and web-based learning platforms, such as Blackboard, WebCT, Schoology, PBworks, edWeb, and Moodle. I have benefited greatly from using these LMSs in my learning, although my professors used these platforms differently. Each professor used it in their own ways, based on their approaches and to achieve their goals.

Some instructors used these platforms as a digital syllabus for administrative purposes, such as submitting assignments, uploading files, and posting grades. The platforms were used as storage places for “digital resources, not platforms for exchanging ideas” (Yuen, Deng, Fox, & Tavares, 2009, p. 151). Some instructors had additional uses for these platforms, such as posting discussion questions, adding interactive tasks, or making drills for learners to work on. In examining their uses of a LMS, I cannot determine if these instructors used technologies “simply for the sake of using technology” (Yuan & Kim, 2014, p. 227) and cannot determine if learners participated only to achieve high scores, to post a comment, or to attain the minimum requirement.

On the other hand, some instructors attempted to use these platforms in effective ways, such as discussing the weekly reading articles in online settings and including guiding questions or activities. These instructors provided learners with supportive materials, such as online templates, videos, discussion boards, and links that enhanced the learning process by continuing their learning outside the classroom. These instructors



were active participants and provided feedback on assignments and participation. They communicated with learners and were co-participants in the learning process (Drewelow, 2013). They paid special attention to the role of technologies in their teaching. They viewed technologies as a crucial constituent of the teaching process in the digital age, not as an additional teaching tool.

By the same token, I explored how some UNM graduate students used LMSs in their classes. I found that they dealt with LMSs as a tool merely to submit assignments. They limited their uses only to what is required in the course syllabus. It appeared that my colleagues' use of LMSs at UNM to submit their assignments was for administrative purposes only, as shown above, with no educational objectives or pedagogical implications.

These differences in using LMSs increased my interest in determining the role of these WbTs in English teaching and learning in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, I was curious to explore how the adoption of Blackboard at SSU helped teachers to support English learning outside the classroom. After using Blackboard as a pilot project during the spring of 2015 at SSU, I talked to three teachers during the summer of 2015. They told me about interesting uses and pedagogical benefits achieved by colleagues who tried Blackboard in the spring semester. In addition, I found them enthusiastic and highly motivated to use Blackboard in their classroom.

Each teacher uses technology differently. I agree with King (2012) that using any technology reflects the teacher's teaching philosophy and perception of the technology. EFL teachers at SSU might use Blackboard in different ways to teach English. They might have different perceptions of using WbTs, including Blackboard, in their teaching.

Based on different teaching courses and approaches, the main goal of language teaching should always be to improve the learner's abilities and skills to use English in real-life situations.

I decided to examine the impact of Blackboard, WbTs, online learning, and virtual resources on EFL teaching and learning in the Saudi context. I do not focus on these technologies per se but on how they are used to promote learners' uses of English outside the classroom. While most EFL teachers still use technologies for self-purposes—not for fostering learning and teaching (Koc, 2013). I aim to determine if teachers at SSU use other ideas, models, programs, websites, applications, templates, activities, or techniques to teach English and to enable its uses outside the classroom.

EFL teachers at SSU have different teaching experiences, perceptions, and backgrounds. I wonder whether such diverse faculty seek pedagogical implications and potential benefits by integrating WbTs into language teaching practices. Brooks (2010) stated that the pedagogical approaches and teaching methods evolve as the technologies evolve. This means that teaching approaches change and improve because they are integrated with growing technologies. Therefore, this study is expected to describe the usability of web-based learning activities to promote language practices by asking EFL teachers and students about their uses of English outside the classroom. It also describes their perceptions of using WbTs and blended learning settings to support learning and teaching of English in Saudi Arabia.

### **Problem Statement**

Many language-learning studies, such as those by Hubbard and Levy (2006) and Yang (2011), discuss the educational uses, pedagogical implications, language practices,

linguistic innovations, and successful methods of using technologies in language education. A large body of research, such as that of Blake (2008), Compton (2009), and Watson and Hempenstall (2008), shows that using technology to mediate language use, practice, and communication is valuable. Therefore, more and more language-learning schools engaged different technologies in their curriculum and adopted blended learning approaches that integrate face-to-face instruction with online activities and technology-based instruction (Comas-Quinn, 2011).

In response to this trend, in the past few years, many Saudi universities used different LMSs to establish their blended learning systems. Moreover, SSU decided to use Blackboard as a blended learning platform starting in the 2015-2016 academic year to engage in a web-based learning environment. SSU acquired Blackboard to enable teachers to use open online resources. This university supports its faculty in using open web-based learning materials. According to the SSU website (2015), every teacher is expected to provide the minimum electronic LMS services to their students and to include, among others, additional supporting materials, such as video, YouTube, or PDF file to assist students. Therefore, EFL teachers at this university usually are encouraged to employ any resources that help them to succeed in teaching English.

It was my interest to explore whether the adoption of Blackboard in this university helps EFL teachers to promote learning of English outside the classroom. I was interested in recognizing if EFL teachers use Blackboard to deliver “a wide variety of multimedia content, with pedantic and authentic language models” (Szendeffy, 2008, p. 4) that support limited EFL classroom learning. Such support enables EFL learners’ participation in unlimited learning practices in online settings, exposes them to English in

real-life situations and to encourage individual learning, and provides them with more web-based opportunities to use their English outside the classroom (Barrs, 2012). In addition, another interest was to ask for the perceptions of teachers and students at this university of using WbTs in English learning outside the classroom after Blackboard was applied.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purposes of this qualitative study are to (a) determine whether WbTs, software applications, online resources, and related activities help EFL teachers to promote learners' uses of English outside the classroom after the adoption of Blackboard as a learning platform at SSU, and to (b) learn about EFL teachers' and learners' perceptions of using these WbTs to learn English.

### **Research Questions**

**Main question:** How does the adoption of Blackboard in this university help teachers provide web-based opportunities and employ online resources to support students' English learning outside the classroom?

This main question describes the goal and focus of the study. It is an umbrella that covers the entire study. It looks for how the adoption of Blackboard at SSU helps teachers provide web-based opportunities and employ online resources to support students' English learning outside the classroom. This question addresses the three main parts of this study: involvement of Blackboard in this university, teachers with their utilization of web-based opportunities, and improving learners' English outside the classroom. Each of these three parts is the focus of the three sub-questions. This question helps me to discuss these parts in order to determine if the adoption of Blackboard

promotes learning of English, creates collaborative learning environments, exposes students to English in real-life situations, and enables them to learn English outside the classroom.

**Sub-question 1:** How is Blackboard used in the EFL context at this university?

Do these uses support English learning outside the classroom? If so, how?

This first sub-question looks for the uses of Blackboard in the EFL context at this university. How do the teachers use Blackboard? It attempts to explore the uses of Blackboard either for administrative or pedagogical purposes. Are there different uses? Does any one of these uses support English learning outside the classroom? How has the adoption of Blackboard changed teaching methods and approaches? What are the impacts of using Blackboard as a blended learning system on EFL teachers? This question helps me to decide if Blackboard is used as a tool that connects EFL learning and teaching in Saudi Arabia with online settings and WbTs. Do EFL teachers use these WbTs to support collaborative and authentic activities to learn English beyond the classroom? Do EFL learners benefit from blended learning environments, online learning resources, and WbTs to practice English outside the classroom?

**Sub-question 2:** What are the teachers' perceptions of their use of web-based technologies, including Blackboard, to support English learning outside the classroom?

This second sub-question asks about teachers' perceptions of using WbTs in their teaching. What are their perceptions of English learning outside the classroom in these WbTs or online settings? What are the opinions of learners and their willingness to communicate in English outside the classroom? Understanding teachers' perceptions of these uses helps to improve teaching approaches and materials in this EFL context. How

do they connect classroom activities with English learning that occurs outside the classroom? How do they think about engaging WbTs, Blackboard, and online learning to support English learning? Answering these questions helps to recognize how EFL teachers' perceptions affect what can be improved in EFL settings and how their perceptions influence their teaching approaches and student outcomes.

**Sub-question 3:** What are the students' perceptions of their use of web-based technologies, including Blackboard, to support English learning outside the classroom?

This last sub-question focuses on learners' perceptions of their uses of WbTs for learning English outside the classroom. To support learners in the EFL context, I need to understand the students' perceptions of using WbTs to learn English outside the classroom and their perceptions of teachers' support and promotions. How do they perceive these uses? Do these uses help them to learn English? Do these technologies and resources help them to communicate in English? Do these technologies and resources encourage them to explore or use other online resources? Do they use English to collaborate with others? How do they interact with English content and speakers in online settings? How do these perceptions affect what is possible to improve EFL teaching and learning? How have students' perceptions changed after using these tools? Understanding students' perceptions helps to improve teaching approaches in the Saudi EFL context and enables one to take advantage of the popularity of English in the Internet as an outside-the-classroom setting.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is important for EFL teaching and learning in general, and in the Saudi context in particular. It discovers how web-based learning platforms and applications are

used to promote learners' use of English outside the classroom, which is a requirement to boost learning of EFL in this context, as I discuss above. This study sheds light on the teachers' approaches, suggestions, and techniques to promote English learning outside the classrooms as well as on the students' uses and experiences of using English outside the classroom. In addition, it discusses teachers' and students' perceptions of using WbTs to learn English outside the classroom. It helps policymakers in Saudi Arabia—teachers, administrators, curriculum designers, materials developers, and educational technologists—to understand the role of WbTs in students' learning of English outside the classroom.

Using English outside the educational institutions is a challenge that increases after the utilization of WbTs and Internet in the Saudi education. Students' use of English relies on teachers' support. Meeting the challenge can support the formal classroom instruction by providing numerous non-formal learning practices outside the classroom and by exposing students to English in various informal activities in online settings. The findings of this study discuss and present out-of-class uses of English in different WbTs. The adoption of Blackboard as well as the emergence of many WbTs reshapes teaching opinions and approaches of EFL (Chapelle, 2009). EFL teachers need to address the use of WbTs, the Internet tools, and online resources with their learners and understand how language learning and teaching may benefit from such tools and resources (Jin & Deifell, 2013). This study might help EFL educators in Saudi Arabia to:

- expose diverse perceptions through the voices of teachers and learners about their uses of WbTs in English learning outside the classroom,
- integrate out-of-class English activities with existing learning environment,

- incorporate or modify out-of-class English activities into their teaching,
- identify some WbTs to use in the Blended English learning context,
- compare what they are doing with what they could be doing to promote language learning outside the classroom in web-based settings, and
- encourage learners to facilitate their language learning by seeking opportunities to use English outside the classroom.

### **English Learning Contexts**

Learning English in a native-English speaking (NES) country, such as the United States, the UK, and Australia, differs from learning English in Saudi Arabia, which is considered a non-native-English speaking (NNES) country (Crystal, 2003). In the United States, English is the main language of daily life and the first language of most people. Therefore, NNES learners of English in the United States learn it as a second language (ESL) and use English wherever they go and whenever they need to use it. On the other hand, English is used and taught as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia. In NNES countries, students learn their English while living in their first language environment, with little opportunity to interact in English outside the classroom (Barrs, 2012).

Many differences and similarities exist between ESL and EFL. Also, both contexts may share some teaching approaches and learning strategies (Krieger, 2005). While many differences between both contexts are present, I discuss some major differences for the purposes of this study. The main difference between ESL and EFL is the importance of English in the environments in which the learner lives. Therefore, the goal of learning English differs in both contexts, based on students' needs in each environment.



In ESL classrooms, English is the dominant language because students usually are from different NNES countries, have different cultural backgrounds, and speak different native languages (Graves, 2008). Therefore, they communicate with each other in English and learn it for different purposes, such as daily uses and communication needs. They use English extensively in everyday life because English is embedded around them. Their English learning skills, particularly listening and speaking, develop quickly due to their authentic uses in the surrounded environment (Lightbown & Spada, 2006).

In EFL classrooms, students are usually from the same country, have the same culture, and share a native language. They learn English mostly for academic purposes and for school requirements. They do not immerse themselves in English outside the classroom because a physical English environment is rarely available for them. This is due to the disconnection between the inside and outside of the classroom: students learn English while living in their native language environment (Barrs, 2012). Consequently, their reading and writing skills advance more and faster, than speaking and listening (Khan, 2013).

There are many difficulties in EFL for both teachers and learners in general. For the teachers, these difficulties are related to teaching methods, educational objectives, learning context, language uses, and curriculum (Alshumaimeri & Alzyadi, 2015). For the learners, some characteristics play a role in learning, such as attitudes, self-confidence, anxiety, enthusiasm, and motivation. Such difficulties differ from learner to learner, teacher to teacher, school to school, and country to country (Crystal, 2003). I discuss some difficulties related to the Saudi EFL context in the following section.

## **English in Saudi Arabia**

The Saudi government pays special attention to teaching the English language (Alahmadi, 2011) even though English is not the main language of daily life there. In addition, some people use English for specific purposes in limited situations, such as in hospitals and aviation (Al-Shammari, 2007). EFL learners and teachers in Saudi Arabia encounter some difficulties, such as the lack of opportunities to use English outside the educational institutions (Liton, 2013). Other difficulties come from the teachers' use of traditional methods that focus on face-to-face instruction inside the classrooms. These teaching methods do not fit the digital age (Alshumaimeri & Alzyadi, 2015) because they divide English into discrete skills and areas of knowledge, deal with skills in isolation, dominate the English teaching practices (Al-Musharraf, 2007), encourage the use of Arabic, consider "learning as the rote memorization of grammar and vocabulary" (Al-Seghayer, 2015), and do not support communicative activities.

Current students in Saudi Arabia require modern teaching approaches that are built on web-based materials (Mahib urRhaman & Alhaisoni, 2013). Most of current Saudi learners are considered "native digital" students (Prensky, 2001) who live in the digital age and are surrounded with digital devices, or are part of the "net generation" (McLoughlin & Lee, 2007); who are exposed to communication technologies that have become part of their daily lives. Such learners "process information and learn differently than their teachers, they will be less accepting of traditional definitions of 'classroom' and 'class participation' and the roles assigned to teachers, and they will use technology as a tool for creative expression" (Thorne & Payne, 2005, p. 380). This study attempts to find solutions to these difficulties through investigating the possible teaching modalities,

delivery methods, learning tools, online resources, and uses of English outside the classroom that suit such digital students.

### **Paucity of Literature**

EFL in Saudi Arabia is worth investigating because of the paucity of literature about EFL teaching and learning in the web-based environment. More specifically, little is known about teaching and learning English at the Saudi tertiary level. This study attempts to shed light on the Saudi EFL context after the launch of blended learning platforms in Saudi higher education. Some studies do exist about uses of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL). In the Saudi EFL context, researchers found that students enjoy using CALL (Al-Shammari, 2007), students are independent in their learning (Alrumaih, 2004), students control their learning, and have more opportunities to practice English (Almekhlafi, 2006). Some researchers focused on using CALL for specific learning skills such as reading (Al-Jarf, 2007) and writing (Montasser, 2014). Others discussed learners' characteristics such as motivation (Liton, 2012) or explored textbooks such as the study of Alshumaimeri and Alzyadi (2015) about English textbook in secondary school.

These studies showed positive results, good perceptions, perceived enjoyment, and supportive attitudes about using CALL in English classes in Saudi Arabia. These studies attempted to increase students' achievement, to solve learning difficulties, or to suggest teaching approaches. The focus of the literature was on learners and learning inside the classroom.

However, a few studies focused on teachers; they include research by Alshahrani (2014), who investigated EFL teachers' written corrective feedback practices, and by

Liton (2013), who studied teachers' perceptions, evaluations, and expectations about English language courses in Saudi universities. While there is no study in the Saudi context about the EFL teachers' role in promoting the learners' use of English in blended learning environments or outside the classroom, one study exists about EFL teachers' perceptions of Blackboard applications in Saudi Arabia (Mohsen & Shafeeq, 2014). This study stated that most teachers have positive pedagogical perceptions regarding the integration of technology in language teaching.

The previous studies consistently show a high level of satisfaction in the use of technologies in the Saudi EFL context. In this study, I attempt to pursue more thoroughly how teachers might benefit from technologies, online resources, and virtual applications to promote learners' use of English outside the classroom after the adoption of blended learning platform. I aim to explore how EFL teachers at SSU harness web-based resources in real applications, how those teachers enable learners to use English in different situations outside the classroom, and how the teachers take advantage of blending traditional instructions with digital learning instructions (Comas-Quinn, 2011). I also aim to learn about teachers' and learners' perceptions of these uses in language learning outside the classroom. Moreover, this study might contribute to the literature about how to support language learning outside the classroom and how EFL learners use English effectively beyond the classroom.

### **The Saudi EFL Context**

**Education system.** The education system completely segregates students, teachers, and staff by gender, like all public domains in Saudi Arabia. The general education system in Saudi Arabia is highly centralized and administrated by the Ministry

of Education (MoE). In higher education, no central authority exists and each university administers its own curricula and programs. The academic year has two semesters; each consists of 18 weeks. The last two weeks are for taking the final examinations. Students must pass these examinations to move into the next grade. Teachers are expected to develop examination questions from the textbooks. Education is mandatory in Saudi Arabia for all children between the ages of six and fifteen years.

The Saudi educational system consists of four main phases: (a) the primary phase is six years, grades one to six; (b) the intermediate phase lasts three years for grades seven to nine; (c) the secondary phase is also three years for grades ten to twelve; and (d) the university level that starts at the age of 18 (MoE, 2015). Higher education in Saudi Arabia includes the public and private universities and colleges. Private universities charge tuition while public universities do not. These universities confer 'Bachelor degrees' to their students who successfully complete the required units.

**English in public education.** English was introduced as a foreign language in Saudi education in 1925 (Al-Ahaydib, 1986) as a core subject. For decades, English was taught only in intermediate and secondary schools. However, English is now taught in elementary schools due to the importance of English. Students start learning English from the fourth grade, at the age of ten. The overall aim of teaching English in public education is to enable students to speak, read, listen to and comprehend simple English, and write simple passages in order to be able to communicate with other English speakers (Aldosari, 1992). All Saudi schools use the same syllabus and textbooks, assigned and distributed free of charge by the MoE. Curriculum is strictly rule-governed. The textbooks are the main teaching materials on which the students and the teachers rely.

The main method of instruction has always been class-based and teacher-centered (MoE, 2015).

Many teachers use traditional teaching methods such as the grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods. In addition to what I discuss above, these methods are not productive because they only focus on grammatical rules and use Arabic, learners' first language, to translate the knowledge. English teachers employ a number of techniques to carry out these methods such as structural analysis, chorus work, answering questions, corrections, and translating texts (Al-Seghayer, 2015). Saudi EFL teachers believe that grammar is the most central aspect of the English language to master (Ahmad, 2014), and EFL students are passively attentive to their teachers' lessons of grammar or vocabulary (Al-Seghayer, 2015). Such teaching methods are boring, do not encourage the learners to use the English language in real-life situations or for communicative needs, and do not support EFL teachers and learners in today's interactive world.

The EFL classroom is mostly teacher-centered and textbook-directed. Students' participation is limited to parrot-like repetition of chunks of text from a set of books read aloud by the teacher (Al-Seghayer, 2015). Moreover, EFL teachers focus on preparing the students to do well in the examinations. In such a context, EFL teachers are seen as facilitators of examinations more than facilitators of linguistic proficiency. The examination system emphasizes grades rather than fluency or proficiency because it is achievement-oriented rather than performance-oriented (Al-Seghayer, 2015). Students are required to pass the examinations by memorizing the words and expressions. They do not use these words or expressions outside the classroom. They lack practice in using this new language in authentic learning activities (Liton, 2013).

**EFL challenge in Saudi public education.** English is taught from an early age in Saudi Arabia. However, Saudi students' English fluency does not often reach the intended level when they graduate from secondary school. Their English proficiency level ranges from pre-intermediate to post-intermediate levels when they graduate (MoE, 2015). This problem has been a concern for educators in Saudi Arabia since the last century. For example, Alfallaj (1998) stated that the majority of students have the ability to produce only a limited number of correct English sentences and are not fluent in English communication. In addition, I discussed above some factors that might lead to such weaknesses in learning English in Saudi public education, such as the use of traditional teaching methods and the limited use of English in real-life situations.

**English in higher education.** English is taught in all Saudi universities and colleges. English is the only required foreign language in higher education institutions. Levels and types of English differ and depend on the department and university requirements (Al-Asmari, 2005). Some universities teach English for general purposes (EGP) and others teach English for specific purposes (ESP) for students who will major in specific majors such as medicine, nursing, engineering or computer science. In addition, English is a medium of instruction in some Saudi tertiary institutions, such as the ones that concentrate on scientific- and business-related majors, including medicine, nursing, pharmacy, computer science, engineering, economics, and business administration (Al-Shammari, 2007).

Saudi universities are influenced by the global trend to include English in education because it is the dominant global language of education (Phillipson, 2001). Therefore, there have been some developments in the use of English language in higher

education. In the past few years, Saudi Arabia recognized the importance of the English as the leading language of knowledge and information (MoE, 2015). Without English, these students will not have the ability to succeed in the digital age. Due to the fact that many students attend the universities with low achievement levels in English (MoE, 2015), the policymakers recommend improving the English skills of the newly admitted student before they attend undergraduate courses in different departments. Therefore, many Saudi universities now offer an intensive English program, well known as the preparatory year program (PYP).

### **The PYP in Saudi Higher Education**

Saudi universities and colleges established their PYP as a first-year program in the university. It provides students with an intensive English course. This program aims to improve students' English level and to bridge the gap between their previous education in secondary school and the educational standards of the university. The PYP prepares pre-undergraduate students for their academic studies in different specialties. It minimizes the English language proficiency gap between general education and their academic studies in higher education. It transfers the general education graduate from the Arabic medium of instruction to the English medium of instruction.

In the first year, students study an intensive English language course along with other general courses, such as computer science and communication skills. Students must pass this year successfully in order to start studying in their majors. The teaching materials differ from one university to another. The curriculum is determined by the policymakers in each university. The average amount of English instruction is 18 hours a week, while other general courses are taught for about two hours a week. Learners are



highly motivated to learn English as it is related to their needs, interests, and desires (Ellis, 1994). They know definitely why they are learning English in PYP.

Students whose standard of English is below intermediate level are required to attend this program. A placement test allocates students to their appropriate level. The students should pass two levels of the PYP in two semesters in order to begin their courses towards Bachelor's degrees. Each level has a duration of fifteen to sixteen weeks. By the end of each level, students take a placement test to determine if they can progress to the next level. In general, students who have obtained a score of 500 or more in TOEFL are exempted from the PYP and they can start studying their majors at the university immediately. By the end of the PYP, students are assessed to make sure that they reach the required English standard. The assessment includes speaking tests, writing tests and multiple-choice tests. This is a general description of the PYP in Saudi universities while more specific details about the study setting appear below.

**EFL at SSU.** This section gives specific details of the PYP at SSU, which is the EFL setting of this study. According to the SSU website (2015), the PYP constitutes 30 credits in which students take intensive English along with communication skills and Information Technology (IT) courses. The PYP English program is an integrated language skills-based course that offers integrated skills at two levels. Students spend 20 hours a week working on reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Grammar is taught concurrently. This university uses a special edition of the "Q-Skills for Success" series from the Oxford University Press in its PYP program. Students complete up to Level 3 of the series in this year, as Table 1-1 shows below. The "Q-Skills for Success" series is

complimented by “National Geographic’s Reading Explorer”. SSU’s goals of teaching English in its PYP are to:

- Prepare students to master the linguistic, technological, and scientific aspects of different areas in the English language program, depending on the field of training students choose.
- Support the learning process by providing environments where teaching, research, training, and practice complement each other.
- Help students develop critical thinking in all subjects and foster a positive attitude towards professional development, further studying, and lifelong learning.
- Acquaint students with conceptual approaches to various fields available in the English language program.
- Help students develop the ability to learn and contribute critically.

Table 1.1

*Textbooks for EFL in the PYP*

<b>Course ID</b>	<b>Book Title</b>	<b>Skill</b>	<b>Author(s)</b>
ENGL 001	Q-Skills for Success 1	Reading & Writing	Sarah Lynn
ENGL 001	Q-Skills for Success 2	Listening &	Jaime Scanlon
ENGL 001	Explorer 1	Reading	Nancy Douglas
ENGL 002	Q-Skills for Success 2	Reading & Writing	Veigh & Bixby
ENGL 002	Q-Skills for Success 2	Listening &	Margaret Brooks
ENGL 002	Q-Skills for Success 3	Reading & Writing	Gramer & Ward
ENGL 002	Q-Skills for Success 3	Listening &	Craven &

The PYP is an academic year divided into two academic semesters, known as English 001 and English 002. Each semester includes four courses; reading, writing, listening, and speaking. At the beginning of the year, a placement test allocates students to their appropriate level. About 60-70% of them are placed in English 001 while the remaining students are placed in English 002. Very few students are exempted from studying PYP and can start their majors directly. Last year, only one student was exempted (the department chair, personal communication, October 28, 2015). Exemption examinations are held for English 001 and English 002 within the first week of the academic year. The student is exempted from studying any of the courses mentioned above if he obtains a score not less than Very Good (B) in the exemption exam of that course. SSU uses the benchmark of the Common European Framework (CEFR).

The students must successfully finish the requirements of each semester. About 80% of students pass English 001 and advance to English 002. Other students have a chance to repeat English 001 so that they can pass to English 002. At the end of the year, students take a proficiency test to measure their performance and development. More than two thirds of students pass English 002 and start their majors. Students are allowed to repeat a course only once, either English 001 or English 002. They are dismissed if they do not succeed in this chance.

The student successfully completes the requirements of the preparatory year if he fulfills the following conditions: (1) passing the course requirements in a period not exceeding three main academic semesters, (2) passing English 001 and English 002 courses with a score no less than Good (C) in one of them and a score of Pass (D) in the

other, or a score no less than High-Pass (D+) in both courses, and (3) passing other courses (the department chair, personal communication, August 28, 2015).

***WbTs in the PYP.*** The Saudi EFL context looks at technology as a solution for some of the problems in language learning. The use of technologies in instruction is receiving increasing attention, and many studies highlighted positive attitudes towards this type of instruction from the instructors' and administrators' points of view (Alnujaidi, 2008). The PYP is a dynamic project that looks for modern teaching approaches and uses new technologies in its curriculum. Like any other educational program, the PYP evolves based on students' needs, interests, challenges, and suggestions. The PYP is influenced by a current movement in Saudi universities to involve different LMSs in their educational systems such as Blackboard, WebCT, Canvas, and local LMSs such as Jusur, which means bridges.

At my study setting, SSU offered Blackboard as a pilot project for faculty use in the spring semester of 2015. SSU began to require the use of Blackboard in the fall of 2015. Among many attempts to improve its learning products and in pursuit of supportive inputs, SSU aimed to develop interactive web-based supplementary materials to support its face-to-face courses. According to its website (2015), teachers were freed from manually entering their courses data or students' names because the Blackboard system was synchronized with the Student Information System. Their courses and students appeared to them as they are scheduled automatically. Teachers did not worry about data entry as they used to do before Blackboard. This made it easier for teachers to focus on teaching materials and supporting documents. EFL teachers in the PYP were part of that development.

*Other services.* One of the features of SSU is to promote extracurricular activities that support PYP. SSU announces these activities weekly and encourages its students to attend them. This university successfully organizes multiple clubs based on social and behavioral skills that promote verbal flow among their respective members. These clubs provide students with opportunities to earn certificates of club attendance to add to their academic profiles.

SSU develops an English club to enhance the students' communication in English and advance their general skills in social discourse, as a way to develop linguistic diversity at SSU. The activities of the club are geared towards creating opportunities to develop additional communication amongst its members and students in the PYP. The main goal is to create opportunities for students to listen to, and speak English under favorable conditions. The activities are interactive and students take the center of the stage.

In addition, the club invites some speakers to give lectures in English during the academic year. Such activities provide students with the native-like second language environment necessary for practicing the language. In this club, English is acquired without the stress and fatigue of an academic class. The students walk away with improved vocabulary, improved confidence, and improved self-esteem. The English department also offers evening paid courses, such as TOEFL preparatory courses, IELTS courses, and IELTS Overview, for its students and the public through the Community Services Office at SSU.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter introduces a study about whether the adoption of Blackboard helps EFL teachers at SSU to use WbTs for promoting English learning outside the classroom in Saudi Arabia. This first chapter provides the definitions needed in this study: research background, problem statement, the purpose of the study, research questions, and the significance of the study, and finally, the status of EFL in the Saudi context and the EFL context at SSU.

## **Overview of Next Chapters**

This dissertation is composed of five chapters. The next, and second, chapter presents the theoretical framework, reviews related literature, offers further background, and discusses influential concepts of learning and teaching English. The third chapter introduces research design, procedures, and methodology to conduct this study. Chapter Four explains the findings based on research questions, emerging themes, and related literature. The last chapter discusses the findings, provides pedagogical implications, states the limitations of the study, and offers recommendations for future studies in this area.

## Chapter 2

This chapter provides the theoretical background of my research. It starts with a brief description of sociocultural theory (SCT) as a language-learning theory adopted in this study. Specifically, this chapter discusses the key concepts of SCT that focus on second language learning. These main concepts are my theoretical framework to conduct this study about learning English outside the classroom. Then, I define the concept of *perception*, how it is related to this study, and how to understand participants' perceptions of using English in a web-based technological setting and outside the classroom. The second part of this chapter reviews related studies that consider the key concepts of SCT and perceptions of language learning by means of WbTs. This chapter offers a rationale for investigating learning English outside the classroom after the implementation of Blackboard as a blended learning platform at SSU.

### Theoretical Framework

#### Sociocultural Theory of Language Learning

The study focuses on the role of WbTs to promote EFL students' learning of English outside the classroom. It attempts to determine whether these technologies expose learners to English in authentic situations, enable them to participate in social English activities, and support their communication and collaboration with individuals and groups. Therefore, this study concentrates on the learning environments, students' surroundings, and online settings in which EFL students use WbTs in their learning. This study discusses the opportunities to use English, to expose learners to English in real-life situations outside the classroom, to enable students' participation in unlimited learning practices, to take advantage of the common use of English in online settings, and to

change their views about English as a communicative tool, not only as a classroom subject.

Such concentrations on language input and learning environment outside the EFL classroom lead me to rely on SCT, as a second language theory, that creates a theoretical framework for this study. SCT provides a perspective that focuses on learner's surroundings where the learner lives, grows up, interacts, and learns (Vygotsky, 1978). In this perspective, the environment influences how learners think and what they think about. The environment is the essential and determining factor in the learning process and mental development. Therefore, learning is a social event taking place as a result of interaction between the learner and the environment (Vygotsky, 1978).

In this study, SCT illustrates the role of the main concepts: social context, learning environment, authentic uses, language input, teachers' assistance, students' support of each other, their collaboration, their interaction, and their participation in EFL learning opportunities. SCT helps me to investigate whether WbTs provide supportive environments that promote learners' uses of English after the adoption of Blackboard at SSU. It also helps in exploring thoughts about using English in these settings and exploring teachers' and students' perceptions of these uses because language and thought are closely connected and affect each other (Vygotsky, 1986). Below, I introduce SCT in general before I discuss its concepts that are applied to English learning in this study.

SCT considers the language learner a social being who learns with and through others (Lantolf, 2004) and is an active constructor of their learning environment (Mitchell & Myles, 2004). Guoxing (2004) stated that learners in this sense are responsible for their own learning environment. This language learner is viewed as an active participant who



uses the language to participate in a linguistic community (Giroir, 2014). Because students can learn from learning experience (Lave & Wenger, 1991), language learning is often produced within different communities rather than being accomplished by isolated individuals (Cummins & Davison, 2007). Ellis (2000) stated that language learning occurs among learners, not within them, in the social world. This study describes whether EFL learners use WbTs to learn English and to seek more opportunities to use English within different social activities outside the classroom.

On the other hand, language teachers are seen as social agents (Cross, 2010) and as active constructors of their teaching environment (Aimin, 2013). They are seen as experts who provide learners with knowledge, guide them, expose them to a target language, and support their learning. They facilitate meaning construction during the instruction process. Whatever teachers think of learners' language learning certainly will affect the teachers' constructions of their teaching environment. I show below the role of teachers in scaffolding EFL learners through the zone of proximal development (ZPD) as a central contribution of SCT. This study attempts to determine whether EFL teachers expose learners to English learning activities and promote their participation outside the classroom through the use of WbTs.

**Mediation and internalization.** Mediation and internalization are SCT concepts necessary to learn a language. People gain control of and reorganize their cognitive processes during mediation as knowledge is internalized during social activity (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). Mediation involves (a) mediation by others in social interactions, (b) mediation by self through private speech, and (c) mediation by artifacts (Ellis, 2003; Lantolf, 2000). In my study, these three roles of mediation are available.

EFL teachers, fellow learners, and others play the first role. Self-mediation through private speech plays the second role, as I discuss below. WbTs and out-of-class learning opportunities play the third role.

SCT considers learning as a “mediated process partly through learner’s developing use and control of mental tools” (Mitchell & Myles, 2004, p. 195). Mental tools extend our mental abilities by acting as extensions of the mind (Vygotsky, 1978) to interact with surroundings, to communicate with others, and to analyze realities. These tools include symbols, signs, maps, numbers, plans, musical notation, pictures, and language. Human mental tools mediate between the human social and mental activity and therefore reflect the social and cultural background of the learners (Lantolf, 2000). These tools enable people to understand numerical symbols, diagrams, mnemonic devices, graphs, and language (Lantolf, 1994). People use these tools to perform many functions, such as concentrating, retrieving, categorizing, speaking, interacting, thinking, and reflecting. These learning activities support personal development that is fostered by mental tools.

In SCT, language is a tool that mediates learning in mental activity (Lantolf, 2000). Moreover, language functions not only as a communicative tool but also as a psychological tool that mediates meaning between the individual and the linguistic goal and therefore assists the cognitive development process (Lantolf, 2006). Human mental functions include language using, learning, and developing, which are mediated by cultural artifacts, activities, and concepts (Lantolf, 2000).

The process through which language or cultural artifacts takes on a mental function is known as internalization. Lantolf and Thorne (2006) stated that internalization

is a negotiated process that reorganizes the relationship of the individual to one's social environment and generally carries it into future performance. Internalization helps to form higher mental functions and cognitive processes. Interaction facilitates those cognitive processes by giving learners access to the input they need to activate internal processes. In the language-learning context, learning means to internalize language items that are covered, selected, taught, sequenced, or transmitted in language lessons (Van Lier, 2004). Learners also can internalize linguistic knowledge after they produce it in either their private speech or in interacting with others or with more-capable peers and teachers. This internalized knowledge enables them to use various language forms and functions independently in future interactions.

SCT assures that development of human cognitive and higher mental functions come from social interactions and through participation in social activities requiring cognitive and communicative functions (Lantolf, 2006). Therefore, learners can control their mental processes depending on what they hear, understand, and say in their interaction and participation. For example, students direct their mental functions to acquire English when they listen, talk, read, write, think, and imitate. After several uses, using English may mediate the mental functions of the learners and help them to acquire the language. Using English in different circumstances for interaction may serve as mediation to acquire the linguistic knowledge of English. When interacting in English, learners produce forms and functions of English prior to recognizing the nature of these forms and functions. Using English might immerse the learners physically in a real-life social environment in which they actively acquire the language.

Students' learning of English occurs as the product of what they capture and observe about language (Lantolf, 2007) upon their participation and interaction within this environment, within peer groups, and within educational institutions. In the EFL context, learners need not only oral explanations inside the classroom but also practical applications and activities outside the classroom. They need to use English in real-life situations, have more opportunities to practice their skills, and be exposed to English in online settings. Therefore, language learning can occur physically in group discussions, on field trips, in internship experiences, or virtually in email, instant messaging, wikis, blogs, forums, and social-networking sites that support communicative and collaborative learning (Motteram & Sharma, 2009). Participating in these online activities might immerse EFL learners in these activities, expose them to high input of language (Lantolf, 2007), and therefore, might develop their language skills.

I indicate above how SCT looks at language learners as active social beings who participate in learning experiences. SCT emphasizes the role of social context on the learner's development. SCT states that the learner's developmental process moves through three general stages in social context: from being object-regulated process, to being other-regulated process, and to being self-regulated process (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). The first stage means that a learner's language proficiency is influenced by how an object is used. The second stage means that a learner's language behavior is controlled by others. In the third stage, a learner uses the language to achieve personal and social purposes. As learners' language develops, they gain increasing control over those mental tools and, as a result, develop communicative skills (Lantolf, 2000). The more they participate, the more knowledge and confidence they gain. Therefore, they can progress

autonomously in their learning, participate in activities, use different learning resources, and pay attention to learning opportunities available to them if their teachers direct them.

***Private speech.*** In SCT, private speech, known as self-talk, is another tool that enables learners to manage their thoughts and direct their behaviors. This speech means collaboration with one's mind; it is for oneself, while external speech is for others (Vygotsky, 1986). Learners' self-talk, such as repeating new words, thinking aloud, retrieving ideas, and preparing sentences to utter, improves their learning of English and progresses their self-direction. This interpersonal speech arranges an intrapersonal function in which the speech is directed to the self (Lantolf, 2007) and supports self-interaction. In addition, private speech is one version of mediation of language learning (Ellis, 2003; Lantolf, 2000). Therefore, private speech is a primary way for using language to regulate mental functioning.

Private speech has three functions: metacognition function, practice function, and internalization function (Brown, 2007). Private speech might use linguistic mediation to lead to self-controlled cognitive functioning. For example, when people communicate socially, they appropriate the patterns and meanings of their speech and utilize it inwardly to mediate their mental activity (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Therefore, I argue that EFL learners can use private speech as a means to internalize and mediate the linguistic features they use in their learning opportunities; to plan learning activities and strategies; to focus attention on their mistakes; to link words, ideas, and thoughts; and to aid learners' development (Vygotsky, 1986). Then, they can originate more social speech that is either directed to other people or is directed by others.

**The notion of ZPD.** ZPD is defined as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Although ZPD is a complex system of different interdependent elements, including the participants, artifacts, and environment (Mahn & John-Steiner, 2002), ZPD contributes to understand the process of language learning. The effects of mediation on learning a second language, as explained above, are mutually constructed in ZPD, which emphasizes collaboration, social interaction, and social mediation (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

ZPD emphasizes the importance of guidance, help, advice, and demonstration from more-capable peers or experts. This concept can help teachers to facilitate collaboration and interaction between a teacher and a learner and among learners themselves (Lantolf, 2007). In web-based learning contexts, this process of collaborative interaction provides EFL learners with opportunities to interact and collaborate with English speakers, such as teachers, peers, and native speakers (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). Doing so might assist students to learn English and to develop linguistic knowledge (Mitchell & Myles, 2004).

SCT attributes the second language development to ZPD because second language learners can develop linguistic skills with the assistance of a teacher or of a more-proficient user of the target language. The range of skills that can be developed with adult guidance or peer collaboration can exceed what can be attained alone (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). In addition to the role of creating a collaborative relationship between the teacher and the learner to complete a task, ZPD leads the learner to the highest

possible cognitive levels through a teacher-learner interaction (Lantolf & Appel, 1994). However, this result is not limited to the interaction between a teacher and a learner. Peer collaboration and group work among learners can be as effective as the assistance of the experts in the concept of ZPD (Riazi & Rezaii, 2011; Shehadeh, 2011). Therefore, ZPD is a conceptual and pedagogical tool (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006) that might help to provide EFL learners with online learning opportunities in which teachers support their learning and learners collaborate to develop their language.

In SCT, language learning is different from language development (Lantolf, 2007). Learning leads and shapes development and can stimulate qualitative developmental changes (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014). Therefore, learning a language leads to language development in the student, as a gradual and ongoing process (Lantolf, 2007). It is not a straight, causal process, but it happens with meaningful social interactions in intentionally designed language-learning environments (Norton, 2009).

***Participation.*** Participation plays a central role in learning English and language development. In SCT, the term *participation* is used instead of acquisition because learning is seen as a socially-situated activity rather than as an individualistic one (Lantolf & Appel, 1994; Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). In particular, language learning occurs when learners participate in the social world within different communities (Cummins & Davison, 2007; Ellis, 2003). Participation requires and simplifies collaborating with others in a language-learning context. In online settings, for example, participation means to use English in an authentic context in different activities such as email, instant messaging, wikis, blogs, forums, and social-networking sites.

Using English in such activities promotes group dynamics and supports communicative and collaborative learning (Motteram & Sharma, 2009). Therefore, when learners use English to participate in these online activities, they are able to achieve a mastery of the language. The more they use English to participate in the activities around them, the more linguistic knowledge and language development they gain. Language development occurs as a result of meaningful participation in human events (Van Lier, 2004). Learners can benefit from other people when they communicate with them, especially with experts such as EFL teachers, through ZPD (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000).

**English learning and social context.** Learning English as a socially mediated process requires it to occur through meaningful social interaction with other people and participation in activities (Lantolf, 2006). SCT considers language learning as a contextual and social situation (Mitchell & Miles, 2004) in which learners participate in meaningful communicative activities with other people (Lantolf, 2004). Therefore, a social environment makes language learning meaningful and supports the process of second language development because learners receive high input of the language during their communication with people in this environment. WbTs might be used as communication platforms to boost language development by promoting learners' interactions outside the classroom. In these activities, learners interact with others, collaborate with each other, acquire new vocabulary, discuss ideas, improve their language skills, and obtain linguistic knowledge. Therefore, using English to interact with people in different social activities enables learners to develop their linguistic skills (Lantolf, 2006).



In Saudi Arabia, the social environment plays a critical role in learning English. It is difficult to learn English there because EFL students do not participate, interact, or communicate in a social environment (Al Shlowiy, 2014) due to the limited opportunities to use English (Liton, 2013) and the fact that English is not embedded within the Saudi public context. To learn English, EFL students must use it in their daily life. One of the suggestions is to use technologies and digital resources in EFL contexts (Jin & Deifell, 2013) to promote many uses of English. Students need to learn with and through others and need to engage in learning activities with other people (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001). The more frequently students use English, the more they will learn it and be exposed to its structure and linguistics.

In this study, I use SCT ideas of social setting, learning context, language input, authenticity, collaboration, teachers' support, interaction, and participation as my lenses to:

- Review literature and find related studies.
- Determine whether EFL teachers promote learners' uses of English outside the classroom after adopting Blackboard at SSU.
- Describe how EFL learners use English outside the classroom.
- Discuss how EFL teachers' and learners' perceptions about these uses and their experiences in the Saudi EFL context, as I show below.

I use these ideas of SCT to analyze how WbTs might be used in EFL-blended learning environments to:

- Create authentic activities that enable learners to use English in a social context.

- Engage learners in different-skills learning practices.
- Promote collaborative learning and interaction among learners and with others.
- Encourage learners to participate in English activities.
- Provide learners with access to expert, virtual native-English speakers to communicate with them in English outside the classroom.

### **Perceptions of Teachers and Learners**

**Definition.** This section defines perception and identifies the role of perceptions in this study. This study focuses on understanding participants' perceptions of learning language and using WbTs in a social context. The goal is to understand how an EFL population at SSU views and interprets learning English in web-based opportunities and online resources around them. Based on SCT, the term perception is defined in many ways and formulated as a result of social experiences and interaction within the environment (Covey, 1989). The environment affects the person while interacting with one's surroundings and can influence learner's development in different ways and at different ages (Vygotsky, 1994). On the other hand, each individual influences one's own environment and has different perceptions of the environment, which is changeable and dynamic (Vygotsky, 1994).

I present some definitions of perception chronologically, old and modern, before using two of them to create my definition of perception, which assists me in this study. Perception is "the process by which an organism receives or extracts certain information about the environment" (Forgus, 1966, p. 2). Siann and Ugwuegbu (1980) defined perception as "the process by which we extract meaningful information from physical

stimulation. It is the way we interpret our sensations” (p. 90). Hellriegel and Slocum (2007) defined perception as “the process by which people select, organize, interpret, and respond to information from the world around them” (p. 70). Finally, Ahmad, Gilkar, and Darzi (2008) defined perception as a way an individual experiences the situation and has a unique interpretation of the situation, not necessarily an exact recording of the situation.

These definitions share some elements, including that perception is not only a psychological process but also is a cognitive process that influences individuals’ behavior. It is also a process by which individuals observe and interpret the elements in their environments. That means that perception helps individuals to view things in the environment around them. In other words, perception provides individuals with a model of their world and helps them to anticipate some future events and to handle them appropriately (Choy & Cheah, 2009). This means that the learning environment can nurture students’ perceptions and learning development (Aimin, 2013). In this study, students’ interaction and interconnection with English in WbTs and blended learning environments shape their opinions, develop their cognition, and improve their mental function (Vygotsky, 1994).

I use the last two definitions suggested by Hellriegel and Slocum (2007) and by Ahmad et al. (2008) to create my definition used in this study. I aim to gather participants’ perceptions of using English in a web-based technological setting and outside the classroom after the adoption of Blackboard at SSU. Both definitions have different senses in which learners and teachers are able to interpret information about their uses of online resources and make sense of their uses of English. Learning about my participants’ perceptions of these uses requires noticing how they describe their blended

learning environment, their relationship to it, how this environment shapes their thoughts and experiences, and how they influence it (Vygotsky, 1994). The nature of my study leads me to define perception as *a process in which people experience, select, organize, respond to, and interpret information from a situation around them in a unique way.*

Perception is derived from experience and memory (Bruner, 1973) and from social experiences and interaction within the environment (Covey, 1989). Fantino and Reynolds (1975) stated that the development of perception is influenced by past experiences or learning, motivation and expectations, personality, and attitudes. Hellriegel and Slocum (2007) stated three factors, personality, motivation, and expectations that influence people's perception. In addition, Feng (2012) considered experiences, motivation, expectations, personality, and beliefs as interwoven variables that influence individuals' perceptions.

These factors play a role in creating EFL teachers' and students' perceptions of learning English outside the classroom through web-based learning opportunities. In addition, their perceptions are associated with three points, according to Bruner (1973). First, their perceptions are influenced by the stimulus, individual's experience, intension, and social needs. Second, the perceivers select information and form hypothesis to decide what is actually happening. Finally, perception is an activity of higher mental processes—such as reading, speaking, and thinking which are developed—that enable them to have their view of the world, to anticipate future events, and to act accordingly. In my current study, the exploration of the participants' perceptions allows me to understand the participants' experiences, intension, and social needs influence their views,

understanding, and expectation of learning English outside the classroom, of using English in blended learning platforms, and of using WbTs in the Saudi EFL context.

**Rationale.** This study explores EFL teachers' and learners' perceptions of learning English outside the classroom with the help of WbTs. Their perceptions of blended learning environments and digital tools may influence their performance in these settings. Their perceptions not only matter but also influence how they learn and teach in this environment (Choy & Troudi, 2006) because each student and teacher can influence one's environment (Vygotsky, 1994). My aim is to determine how their perceptions influence learning and teaching of English in this Saudi EFL context. An essential part of this study is to learn about participants' perceptions of their experiences in these online activities. In addition, this study attempts to determine whether teaching approaches that engage online opportunities influence students' perceptions of their learning environment and consequently their learning outcomes (Goh, 2005).

According to Cope and Ward (2002), research about teachers' and students' perceptions of learning and teaching contexts recognizes a number of systematic associations that link teachers' perceptions and their teaching methods with students' perceptions, learning styles, and learning outcomes. These associations determine the influence of the teachers' perceptions on their teaching approaches, which impact students' perceptions, their learning methods, and finally, their learning achievements. Therefore, understanding their perceptions of using WbTs to learn English outside the classroom might contribute to improving EFL teaching and learning in Saudi Arabia.

Perceptions are connected with and influenced by thoughts. Perceptions also are associated with experiences or past learning, motivation, expectations, personality, and

attitudes. Therefore, perceptions play a role in shaping one's thoughts. This study relies on concepts of SCT to look at how WbTs and online environment can influence thoughts about learning English outside the classroom.

SCT concepts that I discuss above combine cognitive efforts and people's perceptions of the environment. Their reflections, feelings, and responses to the environments are very important in my study because affective aspects of learning situations play important roles in language learning and development (Mahn & John-Steiner, 2002). Affective aspects are emotional factors, including feelings, motivation, anxiety, self-confidence, and attitudes (Lightbown & Spada, 2006), which affect leaning EFL, learning environment, and learners' abilities to learn a new language. Therefore, SCT concepts enable me to investigate not only pedagogical aspects but also affective aspects of WbTs in out-of-classroom environments. SCT helps me to go beyond the cognition level by exploring teachers' and students' affective responses and reflections on blended learning environments.

**Teachers' perceptions.** Teachers' perceptions are important factors to experience, to select, to organize, to respond to, and to interpret information of their teaching environment. Teachers' perceptions contribute to their utilization and integration of WbTs in language education (Ajayi, 2009). Their perceptions are connected to their use and integration of technologies into classrooms (Feng, 2102). Teachers' perceptions of using WbTs to promote learning English outside the classroom influence their teaching, how they use these technologies, and the quality of these uses (Wasserman & Millgram, 2005). To know their perceptions helps me to determine how and why EFL teachers at SSU adopt these technologies (Levin & Wadmany, 2005); to learn about how

they experience a blended learning environment, select learning materials, organize teaching activities, and interpret the pedagogical benefits; and to describe how these technologies are used (Cox, 2003) to support language learning outside the classroom.

Because the previous studies (Alnujaidi, 2008; Mohsen & Shafeeq, 2014) report positive perceptions of using WbTs in the Saudi EFL context and because this study focuses on the uses of WbTs, it mostly seeks how teachers' positive perceptions influence such uses after the adoption of Blackboard. The uses of WbTs in learning environments rely on and are influenced by teachers' positive perceptions of the role of these WbTs in such an environment. If teachers' perceptions are positive and if teachers are willing to use WbTs, teachers will accept and adopt these technologies in their classrooms. Teachers' positive perceptions motivate teachers to use these technologies in their teaching approaches (Cox, 2003). Teachers' positive perceptions of using WbTs mean that the teaching process with these technologies is efficient, effective, and beneficial for the individual (Bolliger, Inan, & Wasilik, 2014). In addition, these positive perceptions will be passed on to, and picked up by, their students (Levin & Wadmany, 2005).

On the other hand, negative perceptions neither support these uses nor lead to the integration of WbTs in teaching approaches. This study relies on research findings that provide evidence to the positive effects of the use of WbTs on language learning and teaching (Blake, 2008; Compton, 2009; Khan, 2005; Thorne, 2008). Therefore, negative perceptions are not the focus in the study, although I discuss some of them below to seek solutions or implications. Generally speaking, teachers' negative perceptions are influenced by different factors. For example, the lack of knowledge of computer integration related to pedagogies (Wiebe & Kabata, 2010), the lack of guidelines and

standards (Kessler & Plakans, 2008), insufficient access to technology resources (Fidaoui, Bahous, & Bacha, 2010), time constraints and course load (Villada, 2009), and technology use and exposure (Mathews-Aydinli & Elaziz, 2010) are factors that might develop negative perceptions among teachers. Mathews-Aydinli and Elaziz (2010) mentioned other factors, including age, gender, years of teaching experience, and cost.

**Students' perceptions.** Students' perceptions play a role in the formation of their experience, selection, organization, response to, and interpretation of information of their learning environment. Students' abilities to learn a second or a foreign language are correlated with different affective factors and individual differences, such as their attitude, motivation, confidence (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). EFL students' perceptions have the greatest influence on their achievement (Williams & Burden, 1997), particularly to learn a second language (Tse, 2000).

Moreover, their perceptions of teachers and teaching approaches impact their achievement that go beyond the effects of their individual abilities and environmental factors (Schunk & Meece, 1992). The way they see things affects not only their attitudes and behaviors but also how they see their teachers (Covey, 1989). This means that students' perceptions of their teachers, their teaching approaches, and their use of WbTs affect their perceptions of their learning and their learning environment. Wittrock (1986) stated that teaching approaches influence student perceptions, achievement, and motivation. Students' perceptions affect how they learn and how they benefit from their experience within the learning environment (Alebaikan, 2010). In EFL, I show above that language development occurs as a result of meaningful participation in human events.



Therefore, such participation involves positive perceptions of using English in many actions to construct meaning in different contexts (Van Lier, 2004).

Exploring EFL students' perceptions at SSU illustrates if they are comfortable using English in different online modes outside the classroom; if they report significantly greater levels of satisfaction of learning and engagement; and if they are more likely to use these technologies for learning English and, consequently, language development. Learners' perceptions may include some factors related to their language-learning experiences, including opinions about teachers, views of instructional activities, teaching approaches, learning environment, learning difficulties, and expressions of satisfaction with their progress in the classroom (Tse, 2000). Such perceptions are important in understanding how to support EFL learners at SSU to use English outside the classroom.

### **Perceptions in Sociocultural Theory**

The environment shapes people, and people also shape the environment (Vygotsky, 1994). People have various perceptions of the same environment based on different factors, as I discuss above. Understanding the factors that influence perceptions shows how participants perceive the same environment in different ways. SCT emphasizes the integration of social, cultural, and biological beliefs in social environments that play a role in developing human's cognitive abilities (Aimin, 2013). Such development might influence their knowledge, thought, and feeling about these environments. In addition, SCT gives priority to the social aspects of people's thoughts and feelings (Bernat, 2008) and sees human thoughts as the ultimate product of socialization (Rozycki & Goldfarb, 2000).

In SCT, thoughts relate people's knowledge to actions or behavior (Lantolf & Appel, 1994) and enable people to know their social environment and to anticipate future events (Choy & Cheah, 2009). People's feelings influence the way they think and react in this environment and influence the way they interpret their actions and behaviors. People's knowledge about environment, which comes from their thoughts and feelings, determines their perceptions of the social context (Cross, 2010). In this study, EFL teachers' and students' perceptions of using WbTs for learning English outside the classroom at SSU are influenced by their experience within this technological learning environment. This knowledge is responsible for their behaviors and practices in using WbTs to promote learning English in online settings. The social contexts of this study consist of WbTs, online settings, and blended learning environments.

The factors I mention above are socially based aspects that influence the participants' perceptions. These perceptions are part of the cognitive function that is the focus of SCT. EFL teachers' and learners' perceptions are their personal knowledge, intuition, and views of learning English in social settings. Applying SCT to web-based settings highlights the fact that their perceptions cannot be seen as an abstract or stable concept to be used in different learning contexts (Cross, 2010). Their perceptions are concrete ones about their stories and experiences of learning English in web-based settings outside the classroom. Moreover, perception is influenced by social needs and personal variables, such as experience and intention (Siann & Ugwuegbu, 1980). The perceiver is not passive in the process of perceiving but is actively engaged in selecting the information and making hypotheses to decide what is actually happening in one's

social life. My goal is to obtain the perceptual data of their practice and experience: what they report about these social settings.

In this study's design, perceptions refer to students' and teachers' personal and subjective interpretations about which web-based practices are effective in learning English outside the classroom, and to their perceptions of certain learning behaviors that occur in their EFL context. Exploring the participants' perceptions of their experiences about blended courses and web-based opportunities assists in understanding how they learn and teach in this new learning environment and in supporting the uses of English outside the classroom. I believe that every research context has its own influence on its participants' perceptions. Thus, it is anticipated that the results of this study would elucidate more factors that influence the participants' perceptions of using WbTs to support learning English outside the classroom after the adoption of Blackboard as a blended learning environment at SSU.

This study looks for perceptions of using WbTs to learn English outside the classroom after the adoption of the Blackboard learning system at SSU. Teachers' and students' perceptions of these uses help to:

- Understand the thoughts beyond using WbTs in this Saudi EFL environment.
- Understand the participants' opinions about the influences of WbTs on communication, authentic learning settings, and collaborative activities.
- Determine the pedagogical benefits and advantages of these uses in language learning.
- Recognize how and why teachers and learners use these WbTs in their courses.

- Discuss how WbTs might be used in this EFL blended learning environment.
- Explore the factors that lead EFL teachers to promote learners' uses of English outside the classroom after adopting Blackboard at SSU.
- Discover the factors that lead EFL learners to use English outside the classroom. Factors include past experiences, previous learning, motivation, expectations, personality, attitudes, and beliefs.

### **Related Studies**

In this section, I review studies related to the concepts and definitions I describe above. I discuss these studies and link them to my theoretical framework in three parts: (a) concepts of SCT related to this study, such as authenticity, collaboration, interaction, ZPD, and participation; (b) teachers' and students' perceptions of using different WbTs; and (c) their perceptions of blended learning in educational EFL contexts.

In reviewing these studies, I concentrate on the role of the learning environment, collaboration, social context, WbTs, and online settings in language learning and teaching. I attempt to learn how WbTs might support teachers to teach, and students to learn, in the 21st century. Reviewing related studies enables me to recognize what opportunities to learn English are available, how to expose learners to English in real-life situations outside the classroom, how to empower students' participation in plentiful learning practices, and how to take advantage of the presence of English in online settings. In addition, literature about teachers' and students' perceptions provides me with insights about how the web-based environment might influence the way teachers and learners think and what they think about, their mental development, and their relationships with that environment (Vygotsky, 1978). Learning about perceptions can

improve my ability to determine the pedagogical features and affective factors in using WbTs to support EFL learning and teaching. Doing such a review provides me with a background to compare findings of this study with related research.

### **SCT Concepts**

**Collaborative learning.** Collaborative learning is an important concept in SCT because learning is a collaborative achievement rather than an isolated individual's effort in which the learner works unassisted and unmediated (Ellis, 2000). Collaborative learning increases students' interest in learning and enables them to perform at higher intellectual levels than when they work individually (Vygotsky, 1978). It is called "group learning" or "shared learning" because it involves "the instructional use of small teams so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning" (Yang & Chen, 2010, p. 663). In SCT, learning is constructed through the collaboration of individuals in a situated context (Kim, 2011). Learners scaffold one another as they take part in collaborative activity, and such collaboration leads to the co-construction of linguistic knowledge (Lantolf, 2007).

In the language-learning context, collaborative learning means that learners participate with each other to enrich individual language skills. SCT looks at each learner as an active participant in the learning environment. In this study, collaborative learning is very important because Saudi classrooms in general are not collaborative, group work is nonexistent, and students learn individually (Nather, 2014). These classrooms are traditionally teacher-centered and students have limited opportunities to collaborate or interact with their peers and teachers (Al-Seghayer, 2015). By reviewing literature, I

attempt to determine how WbTs can apply collaborative activities to language learning in the Saudi EFL environments.

Shehadeh (2011) investigated the effectiveness and students' perceptions of collaborative writing in English among 38 first-year students at a large university in the United Arab of Emirates. In the control group class, writing tasks were carried out by students individually; in the experimental group class, these tasks were carried out in pairs. The study lasted 16 weeks and involved a pre-test and post-test. Shehadeh used a holistic rating procedure that included content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics to determine writing quality. Results of the study showed that collaborative writing had an overall significant effect on students' English writing. This effect was significant for content, organization, and vocabulary, but not for grammar or mechanics. In addition, most students in the collaborative writing tasks enjoyed the experience and believed that it contributed to their learning of English. The study also showed that the peer-scaffolding experience enhanced not only students' writing competence but also their speaking ability and self-confidence.

This finding is verified by Montasser (2014), who studied how a collaborative language learning (CLL) approach might be used to encourage EFL learners of the college of languages and translation at Al-Imam University in Saudi Arabia. The study focused on how students learned from their peers and how this collaboration helped to develop their writing skills. The study showed that the students' scores in writing were higher for the post-test than the pre-test after applying CLL, although students still made some mistakes. These findings prove that using CLL in writing classes supports learners, scaffolds their ZPD, lowers their writing anxiety, and enables them to successfully

complete any writing assignment. This study suggests that many WbTs, such as blogs, wikis, and the discussion forums, might be used in writing classes to achieve these positive results and to encourage collaborative learning.

By using these web-based learning technologies, learners could work together in pairs or groups to speak, write, and think in English. Such collaboration can improve their language learning. Collaborative learning through technology mediation is the trend in higher education programs (Warschauer, 2010). New web-based applications have unlimited possibilities for collaboration and community engagement (Hearn & White, 2009) and provide language learners with flexibility in which each student chooses when and where to learn (Al-Musa & Al-Mobark, 2005). For example, the Blackboard system offers several collaborative tools such as synchronous chats, asynchronous components, comment areas, and electronic mail (Hameed, Badii, & Cullen, 2008). These tools might enable learners to interact with each other and to support their learning in a collaborative learning environment.

Maushak and Ou (2007) studied how synchronous communication facilitated graduate students' online collaboration. Thirty students were required to use instant messenger (IM) for discussing their group projects. Later, the researchers asked the students to post in IM their reflections on their collaboration. Transcription and content analysis of students' synchronous discussions in IM revealed that online collaborative interactions were similar to those in face-to-face situations. Maushak and Ou (2007) reported that synchronous communication facilitated online collaboration and enabled learners not only to exchange ideas and thoughts, but also to construct new knowledge for each other. In such a study, collaboration provided learners with opportunities to

reach linguistic improvement that they would not have attained alone. Maushak and Ou's (2007) study is another example that supports the importance of collaboration in learning and constructing knowledge.

Integrating WbTs with other teaching approaches supports the teaching and learning, communication, interactivity, and collaboration that are essential in language-learning environments. I argue that WbTs can situate students in different collaborative learning experiences. Different online websites, such as *Easy World of English*, *Many Things*, *BBC Learning English*, *TV 411*, and *Activities for ESL Students*, can provide different collaborative learning activities (Li, 2013). In these activities, students interact with each other, share ideas, convey information, provide feedback, build language skills, exchange experiences, and support their learning. In addition, students first learn collaboratively during social interaction before they can play a role in their independent learning (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). In addition, Blackboard might be used to introduce students to different virtual forums, groups, social networking services, and discussion boards. Providing these online alternatives to students in NNES countries will reduce the need for them to travel to NES countries to learn English (Al-Musa & Al-Mobark, 2005).

**Social interaction.** Social interaction occurs in and is emphasized by collaborative activities and serves as developmental tools for language learning (Lantolf, 2006). Social interaction is paramount to construct cognitive and emotional images of reality (Aimin, 2013) and to develop speaking skills and thinking strategies (Vygotsky, 1986). Interaction comprises the active creation and modification of thoughts, ideas, and understandings as a result of experiences that occur within sociocultural contexts (Zong, 2009). Learners construct the new language through socially mediated interaction and



interactive activities (Lantolf, 2006). In EFL contexts, learners need to be engaged in language activities inside and outside the classroom. Fostering interaction in English outside the classroom is considered fundamental for second language development (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003).

I show above, in the study of Maushak and Ou (2007), that students' online collaboration and their perceptions of synchronous communication are similar to that in face-to-face situations. However, traditional face-to-face classrooms do not produce plentiful discussion and interaction because they are largely teacher-directed. Social interaction in online settings allows learners to participate more than they do in face-to-face discussions and to construct knowledge in ways not available in classrooms (Brooks, 2010). WbTs promote extensive student-to-teachers and student-to-student interaction in asynchronous and synchronous discussions under the auspices of computer-mediated communication (CMC) (Yang, 2011). WbTs also enable information sharing, idea exchange, and mentoring in which learners and teachers can maintain close relationships with each other by using WbTs.

Online interactions take place through reading, writing, listening, and speaking in either course materials or other online resources. In this study, any interaction such as face-to-face interaction, online interaction, asynchronous and synchronous interaction, are important components for EFL leaning and teaching in blended learning environments. Online courses often use discussion boards, synchronous chat, electronic bulletin boards, and e-mails as substitutes for classroom interaction (Ya Ni, 2013). Blended learning designs can be developed in a way that enhances these types of interactions and communications. This current study looks at whether these types of

interaction in a web-based environment create meaningful and valuable learning opportunities to learn English outside the classroom. It also explores students' and teachers' perceptions of these types of interactions with and within these WbTs.

Zhao (2010) investigated interaction and communication strategy use among non-native speakers of English in text chat and videoconferencing. Learners in a Chinese and a Japanese university participated in text chats and videoconferences to discuss culture-related topics using English as the common language. Text chat scripts and videoconferencing transcripts were quantitatively analyzed to find that both text chat and videoconferencing are valuable tools to assist meaning negotiation and communicative interaction that facilitate second language acquisition. In addition, Zhao found that text chat enables learners to notice their linguistic errors more than in face-to-face interactions.

Interaction is not limited to student-student interaction or student-teacher interaction but also includes student-contents interaction (Moore, 1989) and student-system interaction (Bouhnik & Marcus, 2006). Student-content interaction refers to student engagement with the content or subject matter that is presented to the student. Moore (1989) defined student-content interaction to be “the process of intellectually interacting with the content that results in changes in the learner’s understanding, the learner’s perspective, or the cognitive structures of the learner’s mind” (p. 2). This confirms the concepts of SCT in its view of learning that comes from interacting with one’s surroundings. Without this type of interaction, learning cannot occur.

Student-system interaction depends on the availability of current technologies for the learners and the instructors when using any online learning system (Bouhnik &

Marcus, 2006). For example, the Blackboard system offers the learners and instructors discussion forums, private messages, and email as instruments for interacting. These instruments can enable teachers to monitor the learners and track their progress. For example, learners may use a discussion forum to share their views and have discussions with their peers and teachers. They also can use email to contact teachers or classmates individually. Learners can use this type of interaction to ask for more information without revealing their unveiling requests to other learners and without adjusting a teacher's schedule.

Yang (2011) stated that students' engagement in English might be achieved through meaningful interactions in many CMC activities. CMC facilitates learners' interaction not only in a time-delayed, asynchronous interaction but also in a real-time mode, synchronous interaction. To foster the interaction, learners can use Internet chatting, written or spoken, that more closely mimics actual conversation (Freiermuth, 2002). Fostering interaction makes chats a useful tool for language learning because learners are able to think and to write or speak in English. WbTs allow students and teachers to chat with each other anywhere and anytime (Cavus, 2007). This student-instructor interaction can involve a mutual communication between the instructor and students, such as one meant to counsel, support, and encourage (Moore & Kearsley, 2012).

The social context plays a central role in facilitating and supporting interaction. Wei, Chen, and Kinshuk (2012) developed a framework based on social cognitive theory to enhance social interaction in online learning environments. In these online environments, students typically experience isolation and alienation. These negative

experiences can be reduced by enhancing social presence. A questionnaire-based survey was carried out among 522 learners who had previous learning experiences in online learning courses. The results show that social presence has significant effects on learning interaction, which in turn has significant effects on learning performance. In addition, the study verifies that a higher degree of social presence enhances learning interaction, fosters the development of critical thinking skills, improves learning performance, and leads to greater learning satisfaction with a course (Wei et al., 2012).

This social interaction—student-student interaction, student-teacher interaction, student-content interaction, and student-system interaction—is missing in English language programs, courses, and textbooks (Zohoorian & Baghban, 2011). In Saudi Arabia, EFL context lacks language practices in real situations (Alshumaimeri & Alzyadi, 2015) to support classroom instruction and to increase students' learning. These language practices are lacking in most EFL contexts (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003; Nation, 2003) because most EFL courses focus only on language knowledge, such as vocabulary and grammar (Zohoorian & Baghban, 2011).

Language learners need to be exposed to the target language in the learning environment (Lantolf, 2007). WbTs can compensate by exposing EFL learners to language in authentic interactive contexts. Online learning environments might be effective learning environments because they help to create interactive activities. These activities enable EFL learners to interact with people across the Internet, such as with their teachers and fellow students, with contents such as learning activities and assignments, and with systems such as discussion boards and announcements (Blackboard, 2015). The more learners interact in English, the more they are engaged in

learning (Veletsianos, 2010). Using English to interact with others is the ultimate goal of learning English.

Such social and interactive contexts provoke learners' participation and increase learning opportunities in a second language-learning environment (Mitchell & Myles 2004). Interaction requires and leads to participation in concrete and meaningful communicative activities with other members of a speaking community (Lantolf, 2006). Participation is one of the key contributions of SCT to language learning because it combines the social context with individual acquisition (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). SCT states that a learners' effort would not result in the mastery of the language unless the learner benefits from other people, as I discuss in ZPD. Individual learning is embedded in social process and is mediated by participation in a social process and by others in the context of language learning. When learners collaborate and participate in these activities, they enrich their individual language skills and they support each other to develop their learning. In EFL context, an EFL learner's active and positive participation in English learning activities is essential for the effective learning of the language (Lantolf, 2007).

Kim (2011) examined the online postings of six students—three non-native and three native speakers of English—who were enrolled in an online course on teaching English to speakers of other languages. Content analysis was employed to study 201 postings. The findings showed that the non-native speakers of English not only posted more messages in online discussions than their native peers, but also had more reflection on and accommodation of other students' perspectives in their postings than their native peers' postings. The pattern and frequency of these non-native-English speakers'

participation revealed that they gained a legitimate status engaging in academic socialization. Such non-native-English speakers enthusiastically contributed more in the virtual community than their native-speaker counterparts did, because their confidence was piqued by the interactivities.

Kim's study pays attention to the role of EFL teachers to promote their students' engagement, participation, and interaction in learning activities. Below, I discuss the teachers' role in the section entitled the concept of ZPD, which concentrates on teacher's guidance and support to learners. This is suggested by SCT in its concept of ZPD in which the knowledgeable people, such as teachers in Kim's study, scaffold the less knowledgeable students to accomplish a task that they might not be able to do by themselves.

**Authenticity.** Authentic situations can support language learners through learning activities that resemble real-life actions. Authentic learning is a collection of criteria and related concepts that (a) have real-world significance, (b) define tasks needed to complete the activity, (c) provide learners with opportunities to examine the task from different perspectives using a variety of resources, (d) and afford opportunities for collaboration and reflection (Herrington & Herrington, 2006). In other words, authentic learning is a multidisciplinary, educational approach that allows learners—with the guidance of their teachers—to explore, discuss, and meaningfully construct concepts and relationships in the context of real problems and projects (Herrington & Herrington, 2006).

Therefore, authentic learning is a beneficial pedagogical strategy that helps learners to connect existing with new knowledge, and to explore new knowledge deeply in context (Banas & York, 2014). This connection makes a meaningful learning because

learning is embedded in the social and physical context and because it reflects the way the knowledge is used in real life (Herrington & Oliver, 2000). This connection helps to bridge the gap between theoretical classroom learning and real-life application. In addition, authentic learning may be a means to bridge the contextual gap between technology, learning environments, and pedagogy (Banas & York, 2014).

In language learning, the best setting is in real social life (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The best setting for acquiring English occurs in a natural setting (British Council, 2015). Learning in natural settings occurs as a function of the activity, context, and culture in which learning takes place (Lantolf, 2000). Authenticity might occur in the classroom, outside the classroom, or in an online setting. In the 21st century, it is possible to create authentic activities in a language-learning setting by using the Internet or other WbTs (Zong, 2008). Thousands of authentic learning materials exist online, such as videos, virtual radio, news channels, application forms, restaurant menus, magazine articles, newspaper reports, television advertisements, and chat communities. For example, EFL teachers can use online newspapers, magazines, articles, short stories, and novels to expose students to different genres in English drawn from real life.

In the Saudi EFL context, teachers use authentic language materials in their classes to provide exposure to the real-life language uses for communication among native speakers. Authentic uses of English offer new linguistic knowledge, expand communicative abilities, raise learners' motivation, stimulate them to learn by themselves, and create positive perceptions of learning English as a language, not only as a classroom subject. Moreover, these uses prepare EFL learners for the future uses of English in the real world outside the classroom for communicative purposes rather than

instructional materials (Tomlinson, 2012). Authentic learning helps not only to integrate language skills but also to enable teachers to overcome the students' individual differences (Alshumaimeri & Alzyadi, 2015). Below I discuss authentic learning materials in an out-of-class context and in an online context.

*Outside the classroom.* EFL learners receive only a limited exposure to English in classrooms. It is difficult to achieve reasonable proficiency in language when students' hours per week of classroom teaching are restricted, even over a period of years (Barker, 2009). I argue that EFL learners need additional opportunities to engage in English outside the classroom. Chusanachoti (2011) studied how four Thai EFL learners engaged in activities outside the classroom to practice English. The findings illustrated that learners were regularly involved in a range of activities, such as watching movies, reading newspapers, listening to songs, and participating in Internet activities. In addition, the participants usually engaged in multimodal, non-face-to-face interactive, receptive, and incidental learning activities.

Chusanachoti's (2011) study suggests that out-of-class English activities can be valuable for language learning: These activities merit special consideration by EFL teachers who may incorporate out-of-class English activities into formal instruction to help learners pay attention to and participate in meaningful communicative activity. Chusanachoti's study shows that online learning opportunities and web-based resources present great advantages to support EFL learning and to enrich students' uses of English (Tsai, 2009). Moreover, these online opportunities and web-based resources precede traditional out-of-class English activities in the 21st century.



*Online language learning.* Online learning provides more opportunities to use English than traditional learning in the language classroom. These online opportunities facilitate using English outside the classroom. Online language-learning courses often substitute classroom interaction with electronic bulletin boards, discussion boards, synchronous chats, and e-mails (Ya Ni, 2013). The online learning environment is democratic because it allows learners, particularly those who do not speak in class, to have a voice (Ryan & Scott, 2008). In online discussion, no one can dominate the conversation. In addition, learners can participate in knowledge construction in ways not possible in face-to-face discussions (Brooks, 2010). Any learner can participate online more than they do in face-to-face meetings.

Throughout the online learning environment, learners can learn from each other not only in the classroom but also outside the classroom. This collaborative environment creates a collective ZPD that connects individual ZPDs with different abilities in order to enable learners to take advantage of other peers' knowledge, feelings, and benefits (Shayer, 2002). This collective ZPD contributes to others' learning, accommodates diverse membership, and nurtures the authentic expression of multiple perspectives (Wilson, Ludwig-Hardman, Thornam, & Dunlap, 2004).

An interactive environment can integrate multimedia material such as videos, images, and texts (Mohsen & Shafeeq, 2014) that facilitate language input. Motteram and Sharma (2009) stated that the interactive environment helps to mend the disconnection between the inside and outside of the classroom, such as that of EFL classrooms. Previous studies reported that successful language learners rely on active engagement with the target language beyond the classroom (Lai & Gu, 2011). This is especially true

in a wider first language context as in Saudi Arabia, where students have limited interaction with English outside their classrooms (Nation, 2003). I discussed earlier how Kim (2011) found that non-native-English speakers were more willing to contribute in the virtual learning community than their native-speaker counterparts.

Lu (2008) investigated the pedagogical use of mobile phones for vocabulary learning with Taiwan EFL learners. The study examined the effectiveness of short message service (SMS) on vocabulary lessons. Thirty students were distributed into two groups; the first group received a list of 14 printed words and the second group received the same 14 delivered by SMS. In the second week, the two groups switched their media to learn a new list of 14 vocabulary words. Students remembered more words during the post-test after reading the regular and brief SMS lessons than they did after reading the relatively more detailed print material. They found that learning printed words was an overwhelming and tedious task, whereas learning words delivered by SMS was interesting, enjoyable, and manageable. Lu's study proved that EFL students had a greater gain in English vocabulary when learning via mobile phones than via paper materials.

Students reported positive attitudes towards using mobile phones to learn vocabulary. Mobile phones are effective for maximizing the exposure to target words and authentic learning (Lu, 2008). Authenticity in language learning becomes more available with mobile technology. It is easy to access online and to connect to the Internet with modern portable devices (El-Hussein & Cronje, 2010). These mobile devices can connect classroom learning with outside language-learning environments (Levy & Stockwell, 2006) and can support learners' engagement in creative, collaborative, critical, and

communicative learning activities (Cobcroft, Towers, & Smith, 2006). Therefore, mobile devices might be used to expand discussion beyond the walls of the classroom, to create knowledge, to collaborate with fellow students, and to interact with a larger range of content (El-Hussein & Cronje, 2010). These features are essential in language learning from SCT perspectives.

Mobile learning is “any type of learning that takes place in learning environments and spaces that take account of the mobility of technology, mobility of learners, and mobility of learning” (El-Hussein & Cronje, 2010, p. 20). In addition, mobile learning is uniquely placed to support personalized, authentic, and situated learning (Traxler, 2007). In mobile learning, students have the flexibility to engage in the educational process and material anywhere, any time (Dew, 2010). In this sense, learners are active constructs of their learning environment (Mitchell & Myles, 2004). They are responsible for selecting a learning environment that can nurture and scaffold them (Aimin, 2013). This shows why SCT focuses on how the learning occurs and what happens in the learning process wherever learning takes place (Khaliliaqdam, 2014).

*The Internet-based education.* The Internet is used as a medium to support the learning process (Cavus & Momani, 2009; Srichanyachon, 2014). Leu (2002) observed that “the Internet has entered our classrooms faster than books, television, computers, the telephone, or any other technology for information and communication” (p. 311). Language teachers can take advantage of using the Internet as a rich resource of many language-learning websites. EFL teachers can use electronic dictionaries, online grammar activities, vocabulary-building tasks, and writing-training websites in their teaching curriculum. They can integrate WbTs such as blogs and wikis to facilitate the

development of learning skills, such as reading, writing, understanding, and critical thinking (Thorne & Payne, 2005; Yamauchi, 2009). Teachers can use an audio-voice conference to teach listening and speaking skills (Ghaemi, Khodbakhshzade, & Kargozari, 2012) and can use digital games to “lower some of the frustration and anxiety students often feel while learning a second language” (Purushotma, Thorne, & Wheatley, 2009, p. 1).

Twenty years ago, Warschauer (1996) found that language learners express themselves comfortably, freely, and creatively when they chat online. Later on, Ramchandran (2004) found that the Internet enables students to write strong research papers and to improve their collaborative writing. It is worth mentioning that the Internet offers many written practices in different electronic models, such as chatting, in which learners try to type quickly and improve their writing skills, grammatical structures, and punctuation skills. In addition, learners can reduce the number of spelling mistakes in these written practices (Kargozari & Ghaemi, 2011). In this case, I argue that WbTs are beneficial for language learning, particularly for writing improvement and the correction of spelling mistakes (Conroy, 2010).

In this digital age, the use of the Internet is linked with LMSs. In other words, the common use of the Internet today enhances the adoption of different LMSs in educational institutions (Mohsen & Shafeeq, 2014). The Internet is used as a supportive learning environment in the curriculum of many institutions (Comas-Quinn, 2011). The Internet could work as a social context to provide many interactive opportunities, collaborative activities, and authentic practices for language learning. The Internet can provide a large number of solutions and suggestions for language learning inside and outside the

classroom. For example, the Internet can develop learners' literacy (Ramchandran, 2004), boost their vocabulary (Horst, Cobb, & Meara, 2005), and improve their speaking skills (Ghaemi et al., 2012).

In a blended learning environment, the most important component is the Internet in which students can communicate with their instructor and fellow students. In Chapter 1, I discuss that blended learning's reliance on a LMS that uses the Internet as a medium to support education and the learning process (Cavus & Momani, 2009). Srichanyachon (2014) studied the views and perceptions of 198 EFL students at Bangkok University about using LMS along with traditional face-to-face learning. Srichanyachon focused on understanding the factors that influence the adoption of LMS based on users' own experience. A questionnaire was used to show a positive relationship existed between students' attitudes towards using the Internet as a learning tool and their perceptions of using LMS. Also, students who used the Internet as a learning tool expressed more positive perceptions of using LMS than those who did not use the Internet as a learning tool. These findings led Srichanyachon (2014) to suggest that "teachers should encourage students to figure out the advantages of using the Internet as a learning tool" (p. 35).

*Blackboard.* Blackboard is the LMS that stimulated my study, although it is not the main focus of it. The focus is on how Blackboard, with the assistance of other WbTs, might be used at SSU to support language learning outside the EFL classrooms. Many educational institutions employ Blackboard as a LMS in their curriculum (Chang, 2008). Educators use Blackboard to support traditional education through online education. Blackboard is an interactive, multimedia platform that combines visual, audio, and video elements (Blackboard, 2015). Interactive multimedia materials attract learners' attention

and create mental images that help improve the retention of information being taught (Clements & Sarama, 2003).

Blackboard applications have the potential to change the way teachers teach and learners learn (DeNeui & Dodge, 2006), to offer a highly interactive medium of learning that can be customized to meet individual needs of students (Levine & Sun, 2003), and to influence the selection and development of online resources that affect traditional teaching practices (Coates, 2007). However, Blackboard, as any technology, cannot offer successful education itself; success depends on how it is used, planned, and supported by different strategies (El Tartoussi & Tamim, 2009). In my study, I am interested in finding ways that might shift Blackboard from its original uses as a web-based learning system to a new learning platform, which promotes learning English outside the classroom and encourages independent learning.

Teachers are advised to make use of the functions of Blackboard in learning English by providing learners with numerous experiences to enhance their language skills (Watson & Hempenstall, 2008) in two learning situations: face-to-face and online. The use of face-to-face teaching is important “as a basic building block of the learning experience, enriched and enhanced by the integration of the Internet and other teaching and learning technologies into studies undertaken both in and out of the classroom” (Mohsen & Shafeeq, 2014, p. 110). Such integration relies on the mediation and support of the teachers who work towards the learning goals and learners’ needs (Mohsen & Shafeeq, 2014).

**The concept of ZPD.** Above, I discuss the concept of ZPD that assures the focus of SCT on the social context rather than on individual efforts. I show the importance of

guidance, help, advice, and demonstration from more-capable peers or experts such as EFL teachers or native-English speakers. Collaboration and interaction between learners and teachers and among learners themselves can scaffold and assist in their language acquisition (Ellis, 2000). ZPD enables learners to progress from their actual developmental level to their potential developmental level via collaboration and interaction with the teacher, other learners, content, and system. Learning is an intermental activity that takes place in ZPD in which learners are not capable of self-regulation but can achieve the desired outcome through a process of other-regulation (Vygotsky, 1978). In other words, a learner can perform at a higher level with support from other individuals when they interact with others.

ZPD supports and comprises the roles of authenticity, social interaction, and collaboration in learning. Students learn by listening, talking, reading, writing, observing, modeling, doing, thinking, and imitating. These activities immerse the learners physically in real-life experiences in which they interact with each other and thereby enhance their levels of knowledge. Therefore, the role of ZPD is to assist learners to advance to a higher cognitive level through interaction during these activities. ZPD is not simply to create a scaffolding relationship between the expert and the novice for the purpose of task completion, but to lead the novice to the highest possible cognitive levels through interaction (Lantolf & Appel 1994).

I discuss above how Shehadeh's study (2011) found that collaborative writing had a statistically significant effect on improving students' second language writing in terms of content, organization, and vocabulary. In Shehadeh's study, it was conceptualized that ZPD would emerge through interaction and participation in collaborative activities, not as

a quality of learners (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). This confirms the main pedagogical implications of ZPD, which emphasize collaboration and social interaction (Lantolf, 2007). Collaborative assistance between an expert and a novice can create interactive opportunities for second language learners with more advanced speakers of the target language, including teachers, peers, and native speakers (Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Thorne & Lantolf, 2007).

Khaliliaqdam (2014) examined the role of scaffolding via interactive activities in terms of developing basic speech. At the beginning of the study, six adult foreign language learners were given the main words and were required to create sentences using those words. This activity was repeated and each time the number of main words of the sentence in an activity was reduced. Students were required to create the sentences with the help of the teachers. Then, pictures were given to the learners, and they had to tell a story based on the pictures. The teacher provided a few guided words when necessary. Students could create and say more sentences about a picture when the words needed to describe the picture were provided by the teacher or other students. At the end of the course, the learners' speech level had improved.

In language learning, Khaliliaqdam (2014) suggested using collaborative strategy as a potential vehicle for foreign language development, because it provides cognitive structure, sufficient comprehensible input, an organizational model of language, and reinforcement for the learners. The results proposed that scaffolding within ZPD enhanced learning significantly because the atmosphere was collaborative and supportive. Language input and reinforcement from the teachers provided to the learners cognitive structure and an organizational model of language. Language scaffolding served as a



bridging means for students to learn a foreign language more effectively and efficiently. This supports the beliefs about how collaborative environments and interactive activities provide EFL learners with opportunities to learn English.

***Teachers' role.*** EFL teachers as well-informed and expert persons in the language classroom. They have the ability to scaffold the less knowledgeable students to learn the language. In the digital age, WbTs have greatly changed their roles in the blended learning environments. In addition to their traditional roles, teachers are required to support their EFL learners and help them to become comfortable with learning through technologies. This help is a “concern for teachers” in the 21st century (Egbert, 2009). Taking care of their roles is an essential part to succeed in this age. Having positive perceptions of using and applying WbTs in their teaching might support their success (Park & Son, 2009).

Watson and Hempenstall (2008) advised teachers to recognize the potential of technology in language learning in order to provide learners with diverse experiences that enhance their language skills. Soonhyang (2006) stated that teachers must remain updated with evolving classroom materials and teaching methods. More importantly, language teachers are encouraged to employ technologies and web-based applications that transform the learning and teaching environment (Ya Ni, 2013). Blackboard, as an example of WbTs, supports fundamental change to curriculum, teaching approaches, and course delivery that includes the role of the teacher (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008).

Teachers are advised to use online activities that are compatible with in-class tasks (Yuen et al., 2009). Doing so might create a social learning context that promotes language use. In the EFL context, one of the most important tasks for teachers is to

promote their students' engagement in English outside the classroom and in online settings, in both a non-formal and an informal educational context (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). EFL teachers are required to expose their students to English in many ways. This can be achieved through, for example, meaningful interactions under the auspices of CMC (Yang, 2011).

Using new technologies, such as Blackboard, does not essentially change language-teaching practices, but it may support the existing pedagogical foundation and outlook of teachers' roles. Wallace (2003) stated that web-based teachers should be present in an online context through a number of techniques, including facilitating discussions, providing direct instruction, and giving feedback to students. Offir, Barth, Lev, and Shteinbok (2003) illustrated six different roles for teachers in web-based environments; social, procedural, expository, explanatory, cognitive task engagement, and learning assistance.

Moreover, Goodyear, Salmon, Spector, Steeples, and Tickner (2001) specified eight roles for teachers in web-based environments as a facilitator, adviser-counselor, assessor, researcher, content facilitator, technologist, designer, and manager. The goal of these roles is not to limit the teachers' contributions in the web-based learning environment but to help them understand what constitutes their roles in the online setting. The better they understand their responsibilities, the more the learning process will be facilitated (Comas-Quinn, 2011). Their role in using WbTs depends on their perceptions of these technologies (Park & Son, 2009), as I discuss below.

## **Perceptions of Teachers and Learners**

This study also explores students' and teachers' perceptions of using WbTs to support learning of English outside the classroom, their perceptions of web-based learning opportunities, and their perceptions of different types of online interactions. It attempts to learn about how they experience, select, organize, respond to, and interpret information about using English in WbTs outside the classroom and how the blended learning environments influence their learning and teaching. Learning about their perceptions of current experience with blended EFL courses assists in understanding how they use WbTs to learn and teach in this new learning environment. In addition, it assists in increasing the pedagogical benefits of this use and meeting any challenges.

**Teachers' perceptions.** In addition to earlier mentioned teachers' roles, it is essential to state that teachers' use of WbTs depends on their perceptions of them (Park & Son, 2009). This means that teachers are more likely to translate their perceptions of technologies into instructional practices (Ihmeideh, 2010). The reverse is also true. Changing teaching techniques is not "a piece of cake" because it necessitates changing beliefs about technologies (Mohsen & Shafeeq, 2014). Therefore, I argue that successful integration of technology to teach language relies on teachers' positive perceptions of technology. Positive perceptions play a vital role in adopting new technologies for teaching purposes (Albion & Ertmer, 2002). Teachers might also reconstruct their perceptions of teaching and using WbTs based on their practice, experience, knowledge, and progress in language learning and teaching.

Lacorte (2005) examined the role of teachers' perceptions of their own pedagogic principles in their teaching activities. Lacorte observed and interviewed teachers of

Spanish as second language in the United States to determine the relationship between their knowledge and beliefs and their practices. This qualitative study showed that the teachers' practices and communicative approaches were influenced by their own personal theories and experience of language teaching. In addition, contextual factors such as classroom management issues, large number of students, and limited teaching resources contributed to their perceptions and practices. Lacorte's study shows that teaching methodologies can support communicative tasks, interactive activities, learner-centered instruction, and digital trends in foreign language teaching. Teaching methodologies can be more beneficial if teachers understand how diverse pedagogical and institutional conditions may influence their work. It also proves the importance of teachers' management of the transitions between instructional stages and the relationship among their knowledge, abilities, and beliefs to take advantage of these transitions.

In another study, Kessler and Plakans (2008) examined the relationship between teachers' attitudes and confidence and their use of CALL, particularly the use of digital audio and video in ESL classrooms. The authors tracked seven teachers at two large universities in the United States over a semester. They also interviewed those teachers periodically in order to gain insight into their confidence with the use of CALL. The findings indicated that the teachers did indeed integrate CALL in their course assignments; specifically, they used audio or video for teachers' feedback, listening or speaking assessment, and students' self-assessment or self-study.

Kessler and Plakans (2008) rated teachers' confidence in three categories: highly confident, contextually confident, and less confident. (High confidence does not mean high integration or extensive use of technology.) Teachers expressing contextual

confidence were those teachers who used audio the most in integrated ways. Highly confident teachers used technology less often with less integration than the contextually confident teachers. Less confident teachers integrated CALL only in prescribed ways. The highly confident teachers spent less time using CALL than contextually confident and less confident teachers. Finally, CALL preparation programs may focus on developing contextualized confidence in using certain types of technology rather than expecting teachers to develop a high level of confidence of using technology in teaching.

Kessler and Plakans (2008) further suggested that teachers should think of ways to familiarize themselves with technology to teach language, such as repetitive practices. In addition, teachers need to specify time for their own practice, to produce high-quality instructions, and to look for technical supports. In online learning settings, effective teaching depends on a comprehensive understanding of the nature of interaction and ways to facilitate interaction through technologically transmitted communications; parallel to my discussion about social interaction above. Such understanding not only relies on the teachers' perceptions of their own teaching and of these technologies, but also leads to the ways they integrate technologies into their practices.

Ajayi (2009) examined 33 pre-service teachers' perceptions of asynchronous discussion board (ADB) as a tool for learning to teach. ADB was integrated into two literacy courses for 33 pre-service teachers over 16 weeks. Data were collected through oral interviews, written reflections, and participants' postings on the discussion board. The data were analyzed using a verbal analysis method. The results showed that the participants perceived ADB as a significant tool of learning to teach because it promoted situated learning, facilitated a social construction of knowledge, encouraged

collaboration, and afforded customized learning experiences as well as independent learning. Ajaya (2009) discussed how understanding pre-service teachers' perceptions of their own learning while using technology helped to connect their perceptions with what they actually did in real-life situations. This understanding helped to fill in the gaps in teachers' preparation programs, which rely on theories and expectations, and teachers' uses and practices, which rely on real-life experiences.

In a study of ten ESL/EFL teachers, Kim (2008) examined teachers' perceptions of using computers in their classrooms. Teachers were enrolled in two programs: a teacher education program and an advanced educational technology program. Data collection came from an individual interview with each teacher for 50 minutes. Kim found that CALL functions as (a) a tool for resources, communication, presentation, writing; (b) a motivator; and (c) an alternative, optional tool. Teachers' perceptions and expectations of computers favored their use as instructional tools, not as a learning tool for a student's use. Their perceptions of the role of computers were restricted to a supplemental and instructional tool in their language classrooms. Furthermore, teachers' perceptions of CALL were still based on a teacher-centered teaching paradigm. The study showed that CALL technology was regarded as an extrinsic motivator in language classrooms. In addition, the uses of computers in the classroom varied depending on the teachers' perceptions and expectations of computers (Kim, 2008).

In using technologies to teach English in Saudi Arabia, Alshumaimeri (2008) conducted a survey study of secondary EFL teachers. He studied their attitudes towards using CALL in English classrooms in the secondary schools. He also reviewed the effects of other factors on their perceptions to understand the implications of using CALL in

English language classrooms. Alshumaimeri found that teachers held positive perceptions of using computers in teaching English. In more detail, a descriptive and statistical analysis indicated a positive correlation between a teacher's desire for a computer, and a positive perception of using Information Technology approaches to learning in the Saudi classroom. The study recommended including specialized training for EFL teachers to support their integration of CALL into regular classroom instruction. Engaging teachers' positive perceptions in their teaching requires developing training sessions based on teachers' unique needs, specific content areas, and individual characteristics of the students who are the ultimate beneficiaries of innovation. In addition, teachers lack opportunities for discussing their opinions and sharing their experiences as they develop their own approaches to integrate WbTs into the curriculum.

Hammond and Gamlo (2015) conducted a mixed-method study about using Information Communication Technology (ICT) at a Saudi university. The goals were to understand how ICT was used, to discover what encourages and discourages EFL teachers to use ICT, and to describe and evaluate the reported use of ICT by EFL teachers. The findings showed that ICT was used in multiple ways. Three types of teachers were identified according to their use of ICT: extended users, restricted users, and non-users of ICT. However, the majority of teachers reported that ICT helped them as teachers. Even if they spent time preparing a lesson, ICT saved a great deal of class time. Teachers were able to cover more materials in class and possibly had time for extra reinforcement activities. Material could be reused, which means less time needed in preparing future lessons. Teachers also gave examples indicating how ICT provided different teaching and learning strategies, such as creating blogs to teach collaborative

writing, encouraging students to create PowerPoint presentations, and sending feedback via email.

Focusing on Blackboard as one of the WbTs, the perceptions of using it as a LMS in Saudi EFL context are not discussed fully in literature. Mohsen and Shafeeq (2014) studied EFL teachers' perceptions of using Blackboard applications in Saudi Arabia. They found that EFL teachers had positive perceptions of Blackboard applications to English language teaching. "Most teachers view Blackboard as a structured e-learning platform that helps improve the teacher-student relationship in a course and aids to make teaching English more successful" (p. 108). However, Mohsen and Shafeeq (2014) reported that the use of Blackboard as a blended learning system still focused on administrative issues rather than pedagogical significance for language learning. My study attempts to look for pedagogical implications of using WbTs to support learning English in the Saudi EFL context after adoption of Blackboard at SSU.

In 2014, SSU, the setting of this current study, conducted a survey to measure the knowledge and experience levels of the academic staff on online learning in general and Blackboard in specific. The result showed that teachers had a positive perception and many teachers had good experience in e-learning in general "rating from 50% to 100% and the tendency towards BLACKBOARD usage is very high at 57%" (SSU, 2015). EFL teachers at SSU considered Blackboard an important tool in their teaching (the department chair, personal communication, August 28, 2015). In my study in English department at SSU, I focus on EFL teachers' and students' perceptions of using Blackboard—with other WbTs—to teach English in a blended learning context and to promote learning of English beyond the classroom. This study enables me to describe



how WbTs might influence the learning environment, teachers' and learners' thoughts, their experiences, and their relationship with this web-based environment (Vygotsky, 1978). I attempt to determine the pedagogical features and affective factors in using WbTs to support EFL learning and teaching.

**Students' perceptions.** Students' use of technology in their learning depends on their perceptions of technologies as well as their teachers' perceptions and approaches (Wiebe & Kabata, 2010). In other words, students' use of technology relies on their experiences, past learning, motivation, expectations, personality, and attitudes towards their learning environments. Students would use technology in their learning of English if they had positive perceptions, experiences, motivation, and feelings. The opposite is also true. Sociocultural concepts state that the learning environment plays a role in shaping students' perception, expectation, satisfaction, participation, interaction, and engagement. For example, a blended learning environment influences students' perceptions, satisfaction, and engagement, and, therefore, students' acceptance of blended learning (Zhao & Yuan, 2010). In addition, the aforementioned types of interactions play a role in shaping students' perceptions of using WbTs to promote learning English outside the classroom.

I discuss in collaborative section above some studies that show positive students' perceptions of using technologies to learn English. First, results of Shehadeh's (2011) investigation of the students' perceptions of collaborative writing at a large Emirati university showed that most students enjoyed the collaborative writing experience; students reported that the experience improved their learning of English and enhanced their speaking ability and self-confidence. In their 16-week-writing course, students were

required to write 12 compositions on an assigned topic, mainly descriptive or narrative in nature. In the experimental group, students collaborated to write these compositions, exchanged feedback with their peers, and edited their tasks. Students perceived collaboration as a tool that improved their writing quality, content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics.

Second, results of the questionnaires in Lu's (2008) study about vocabulary learning in SMS showed that students recognized more vocabulary after reading SMS lessons than they did after reading the relatively more detailed print material. They reported their abilities to memorize the vocabulary in the SMS lessons more easily. They preferred learning vocabulary via mobile phone and looked forward to continuing doing it. They appreciated the convenience and effective time management in using mobile phones to learn vocabulary. Therefore, students in general held positive perceptions of learning vocabulary via mobile phones because they were able to learn the assigned vocabulary items on a regular basis.

Third, results of the study of Montasser (2014) about using the collaborative learning approach with Saudi EFL learners in writing classes state that this approach supports learners, scaffolded their ZPD, lowered their writing anxiety, and enabled them to pursue any writing assignment. Students liked using many WbTs, such as blogs, wikis, and discussion forums, in writing classes. Students developed positive perceptions of the collaborative learning approach in developing language skills, in general, and in developing their writing skills in particular. They found that those WbTs encouraged them to learn from their peers, to develop their writing skills, and to reduce their mistakes.

Finally, results reported by Maushak and Ou (2007) in their study of how synchronous communication facilitated graduate students' online collaboration included students' perceptions of synchronous communication. In the students' reflections, they showed that they considered the synchronous communication activity a positive and productive experience despite some scheduling and technical issues, because it looked like communication in face-to-face situations. In addition, students reported that online communication enabled them to exchange ideas, discuss thoughts, and to construct new knowledge for each other. They also found opportunities to improve their linguistic skills that they would not have attained alone as well as the flexibility to discuss their projects and post their reflections on their collaborations.

Chusanachoti (2011) studied Thai EFL learners' perceptions of using activities outside the classroom to learn English. The participants did not perceive that all activities available outside the classroom, such as listening to songs, watching movies, and participating in Internet activities, could be used as sources of learning English. Participants reported that they usually engaged in multimodal, non-face-to-face interactive, receptive, and incidental learning activities. Furthermore, level of their participation in out-of-class English activities depended both on internal factors, such as motivation and external factors, such as social networks. The study recommended that English activities outside the classroom could be valuable for language learning and worth a special consideration by teachers. Teachers can incorporate out-of-class English activities—online learning opportunities and web-based resources—into formal instruction to help their learners pay attention to and participate in meaningful communicative activity.

These findings were confirmed earlier, in 2003, by Taylor and Gitsaki who examined 112 Japanese EFL students' attitudes towards the web-enhanced language learning (WELL) course. Students reported how they searched information on different web-pages in the computer laboratory or at their homes. They interacted with their partners and shared information that they found on the Internet and brought to class. Taylor and Gitsaki (2003) stated that using the web was a valuable means for students to practice computer skills and to learn English language. In addition, participants found that the WELL course offered opportunities for them to talk to their peers, to spend time practicing English in authentic uses, and to access updated information. Generally speaking, students felt comfortable and confident enough using computer technology, such as using web browsers and word processors, for out-of-class activities that enhanced their creativity and individuality.

Marek (2008) conducted research to examine EFL students' attitudes towards the use of Internet videoconferencing, and reported their attitudes towards studying English. Marek developed a 20-minute-presentation for each round of videoconferencing, ending with a total of 25 presentations. The topics of each presentation were tailored to encourage students' interests, and primarily focused on American culture and traditions. Two hundred twenty-five students with low English speaking proficiency and comprehension levels from five classes participated in his research. His findings were based upon a quantitative survey and a qualitative interview to evaluate the changes in students' motivation, ability, and confidence. Results showed that the students' attitudes became significantly more positive by the end of the semester. Marek (2008) stated that "the increased student motivation to study English, which can change in a fairly short

timeframe, results in long-term improvements in ability and confidence which take more time to develop” (p. 6).

Hu (2011) conducted an empirical study to describe Chinese EFL students’ perceptions of learning vocabulary via mobile phone. Participants were 24 part-time adult learners majoring in English. A questionnaire was conducted after a four-week vocabulary learning experience assisted by mobile phones. The study revealed how the mobile phone was perceived as a language-learning tool. Learners favored vocabulary learning via mobile phones due to the convenience facilitated by their portability and accessibility. Results supported the idea that adult learners perceived mobile phones as an alternative source to learn vocabulary and to accommodate their particular needs as adult learners to learn anytime and anywhere. In addition, the study stated that regular and immediate vocabulary text messages may act as an effective reminder to adult learners to exercise autonomous vocabulary learning. Vocabulary learning with mobile phones exposed learners to the assigned vocabulary items on a regular basis, which can be a complementary approach to the traditional paper-based vocabulary learning. This result agrees with what was described earlier about mobile learning, particularly about the findings of Lu’s (2008) study of pedagogical use of SMS for vocabulary learning with Taiwan EFL learners.

In Saudi Arabia, Jaradat (2014) studied students’ perceptions of using mobile phones as a learning tool for additional practices within a language learning course. The study was conducted to address how mobile phones are used to learn grammar and vocabulary, inside/outside French language classrooms, for undergraduate students at Princess Nora University. The data were collected via a questionnaire for students’

perceptions of mobile learning and via a pre-test and post-test experiment. Results displayed that students perceived that the utilization of mobile learning improved their learning performance inside and outside the classroom. They reported that the main benefit of mobile learning was to learn anywhere and at any time as well as to enhance their interaction and learning experiences.

Hamdan (2015) explored the EFL students' perceptions of the impact of video material on their listening skills at a Saudi university. More specifically, the study attempted to answer the following primary question: "To what extent do Saudi EFL students perceive that video integration in listening classrooms is effective on their listening comprehension level?" Participants were 18 male students majoring in English, between 18-20 years old, enrolling in a listening and speaking skills course in the first semester of 2014. They were asked to respond to a questionnaire and to write a short paragraph describing their preferences for either video utilization or audio usage. Quantitative analysis was used to study participants' responses to the questionnaire items. The results indicated that there were statistically important differences in the students' perceptions of integrating videos and audios in the listening skill; they favored videos. In other words, the quantitative analysis revealed that students were more interested in learning to listen with videos than audios.

In educational contexts, teachers are advised to understand students' perceptions (Wiebe & Kabata, 2010), particularly their perceptions of teaching approaches and learning environments. Further, students should understand teachers' perceptions of using technologies in their teaching approaches. Such understandings lead to high achievement and great improvement. For example, Fidaoui et al. (2010) explored the perceptions of

EFL teachers and students regarding the use of CALL to motivate learners to improve their writing skills. Participants were 48 fourth graders and their four teachers. Data were gathered during a three-month period using questionnaires, interviews, and observations. Findings revealed that teachers and students shared similar perceptions of the use of CALL in the writing classroom, and recognized the same motivational factors that would encourage students to produce well-developed written work.

However, this finding contradicted the results of other research by Wiebe and Kabata (2010), who reported that teachers and students had different perceptions. Wiebe and Kabata (2010) studied whether differences existed in perceptions between students and teachers towards the use of CALL materials in teaching and learning Japanese. Data were collected through surveys, instructors' journals, log-in frequencies, WebCT tracking systems, time usage on WebCT, and focus group interviews. The findings showed that a difference between students and instructors in their perceptions of the use of CALL materials existed. Students reported that teachers used technologies mostly to save time preparing their course. However, teachers did not consider this to be the case. Similarly, teachers were asked if they explained why they used technologies to their students. Also, students were asked if their teachers explained why they use technologies to them. The results indicated that the answers of the students did not match the teachers' answers.

Wiebe and Kabata (2010) concluded that teachers do not always understand students' perceptions of their teaching with technology-enhanced materials. In addition, students do not always understand teachers' perceptions and goals of their teaching while using CALL materials in their language-learning classrooms. Evidence in the study shows that students had positive perceptions of interacting with CALL materials and felt

comfortable in language-learning environments, while teachers' behaviors did not match their of using CALL varied. The study suggested that teachers should explain to their students the reasons why technology-enhanced materials would benefit them, thereby changing students' perceptions of the usefulness of technology-enhanced materials.

**Negative perceptions of using WbTs.** I show above that negative perceptions come from different factors, including the lack of technological knowledge and skills, the lack of guidelines and standards, the lack of support from colleagues or experts, time constraint, course load, and technology use and exposure. In this section, I review some studies that find negative perceptions of using any type of WbTs in language teaching and learning. These studies show that negative perceptions are mostly associated with teachers and students who do not believe that WbTs have a useful role in language learning and teaching, who do not have enough training, who have not experienced any difference in using or not using WbTs, or who face difficulties or barriers in using WbTs. In general, recent literature is associated with positive perceptions more than negative perceptions, while the literature of the previous three decades produces more negative results. This means that negative attitudes and perceptions of using WbTs decrease in recent literature compared to those in the previous decades.

Biesenbach-Lucas (2003) conducted a case study after the introduction of Blackboard to examine students' perceptions of the efficacy of an asynchronous electronic discussion. Asynchronous discussions were used as a new, additional, component to two graduate-level teacher training courses, which met face-to-face once a week for two and a half hours of regular class time. Students, 30 native-English speakers and 6 non-native-English speakers, were assigned to small groups for an entire semester



to make weekly contributions to their group's course web discussion forum in which they discussed course content. The goals were to foster collaboration, enhance understanding of course material, contribute to a critical understanding of course material achieved individually as well as collectively, provide a forum where mutual support and social cohesion could develop and give non-native speakers in the class an opportunity to use language and participate outside of class.

Students made obvious references to course readings and postings by their group members. The teacher evaluated students' postings on a weekly basis. At the end of the semester, students completed a survey to assess their satisfaction and to suggest modifications of the particular assignment type and format. While students found "greater social interaction with other class members," outside the regular classroom meetings, that promoted understanding of course content, students perceived two main issues as negative. They did not like the "forced, unnatural interaction promoted by the asynchronous discussions" with no useful topic prompts, and "the requirement to make connections to prior postings" by frequently contributing to discussions (p. 24). Results showed that the absence of a specific task provided by the teacher may have lowered their sense of purpose of learning activities. More importantly, using any technology needs to be employed deliberately to support students' learning, not simply because the technology is available. It is not appropriate to state that "technology will capture the attention of students and the expectation that subsequent positive affective effect itself will engage students in ways conducive to effective learning" (p. 36).

Schmid and Schimmack (2010) investigated nine teachers' perceptions of using the interactive whiteboard (IWB) technology in language classes. The study was

conducted during a course training that incorporated a “bottom up” approach to teacher professional development in CALL, and a pedagogical framework based on a socio-cognitive view of communicative language teaching. The researchers used classroom observations, video recordings of IWB training workshops, and in depth interviews with the teachers, to collect data. The findings showed that although teachers appreciated a few benefits of using technology, all teachers engaged in the research reported that the use of technology did not enhance their teaching in a significant manner. They did not attribute any particular benefit to IWB because they could achieve those benefits by using various ways.

Likewise, in a study in Turkey, Toscu (2013) investigated the relationship between classroom interaction and IWB use in EFL classes. She compared interaction patterns and types that occurred in classes equipped with IWB with traditional classes without IWB. There were two groups taught by the same EFL teacher: a control group and an experimental group. The IWB was used to deliver classroom instruction and discussion with the experimental group while a regular whiteboard was used with the control group in traditional classes. Toscu collected data by observations and video recordings of classes to find only minor differences between the interaction patterns in the IWB and the non-IWB groups. She argued that there were not any significant differences of interaction patterns, either positive or negative, between the two groups of EFL learners and teachers. This technology did not influence interaction in the classroom, nor did it importantly contribute to classroom interaction. Her research suggests that technology alone does not play a crucial role in promoting EFL classroom interaction, but how it is used and the ways we use it for teaching can promote interaction.

Johnsona, Ramanaira, and Brineb (2010) studied students' and teachers' perceptions of the use of CALL technology in language classrooms. The researchers examined how students and teachers interact with learning content, sound, and video in the classroom. They aimed to know what worked and what needed to be improved. In addition, they attempted to determine the pedagogical changes that teachers made in their classrooms, whether students' motivation and response to the CALL environment were affected, and in what ways. Results indicated that although a majority of learners and teachers in language classrooms appreciated the benefits of technology, they were convinced that the use of technology is not necessary to learn or teach language more effectively.

In Australia, Bain and McNaught (2006) investigated the beliefs and practices of teachers in 22 projects of computer-assisted learning (CAL). The researchers collected detailed interview data, information about uses of the project software, and details about curriculum used. Their aim was to investigate the relationships between the design and outcomes of CAL and the educational beliefs and practices of the teachers who developed and used such technology. Analyzing the relationship patterns between beliefs and practices helped to understand teachers' feelings. Teachers were unwilling to change their teaching. The resistance to the adoption of technology could be because some teachers did not know how to identify with the instructions given by academic staff developers. Older teachers felt unprepared to use such approaches in the classroom if they were inexperienced with technology. Some teachers were unable to properly employ the CAL to their particular classrooms. These findings showed that such teachers'

negative attitudes might carelessly be transmitted to the students and be the deciding factor in the efficiency of new teaching practices.

In another study, Lei (2009) examined preservice teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and technology experiences and expertise at a large northeastern university in the United States. As those teachers were seen as digital native, Lei attempted to identify the strengths and weaknesses in their knowledge and skills about technologies, and to determine what type of training was required for preparing them to incorporate technologies in their future classrooms. The author collected data through a technology survey administered when the participants had little classroom teaching experience. Lei found that the participants were proficient with basic technologies but were not familiar with more advanced technologies, they lacked the experiences to use Web 2.0 technologies with potential for classroom applications, their use of Web 2.0 technologies was limited to mainly social-networking services, only a few of them had spent most of their time on learning-related activities, and most of them had spent most of their time on social-communication activities.

The study revealed that those digital-native preservice teachers had strong positive beliefs in technologies, yet moderate confidence and reserved attitudes in using them. The results suggested that, growing up with technology, digital natives as preservice teachers were only savvy with basic technologies and social-communication technologies. Moreover, digital natives may not be as tech savvy as expected, even though they had grown up with technologies. In other words, "having been born in the digital age does not necessarily mean that they are natural natives" (p. 93). Such teachers need preparation to help them learn more advanced technologies, classroom technologies,

and assistive technologies. More importantly, they need preparation to help them make the connections between technology and teaching and to help them make the transition from being digital-native students to being digital-native teachers.

In a Vietnamese university, Dang (2012) studied the factors that prevented academic faculty from using ICT in foreign language teaching. Dang aimed to understand the characteristics of ICT non-users by collecting data from a survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The study also explored the role of other variables such as perceived usefulness, individual agency, ICT training, institutional support, and attitudes towards ICT uptake in foreign language teaching. Results suggested that language teachers did not use ICT because of a combination of institutional level factors and teacher level factors. Institutional level factors included the lack of ICT guidelines, lack of training, lack of specific leadership support, and technical problems, while the teacher level factors included effort expectancy, costs-time-workloads, limited access to ICT facilities, computer skills, and negative impacts of ICT on students. Those teachers had not caught up with rapid technological development, were unmotivated, and had negative attitudes towards technology use in language teaching.

Another study from Turkey was conducted by Hismanoglu (2012) to investigate the perceptions of 85 prospective EFL teachers, in the distance higher education system, towards ICT implementation in EFL teaching. Hismanoglu developed a questionnaire based on “an extensive literature review of instruments utilized in different educational backgrounds” (p. 188) to gather data about teachers’ perceptions of ICT integration. Then, he interviewed 22 respondents throughout three weeks. The researcher found that most respondents expressed negative perceptions of ICT integration due to the nature of

the training, inadequate delivery of the training, and their confidence in using ICT in their future teaching. Future teachers specified some complications in integrating ICT in EFL teaching, including the lack of exposure to lessons fully-designed with ICT tools, lack of opportunities to try ICT, the need to practice in a technology laboratory, lack of educational technology teachers, an exam-driven educational system, and exam-oriented study habits to learn only what is to be tested. Such a study provides fundamental reasons for the teachers' negative perceptions of using WbTs in EFL context, which is similar to the context of my study.

On the whole, these studies show negative perceptions based on different WbTs, participants, experiences, and locations. I believe that research locations, contexts, and participants influence the findings of any study about perceptions. Perception is a complex matter that is problematic in describing and predicting without recognizing affective, attitudinal, and pedagogical factors, as I discuss throughout this dissertation. Within the above definitions of perception, reviewed studies, and discussed factors, the research questions and data-collection methods in my current study explore the factors that influence the participants' perceptions of using WbTs to create a blended learning environment that promote learning of English.

### **Perceptions of Blended Learning**

My current study explores how blended learning environments in Blackboard could bring a range of WbTs to create more effective English learning outside the classroom. Blended learning has more advantages than face-to-face classroom instruction alone, as shown in Chapter 1. Blended learning attempts to bridge the gap between a

teacher-centered approach and a learner-centered approach; the latter relies on online learning and makes learning more effective.

This current study investigates blended learning environments to explore how such environments provide additional opportunities to learn English outside the EFL classroom. I discuss the lack of opportunities to use English beyond the classroom as one of the major problems in the Saudi EFL context, particularly at the tertiary level. My argument states that blended learning platforms and LMSs, such as Blackboard, have the potential to resolve the problem and compensate by using WbTs.

Although the use of blended learning has grown in English teaching and learning in past years, research on blending in-class instruction with after-class web-based learning for EFL is still lacking (Chena, 2015). In addition, little attention has been paid to EFL teachers' and learners' experiences and perceptions, particularly those who are in higher education.

Among recent research, Chena (2015) studied EFL students' perceptions of the blended learning approach by focusing on speaking skills. The researcher integrated an asynchronous computer-mediated voice forum into an English conversation course at the tertiary level in Taiwan. Twenty-three students minoring in English were asked to complete in-class speaking exercises and eight after-class speaking tasks on a bi-weekly basis. Teachers gave feedback in the classroom. Data were collected from an open-ended questionnaire, a blended learning satisfaction questionnaire, and semi-structured interviews. The study found that the students had a favorable attitude towards the blended learning experience. In addition, students perceived their overall oral proficiency expanded and their language improved in pronunciation and lexical accuracy due to

integrating asynchronous computer-mediated voice forums into their English conversation course. Blended speaking instruction was also valued for reinforcing their learning with after-class speaking tasks, and for connecting to the knowledge they had learned in the class.

Such a supportive blended English learning environment influences students' perceptions, learning, and acceptance of the blended learning approach. In addition, a supportive blended learning environment influences students' satisfaction and engagement in learning activities (Lin, 2009; Zhao & Yuan, 2010). Lin (2009) designed a year-long case study to examine students' views of blended learning. Blackboard was incorporated as a LMS into the online portion of the coursework at a small Northeastern college in the United States. Fifty-one candidates enrolled in two hybrid courses, taught by the researcher during the fall of 2006 and the spring of 2007, participated in the study. Both courses were 300-level professional skills courses in an elementary teacher education program. Blackboard helped to make the two courses "paperless" by uploading all relevant documents, such as lecture notes and PowerPoint slides. The instructor archived all the discussion boards in PDF format and posted the documents in Blackboard for further reference and discussion in Face-to-face classrooms.

The researcher collected quantitative and qualitative data from surveys designed for the purposes of the study. Results indicated that most students expressed positive views, but some had negative experiences. Results also indicated that some students face challenges, such as lack of technology skills and lack of internet access, that might interfere with their learning and negatively impact student attitudes towards learning.



**Blended learning in Saudi Arabia.** The Saudi higher education started using blended learning as a means of improving quality and capability of its institutions (Alebaikan, 2010). While blended learning is still a new trend in many educational institutions there, some studies about perceptions of using blended learning in general exist, such as Alebaikan (2010), Alenezi (2012), and Al-Qahtani (2013). In the Saudi EFL context, blending in-class learning with after-class web-based learning is rare in literature. Studies discuss pure online learning, web-based learning, e-learning, CALL, or technology-based learning in EFL classroom such as Alahmadi (2011), Almuqayteeb (2009) Alnujaidi (2008), and Al-Shammari (2007). Some studies focus on specific technology such as mobile technology (Jaradat, 2014) and video technology (Hamdan, 2015) while other focus on a particular skill such as reading (Al-Jarf, 2007) or writing (Montasser, 2014).

Alebaikan's (2010) study was among the first studies that identified Saudi students' and teachers' perceptions of the advantages, challenges, and future of blended learning. The study focused on the female population at one of the leading Saudi universities. (I mentioned earlier that Saudi education follows a gender-segregated system.) The findings clarified how most Saudi higher education students might perceive blended learning in this current decade. Alebaikan (2010) found that participants perceived blended learning as a potential alternative to other successful learning experiences in Saudi Arabia. Most participants appreciated the flexibility that blended learning courses offered them. This research discussed some factors that influence the implementation of blended learning in Saudi education. In addition, it provided insights and strategies to face the challenges of applying blended learning in that context.

Such findings are supported by Al-Qahtani (2013) who investigated the male students' perceptions of three methods in terms of students' achievement: e-learning, blended learning, and classroom learning. He randomly identified two experimental groups together with a control group from Umm Al-Qura University in Saudi Arabia. Pre-test and post-achievement tests were applied to assess students' achievement in these groups. The results showed a statistically significant difference among the three methods in terms of students' achievement. Students did better using and favored the blended learning method. No significant difference was found between the e-learning and traditional learning groups in terms of students' achievement.

Likewise, Alenezi (2012) examined teachers' perceptions of blended learning based on age, gender, education level, nationality, and teaching experiences. In two Saudi universities, a survey questionnaire was used to collect the data. Findings showed a positive perception of blended learning by faculty members who believed that blended learning is a tool that enhances learning. In detail, different components of identity made some difference their perceptions. Females' perceptions were more positive than those of males. Teachers under 44 had a "stronger perception" of blended learning than teachers over the age of 45. Teachers with less teaching experience had a "stronger perception" than those who had been teaching for more than ten years. Finally, nationality also influenced the positive perceptions of non-Saudi teachers.

### **Literature Gap**

From my review of the literature, I believe that: (a) most literature about web-based learning and blended learning environments originates from non-Saudi learning institutions because the emergence of blended learning in Saudi education is still

considered new; (b) most studies were quantitative-based designs; (c) most researchers focused on a single technology, CALL application, or social networking service such as Facebook; (d) most researchers focused on a single skill or ability to learn English such as reading or speaking; and (e) most studies showed positive perceptions of integrating technologies in a language-learning context.

The first four points above show a gap in the literature about using web-based learning platforms and blended learning in the Saudi EFL context. My study aims to fill this gap by qualitatively exploring the uses of these WbTs to promote learning English in this context. It focuses neither on a particular skill of English nor on a particular technological application or device. It seeks any possible use of these technologies to improve any ability or skill to learn English outside the classroom. In other words, the study looks for multiple purposes by using multimodal technologies by teachers and learners simultaneously. I do not limit my examination to one or two technologies, including Blackboard itself as the only LMS technology used at SSU.

Regarding the last point about positive perceptions of integrating technologies in a language-learning context, this study aims to go beyond such affective perceptions by looking at data taken from experiences and practices of EFL teachers and learners in the blended learning environments. Such data include participants' perceptions in relation to immediate sensory experiences of WbTs, to EFL teaching and learning, to their views of themselves as learners or teachers, to how they perceive in the changes in these environments, and to how they think about these environments. These perceptual data also contain the differences in participants' perceptions, responses, thoughts, needs, and interests. Although affective factors are important in human development and in learning

(Mahn & John-Steiner, 2002), I attempt to determine both if EFL teachers take steps to incorporate these WbTs and also if EFL learners are ready to use online resources in learning of English. I aim to determine whether integrating some WbTs in a curriculum might support different skills at the same time, whether it could create a social environment for learning English in authentic activities, and whether it may scaffold EFL learners to use English in collaborative learning environments.

Investigating perceptions in this current study is one of its main goals. My second and third sub-questions ask about EFL teachers' and students' perceptions of using WbTs, including Blackboard, to support learning English outside the classroom. My study aims to go deeper than the focus of those studies that I review above. I attempt to investigate how to benefit from technologies, online materials, and virtual resources to promote EFL learners' use of English outside the classroom after the adoption of a blended learning platform at SSU. In addition, I focus on describing their experiences and perceptions of how to use web-based materials to support language learning outside the classroom, how learners use English in different situations away from the classroom, and how teachers and learners perceive their uses of WbTs in language learning outside Saudi educational institutions.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter reviews literature relevant to the use of WbTs and the blended learning environment in language education. It theoretically frames this study based on the concepts of SCT related to language learning and teaching, including social context, authentic language input, ZPD, teachers' assistance, collaboration, students' support of each other, students' interaction, and their participation in EFL learning. I discuss these

concepts and support them by reviewing some related studies from different learning contexts and backgrounds. These studies show how WbTs play a role in developing the learning environment, teaching approaches, learning strategies, and instructional contents. Based on SCT, literature shows the importance of learning environments, students' surroundings, and online settings in providing learning opportunities, exposing learners to English in real-life situations, enabling students' participation in unlimited learning practices, and changing their views about learning situations and teaching approaches. In brief, learning environment is an essential and determining factor in the learning process and mental development (Vygotsky, 1978).

I define perception as the process in which people experience, select, organize, respond to, and interpret information from a situation around them in a unique way. This definition shows what I mean by perception, how I use it in this study, and why I connect it to SCT. In SCT, social experiences and interaction within learning environments formulate teachers' and students' perceptions and vice versa (Covey, 1989; Vygotsky, 1994). Using this definition to review literature guides me to determine how WbTs may influence teachers' and students' perceptions and also determine the factors behind this influence such as personality, experience, motivation, confidence, and affective factors (Gardner & Lambert, 1972).

A review of the literature on using WbTs in language teaching and learning and on teachers' and students' perceptions of using blended learning environments reveals many themes: the importance of the social interaction, collaborative learning, and authentic use of English as the main requirement in language learning; the ability of WbTs to support these requirements; the unlimited learning opportunities in online

settings; the need of exposing EFL learners to English in web-based learning activities; the capabilities of EFL teachers to empower students' participation in plentiful learning practices; and the fact that the environment might influence how teachers and learners think, what they think about, their mental development, and their relationship with that environment (Vygotsky, 1978).

This existence review also sheds light upon the educational features and affective factors in using WbTs to support language learning and teaching. WbTs usage is increasing among teachers and learners as well as their contact and exposure to WbTs; resulting in positive perceptions of using them. Current literature suggests that it is not appropriate simply to assume that using WbTs would create supportive learning environments or effective teaching. Using WbTs requires changes in teachers' and students' roles and perceptions. Research evidence also indicates that students and teachers face some obstacles in using WbTs, such as lack of time and training.

### **Chapter 3**

This chapter starts with restating the problem and purpose of the study and reviewing research questions. Next, it moves to discussing the study's research design, including the research methodology, researcher's role, research setting, and participants' sample. This chapter also describes the detailed research procedures I followed, starting with ethical considerations, how to collect and analyze data, and providing a rationale for using those procedures.

#### **Restatement of the Research Problem**

The main goal of this study was to determine whether WbTs, applications, and related learning activities help EFL teachers to promote learning English outside the classroom after the adoption of Blackboard as a learning platform at SSU. I was interested in exploring whether the adoption of Blackboard helped EFL teachers to promote learners' use of English outside the classroom. Discovering if EFL teachers use Blackboard to distribute different multimedia content and authentic language activities (Szendeffy, 2008) was one of my interests. In addition, this study aimed to learn about EFL teachers' and learners' perceptions of using WbTs to support learning in this Saudi EFL context. Learning about their perceptions helps to share their experiences of using these technologies to learn English outside the classroom after Blackboard was applied at SSU. Achieving these goals assists to improve teaching approaches in the Saudi EFL context in the 21st century. It also helps to empower students to participate in and take advantage of the widespread presence of English in online settings outside the school.

### **Research Questions**

This study attempted to answer this main question: How does the adoption of Blackboard in this university help teachers provide web-based opportunities and employ online resources to support students' English learning outside the classroom? In addition, three sub-questions were asked:

- How is Blackboard used in the EFL context at this university? Do these uses support English learning outside the classroom? If so, how?
- What are the teachers' perceptions of their use of web-based technologies, including Blackboard, to support English learning outside the classroom?
- What are the students' perceptions of their use of web-based technologies, including Blackboard, to support English learning outside the classroom?

### **Research Design**

This study attempted to describe the teaching processes and learning practices in technology-based environments outside the EFL classrooms, after SSU's adoption of Blackboard as a LMS. This research topic and its goals required a review of EFL teachers' techniques at SSU to promote language learning outside the classroom, how they used WbTs to encourage learners to use English beyond the classroom, and how they engaged their learners in their teaching approaches, as well as a review of how learners used these technologies in their learning, how they learned English outside the classroom, and how they viewed these uses in their learning.

This study also discussed teachers' and students' perceptions of these uses. I attempted to obtain details from them about their experiences and practices because little is known about the Saudi EFL context in general (Alahmadi, 2011), and in particular



about promoting EFL in blended learning setting as introduced to Saudi universities in the past few years (see Chapter 2). Such a context required a descriptive study that explores its nature and paves the way for more studies. Therefore, I selected a qualitative research design to help me conduct this study. The qualitative research design was appropriate for collecting and analyzing data to answer my research questions. This design enabled me to understand what those EFL teachers and learners contributed to this study by their uses, experiences, and perceptions of using WbTs in learning and teaching of English.

### **Qualitative Research Design**

Qualitative research is a way to explore and understand the meaning that individuals or groups attribute to a problem, a situation, or an experience (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research is “an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there” (Patton, 2002, p. 49). Qualitative research involves developing questions and procedures; collecting data in the participants’ setting; analyzing data inductively, based on particular themes; and interpreting the meaning of the data (Creswell, 2007). In qualitative research, “researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 5).

Qualitative research exists in various designs and can be organized in varied forms, although the procedures for all qualitative research design mainly follow an inductive and an interpretive process (Merriam, 2009). The interpretive process of qualitative research helps the researchers to reduce the complexity of a situation by fully

understanding the research problems, the type of data they need, and the way they should analyze data (Creswell, 2007). Because I needed to generate meaning from the data collected and from the views of participants in this study, I used “basic qualitative research” as my research design, a design that is also described as a “generic” and “interpretive” qualitative study (Merriam, 2009, p. 22). This design helped me to interpret the meaning I obtained and the data I gathered to answer my research questions.

Merriam (2009) stated that the basic qualitative research study is used by researchers who are “interested in (1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences. The overall purpose is to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences” (p. 23). This design is particularly well suited to understand effective educational processes using WbTs and blended learning environments, such as to uncover uses, strategies, techniques, experiences, and practices of Saudi EFL teachers and learners at SSU as well as to understand their perception of these uses and experiences. An interpretive qualitative study focuses on interpreting and describing a social construction of meaning in a natural setting.

The basic qualitative research design enabled me to find answers to my research questions and to understand the participants’ responses and thoughts about their experiences of language learning in WbTs and in online settings. I was interested in understanding how those teachers and learners used WbTs in their education practices to promote learning of English outside the classroom. My understanding relied on their interpretations of their experiences and of how they made sense of these experiences, as well as their perceptions of these uses and experiences. This design helped me to describe

how and why EFL teachers promote the learners' uses of English outside the classroom and how and why EFL teachers use different online materials.

Moreover, I used this design to understand how EFL students interpret their experiences in these virtual resources and online learning environments. This design included an inductive strategy in which I was able to collect data from questionnaires, interviews, written reflections, and my notes. In addition, this design assisted me to describe some uses of WbTs and online applications in the Saudi EFL context and to interpret EFL students' perspectives about their uses of English in these virtual activities and online contexts. Finally, I believe that this design with research questions guided me to provide descriptive and significant data in this study.

**Research design rationale.** In addition to what I explain above about basic qualitative research design, I used this design because I, as a researcher, favored an inductive style and a focus on individual meaning to conduct this study (Creswell, 2007). I used this design to address the three points that Merriam (2009) discussed above. These points led me to describe not only the EFL teachers' and learners' perceptions but also their interpretations of their experiences in web-based environments, virtual activities, and blended learning. Therefore, I looked for their expressions, views, perceptions, and responses to my questions in their own words. Such focus enabled me to compare, categorize, and analyze the data in a meaningful way. This is not possible with quantitative approaches in which participants are forced to choose from given responses.

This research design was appropriate based on my research goals, focuses, and questions. This design reflected my personal interests and experiences as an EFL learner and teacher who attempted to improve EFL teaching and learning by using WbTs in

blended learning environments. Such a design supported my way of looking at research by following an inductive style in which I focus on understanding individual's responses, experiences, explanations, and perceptions of the environment. I attempt to generate meaning from these items about my research topic through an interpretation process after rendering the complexity of a situation (Creswell, 2007).

In the basic qualitative research design, participants' perceptions of using WbTs might emerge as part of the study findings—although learning about their perceptions was among the goals of the study. In this study, basic qualitative research design was the applicable research design to conduct open-ended questionnaires, to interview participants individually, and to collect reflective answers to follow-up questions. In addition to evoking meaningful responses and interpretations, other reasons to select basic qualitative research design are:

- My study setting and sample were new to the literature, particularly students. Many researchers applied quantitative research designs in similar settings, while some recent studies followed mixed-method research designs.
- My research topic required exploratory research and review with many details, because little research has been conducted.
- It was a flexible methodology that enabled me to add, change, or organize my interview questions as I progressed, because my methods of data collection and analysis were “recursive and dynamic” (Merriam, 2009, p. 169).

### **Researcher's Roles**

This section discusses my background and experience that are related to this dissertation study. I am a bilingual person who speaks Arabic as a native language and

English as a second language. I started learning EFL formally in a classroom in intermediate school. Later, I had opportunities to learn it naturally in native English speaking countries, in the UK, Australia, and the United States respectively. I have been exposed to English in the settings of both ESL and EFL. I have been using English in traditional learning settings as well as in fully online learning and blended learning settings. In Saudi Arabia, I am an EFL teacher with more than 15 years of experience. I have been learning and teaching English for more than 25 years. Therefore, my learning experience and teaching background provided me with a comprehensive perspective to conduct this study. I am familiar with the needs, challenges, solutions, learning styles, and teaching approaches in the Saudi EFL context.

In this interpretive study about using WbTs and online learning resources to support EFL learning and teaching in Saudi Arabia, I relied on my experiences of learning and teaching of English. I looked at the English language from the roles of a learner, a teacher, a bilingual, and a researcher. I played different positions in this study, namely as insider researcher and outsider researcher (Maxwell, 2005). As an outsider researcher who had a pre-existing knowledge of the research context and was familiar with the research setting and participants (Creswell, 2007; Merriam 2009), I examined the impact of Blackboard, WbTs, and blended learning environments on EFL teaching and learning in the Saudi context. I brought my values, assumptions, expectations, and experiences into this study (Merriam, 2009). They might have influence my understanding, thoughts, and interpretations because I was the primary instrument of data collection and analysis as well as study organization and the interpretation of participants' responses (Merriam, 2009). In other words, I organized this study, reviewed

the literature, and completed all procedures based on my insights, ideas, expectation, and assumptions.

As previously discussed about my preferences, goals, focuses, experiences, and interests, I attempted to answer my research questions by interpreting collected data from my participants in order to achieve the purpose of this study. Therefore, I recognized that my own background and interests influenced my interpretation. I acknowledge how my interpretation grew from my personal experiences. My learning experience, teaching background, research interests, and personal skills presented biases in this study. My goals were to answer the research questions, to interpret them, and to suggest solutions based on teaching techniques. To achieve my goals in this study, I had to reduce the subjectivity by linking this study to existing research, by collecting data extensively, by drawing on multiple sources of information, and by using a holistic analysis of the entire study, as I discuss each one below.

### **Research Setting**

The setting of this research was in the male campus of SSU in Saudi Arabia. Saudi universities provide high school graduates with a preparatory year program (PYP). The PYP introduces an intensive English program that focuses on the English language skills necessary for higher education. This study was conducted in a PYP in the English Department at SSU. SSU is an academic institution that supports research and professionally accommodates researchers. According to the SSU website (2015), SSU encourages conducting applied research to localize and develop technology for educational purposes and to solve problems affecting that research. SSU staff and faculty

strive to create a safe and dynamic learning environment that encourages the development of individual potential.

As a leading country in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia employs many foreigners in a diversity of professions. In addition, SSU is located in a city that has a large number of those foreigners. This city has many educational institutions and business establishments that rely on employees from all over the world. Those employees are from either NES countries such as Australia, Canada, South Africa, the UK, and the United States or NNES countries such as Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, and the Philippines. Such diverse workforces use English as lingua franca in their communication in their workplaces and in public places in this city. Therefore, Saudis can use English to communicate with those foreigners. This scenario shows that the participants, students in particular, of this study had opportunities to use English to communicate with such foreigners outside the classroom. Such access to English in daily life gives this city an advantage because many cities in Saudi Arabia do not have many English-speaking foreigners.

### **Research Participants**

The participants of this study were EFL teachers and students of PYP at SSU during the fall semester of 2015. The English department had 26 EFL teachers who worked at or graduated from international universities in Australia, Canada, and South Africa, the UK, and the United States. The SSU website (2015) included demographic information about the EFL teachers. For example, the age of EFL teachers ranged from 34 to 58, and their teaching experiences ranged from five to 26 years. They have taught ESL and/or EFL in several countries. About half of them came to SSU from NES

countries such as Canada, South Africa, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, the UK, and the United States. The other half were from NNES countries such as India, the Philippines, Pakistan, or Arabic speaking countries. This diversity brought diverse cultural backgrounds, teaching experiences, and learning strategies to the EFL context at SSU.

On the other hand, most EFL students graduated from high school last academic year, 2014-2015, while a few graduated the year before (SSU website, 2015). Saudi universities give priority in accepting the high-school graduates of the same year they graduate. If students do not get a university-admission directly after they graduate from high school, they will have fewer opportunities to be admitted the next year. They were 18-22 years old based on admission requirements of SSU. They were full-time students. SSU accepted 600 students in its PYP at the beginning of the 2015-2016 academic year. They were distributed into 20 classes, 30 students in each. Their level of English proficiency ranged from beginning learners to intermediate learners. They attended the PYP to improve their English skills and to achieve the required scores for attending undergraduate studies, in which English was used as the primary medium of instruction. By the second half of the fall semester of 2015 when I conducted this study, the number of students in each class dropped to 24-26 students as a result of withdrawals.

Such students' access to English inside the classroom inspired me to explore their access to English outside the classroom after the adoption of Blackboard. I neither plan to seek more demographic information other than what I discuss throughout this study based on what is available in the website of SSU, nor plan to use these demographic data as variables to discuss related findings and to answer my research questions. Therefore, I decided not to ask about these data in my study in order to focus on responses about uses,



experiences, and perceptions, and to make participants comfortable so that they would share their experiences. I planned to have up to 100 participants (20 teachers and 80 students) respond to the questionnaires. From those 100 participants, my interviews were supposed to be conducted with up to 16 of them (4 teachers and 12 students). Their participation was voluntary, as explained in the consent form for questionnaires, invitation letter, and consent form for the interview. In the next sections, I explain in detail the actual number of participants and the procedures of the methodology used in this study.

### **Ethical Considerations**

I obtained permission from the Chair of the English Department at SSU to collect data. I received all needed permissions, such as from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at UNM, to conduct this study. This required, among others, an explanation of how to recruit the participants, how to identify them, and how to protect their privacy. I ensured that the confidentiality of the participants and organizations was protected. Files, research-related equipment, and consent forms were physically stored in a locked cabinet at my home office while digital documents and recordings were saved in my personal, password-protected laptop. I collected their informed consent prior to conducting my study. Participants were reminded continually that their participation was voluntary. I confirmed that one could withdraw at any time with no effects and it would not be considered as a part of any course or requirement at SSU.

To protect and ensure privacy and the security of all participants' personal information, I did not use their names or identities in this study. I gave each teacher a pseudonym and each student a study number. Each pseudonym and study number

included all data for its participant. In other words, each participant's data, response, written reflections, and recordings were linked to his pseudonym or study number. Their responses, recorded interviews, and transcriptions were saved in a protected folder in my password-locked laptop.

### **Data Collection**

This study implemented an inductive and an interpretive process in which I attempted to generate meaning—related to my study focuses and questions—by exploring the uses of WbTs, interpreting collected data, explaining participants' perceptions, and discussing the findings. The study focused on answering the research questions from the participants' experiences and views (Merriam, 2009). Doing so required various methods to collect data about how WbTs were used after the adaption of Blackboard at SSU, how EFL teachers at SSU promoted language learning in web-based settings outside the classroom, how EFL students learned in this digital environment, and how teachers and students perceived these tools as well as their usage.

I used English as the language of communication in collecting my data. I confirmed that the selected students for interviews understand all details in the consent form although I used some Arabic equivalent words to explain some terminologies in the consent when it was necessary. I explain the language limitations in Chapter 5. In the next section, I briefly introduce my data-collection methods before giving particular details in the following sections.

**Questionnaire.** I started collecting data by using two questionnaires for teachers (Appendices A and B) and two for learners (Appendices C and D). These questionnaires included open-ended and closed-ended questions as well as statements with a five-point

scale, as shown below. The closed-ended questions asked about the basics of online learning settings and communities and included objective items written as multiple choices. These questions asked the participants to select the choices from a stated list of options. On the other hand, open-ended questions allowed the participants to provide comprehensive responses and meaningful information (Patton, 2002). Participants replied with their own responses. These different types of questions and statements attempted to elicit relevant information about participants' uses of WbTs to learn English outside the classroom. Using a mixture of open-ended and closed-ended questions was beneficial in obtaining their responses by which I explored many concerns about my research topic.

Formulating questionnaires involved a clear understanding of the research problem and research questions. This understanding helped to build relevant questions. My questionnaires were reviewed by two graduate students at UNM to identify any confusion or ambiguity. Then, I tested my questionnaires with graduate students at other American universities. I administered my questionnaires online through Google Documents. I attached an informed consent form to each questionnaire. My questionnaires were the initial stage of data collection in this study. This stage paved the way to interview EFL teachers and students.

**Interview.** An interview was my second data collection method. In the interview, I engaged with participants in a conversation focused on the research questions (DeMarrais, 2004). The interview was a conversation with both a plan and a goal (Dexter, 1970). The plan was to ask questions from the interview guide (Appendix E), which was built earlier, and to ask the same questions used in the questionnaires if necessary to clarify their responses. On the other hand, the goal was to obtain a detailed

description about the participants' thoughts, practices, experiences, and perceptions of using WbTs and activities at SSU to promote the learners' use of English outside the classroom. Based on my definition of perception in Chapter 2, I interviewed EFL teachers and students, as I explain below, and asked them to describe their uses, selections, and experiences of WbTs and online resources to learn English outside the classroom as well as to reflect on their responses to the questionnaires and to their thoughts about blended learning environments.

I conducted a semi-structured interview that allowed me to ask a mix of questions (Merriam, 2009). Semi-structured interviews created a safe environment in which the EFL teachers and students felt comfortable to talk, express, and share their stories and experiences about promoting learning of English in web-based technological settings. In addition, they were able to ask for clarifications if there was ambiguity in my questions. I arranged with my interviewees the time to meet in a quiet office reserved for me at SSU. In addition, I had the flexibility to ask, re-ask, explain, order, and follow up my questions. Each teacher's interview lasted approximately 60 minutes, while the student's interview lasted 30 minutes or less.

**Follow-up Question.** My third data collection method was in written form. I used a follow-up technique to ask short-answer questions. This technique determined if some questions needed more investigation, if there were interesting themes or concerns, if there were unclear responses, or if some participants were willing to share more ideas and information. Moreover, I used this technique to send some follow-up short-answer questions to interviewees after I read all responses. I compared teachers' responses and

students' responses to extract other questions. These questions elicited more information about their responses from the interviews.

I also called this collection method a written reflection or reflective writing. This technique of data collection is widely used in the literature; the researchers use it in different ways and under different names, such as written answers, journals, diaries, records, memos, and logs. Delany (1994) called this written method a silent interview in which the writers express themselves in written words. Delany (1994) considered any written method of collecting data as a written interview because it resembles an oral interview but elicits information differently.

This was a general description of the data collection methods used in my study in addition to my notes as a researcher. In actual research procedures, I started with teachers' questionnaires and interviews before moving to students' questionnaires and interviews. Then, I sent my follow-up questions to the teachers and students (see figure 3.1). The next section explains in chronological order the details of my data collection.

## **Data Collection Procedures**

### **Teachers' Questionnaires**

My first data collection method was a questionnaire. I used teachers' questionnaires to obtain general information about the learning context at SSU and to look for specific data related to my research questions. I used teachers' questionnaires to initially learn about their insights, viewpoints, perceptions, teaching approaches, and pedagogical objectives. In addition, I used the first questionnaire to eliminate participants for the second teachers' questionnaire and, then, interview. I created two questionnaires for EFL teachers (Appendices A and B), as I discuss in the following section.

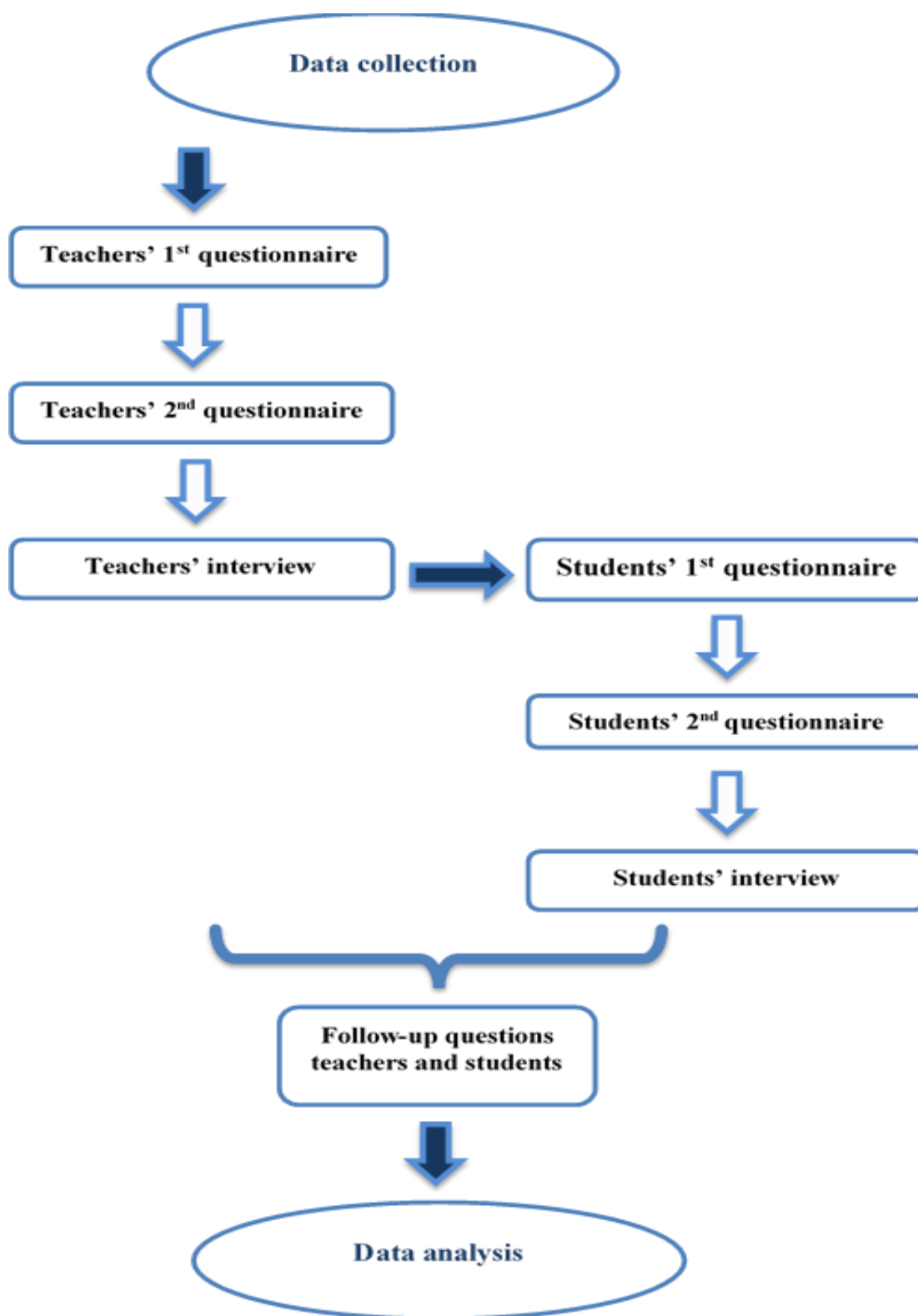


Figure 3.1 *Data collection procedures.*

**Initial questionnaire.** My initial questionnaire (Appendix A) attempted to discover how EFL teachers use supporting technologies and online resources in their teaching with Blackboard at SSU. I asked about their specific uses of Blackboard, such as uploading web-based files, adding learning links, and communicating with students. The focus was on learning how they used Blackboard in general, and in particular how to support their students to learn English outside the classroom. In addition, I included 19 statements asking about their uses, feelings about the blended learning environments, and perceptions of using WbTs to teach English. EFL teachers were requested to respond to these statements in a five-point scale: strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree, strongly disagree. Such a scale allowed them to select different possible responses and give some indication of strength of feeling. These statements were the initial investigation of their perceptions of using technologies and Blackboard in their teaching.

I sent an electronic link to my questionnaire to the chair of the English Department at SSU, asking him to forward it to EFL teachers. The questionnaire started with a consent form. I planned to wait a week to receive up to 20 responses to this initial questionnaire. However, 20 responses arrived within five days. I accepted the responses and deactivated the questionnaire's link. That means five teachers among the 26 EFL teachers at SSU did not participate in my initial questionnaire. The department chair (personal communication, October 29, 2015) told me that four veteran teachers, who were in their late 50s, were not interested in utilizing Blackboard in their courses. Some teachers did not provide their names in the initial questionnaire. Some did not answer open-ended questions. Others did not select an option of the five-scale statements: strongly agree, agree, neither, disagree, strongly disagree.

Their responses to this questionnaire, though, enabled me to find four teachers who (a) had various experiences using web-based technologies other than Blackboard, (b) used different online resources in their teaching with Blackboard, and (c) provided several uses for and benefits to their students outside the classroom. The responses of these four teachers showed that they were the most frequent users of WbTs and most tech savvy among the teachers. The four teachers were: Abdo, Noor, Taher, and Zaki—names are replaced by pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality.

**Second questionnaire.** With those four teachers, I moved to the second teachers' questionnaire (Appendix B), which asked about the specific uses, benefits, perceptions, and objectives of using WbTs in their language teaching. I sent to them the link to my questionnaire, asking how they might support their students to use English for communication beyond the classroom. Using 11 statements enabled me to learn more about their perceptions of using these technologies in this Saudi EFL context. To respond to these statements, I also used a five-point scale: always, often, sometimes, rarely, never. My goal of using the scale was to obtain meaningful information about their experiences and perceptions of promoting language learning outside the classroom. Within three days, the four teachers responded to this questionnaire. This led me to move forward to interview those four EFL teachers.

### **Teachers' Interview**

I invited those four EFL teachers to take part in interviews. They all agreed. I met with them individually to discuss their participation, answer their questions, and make sure they understood the consent form. Three teachers allowed me to auto-record their interviews while the fourth teacher did not. Each one signed the consent form and



scheduled a meeting. I met with two teachers only one time for about 60 minutes each and twice with the third and fourth teachers because both gave many details about their uses, experiences, and perceptions. The latter two teachers agreed to my request to meet me again. The two interview meetings with the third teacher took 114 minutes; with the fourth teacher, 103 minutes (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1

*Teachers' Interview, Recording, and Length*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Recording</b>	<b>Length</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Abdo	Yes	60 min	11/11/15	
Noor	Yes	60 min	11/10/15	
Taher	Yes	60 + 54 min	11/09/15 + 11/12/15	Two
Zaki	No	60 + 43 min	11/09/15 + 11/11/15	Two

In these meetings, I asked the teachers about their specific uses and experiences of using WbTs and applications as well as online materials and resources in their teaching of English. My interviews were opportunities to extend the questionnaires and to obtain additional data. I asked open-ended questions about their feelings after using WbTs, including Blackboard. Learning about their feelings helped me to understand their perceptions of using WbTs and how their perceptions influenced their teaching approaches in this blended learning environment. Moreover, one of my goals to conduct the interview after the questionnaire was to dig deeper into specific responses. Responses to questionnaires are always general answers that invite more investigation.

Interviews enabled me to determine what their experiences with WbTs were like and to collect more details about their uses, opinions, beliefs, perceptions, and preferences. In addition, I asked about creating a collaborative learning setting and using authentic learning activities. One of my questions asked about their role in promoting

learning of English in web-based learning settings and encouraging their learners' participation outside the classroom. Moreover, I attempted to learn about how teachers benefited from the existing online English video, websites, forums, free courses, learning communities, chat groups, and other web-based applications in their teaching of English at SSU.

I asked about their teaching objectives of using these technologies as well as about their perceptions in using them in the Saudi EFL context. I asked if they had found any difference in learners' interests or willingness to use English and to communicate in English. I asked about the difference between face-to-face learning and blended learning. We talked about their understanding of using technologies, their opinions of Blackboard integration at SSU, their thoughts about the innovations and benefits that WbTs might bring to education, and their experience of and concerns about engaging in these technologies in EFL teaching. I learned that the four teachers were among those teachers who used Blackboard in the spring of 2015, as a pilot project at SSU. This note proved that my criteria to select those teachers from their responses to my first questionnaire were effective.

In these interviews, the questions were based upon an interview guide that was developed throughout the study and questionnaires' responses (Appendix E). There were many similarities among their answers because most of my questions were the same with each teacher. The four teachers extensively described the difficulties they had using WbTs when they answered my questions about their uses and practices. In other words, I noticed that their answers focused on the challenges they faced. While I did not expect to

find many responses about difficulties or challenges, I discuss them specifically within my themes because they existed in my data.

I audio-recorded the interviews and took notes about each interview, particularly with Zaki who did not allow auto-recording. At the end of the meetings, I informed each teacher that I would email him, asking some follow-up questions. Finally, I informed them that I needed to learn about their students' uses, experiences, and perceptions.

### **Students' Questionnaires**

I also used a questionnaire as my first data collection method with EFL students at SSU. I arranged with those four teachers to send the questionnaires to their students. Each teacher had two classes with a different number of students, as you can see in Table 3.2. I created two questionnaires described below. I used separate electronic links to each teacher administrated by Google Documents; these links permitted me to determine which class the student came from. I hoped to gain 20 participating students per each teacher of those four teachers. So, the plan was to have up to 80 student responses to each questionnaire. I selected that number to make room for accepting any number of responses fewer than 80. Most of the reviewed studies in Chapter 2 reported receiving responses from about half of the target participations. Therefore, about 40 responses were expected to provide me with different perspectives and answers to my questions.

Table 3.2

*Teachers' Classes and Students*

<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Classes</b>	<b>Students</b>
Abdo	2	49
Noor	2	49
Taher	2	50
Zaki	2	51
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>199</b>

After sending the links to the students, I planned to wait a week to receive their responses to each questionnaire. Students were asked to provide their names and emails for classifying purposes; some did, and some did not. Each student was given a study number that is built on and linked to his teacher's pseudonym. For example, if the teacher's pseudonym was John, his students were John's student 1-1, John's student 1-2, John's student 1-3, and so on. I used Microsoft Word to create a table that connected the students' names to their study numbers. I linked the data of each student to his study number. I used a table for each teacher and his students.

In the responses to the second questionnaire, I used the same study numbers with the identified students, those who wrote their names. However, some students did not provide their names. I was not able to determine if they participated in the first questionnaire. I could not link them to the previous study numbers because it was not known if students who participated in the first questionnaire responded to the second. In other words, some of the participants in the second questionnaire might have been newcomers to the study. Therefore, I assigned each new student a new study number different from the numbers used in the first questionnaire, i.e., John's student 2-1, John's student 2-2, and so on. Appendix F includes a list of each teacher's students.

On the other hand, knowing students' names was not essential to the validity of the study. All students were adults who graduated from secondary schools and joined the PYP at SSU. Furthermore, students' responses to these two questionnaires were linked in the analysis process to produce a complete picture of their uses and practices and to generate findings that answer research questions. In the next section, I explain how I used these two students' questionnaires and my goal and focus for each questionnaire.

**First questionnaire.** I used the first questionnaire (Appendix C) to learn about the ways students used English in their daily lives on one hand and about the ways they used WbTs, applications, and social networking services on the other hand. I asked about their uses of English in general. I attempted to understand how they used English and how they enhanced their use of English. My questions asked about how they learned English, about the reasons for their use of English in online settings, about the importance of English in their lives, and about the activities in which they used English.

Moreover, I included 11 statements asking about their general uses, feelings, and perceptions of WbTs including Blackboard. Students were requested to respond to these statements using a five-point scale that contained strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree, strongly disagree (Appendix C). I received 32 responses in a week. This number was lower than I expected because the links were sent to eight classes that included 199 students (see Table 3.2). Table 3.3 shows the number of students per each teacher. Later, I discovered that students were busy studying for the second mid-term examinations the next week. However, the responses I did receive gave me the required ideas about how WbTs and online applications helped them to use English and which websites or virtual activities they are interested in. The answers showed me how their uses of English in online contexts might help them with their English outside the school.

**Second questionnaire.** The students' second questionnaire (Appendix D) focused more on their uses and perceptions of WbTs to support their learning of English. I included open-ended questions about learning English outside the classroom, about opportunities to speak in English, and about their teachers' uses of online resources. In addition, I included statements about the benefits and importance of using these

technologies in their language learning and what they might obtain from their teachers' promotion of their participation in online activities outside the classroom. Other statements looked for the frequency of using some specific WbTs, such as YouTube, Facebook, and Skype. Students were able to select from always, often, sometimes, rarely, or never.

Table 3.3

*Number of Responded Students per each Teacher in First Students' Questionnaire*

<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Students Number</b>
Abdo	6
Noor	5
Taher	9
Zaki	12
Total	32

I sent the second questionnaire links to students on the last day of the mid-term examinations to attempt to assure good participation. Fifty-four responses were received within the specified time limit. Table 3.4 shows the number of students per each teacher. I deactivated the link and looked at these responses, particularly responses to open-ended questions.

My plan was to look at their responses to both questionnaires for determining who (a) provided more information about using technologies in their lives, (b) used English outside the classroom, (c) used English often in different online applications, (d) perceived some benefits from their uses of technologies in their learning of English outside the classroom, and (e) expressed a desire or interest to improve their learning of English through the use of technologies and online resources. Based on students' responses, I invited some of them to participate in interviews.

Table 3.4

*Number of Responded Students per each Teacher in Second Students' Questionnaire*

<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Number of students</b>
Abdo	15
Noor	8
Taher	12
Zaki	19
Total	54

### **Students' Interview**

These criteria guided me in specifying 12 students (three students in each teacher's class) to conduct the interview after excluding students who did not provide their contact information. I was able to confirm that four of those 12 students participated in both questionnaires (Table 3.5). Some students might have participated in both questionnaires but they did not provide names. I sent invitation letters to those 12 students asking for their participation in the interview. Ten students accepted my invitation and agreed to participate in the interview. However, one of them did not come to the initial meeting and withdrew. I held an individual meeting with each one of those nine students to explain the consent procedures, as I did with teachers. Three of them did not allow me to record their interviews, and four students said that they preferred not to use an audio-recording device in their interview. Therefore, I audio-recorded only two students' interviews and continuously kept notes during the other students' interviews. I was able to write most of their answers, and most were short.

In my initial meetings, some students discussed the possibility of conducting the interview in Arabic. They said their preference for using Arabic was because they needed to express themselves in a complete manner. I explained that the questions were not hard

to answer and informed them that most of my questions would be similar to those in the questionnaire. I told them that they could prepare some ideas and answers to talk about in the interview. In addition, I confirmed that their participation was not considered part of any course or requirement at SSU. My interviews with those nine students ranged from 23 minutes to about 30 minutes.

Table 3.5

*Invited Students and Accepted Interviewees*

<b>Study Number</b>	<b>Accepted</b>	<b>Recording</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Abdo's student 1-3	Yes		Participated in both questionnaires
Abdo's student 1-4	Yes		Participated in both questionnaires
Abdo's student 1-5			Participated in both questionnaires
Noor's student 2-1	Yes, but		Withdrew
Noor's student 2-3	Yes		
Noor's student 2-5			
Taher's student 1-1	Yes		Participated in both questionnaires
Taher's student 1-4	Yes		
Taher's student 2-5	Yes	Yes	
Zaki's student 1-8	Yes		
Zaki's student 1-9	Yes		
Zaki's student 2-13	Yes	Yes	

I interviewed these students to learn more about the ways they use WbTs and applications to learn English outside the classroom. I asked a variety of questions based on the interview guide (Appendix E) and their previous responses to questionnaires. I conversed with them about their opinions and the benefits of web-based learning settings. In addition, I looked for their perspectives on how their teachers helped them and on how such help improved their learning of English. I asked each student about his teachers' responses and practices. For example, if a teacher told me that he utilized YouTube in his



teaching, I asked his students about the benefits of using YouTube in their English learning.

In my interviews, students' answers to my questions were often similar and short. However, some students shared additional, and different stories, experiences, practices, and uses of English in their lives outside the classroom. In many times, I asked for clarifications, used follow-up techniques, and probed to obtain more details. My follow-up questions to students about their teachers' practices provided insights from different perspectives in order to learn English outside the classroom.

These questions provided me with some details to match their answers with their teachers' practice, and enabled me to triangulate my data. For example, I matched the answers about the Quizlet website that was used by Noor and his students, and I asked Taher's students about his use of Google Drive as a collaborative tool. Such questions could reveal possible discrepancies in their uses, views, understandings, and perceptions. In classrooms, teachers could use some activities that are perceived by students as useless activities and vice versa. Investigating the understanding and perception of EFL teachers as well as EFL students was essential in my interviews to obtain greater understanding of the blended EFL context in the Saudi higher education. At the end of each interview, I informed each student that I might email him some follow-up questions.

### **Follow-up Questions**

My third data collection method was to send follow-up questions to the interviewees. I used this follow-up method to collect written data and reflective writing. I wrote some follow-up questions while I was transcribing the interviews and reading my notes. Then, I sent an email to each interviewee to request his thoughts on the interview

and to answer different questions for each one based on his responses to the interview questions. My goal was to provide them with time to think and to reflect on certain responses or/and questions they had been asked in the interview.

I included instructions and prompts to guide them to focus on the objectives of these questions. For example, I repeated my interview questions in different ways or by using simple words to encourage them to elaborate. I revised my follow-up questions several times. The interviewees had opportunities to add or comment on whatever they wanted. They had the time and opportunity to compensate for whatever they remembered after the interview or any difficulty they faced during the interview. I sent follow-up questions to 13 interviewees (four teachers and nine students). I waited for their responses before I began intensively analyzing data, about a month after sending the follow-up emails. I received responses from six interviewees (two teachers and four students). Teachers who sent their answers were Taher and Zaki; students who responded to my follow-up questions were Abdo's student 1-4, Taher's student 2-5, Zaki's student 1-9, and Zaki's student 2-13 (Table 3.6).

Table 3.6

*Students' Responses to Follow-up Questions*

<b>Study Number</b>	<b>Sent</b>	<b>Answered</b>	<b>Received</b>
Abdo's student 1-3	12/17/15	No	
Abdo's student 1-4	12/17/15	Yes	12/24/15
Noor's student 2-3	12/17/15	No	
Taher's student 1-1	12/17/15	No	
Taher's student 1-4	12/17/15	No	
Taher's student 2-5	12/17/15	Yes	12/29/15
Zaki's student 1-8	12/17/15	No	
Zaki's student 1-9	12/17/15	Yes	01/14/16
Zaki's student 2-13	12/17/15	Yes	12/20/15

### **Researcher's Notes**

My own researcher's notes were also a way of collecting data in this qualitative study. It is common to find that qualitative researchers write reflective notes and memos to themselves (Merriam, 2009). Therefore, I wrote comments and memos about what I learned and found as the study progressed. During data collection, I continuously took notes about responses to my questionnaires and about each interview, particularly with the participants who did not allow auto-recording. I ended with more notes about students' responses and meetings than about teachers' responses and meetings.

During my visit to the study location, I kept a journal to include details about using Blackboard and WbTs in the English Department that I obtained from my meetings and conversations with my colleagues. In my meetings with the department chair, he told me about some of his observations and expectations. For example, about two thirds of the teachers reported that they had increased the use of technologies and the Internet after adopting Blackboard. Many teachers communicated with students using different online services more often than in the previous academic year. In their monthly meeting, more teachers said they expected to use technologies and online resources more frequently in the next academic year. Also at their meetings, they discussed their use of Blackboard features, forums, Listserve, and similar applications. The chair reported that, prior to Blackboard, five teachers were "tech savvy" and used technologies to develop online tasks and offered tutoring sessions for other teachers at the beginning of the academic year to help them use Blackboard. Regarding students, the chair said they showed "high interest" in using Blackboard (the department chair, personal communication, October 29, 2015).

Reviewing my notes, journals, and memos taught me how to prepare for the next steps and helped me to learn from previous steps, as suggested by Merriam (2009). During data analysis, I wrote many notes about my collected data and continued to review and add to them. These notes were used as an important data analysis strategy. They guided me frequently in data reduction, data display and organization, and writing up the findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I coded my notes and discussed them with participants' responses.

I briefly introduce repeated notes here, which show that most participants (a) had great interest in using Blackboard and WbTs to learn English in this Saudi EFL context, (b) recognized the importance of English in today's digital environment, (c) and were eager to try any new supportive learning techniques. They considered the adoption of Blackboard as a huge paradigm shift. Zaki, one of the four teachers, said they were "thirsty to this good move" (personal communication, December 9, 2015). They also compared new blended learning settings with the traditional settings in their responses, although the comparison was not requested. They talked about the role of different WbTs in their teaching and learning of English.

Students discussed trends and objectives of using English. They did not discuss short-term goals such as passing PYP or earning high marks. They talked about their future, starting with studying fields of specialization at SSU. They recognized the role of English in their lives. Some students mentioned websites or applications I did not expect. For example, many students said they used the Snapchat application. I did not include this application in my list of WbTs in the questionnaires. In addition, my data did not include clear details about using Snapchat or other new applications mentioned by

students. I attempted to ask follow-up questions about them, but I ended up with little new information because students either did not respond or provided brief details.

### **Data Analysis**

I planned to use descriptive and interpretive analysis in this study, although I included some numerical analysis because some of the survey responses were quantitative in nature. My data analysis began during the data collection process, with the responses to my first questionnaire. Because qualitative research is “not linear, step-by-step process” (Merriam, 2009, p. 165), my data analysis was “recursive and dynamic” (Merriam, 2009, p. 169). I analyzed the data as they were collected by organizing them and writing notes. I began the analysis process when I received teachers’ responses to their initial questionnaire. At that moment, for example, I read teachers’ answers, cleaned them, organized them in my tables, gave a pseudonym to each teacher, looked at their data several times, wrote personal memos, compared their answers, added comments, applied my criteria to choose interviewees, made decisions, and saved the data in my personal-protected laptop.

I repeated this process after I collected any data. Some data required additional procedures, such as interview data that needed transcription and revision. Therefore, I was engaged in an eclectic process by using several procedures simultaneously (Merriam, 2009). As the data were flowing to my tables, I thought about how to divide them into some related themes, such as *Internet learning activities*, *new teaching tasks*, and *learning with enjoyment*.

This does not mean that I completed my data analysis when the data collection had been completed. In fact, data analysis became more intensive as my data were

completely collected. After data had been collected, I continued transcribing the audio-recorded interviews manually, reviewing the documents, considering my own notes, and organizing the responses in files based on the participants and the data resources: questionnaires, interview, follow-up questions, and researcher's notes.

Data analysis was done manually. I did not use any software applications. The analysis included transcribing of interviews and data cleaning, managing, organizing, coding, categorizing, and discussing. I used the walls of my home office, dozens of printed papers, colored highlights, three tables, clips, stickers, and scissors.

For several reasons, I chose not to use software applications. First, I examined the manuals of some of the software and found that they did not replace my roles, as researcher and analyst (Merriam, 2009) because the software is only a support. Using software applications would have required a great deal of additional work that would have been of limited benefit ultimately.

Second, using the software would have required time to learn and to understand its application to any study. Then, more time would have been necessary to analyze the data of my study using that software. I chose to use this time for my analysis and write-up process. I did not have time to learn extra applications at that point.

Third, I did not have large body of data. I compiled all responses from different resources in one Microsoft Word document. I organized them chronologically in paragraphs and sections by sources: teachers' initial questionnaire: second questionnaire: interviews: before the students' initial questionnaire: second questionnaire: interviews: and finally the answers of teachers and students to my follow-up questions.

Fourth, I wanted to be close to my data and to become carefully familiar with them. I preferred to directly handle all procedures in my research by knowing how to collect, manage, organize, clean, code, reduce, connect, analyze, and discuss my collect data. The software might not help me to do that because it “causes an uncomfortable distance between the researcher and his data” (Creswell, 2007, p. 165).

**Transcribing interview.** In the transcription process, I was interested in the participants’ uses, ideas, reflections, perceptions, and experiences with WbTs in blended learning environments. Therefore, I did not focus on exact utterances, such as pauses and laughs, or word-by-word transcription, although these linguistic details could reflect their feelings or perceptions in several ways. I did not use verbatim transcription because this study did not examine language elements and contents like those of discourse analysis studies. The method I used is called a “denaturalized transcription” (Oliver, Serovich, & Mason, 2005); it helped me to transcribe the points relevant to my study and research questions, and it gave me the flexibility to determine and summarize the data that would be useful in data analysis.

I saved all transcripts of the interviews in Word Microsoft documents and linked each interviewee’s data either to his pseudonym or study number. The total length of my interviews was 579 minutes (337 minutes from teachers and 242 from students). Teachers’ interview recordings were 234 minutes (Table 3.1) while students’ interview recordings were 56 minutes (30 minutes with TS 2-5 and 26 minutes with ZS 2-13). Table 3.7 shows the length of students’ interviews. Transcribing these recording interviews produced 38 type-written pages.

Table 3.7

*Students' Interview, Recording, and Length*

<b>Study Number</b>	<b>Interview Date</b>	<b>Recording</b>	<b>Length</b>
Abdo's student 1-3	12/06/15		25 min
Abdo's student 1-4	12/02/15		23 min
Noor's student 2-3	12/07/15		25 min
Taher's student 1-1	12/03/15		28 min
Taher's student 1-4	12/06/15		27 min
Taher's student 2-5	12/03/15	Yes	30 min
Zaki's student 1-8	12/02/15		28 min
Zaki's student 1-9	12/06/15		30 min
Zaki's student 2-13	12/07/15	Yes	26 min

Then, I read the responses and transcriptions to record my first impressions. I re-read the data carefully several times to gain a general idea of them. I immersed myself in the data until I became familiar with them. I wrote notes in the margins, highlighted important information, looked for repeated words or concepts, and commented on the data. I employed several techniques to do these activities, such as using *Find feature* in Microsoft Word to find main terms and repeated concepts and to compare notes. Doing this enabled me to make sense of the data and to reflect on their overall meaning. Then, I re-read the data to find all relevant details, important statements, responses of surprise, and information to that found in the literature.

**Coding process.** I began coding my collected data in an “open coding” process that allowed me to identify any useful segment of data and to categorize them into different labeled codes (Merriam, 2009). In this expansive manner process, I initially included many notes, responses that surprised me, and comments related to my study focuses, goals, and questions. There were many codes of repeated words, important responses, highlighted phrases, literature-related concepts, and personal notes. I coded all



responses received or transcribed that might help to address my research questions. At the beginning, I organized them into two sides: teachers' data and students' data. Then, I found many repetitions in data. I deeply investigated the codes and found many were similar, except for a few codes; some of which were unique to the teachers' responses and others that were unique to the students' responses. Because my research goals and questions did not focus on comparison, I compiled both sides together and deleted repetition. This process produced 48 codes guided by participants' words and responses. Those codes were words or short phrases.

In these codes, many practices, similarities, advantages, and challenges reported by participants became apparent. I defined these codes with other labels in order to go beyond participants' words and responses. In other words, their responses included many details and various experiences that I labeled with different codes. These initial codes enabled me to identify similarities in the data and to connect some labels together. Therefore, I combined similarities and connections. I reclassified my codes several times and followed an iterative, progressive, and circular process in my analysis (Merriam, 2009). This process reduced the number of codes to 33. Revealed were main ideas and patterns in data.

At that time, I was immersed in data because the more steps I took, the more sense the data made. I felt that those steps increased my understanding of the participants' responses, experiences, uses, perceptions, and my understanding of how WbTs influenced the EFL learning environments. I was able to recognize the connections among their interpretations and the ways the participants behaved in the blended learning environments. I used those codes to build possible subthemes and themes. I carefully

grouped my codes. After several attempts, I created 10 subthemes and five themes. The iterative process with those details reduced them to 28 codes, nine subthemes, and five themes.

Then, I compared my raw data with my codes and themes. I revised all labels and discovered that some labels were ambiguous. Therefore, I selected more precise labels for several codes. Paying attention to every code and its meaning, I realized that labels and codes should be clear and specific. I carefully re-categorized my codes several times in order to connect those labels into themes. What I was doing every time was following a new process of data analysis (Merriam, 2009). In other words, I followed the same steps explained above. Every time I repeated the steps, I improved my analysis and understanding. These incremental improvements occurred over many days of analysis—conceptualizing data by reading them, deciding which were more important, revising the raw data, and creating subthemes and themes. I developed a list of 18 descriptive codes in longer phrases that described changes that resulted from using Blackboard in the EFL context.

Such a limited number of codes produced manageable data. I felt as if I were able to talk to data. I created subthemes and themes using these 18 descriptive codes. I thought about possible connections that resulted from my study. Then, I used subthemes to describe the changes and created themes to describe the results. Using WbTs led to changes in EFL teaching and learning at SSU. Analyzing these changes generated five main results that were coded and identified as themes. Therefore, changes and results were the logical connections between my codes, subthemes, and themes. Such connections helped me to make sense of the findings of this study.

I grouped these descriptive codes to identify 10 subthemes and five themes: (a) increasing online learning resources, (b) authentic uses of English, (c) participants' affective factors, (d) teachers' roles in blended learning, and (e) students' autonomy (Table 3.8).

I tested those subthemes and themes many times to limit confusion and inconsistency. I attempted to create a comprehensive structure of themes to combine teachers' and students' responses. I did not want to divide themes between teachers and students because my focus was on describing the integrated uses, resources, and perceptions that supported the learning of English outside the classroom. From the beginning, I immersed myself in analyzing my data—not in comparisons. While a number of themes emerged, I continued to wonder if additional themes might be hidden in the data.

Table 3. 8

*Themes and Subthemes*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Subthemes</b>
Increasing online learning resources	Using several features of WbTs Supporting English lessons by online links and videos
Authentic uses of English	Communication in English Various language learning activities
Participants' affective factors	Comfort Raising motivation Growing confidence
Teachers' roles in blended learning	Facilitating rather than lecturing Dealing with students' difficulties and individual differences
Students' autonomy	Continuing their learning of English

With the above details in mind, I carefully developed the themes by analyzing participants' words, iteratively coding their responses, thoughtfully relating them to theoretical frameworks, and simultaneously linking them with my research notes and experiences. Therefore, themes emerged inductively and were identified within the data. They were data driven (Merriam, 2009). In other words, my study goals and data collection procedures allowed the data to speak for themselves and to generate these themes. In addition, I named the themes within the theoretical framework of this study, SCT, which was used as a foundation for the analysis process. Looking at my themes in Table 3.8 shows that they were developed from SCT concepts including collaboration, authenticity, teachers' support, students' interaction, learning environment, and ZPD.

### **Validity and Reliability**

I followed "a model of research trustworthiness" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to produce valid knowledge and reliable data. The reliability of my data was validated by a number of procedures, such as detailed description of research design, triangulation, and peer debriefing (Brenner, 2006). I explain below how these strategies helped me to produce credible knowledge of interpretations and to confirm the accuracy of the study's data collection (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In addition, I carefully selected my interviewees—as my first practical step toward credibility in qualitative research—and explained in detail my research procedures. I also clearly described research background, the research problem, research questions, statement of purpose, study design, location, participants, and procedures. These were practical steps toward validating the reliability of this study.

I employed the strategy of peer review or peer debriefing to review my work and to suggest changes (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009) by asking two postgraduate students studying at UNM to review the questionnaires, interview questions, and data analysis. They also examined the interviews' transcription as well as the extraction of findings to validate the analysis (Brenner, 2006). My questionnaires were tested with some graduate students at other American universities. These steps produced credible knowledge of interpretations and emphasized the uniqueness of my research context.

Triangulation was my primary strategy to use multiple research approaches and methods to collect and analyze data. I triangulated my findings by using multiple research approaches to collect and analyze data to produce a cohesive understanding of the investigation. I scrutinized the reliability of my collected qualitative data through the triangulation of data sources (Figure 3.2), which ensured its trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I used questionnaires, interviews, and follow-up questions to gather data from different participants, both teachers and students, at different times. In data analysis, I followed several stages of coding to immerse myself in the data. Triangulation enabled me to produce a cohesive understanding of data; to overcome the bias, weakness, and unproductiveness of a single method; to enhance the consistency of different data sources; to describe and synthesize the themes emerged from coding process; and to improve the consistency of findings.

In coding process, several times in different steps, I consulted other doctoral students about my coding process and thematic findings. I established the credibility of data analysis throughout the entire process of coding, analyzing, and structuring the findings by using a peer review or peer examination technique (Merriam, 2009). I shared

the thematic findings with the co-chairs of my dissertation committee. Many discussions about the coding process and analytic findings followed. They provided me with new perspectives for looking at my data and offered suggestions to improve my analysis and to strengthen my findings. I made many small changes based on their contributions.

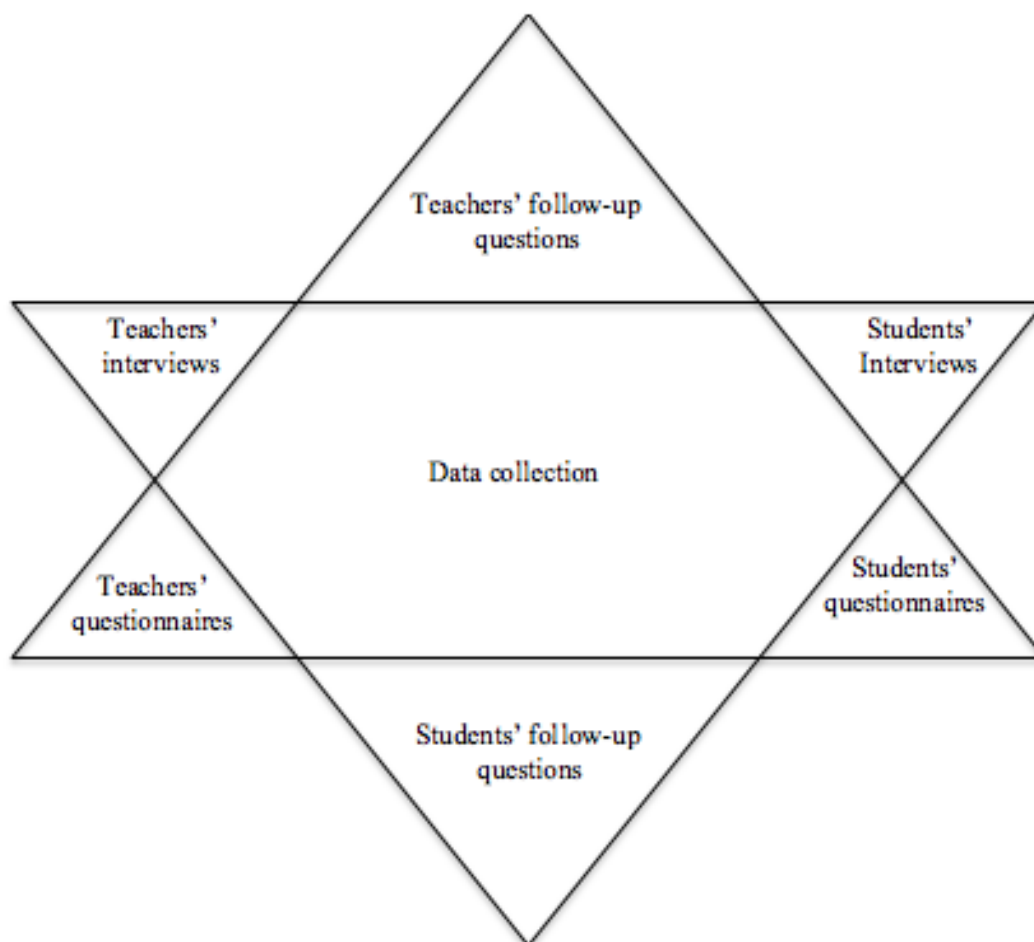


Figure 3.2 *Triangulation of data sources*

I assured the neutrality of the findings that were shaped by the participants and not by my bias or interest. The findings came from participants' self-report of their uses, practices, experiences, attitudes, perceptions, and feelings of using WbTs in EFL learning

and teaching. Their responses and reflections about the research topic and context created the facts of this study. The participants used their own words to describe the learning environments and to answer my open-ended questions in the questionnaire, interview, and follow-up emails. They replied to my questions based on their understanding of using WbTs, of integrating them in an EFL curriculum, and of perceiving the innovations and benefits that WbTs bring to their blended learning environments. Therefore, I confirmed that the findings reflected the understandings and experiences from participants, rather than my preferences. This strategy is what Merriam (2009) called “researcher’s position” or “reflexivity” in which I explain my roles, biases, dispositions, and assumptions at the beginning of this chapter.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter explains the research design and methods that I used in this study to determine whether WbTs, applications, and related learning activities helped EFL teachers to promote learners’ uses of English outside the classroom after the adoption of Blackboard as a learning platform at SSU. I discuss how I used basic qualitative research design to interpret teachers’ and students’ data that I gathered from questionnaires, interviews, and follow-up questions. This design allowed me to describe participants’ uses, perceptions, and experiences of using WbTs to promote English learning outside the classroom. Such interpretive and descriptive processes provided findings that answer my research questions, as I discuss in Chapter 4. This methodology chapter also describes my researcher’s roles, ethical considerations I followed in this study, research setting, and participants. It provides detailed description of the procedures I used to collect and analyze data.

## **Chapter 4**

This chapter describes the findings of this study. The purposes of the study were to (a) determine whether WbTs, software applications, and learning activities helped EFL teachers to promote learning of English outside the classroom after the adoption of Blackboard as a learning platform at SSU, and (b) explore EFL teachers' and learners' perceptions of using these WbTs to learn English. In Chapter 3, I described the research setting and participants. The scope of my study was limited in terms of sample, location, and the number of participants. This chapter answers the research questions according to the themes I found through the analysis of the collected data. I support these themes with evidence from participants' responses and connect them to the theoretical framework and related literature. I frequently use what Merriam (2009) described as "shorter, multiple pieces of evidence" (p. 254) to interpret and analyze my findings. I also use these pieces of evidence to support each other or explain themselves (Patton, 2002).

### **Thematic Findings**

In the previous chapter, I introduced the themes that emerged from the participants' responses to my initial questionnaires, second questionnaires, interviews, follow-up questions, as well as my research notes. Participants' responses, stories, experiences, and uses of WbTs were accumulated, coded, and analyzed to determine the findings of this study. The interviewed teachers were Abdo, Noor, Taher, Zaki; nine students participated in interviews. I use an abbreviation for each student (see Table 4.1).

The findings are related to SSU's adoption of Blackboard as a blended learning environment. That adoption was a fundamental change that created subsequent changes. From these changes, I identified five themes resulting from participants' experiences and



perceptions of the adoption of Blackboard. Themes are: (a) increasing online learning resources, (b) authentic uses of English, (c) participants' affective factors, (d) teachers' roles in blended learning, and (e) students' autonomy. These themes emerged from participants' transcribed interviews and their written responses to questionnaires or emails. I use the term *personal communication* to include these sources of participants' data. These thematic findings answer my research questions; they suggest that using WbTs, including Blackboard, facilitated many changes in the EFL environments at SSU.

Table 4.1

*Students' Abbreviations*

<b>Study Number</b>	<b>Abbreviations</b>
Abdo's student 1-3	AS 1-3
Abdo's student 1-4	AS 1-4
Noor's student 2-3	NS 2-3
Taher's student 1-1	TS 1-1
Taher's student 1-4	TS 1-4
Taher's student 2-5	TS 2-5
Zaki's student 1-8	ZS 1-8
Zaki's student 1-9	ZS 1-9
Zaki's student 2-13	ZS 2-13

### **Answers to Research Questions**

This section delivers answers in detail and discusses findings qualitatively with evidence from participants' responses to questionnaires and interviews. I follow a different descriptive structure to answer each question.

For the main research question, I use the five themes as headings to discuss the answer from different perspectives. In my sub-questions, I integrate the themes to answer each sub-question with no headings or divisions. Each sub-question receives answers from different themes, but with a particular focus on two to three specific themes. For

example, I answer the last sub-question about students' perception based mainly on findings of two themes: participants' affective factors and students' autonomy. However, some details might involve other themes indirectly, such as increasing online learning resources, authentic uses of English, or teachers' roles in blended learning.

### **Main Research Question**

The main research question was: *How does the adoption of Blackboard at SSU help teachers provide web-based opportunities and employ online resources to support students' English learning outside the classroom?* Answers to this question come from the findings of the five themes.

**Theme 1: increasing online learning resources.** This is the first theme emerged from participants' responses as a reaction to SSU's adoption of Blackboard. It shows that the adoption of Blackboard helped EFL teachers and students to increase their use of online learning resources in their English learning environments. This theme is discussed through two subthemes: (a) using several features of WbTs (b) and supporting English lessons through online links and videos. In these subthemes, I show how teachers used more features in different WbTs, such as the discussion forum in Blackboard, to support their lessons with many online links and videos.

**Subtheme 1.1: using several features of WbTs.** This subtheme shows that the use of features in WbTs increased. In Blackboard particularly, the features *discussion forum* and *direct messages* were used among teachers and students. The four teachers reported using the forum and messages in various ways. For example, Zaki expressed his experiences using the forum by telling me that he usually met his students "for one hour each week via the Blackboard's discussion board." He asked comprehension questions

about his lessons to check whether they understood what he taught them. At the beginning of the semester, only some students answered his questions. Then, he showed that the number of respondents increased by saying “more students answered in the next weeks” (Zaki, personal communication, November 9, 2015).

This means that his students’ use of the discussion forum increased from week to week. Zaki specified a weekly hour, in addition to his class time, to discuss his lessons with students and check their understanding. Such continuity of using the discussion forum in Blackboard helped him to engage more and more students in those weekly discussions. He also told me that, “Some students commented on their classmates’ answers” or asked for clarifications. That means the discussion stayed active after his meeting with his students. By the time of his interview, before the end of the semester, Zaki reported that his students “now participate in all discussions.” In addition, he showed that his recent comprehension questions, posted on Blackboard, received more answers from his students.

Based on Zaki’s description, I believe that Zaki’s online discussions were attractive and most of his students were active participants. This technique helped Zaki to follow up his lessons and to communicate with his students beyond the classroom. He was able to provide more details about his lessons. His students had opportunities to reflect on the lesson, to support each other, and to solve their difficulties. In addition, Zaki informed me that he attempted to discuss additional topics, such as campus life and students’ future studies, rather than asking only about his lessons. Those topics also received interest and discussion from his students. The discussion forum also created opportunities for students to share their ideas, experiences, and interests.

Other teachers used the forum in different ways for various purposes. For instance, Taher had another experience to encourage his students' use of the discussion forum when he started using it. His students were not active in responding to his posts on Blackboard because it was new to them and they did not recognize its benefits. Therefore, he gave extra points to students who participated on Blackboard, as the following excerpt from interview shows:

Researcher: How do you encourage them?

Taher: I asked students to interact in the forum by putting some grades on that.

Researcher: Grades. Good. Why?

Taher: It was new.

Researcher: What did you ask them to do?

Taher: Students are asked to post any English topics or comments plus they can upload any useful English materials.

Researcher: How is the forum now?

Taher: Now, many students are active. We have comprehensive English resources.

Researcher: Do you use them? Are they effective?

Taher: Not all. Some. You know, after we have many links. I informed students to add only topics related to the lesson or the unit and then students participate and interact and comment on them. (Taher, personal communication, November 12, 2015)

Taher's words show how he encouraged his students to post in the discussion forum and to add useful links. At the beginning, he did not use the forum to follow up his lessons as Zaki did. Taher used the forum as a useful tool to have additional resources for students. Taher attempted to enable his students to search for whatever helps them in their learning of English. As a teacher, he had his own method for employing Blackboard or other features in his teaching approaches. He used grades as rewards at the beginning of this new system until he had active students who posted many materials in the forum. When he felt that his students' use of the forum increased and they were familiar with uploading and searching processes, he stopped grading them on using the forum. He also directed them to discuss their lessons and to add related links.

The majority of students reported that their teachers used some features of WbTs in that semester such as the discussion forum in Blackboard. Students stated that they discussed their lessons and shared ideas about classes in the forum. In Blackboard's discussion forum, students asked questions, commented on answers, and received quick feedback from the teacher.

For example, NS 2-3 (personal communication, December 7, 2015) said that "everyone must participate in the Blackboard so everyone can learn." This student confirmed that other students participated in the discussions and could learn from their participation. Moreover, AS 1-3 found that the Blackboard system helped him "a lot and enabled students to discuss together or with their teacher and to share thoughts about their assignments." He believed that Blackboard helped his "teachers to teach easier" (personal communication, December 6, 2015). He meant that his teachers taught better and used many online resources rather than regular classroom materials.

Students told me that Blackboard enabled them to “understand their lessons” and to “find answers for their questions” before the following class. They reported that they did not need to wait until the next class if they had inquiries. Students also informed me that their use of different features in WbTs, including features of Blackboard, increased compared to the beginning of the semester. AS 1-3 said that it was not easy to use Blackboard at the beginning “but after you get used to it then it’s easy.” TS 1-4 found writing with others a difficult task because he never wrote in that way. He thought that not all students were “writing in the Blackboard forum” since the beginning (personal communication, December 6, 2015).

The findings of this subtheme demonstrate that features such as the discussion forum played a role in improving the learning environments. In this Saudi EFL context, these features provided many learning activities that promoted many uses of English outside the classroom, as suggested by (Jin & Deifell, 2013). The discussion forum was a learning environment in which students reported learning with and through others. Students, according to Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001), were engaged in learning activities with other people in that environment and these activities boosted students’ use of English, their language learning, and their exposure to its structure and vocabulary.

Zaki’s and Taher’s guidance in using Blackboard features in this new blended learning environment was effective. Their support for using the forum assisted students to accomplish several goals that, in turns, led to learning English and developing linguistic knowledge (Mitchell & Myles, 2004). According to the concept of ZPD, language learners developed their vocabulary and linguistic skills after they had received a teacher’s assistance to learn English. Students reported that they helped each other when

they discussed the lessons and shared thoughts about their assignments. Such collaboration in this web-based learning environment enabled them to learn English outside the classroom because EFL learners had time and opportunities to interact and collaborate with teachers and peers (Lightbown & Spada, 2006).

The four teachers provided their learners with online learning opportunities to support their learning, to allow their collaboration, and to develop their language. More importantly, students' collaboration and their group work with one another can be as effective as the assistance of the experts in the concept of ZPD (Riazi & Rezaii, 2011; Shehadeh, 2011). In Chapter 2, I describe how ZPD is not limited to the interaction and collaboration interaction between a teacher and a learner but also includes interaction among learners themselves. Lantolf and Appel (1994) stated that interactions and collaborations, like these described here, lead to the highest possible cognitive levels. Students' interaction and collaboration in the discussion forum influenced their knowledge, thoughts, and feelings about these learning activities. Such environments improved their speaking skills and thinking strategies (Vygotsky, 1986), which resulted in developing their linguistic abilities.

***Subtheme 1.2: supporting English lessons by online links and videos.*** This subtheme shows that English lessons were supported by various online resources. In my initial teachers' questionnaire, my seventh question was: how do you use Blackboard to support your students' learning English outside the classroom? Most answers included phrases to illustrate that teachers used Blackboard to give students related website links, exercises, and videos clips. The four teachers used Blackboard to involve other WbTs for supporting their lessons and providing more opportunities for language learning.

The adoption of Blackboard at SSU enabled teachers to use these links as teaching materials that improve their teaching. More specifically, teachers reported using Google Applications—Drive, Documents, Images, and Translator—in addition to their techniques with Blackboard. Moreover, teachers repeated names for different links, online quizzes, PDF files, and social networking services that were used on Blackboard, in the forum, or in their messages with students. For instance, Abdo used Blackboard to support his English lesson by using:

. . . Blackboard to extend my learners' interactions outside the classroom by submitting some questions related to the lesson I explained. Or by submitting some video clips and web sites links about learning English. Or supplementary links to give more explanations about the lessons. (Abdo, personal communication, November 11, 2015)

Abdo used YouTube videos to initiate discussion and conversations with his students. He told me that such videos and links encouraged his students' interaction. He provided an example used in a lesson about effective communication in workplaces by stating:

. . . I sent my students a link to a video clip about miscommunication in the workplace. Then, I posted some questions to be answered after students watch the clip at home. After I received all answers, I opened a discussion about that clip. (Abdo, personal communication, November 11, 2015)

This method assures that students can continue their learning outside the classroom. They can use Blackboard as what Abdo described it, a tool that “enabled students to share their opinions about a topic, lesson, or situation” even when the students



are located in different places. Language students need to use the language in activities other than those the teachers use in the classroom. In addition, Abdo found Blackboard a place to carry out “interactive e-lessons that I am designing by using Storyline and other software available to serve” students learning at their homes.

Noor told me that he often posted humorous videos about learning English. He sent extra activities, links, or videos so that his students could practice on their own time. He described such practices as “extracurricular activities.” In addition, Noor used the Quizlet website as his “most frequent used website with Blackboard technology.” Noor described Quizlet as a “free website that has many study tools for students and teachers.” He used the term *study tools* to mean study activities, tasks, links, quizzes, puzzles, lesson plans, and learning files. He also added that such “study tools work for any curriculum, any user, any teacher, any student, and any country.” He specifically used Quizlet to encourage his students to “listen to the words and sentences, pronounce them, understand their meanings in the Arabic language, and repeat after the reciter as much as they can” (Noor, personal communication, November 10, 2015).

In other words, his students used this website as a tutor who supported them acquire the meaning and pronunciation of the new vocabulary. Noor used this technology to facilitate his students’ learning of the new words in each lesson. He informed me about the benefits of using this website. Instead of spending his teaching time explaining new vocabulary, Noor used Quizlet to “minimize the time allocated to explain difficult words instead of the teacher focuses on listening and speaking skills.” Such uses of Quizlet mediated vocabulary learning, which is considered a difficult process for many language learners. Vocabulary learning was mediated by the option for students to repeat the new

words several times. They were not forced to learn them only once in the classroom, as students do in a regular classroom.

Students' data about this subtheme show that Blackboard was a tool that enhanced their language learning experience by linking them to many online resources. TS 1-4 said, that "Blackboard gave his teacher big opportunities to supply them with useful website and good files." He said that his teacher, Taher, often posted "video recorded lectures, English learning websites, and books." His colleague, TS 2-5 (personal communication, December 3, 2015) reflected about using different websites and applications that gave him "more courses about English language and allowed me to share with another student in the world." He also used uploaded links or YouTube videos "every day to watch English conversations" and "listen to grammar lessons." He added, "I always cover any gaps in my learning in English via YouTube, English lessons, usually in grammar."

These students' uses of website links show that students paid attention to how online resources can help them succeed in learning English. Students recognized the usefulness of such WbTs in their learning of vocabulary, grammar, and skills such as listening and speaking. TS 1-4 illustrated, in his own words, how his teacher used various websites and online files in teaching with Blackboard. TS 2-5 went further, telling how these links improved his language skills, grammar in particular. Fundamentally, they saw Blackboard as the main vehicle that allowed their teachers to connect them with those online learning opportunities.

Students also appreciated how Blackboard tied their English program with "many Internet links". They searched the Internet as a "large school" that includes everything.

Therefore, AS 1-4 (personal communication, December 2, 2015) said that he used the Internet to correct his mistakes and improve his skills. He was talking about the Internet in general but he meant learning resources and supporting links. This idea was repeated in students' first and second questionnaires. For example, TS 1-1 expressed his use of the Internet by saying, "Nowadays, Internet is everything, and everyone can get opportunity even in his free time to learn English."

This subtheme shows that students participated in online learning activities because teachers supported their English lessons by online links and videos. It also shows that students' participation in Quizlet, WbTs, or online links, even if they were "extracurricular activities," as Noor said, connected them to English. This participation also led them to use English more and more so that their language learning occurred as a result of their participation (Ellis, 2003). This is also similar to students' participation in the discussion forum that supported students' language learning, (see subtheme 1.1, above).

Both subthemes show that the adoption of Blackboard helped EFL teachers to support their students' learning of English outside the classroom by providing web-based opportunities, employing online resources, and using several features of WbTs that supported their English lessons. These online activities and WbTs features work as mediation tools in the learning process. The mediation comes from various sources: one of them is from tools and artifacts (Ellis, 2003; Lantolf, 2000) that include such online links, tasks, and technologies, as those reported above. These WbTs also supported students to help each other in their attempts to use English in these activities outside the classroom.

When students repeated words, listened to English, read comments, and wrote their ideas in the forum, they were engaged in a thinking process that mediated their learning. EFL students' participation in the discussion topics, their use of online links, and their engagement with YouTube videos immersed them in those activities. Moreover, such activities exposed them to high input of language by which learners captured and observed the language (Lantolf, 2007). Those activities boosted students' language development outside the classroom by promoting learners' interactions with English, facilitating their acquisition of new vocabulary, and improving their language skills.

This theme, increasing uses of online resources, shows that these resources created supportive blended learning environments that differed from other Saudi EFL environments, namely, regular classroom and public life. While students do not use English frequently in Saudi society outside the educational institutions (Al Shlowiy, 2014; Liton, 2013), these new blended environments provided students with many opportunities to use English in various activities in their daily lives.

These environments introduced practical applications and useful activities outside the classroom in order to support classroom instructions and oral explanations. The four teachers and their students agreed that online activities compensated for limited learning activities in class, loaded "students with a large number of words since they are a vital aspect in language learning," and increased "the amount of English that the students are exposed to." Such increases developed this EFL context and made it a supportive environment that provided many learning opportunities. These increases and activities provide an answer to the main research question; the adoption of Blackboard helped

teachers provide more web-based opportunities and employ more and more online resources to support students' English learning outside the classroom.

**Theme 2: authentic uses of English.** This second theme finds that authentic uses of English existed in online activities, including Blackboard's applications. These authentic uses characterize many changes that followed teachers' implementation of WbTs in their teaching with Blackboard at SSU. Many participants emphasized the importance of using English in different activities and for different skills: listening, speaking, writings, and reading. They also described their use of English in these activities as authentic uses of English. In addition, they reported different opportunities to practice English in authentic discussion, communication, collaboration, and interaction in this blended learning context. I discuss this theme in relation to two subthemes, communication in English and various language-learning activities.

***Subtheme 2.1: communication in English.*** My data show that much communication among teachers and students was in English, either via email, in direct messages in Blackboard, or in the discussion forum. I discuss below how such communications were not available before the adoption of Blackboard. In their traditional face-to-face learning, students reported that their communication with teachers was limited. They communicated only in classrooms or in teachers' offices; but with WbTs, students described more opportunities and settings to use English in their communication.

Teachers used Blackboard tools to communicate with their students for many purposes, such as reviewing important points in every lesson, answering students' questions, and providing more feedback. Noor said, "I use email to interact with my students and they also use it in students' communication" (personal communication,

November 10, 2015). Abdo stated that “the tasks on the discussion board enabled them to communicate with each other” (personal communication, November 11, 2015).

These communication patterns created a contextual and social situation for language learning (Mitchell & Miles, 2004) in which learners participated in meaningful communicative activities with other people (Lantolf, 2004). Students’ communication with teachers and other students enabled them to practice their English and supported their language learning. This is confirmed by Zaki who thought that it was “a good idea to use the discussion board, in English, to give them an opportunity to communicate together, practice English, and express their ideas” (personal communication, November 9, 2015).

Students reported increased communication with each other and with teachers in Blackboard. In students’ responses to the first questionnaire, 16 students of 34 selected the statement that indicated that they used Blackboard to communicate with their classmates. Their communications within Blackboard mostly focused on their English lessons, assignments, and their language difficulties. Blackboard supported them with opportunities to communicate about related lesson-issues beyond the classroom.

TS 1-4 said that the Blackboard helped him to “ask questions, respond to other’s post, and communicate with classmates” (personal communication, December 6, 2015). He used English to conduct those activities generated by his teacher and students about their English lessons. Those activities were also reported by NS 2-3 who said, “We ask questions and respond to each other and communicate. When they post things, we comment and say our thoughts on it” (personal communication, December 7, 2015). The majority of participants, both teachers and students, assured me that their

communications were mainly to check students' understanding, answer their questions, clarify the assignments, and provide more knowledge.

In my interviews with the four teachers, they, all, recommended students use English in all their communication with them or with each other. Teachers reported their desire to encourage students to use English more outside the classroom with the help of available WbTs. To simplify students' use of English, teachers told their students not to worry about grammatical rules or spelling mistakes. Noor expressed this clearly when he described his experience of encouraging students to build a story in English.

Noor:           Once I ask them to share their hidden talents and to give us beauty or fashion tips because they will study different majors and would feel excited to share their experiences and knowledge.

Researcher:   Maybe it is hard to describe their majors. How can you encourage them to participate?

Noor:           The students would participate when I tell them that grammar and spelling don't really matter as they express themselves and share their ideas in simple sentences. (personal communication, November 10, 2015)

This quote shows that teachers attempted to facilitate authentic uses of English in students' communication. The four teachers agreed that students liked to participate in such "informal communication" because teachers appreciated students' communication and ignored their mistakes in their online communication. The teachers found that students' fear of making mistakes often prevented their willingness to communicate.

Therefore, the teachers eliminated that fear by permitting students use English in authentic communication.

Students' responses show that when teachers ignored students' mistakes in online postings, communication became easier and more frequent. ZS 2-13 reported that communicating in Blackboard was very difficult the first time. He was "afraid a little bit because it was the first time for me to share my ideas in English. But the teacher makes it easy for us by not focus on our mistakes or correct them" (personal communication, December 7, 2015). Another student, AS 1-4, described students' strategy for dealing with mistakes by saying, "We started to talk and didn't think of mistakes. We laughed when we made mistakes. All students make mistakes in English; I'm not afraid of mistakes now" (personal communication, December 2, 2015).

In those informal types of communication in Blackboard, students were exposed to English in authentic uses. In other words, those methods of communication exposed students to authentic uses of English beyond the classroom. In online settings, students' participation and communication enable students to use English in an authentic context in different activities, such as email, forums, and conversations. This suggests that it is possible for teachers to create authentic activities in a language-learning setting by using the Internet or technologies (Zong, 2008).

By authentic activities or uses, I mean the use of English in real-life situations or conversational settings rather than in regular academic situations or in formal instructions. I define above that authentic materials are those learning activities that resemble real-life actions (Herrington & Herrington, 2006) in which learners explore, think, and learn about the language, use it, and practice its structure. EFL students are



usually exposed to the formal language in classroom settings, but they lack using English in their social life outside the classroom.

One of the students, ZS 1-9, expressed this by stating that he liked to listen and use “informal words” from “people in streets who talk informally and use idioms which I cannot get in classes” (personal communication, December 6, 2015). AS 1-4 used the Livemocha website to chat and speak with people in English because his teacher, Abdo, always reminded him to speak and chat in English. AS 1-4 said that chatting taught him “the social language more than the academic one,” and he liked “using words and creating sentences in different ways like those of real life than those of writing formal papers” (personal communication, December 2, 2015). He also stated that such communication helped him to learn how to type fast and to use “a lot of shortcut words.” These responses show that students recognized the differences between formal and informal learning settings. They needed to be exposed to more opportunities in informal settings.

***Subtheme 2.2: various language learning activities.*** Findings show that various learning activities, including interactive activities, collaborative activities, multimodal activities, and learning-by-doing activities, were used in Blackboard. Participants reported that these activities helped them achieve several goals, such as practicing their listening, speaking, or writing skills.

Among several WbTs used in Blackboard, the four teachers reported that using YouTube videos was “the most frequent learning material.” They found YouTube provided many learning activities and served various learning outcomes. For instance, teachers described many advantages of using YouTube activities, that were not available

in their face-to-face classrooms, such as materials related to the course, encouraging students to listen to authentic uses of language in various situations, exposing students to native speakers, enhancing their knowledge, repeating any lesson or video, and improving their skills. Students were engaged in an interactive context that increased the learning opportunities to use their English, as a second language (Mitchell & Myles, 2004). These advantages did not exist in most EFL classroom that follow traditional teaching approaches. These advantages provided what Ellis (1993) described as an authentic education that mediated language practice in students' surrounding environments.

Abdo gave an example about using a related-lesson YouTube video to create discussions about those videos. His students use English to reflect on his posted videos and expressed their ideas. His goal of discussing YouTube videos was to encourage authentic conversations of English among his students.

Researcher: Nice. Why do you use discussion?

Abdo: I used such technique to encourage learners to collaborate and communicate with me, peers, and others.

Researcher: What's the goal?

Abdo: My goal was to engage them in authentic uses and conversations of the language.

Researcher: Do you do it always?

Abdo: Authentic materials should be in most of my lessons. To assist students to acquire English and achieve intended tasks as if they face them in real-life situations.

Researcher: Do you remember any example?

Abdo: For example, I explained a lesson to achieve the tasks to make a flight reservation by phone. I submitted a website of YouTube, a video clip about a flight reservation that is an authentic resource to enable students practice English as if they are in real-life situations. Another example: once I set the class into five groups and asked students to make video recording a dialogue in real hotel and tourism agency how to book a flight ticket and a room in hotel. The results were amazing, unexpected, even poor students perform well. (personal communication, November 11, 2015)

This quote demonstrates that Abdo provided his students with authentic activities that supported his lessons. This technique boosted their knowledge about the lesson and engaged them in daily practices of the language. Those students experienced what they learned in the classroom, such as words and grammatical rules in real-life settings. I assumed that his students never experienced such informal settings outside the classroom. Therefore, authentic uses of English helped them not only to understand English in real life but also to understand their individual “needs and skills to get there.” In other words, using authentic materials to support students in their learning of English assisted students to determine what they need to use English in their daily life.

Another finding from using various learning activities shows that online activities provided additional learning outside the classroom. The four teachers used different activities to support not only lessons but to extend English learning outside the classroom by providing online links and by suggesting learning resources not related to their lessons. For example, the teachers reported that they “uploaded PDF files about basic grammar rules” and other files about “punctuation rules” because they had noticed that some students needed to revise them before “writing their compositions.” Therefore, students were able to correct their mistakes and to improve their knowledge about grammatical rules and punctuations. Students had opportunities to listen to their lessons from different teachers and to practice new learning exercises.

The four teachers reported that they used numerous exercises so that their students worked together and practiced the language at home. Their objectives for these uses varied from teacher to teacher, as seen in answers to the third question in my second teachers’ questionnaire. For example, they used those additional activities to compensate for limited practice opportunities in class, to increase the amount of English the students were exposed to, to reinforce using English, and to try the exercises more than once.

Students gave me similar answers about the variety of activities they experienced with Blackboard. Students’ uses of Blackboard were mostly in authentic, interactive, and collaborative activities, such as listening to educational lessons about English, watching YouTube videos, discussing topics with other students, accessing learning websites such as [Englishtown.com](http://Englishtown.com), practicing new vocabulary in Quizlet, and speaking with people in virtual learning communities such as the community of Livemocha website.

TS 2-5 used uploaded YouTube videos and links to watch grammar lessons. He considered those online lessons as “real classes because they are from the English source, native people.” He said, YouTube is “like the sea, choose any activity such as sport, news, or history” to listen to English. He also expressed his interests in interactive learning content that support different skills because they “may encourage the user to continue learning by their images, videos, and different sounds.” In addition, he stated:

. . . The most helpful for learning English is the interactive content that let you watch and answer questions while watching a lesson. Or watch and writing comments or write new words. I prefer all in one activity and I think YouTube is the best one because you can watch and listen. And there are many mobile applications provide English learning. (TS 2-5, personal communication, December 3, 2015)

This student, TS 2-5, concentrated on the role played by multimodal interactive content in his language learning. He clearly specified his needs and interests that are similar to many “net generation” students (McLoughlin & Lee, 2007) who seek interactive environments and multimedia applications (Barnes, Marateo, & Ferris, 2007). By interactive content, students not only are motivated to learn but also able to control their learning. Indeed, interactive content makes students, themselves, interactive with learning materials. As Saudi EFL students lack multimodal activities to learn English, teachers can use WbTs to employ multimodal practices in their curriculum. Today’s students do not find their needs and interests in traditional teaching methods, techniques, and activities.

Those various activities—authentic, multimodal, and interactive—facilitated learning of English in web-based settings. Such learning activities, either for reading, writing, speaking, or listening, made many supportive changes in the EFL context. Using Blackboard changed the EFL context from traditional face-to-face settings to blended learning settings. Those blended settings included unlimited online activities that assisted students to learn English. In these settings, the English language was embedded in such a way that EFL learners at SSU received more exposure to English after those changes.

Both subthemes—communication in English and various language learning activities—showed that the adoption of Blackboard at SSU enabled teachers to create a social environment for using English, made language learning meaningful, and supported the development process of learning EFL. In that new environment, students received varied input of the language that positioned them on the “right track” to learn English by using it. Several students reported that for many reasons they did not use English outside the classroom prior to that semester. They showed that there was no supportive environment or comfortable setting to use English before Blackboard provided them with that environment.

As a result of the findings of this second theme, students said they used English more often in different settings for various practices, such as reading, writing, chatting, typing, texting, listening, speaking, and e-mailing. They communicated with each other, with their teachers, and with the public. Most of their activities and communications exposed them to English in authentic scenarios. Because learning in natural settings occurs as a function of the activity, context, and culture in which learning takes place

(Lantolf, 2000), the best language learning setting takes place in such authentic scenarios in daily social life (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

I introduce in Chapter 2 that participation is one of the main factors in the process of language learning (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). Participation supports the developmental processes of language learning (Lantolf, 2006) because participants are immersed in concrete and meaningful communicative activities with other members of a speaking community. In other words, using English to participate in real-life situations immerses the learners physically in these situations where they actively acquire the language.

While the teachers promoted this environment by using Blackboard as a platform that offered many learning opportunities, EFL learners also spent effort and time to participate in this web-based learning environment. Students used English to participate in many authentic, communicative, and collaborative opportunities that were available on Blackboard and supported by teachers. Therefore, students' participation combined the benefits of a social environment that included authentic uses of English with their individual learning efforts to acquire the language.

Web-based learning environments combined the benefits of both ESL and EFL classrooms. In ESL classrooms, students communicate with each other in English and learn English for different purposes, such as daily conversations and communication needs. Their listening and speaking develop quickly due to their authentic uses in the surrounding environment (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). In EFL classrooms, students learn English mostly for academic purposes and rarely use English outside the educational institutions. Their reading and writing skills advance more and faster than do their

speaking and listening skills (Khan, 2013). In this study, EFL learners reported that they achieved as in both situations. They found that the new blended EFL environments offered various learning activities that enabled students to improve many language skills, as if they had attended ESL classes. Students reported that they used English almost every day with and through others and were engaged in learning activities on Blackboard.

**Theme 3: participants' affective factors.** This theme reflects how participants viewed, thought, felt, and dealt with the use of Blackboard and other WbTs in this EFL setting. Participants reported their feelings and experiences of using English in Blackboard as well as their use of WbTs to learn English in blended learning environments. Participants' responses included their perceptions of various changes, including flexible time, easy access, safe uses, improved motivation, growing interest, high confidence, more enjoyment, desire to use, anxiety or fear, and change in routines. Because affective factors include various emotional aspects, such as feelings, motivation, anxiety, and attitudes (Lightbown & Spada, 2006), I discuss these affective factors under three subthemes: comfort, raising motivation, and gaining confidence.

***Subtheme 3.1: comfort.*** The findings of this subtheme describe changes in participants' feeling of comfort, relaxation, and easiness to use Blackboard in their classes. This subtheme focuses on the participants' comfort level in using WbTs in an English program at SSU. In different answers, teachers illustrated that their use of online resources allowed them to teach with comfort. This means that the use of Blackboard helped the four teachers to work with less distress. In addition, this use gave them flexibility to achieve their teaching objectives, to save their time and effort, to lower their



load of face-to-face classes, and to “try more ideas and techniques” or “try out new technologies.”

Teachers reported that “Blackboard connected them to many web-based learning resources and technologies” that were “ready for use” in their courses. Their answers to my second question in the second teachers’ questionnaire (Appendix B), the four teachers mentioned many advantages of using Blackboard in their teaching of English, such as its ease of use, of adding links, and of uploading handouts. This indicates that the adoption of Blackboard created a comfortable teaching environment. Moreover, they reported their comfort in using Blackboard—in any place and at any time—to add learning materials, to follow up their lessons, and to communicate with their students.

Zaki stated that he “can use Blackboard to teach, clarify, illustrate, manage, and keep his students engaged with what he planned.” Thinking about what Zaki said about his feelings after using Blackboard makes it clear that Blackboard helped to achieve his teaching goals. He also said his students were comfortable with his teaching with Blackboard, saying “Students feel bored of the old-fashioned way of teaching.” Moreover, he considered “using Blackboard is a modern way of teaching that can affect students’ positive learning. It can create an enjoyable learning environment” (personal communication, November 9, 2015). Therefore, the adoption of Blackboard as a blended learning platform at SSU created a supportive teaching environment.

The four teachers talked about how Blackboard created comfortable learning settings for their students. Among their responses, teachers said that using Blackboard helped them in “giving anxious students opportunities to be relaxed to participate with the classmates effectively,” “freeing EFL students to do assignments on their own,” and

“providing students with enough time to think, write, correct, and answer without much anxiety.” This shows that students were not forced to participate in learning activities in Blackboard. They had time and were able to prepare their participation and develop their learning. In regular classrooms, students lack such opportunities to think, prepare, and manage their learning for many reasons, such as time constraints, lesson procedures, and the number of students in each class. Another teacher, Noor, confirmed this when he noticed that “some students would never participate in class or share their ideas, but once they were alone in front of their screens, they would feel more comfortable to express themselves.”

What Noor stated here was reported also by the majority of EFL students I interviewed. Students expressed the same perception of feeling comfortable when using WbTs, including Blackboard, in their learning. In their answers to the first students’ questionnaire (Appendix C), 25 of the 32 selected the option that indicated they were comfortable in using English in online settings outside the classroom. In addition, students provided several reasons to confirm their comfort, such as “because there is no stress outside the class.” This means that students did not like learning under force or stress. Students were comfortable using English in WbTs because they perceived Blackboard as a convenient system that provided them with many options to learn. As I show above with teachers, students reported that they found more time to finish their learning tasks, to ask for clarification, and to manage their learning.

ZS 2-13 said, “Using English in Blackboard was more fun for me because I used new words freely without using the grammar.” In his answers to my follow-up questions about supporting learning materials and resources of his teacher, he wrote that he used

learning websites because they were “easy and accessible regardless of the time or the place and more fun, more than the class.” He learned in his “comfortable times and by matching both learn and entertainment” (personal communication, December 7, 2015).

Such feelings of comfort were repeated by most students, such as ZS 1-8, who described Blackboard as a “very useful system by taking your time to think about homework without tension or discomfort” (personal communication, December 2, 2015). Another student, TS 2-5, liked “to write the homework in Blackboard. I prefer to use it more than handwriting.” He stated that it was “easy to use Blackboard by computer or mobile phone.” He had enough time to study what his “teachers put in Blackboard.” He had “the convenience of accessing English learning materials online that allowed for better and easier access learning.” These responses show that students’ comfort in using Blackboard helped them to access their lessons, to do their homework, to improve their language skills, and to seek more knowledge.

Doing so created supportive learning contexts that allowed students to utilize those opportunities in their learning of English. This utilization is obvious when students reported their comfort in using supporting materials that were available on Blackboard with “no stress” outside the classroom. Moreover, students reported useful improvements in language learning courses that created useful learning environments.

***Subtheme 3.2: raising motivation.*** This subtheme describes how Blackboard’s adoption at SSU raised motivation of the four EFL teachers and their students to involve WbTs in English courses. Teachers found that the Blackboard platform not only raised their students’ motivation but also their own motivation to employ more online materials in their teaching. When EFL teachers uploaded links, videos, documents, and

applications to encourage students' learning outside the classroom, the four teachers became motivated to improve their teaching approaches and to motivate their students to try those resources.

The EFL teachers were interested in finding useful resources and making the effort to try them with their students. Thinking about teachers' responses to statements numbers 10-16 in the initial teachers' questionnaire (Appendix A), I found that most teachers were interested in using more online resources in their English classes. This shows that teachers appreciated Blackboard as a useful platform in which they used online resources to develop their teaching and to support their learning. In the second teachers' questionnaire, their reasons for using Blackboard focus on encouraging their students in new and different ways and motivating them to learn outside the classroom.

The four teachers, in particular, often reported that they were motivated to "change their ways" of teaching, based on the benefits they discovered. Taher did not hesitate to tell me that he profited from his students' valuable comments and online materials they posted in the discussion forum. He stated that he was "motivated to use students' links to learn a lot" because he "benefited a lot from them myself and they are very valuable e-materials" (personal communication, November 12, 2015). This indicates that the new advantages of using WbTs motivated teachers to develop their own teaching.

Teachers also attempted to learn how to utilize more functions of Blackboard properly in their teaching. They spent time and effort to teach themselves in this field and to seek more training and experiences. They found unlimited benefits of these uses in their teaching and showed a growing motivation after Blackboard implementation. Had they not been motivated, they would have not done all of that. For example, at the

beginning of his use of Blackboard, Zaki spent “a lot of time and effort to learn how to upload extra materials, how to assess or track students’ participations, and so on.” He kept trying many functions by the “strategy of trial and error.”

Had SSU introduced a practical training, that would have been better than short tutorial and theoretical sessions, Zaki assumed. His words show that he was interested in using Blackboard and sought training. He said, “I need, and for sure need, to be provided by special training courses to be able to use and manage all Blackboard functions.” He compared his “use of the Blackboard with some interactive websites” to say, “We are nothing.” He made sure that “using Blackboard system needs training and practice for teachers before students, and we can’t apply and use most of the Blackboard functions” (personal communication, November 9, 2015). The other three teachers also described their attempts to engage their WbTs in similar scenarios for the sake of progressing in their teaching.

Such feelings explain how highly motivated the teachers were to use Blackboard features in advanced ways to improve their teaching. I believe that if the teachers are motivated to improve their teaching, they would use WbTs or other techniques in their courses. If they are motivated, they would think about how to succeed in producing well-developed teaching materials. Their motivation empowers them to evaluate what works in their teaching, to determine how it works, and decide how to improve it.

Teachers also reported that students’ motivation to learn English in online-based opportunities differed after using Blackboard; it was greater. Students’ interests in using WbTs increased compared to the beginning of the fall of 2015. At the beginning of that semester, a few students were not interested in online learning activities that were

uploaded into Blackboard. The four teachers thought those students “were not motivated to access Blackboard at all.” Nevertheless, the teachers said that disadvantage disappeared “gradually within weeks” because those unmotivated students were only in the first weeks of the academic year. Teachers reported that students’ interests in Blackboard grew and they subsequently participated in online activities and discussions outside the classroom, as shown above.

The four teachers agreed that the adoption of Blackboard created web-based contexts that increased students’ motivation, “enthusiasm, and interest to learn [in learning] English.” Those teachers confirmed the great role of motivation in learning a new language, especially on the students’ own time beyond the classroom. Taher thought that using WbTs was a “strong motivation for students to encourage them to learn English outside the classroom,” and Noor thought that his use of Quizlet motivated his students to expand their English vocabulary in a new and attractive way at their homes. In their responses, teachers repeated that they paid attention to students’ motivation and how their use of Blackboard helped them to boost it.

Students themselves reported that Blackboard raised their motivation to learn English by using available WbTs and learning materials at different times. Students’ responses included feelings similar to those of their teachers about their motivation to use WbTs to learn English. Several students repeated that their use of WbTs raised their motivation and thus boosted their performance. When I asked the students about the reasons of their participation in the discussion forum or watching YouTube videos, they mentioned their motivation as a primary reason. For example, their answers to open-

ended questions in the second questionnaire showed their high motivation for using Blackboard to connect them with useful websites, such as YouTube, to learn English.

Teachers' and students' responses clarify that students' motivation was growing. When students were motivated or were exposed to motivating techniques, their learning advanced quickly, and they sought "more learning opportunities" by themselves. This is evident by ZS 1-8, who liked using WbTs in English learning and was interested in finding new ways for practices of his English. Students were motivated to participate in the forum, as TS 2-5 stated that "discussions and documents facilitated, motivated, and guided individual and cooperative learning between students." No doubt existed about why teachers repeatedly mention students' motivation and how it improved during that semester.

Students reported their own uses of many online resources, particularly YouTube, such as: "YouTube is not boring because you are always involved, engaged, and motivated" and "YouTube is interesting and the opposite of boring classroom." I assured that I heard such words from all participants because I believe that they did not use any technology if they were not motivated. In addition, I emphasize that the new and authentic interactive environments created by Blackboard expanded students' interest and raised their motivation to succeed in their learning. Their own use of WbTs outside the classroom to learn English reflects their raised motivation to take responsibility in continuing their language learning.

***Subtheme 3.3: gaining confidence.*** The data of this subtheme show the growth of teachers' and students' confidence in using these WbTs. Most of the data came from my research notes about teachers and students during our interviews. The four teachers were

confident in developing their teaching approaches and in utilizing new online applications. Students were confident in their use of English in many learning opportunities. Although teachers and students used WbTs in Blackboard for a short period of time before I met them, their confidence existed in their stories, experiences, practices, and attempts. For instance, they were not deterred by a lack of training; they were sufficiently confident in the value of these WbTs to train themselves by trial and error.

The four teachers' confidence was an important factor that enabled them to produce "well-done work" by using Blackboard to achieve their teaching objectives. Abdo confidently said that he used Blackboard from the beginning "to reinforce my teaching aims and to submit helping resources and announcements." Noor's confidence was obvious when he said Blackboard was his "digital office or online desk" and that his "syllabus, worksheets, and everything were uploaded to Blackboard."

The adoption of Blackboard was a source to develop their confidence to teach by using various "online ingredients and effective components." The four teachers were confident to face students' related issues, such as the lack of motivation or their constant attempts to use a specific technology or approach with Blackboard. Their confidence came from unlimited online solutions that they described comparing to the previous year. An example of teachers' confidence came from Taher's story of using a collaborative learning approach to continuously encourage his students' collaboration in writing:

. . . My uses of collaborative learning tasks failed last year because students were not eager to work together online. I thought individual work fitted their preferences, and I did some investigations about them. After the adoption of



Blackboard this year, I used online collaboration techniques in Google Drive and Google Documents. My students used them for writing purposes. I guided them to write their paragraphs and essays in various forms like letters and reports. I explained how to edit their writing, their peer's writing, and revise any written work. The revised work was used as a showcase or as a blog. I considered this work as an electronic portfolio for my students to broadcast their works. They could receive comments and observation. It was their opportunity to broadcast their writing through Google Drive. It motivated them to do more creative works and enabled them to meet not only the minimum standards of expectation, but also high standards in his writing rubrics. (Taher, personal communication, December 21, 2015)

Such experience shows how the adoption of Blackboard helped Taher to re-try his ideas in using online writing collaboration. Prior to Blackboard, his students were not interested in such activities because Taher was not able to follow up his collaborative techniques. He succeeded this time because Blackboard worked as a connection to online settings and as a part of his curriculum this year. Blackboard was a means to follow up, encourage, support, and participate in this collaboration. He realized the role of his guidance, explanation, preparation, plan, and evaluation that are pointers to his evolving confidence in teaching. He was confident in his clear objectives and procedures to encourage his students' collaboration and to improve their writing. I think that Blackboard helped him to develop his teaching abilities and skills. Such development assisted him to gain confidence in his pedagogical approaches and practices as well as in continuing his "visions and moving to the next level."

This last quotation about online writing collaboration also shows how students' confidence grew with Taher's attempts to facilitate online collaborative activities. They not only improved their writing and followed teachers' instructions but also achieved high standards and produced outstanding written works. Students' confidence in writing with colleagues facilitated these accomplishments. Working with others motivated them to write and improve their confidence to use English in writing. In other circumstances, students reported that their teachers' guidance and support made them confident in using English in online settings and in using different resources to improve their reading, writing, listening, and speaking. They confidently reported that they had more practice of English and searched for useful websites.

ZS 2-13 used learning websites, which were suggested by his teacher, to improve his reading, listening, and speaking "by replaying the audio/video as much as" he wanted. He informed me he was confident to use them to "learn more vocabularies with right spelling" and to add "comments to the discussion forum in different ways." This was consistent with the experience of AS 1-4, who described his ability to write in the discussion forum by saying, "I am more confident now when I write." These findings show that those students had confidence in their learning practices of English. They attributed their confidence to using WbTs in an EFL context influenced by the use of Blackboard.

TS 1-4 expressed his confidence by describing Blackboard as "an English reference library" that helped him to learn at any time. He was comparing his learning of English at the time of the interview to his learning of English in secondary school. He also continued by saying that Blackboard allowed him to use English at home on a daily

basis more than he did before. Another student, ZS 1-8, thought that he gained “confidence to use English outside of classroom” that year, 2015, more than before because he believed that he learned “enough English through classes and ready talk in public places and with friends from various worlds who speak the English language.” SZ 1-8 perceived his learning of English at SSU as a factor that supported his confidence to use English in his daily life.

As I explained in Chapter 2, students gain confidence through their learning about the language and on their use of it. The more knowledge about English they acquire, the more confidence they gain. The more use of English in learning activities, the more confidence to use English in their daily lives. They also gain confidence when they understand the learning environments around them and the teaching approaches used in their classes. Students’ confidence plays a critical role in their learning of English and their use of WbTs to learn English.

**Theme 4: teachers’ roles in blended learning.** This theme describes the alterations in teachers’ roles after the adoption of a blended learning system. Teaching roles changed and improved after using Blackboard in their teaching of English at SSU. I discuss their teaching roles in blended learning under two subthemes: (a) facilitating rather than lecturing (b) and dealing with students’ difficulties and individual differences.

***Subtheme 4.1: facilitating rather than lecturing.*** This subtheme discusses how teachers’ approaches and practices with Blackboard were different from before using Blackboard. Using WbTs allowed teachers to find various supportive materials to teach English at SSU. Their responses, experiences, and uses—directly and indirectly—demonstrate that their main role after using Blackboard was to facilitate the learning

process rather than to deliver knowledge. In other words, teachers appreciated that Blackboard simplified their teaching, made work “stress-free,” and provided them with “enough time” to succeed. Moreover, using WbTs gave them more space to facilitate their work and to mentor their learners, not to teach everything by themselves.

In their interviews, teachers described the changes of the teacher’s role after using Blackboard. For example, the four teachers mentioned that: “We see some changes in the learning and teaching processes around”; “The teacher as a facilitator to help the learners to use Blackboard and other technologies and to put them in the right track”; “Blackboard helped me not to write everything I have to do with lesson on the board, not to read the audio scripts if the audio CD is not available, nor move round the class and check if every student is following me”; and “Blackboard helped me to teach successfully by using communication and interaction. Teaching is not lecture and note-taking any more. Computer-based instruction can effectively enhance learning.”

These responses from the four teachers show how teachers described their roles with Blackboard in which they were able to vary their teaching practices and to extend their learning environments by including out-of-class settings. Their descriptions about writing on the board, moving around the class, lecturing, and taking notes display how they felt about the practices they used in the traditional classroom. Although they still performed such traditional practices when I interviewed them, they felt that these practices were “neither enough nor effective.”

They found new, effective practices in using Blackboard and in teaching successfully. They benefited from using YouTube videos, discussion forums, and several websites to develop web-based learning practices. These practices engaged their students,

motivated them to learn, improved their language, and offered different learning scenarios. Abdo told me that “many uses were not applied before.” He meant that many learning activities were not available before he used Blackboard in that semester. He was describing his use of Blackboard “to promote students’ use of English outside the classroom, to facilitate students’ cooperating with each other.” The same was reported in Noor’s experience of linking Blackboard with the Quizlet website to save time by directing his students to improve their listening and speaking skills outside the classroom.

Those changes in teachers’ roles—being facilitators of learning rather than being giver of knowledge—supplied teachers with new choices to construct their teaching environment (Aimin, 2013). In this study, the four EFL teachers were the experts who provided learners with knowledge, guided them, exposed them to the target language, and supported their personalized learning. The teachers supported their EFL learners and helped them to become comfortable with learning through WbTs. Teachers followed the advice of Watson and Hempenstall (2008) to recognize the potential of technology in language learning and to provide learners with diverse experiences that enhanced their language skills by listening to videos, reading posts, writing comments, reflecting on feedback, answering questions, and chatting.

Students also reported that when they had useful instructions, they sometimes did not need their teachers. In other words, they found their own ways to learn after their teachers paved the ways for them to rely on themselves in using uploaded learning material. For example, students corrected their mistakes in many ways in addition to PDF files that were uploaded to Blackboard. ZS 2-13 used Google to correct his spelling. Some students used automatic correction in their mobile phones. NS 2-3 said that

learning in groups can help them to correct their mistakes and to succeed in a “short time.” Moreover, TS 2-5 said he used YouTube and texting applications such as WhatsApp and Telegram to correct his spelling mistakes “easily and free.” Then, he added that his teacher’s feedback about how to correct his mistakes also guided him “to improve the vocabulary and the listening skills.”

Students told me about their teachers’ suggestions of various online resources such as “chatting with some friends on” some programs or phone applications, “listening to videos and practice speaking,” “playing sound audio and repeat it again and again,” “speaking in Skype with British English people to help me to improve English speaking,” and “repeating what I am hearing.” Students’ responses about these suggestions confirm two things: (a) teachers’ role was to provide students with learning opportunities in Blackboard (b) and students found clear instructions and used those opportunities to learn English. Actually, the majority of students found advantages in trying these suggestions that motivated them and promoted their language learning.

This subtheme suggests that the adoption of Blackboard at SSU generated changes to the curriculum, teaching approaches, and course delivery methods (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008). In other words, using WbTs improved the existing pedagogical foundations, learning environments, and teachers’ roles. For example, teachers were present in an online context to facilitate discussions, to provide direct instruction, and to give feedback to students. They reported that they were active participants in learning activities and provided feedback on assignments and students’ participation.

In addition, their experiences with Blackboard followed the six roles for teachers in web-based environments of Offir et al. (2003). The four teachers were (a) social by

creating a positive atmosphere and supporting students' motivation students through the course, (b) procedural by providing information regarding administrative and technical issues, (c) expository by presenting content, (d) explanatory by eliciting students' questions and participation in the different topics of the course, (e) engagers of students' cognition by promoting students' involvement in discussions and tasks to understand content, and (f) assistants of learning by guiding students' learning through interaction (Offir et al., 2003).

***Subtheme 4.2: dealing with students' difficulties and individual differences.***

This subtheme complements the previous subtheme about the role of teachers in facilitating learning in online settings. In blended learning environments, dealing with students' difficulties and individual differences was one of the main responsibilities of teachers for facilitating the learning process (Comas-Quinn, 2011). Students' difficulties vary from student to student and from situation to situation, particularly when using a new system such as Blackboard with SSU' students. Most participants reported this issue by stating that using new features or applying new systems were not always a smooth process.

Teachers succeeded in providing students with guidance and assistance to simplify the transition process. I discuss above how AS 1-3 found difficulties in his initial use of Blackboard. However, by the end of the semester, he described it as an easy system and was familiar with it because his teachers assisted him in using it. Such a scenario was reported by other students about other teachers; NS 2-3 said, "In Blackboard, depend on yourself, and it is hard to communicate directly without assist from teacher and classmate," and ZS 2-13 reported about how his teacher made

communication in Blackboard simple by suspending attention to their mistakes in writing on Blackboard.

Students reported different needs and faced difficult experiences in their English learning. For example, some students said they did not usually feel comfortable in using English outside the classroom—in Saudi Arabia—because “the environment around me do not use the English language,” “not easy,” or “scare of mistakes.” The four teachers dealt with these issues by providing learning opportunities that served students’ individual differences. Teachers realized that online learning resources did not match all learning preferences. Some students preferred face-to-face instructions about grammatical rules or writing lessons. For instance, ZS 1-8 said, that “Blackboard could be helpful in some classes or to practice some skills and activities, but not to learn writing skills” because students needed “lots of workshop in class not in Blackboard.”

Taher’s failure to apply online collaboration in writing activities before using Blackboard was solved after using Blackboard. Prior to Blackboard, students did not realize any role for their collaboration. They might have seen such an approach as an additional task that added nothing to their learning. After students used Blackboard and were engaged in new learning settings such as discussing various topics in the forum, they recognized the role of their interaction and participation to collaborate in their writing. This teacher, Taher, knew that his students were experiencing new procedures. Therefore, he guided them with detailed steps including how to write, edit, revise, and broadcast their writing through Google Drive. Taher was able to follow up his instructions and to accommodate his students’ individual differences, abilities, and skills.



Taher's experience of using Google Drive represents how teachers can succeed in solving difficulties to use online settings that require students' participation, interaction, and collaboration. Another example comes from the use of the Quizlet website to accommodate students' individual differences. Noor noticed differences in his students' abilities to acquire the new words; some students acquired the new words in a few minutes while some needed more time. Quizlet helped him to minimize the time allocated to explain difficult words. It also helped each student to learn new vocabulary as he preferred, with no restrictions. They listened to the words and sentences of the lessons, pronounced them, and learned their meanings in the Arabic language. They could repeat the pronunciation as much as they wished. Learning a new language starts with similar steps. More importantly, such steps allow students to observe their learning and to manage its development.

These examples and uses demonstrate that the adoption of Blackboard at SSU necessitated that teachers deal with students' difficulties and individual differences in online environments. Blended learning environments emphasize on dealing with students' difficulties, as one of the main roles of teachers. In addition, these environments provide teachers with more options to meet the individual needs of all students; either in face-to-face settings or in online settings. Teachers can start the activity in the classroom and ask students to continuously work on it in Blackboard. In these environments, teachers are able to maintain a balance between giving face-to-face instructions and online instructions. In this study, for example, the four teachers—directly and indirectly—did not focus on grammar and spelling in online posts and comments, but

they required students to pay attention to those roles when they wrote their assignment, submitted their compositions, or participated in class activities.

The findings of this theme show that online learning resources empowered the four teachers to support English learning outside the classroom. The adoption of Blackboard allowed these teachers to be facilitators who were used WbTs to solve students' difficulties and to meet their needs, rather than being lecturers who only give knowledge. Teachers were the experts who boosted students in their learning, regardless their skills, abilities, and learning styles. With millions of online learning opportunities and supportive resources, teachers are not required to create learning materials or plan their lessons from the "zero level." However, they can choose what works for their students from these resources and then plan their lessons.

**Theme 5: students' autonomy.** This final theme addresses students' autonomous learning and their abilities to learn independently in web-based settings. Participants' responses mentioned independent learning in several terms, such as student-centered learning, student-based approach, or self-learning techniques. Previous themes show that students learned English through the use of various WbTs, including Blackboard. In this study, the students' autonomy to learn EFL started from their use of WbTs that was guided and supported by their teachers. Then, the majority of students talked about their initiatives relying on what they explored with their teachers.

The four teachers emphasized the importance of students' self-learning and reported that online opportunities enable students to learn English in their homes. Therefore, teachers encouraged students to take responsibility for their learning by suggesting online resources and explained how to use them. Teachers were models for

their students to use those resources and to add related website links to Blackboard for more practices. This also is evident in their answers to my third question in the second teachers' questionnaire; their objectives for using online activities to teach English were to "introduce various learning methods that encourage self-learning" (Abdo), to "improve students' independence and not to depend on the teacher all the time" (Noor), to "give confidence to students in doing things alone" (Taher), and to "develop their skills through self-study" (Zaki). In addition, Zaki's goals of using the Englishtown website with his students included encouraging students' self-learning, as his answer to my follow-up questions show:

The goals of encouraging students to use Englishtown are: 1. Learners have a plenty of time to prepare for the topic of discussion. 2. Learners are not afraid of making mistakes in discussions because they are not standing in front of the classmates. They just use headphones and mic in conversations. 3. They can practice the same in our class. 4. Actually, some of the students benefit from the site. Their listening and speaking skills are improved. 5. I use a free English proficiency test in this website to measure students' English level in areas such as: grammar, listening, and reading. 6. I boosted my students to subscribe in this website as a self-study to improve their English because it includes a lot of free resources and practical tests. (Zaki, personal communication, December 26, 2015)

These goals of using this specific website confirm what I describe above about teachers' emphasis on students' autonomous learning. Zaki provided his students with all that they needed to succeed in their own learning, such as a useful website, enough time, a safe environment, and a variety of tools for practicing and evaluating. He was a model

in using these resources and was available to provide any support needed. Zaki's experience is a good example that shows how the four teachers used WbTs to promote students' learning of English outside the classroom. The four teachers were the source to enrich students' autonomy to learn EFL.

Students also reported they were able to pursue their learning of English in different ways because WbTs provided them with more opportunities to learn English independently. They shared with me different insights for their own learning, self-direction, and the way they looked for an explanation of specific tenses, structural rules, or other needs. AS 1-4 believed that he became "a more independent learner" who memorized many words and corrected his grammar and spelling mistakes. These skills are important for a language learner because students need to memorize words and correct their mistakes. These memorizing and correcting skills are the primary skills for good language learners.

Students reported personal attempts to learn English by themselves using links or videos in Blackboard. To illustrate, their attempts included many WbTs and several software applications to learn English by themselves, by working with classmates, by chatting with people, by acquiring new words, by correcting mistakes, and by practicing at home. Doing these tasks helped them to proceed in their learning of English because these tasks helped students to practice the language and to expose them to it. ZS 2-13 told me that his English progressed because he was "watching a video or movie with English subtitle, reading news or articles about a topic I like, watching lessons about grammar, using Google to correct spelling, and participating in discussions of Blackboard."

EFL students at SSU made it clear that they had sufficient knowledge of English that guided them to “learn more English from the Net [Internet].” TS 1-1 said, “Nowadays, Internet is everything, and every one can get opportunity even in his free time to learn English by chatting with friends on messenger or making some self-study.” TS 2-5 considered YouTube “like the sea, choose any activity such as sport, news, history. For me, it is personal self-learning. I always cover any gaps in my learning in English via YouTube, English lessons, usually in grammar.” Such basic knowledge of English is provided in regular classrooms and is required for their practice of English in online settings.

In addition to students’ basic knowledge of English, students’ skills and abilities to be independent learners allowed them to take advantage of WbTs for developing their learning. As the last two students show in their responses, students can use WbTs to practice their English, improve their skills, and correct their mistakes. The Blackboard features as well as online settings create supportive learning environments that are “in students’ fingers” (Zaki, personal communication, November 11, 2015). Students reported that they used English to achieve personal and social goals because they participated in many social online activities. Therefore, they developed their language skills, gained increasing control over their mental abilities, and practiced their communicative skills (Lantolf, 2000).

Learners were active social beings who participated in learning experiences around them and were acting as self-regulated learners (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Students’ use of the Internet and online tools increased their learning autonomy and facilitated their learning (Warschauer, 2010). Furthermore, students’ participation in

various online settings also promoted student-centered learning (Ya Ni, 2013) because more participation increased self-learning. Therefore, the findings show that WbTs mediate personal learning and offer opportunities for learners to practice their linguistic skills by themselves.

The adoption of Blackboard suggested that the official use of WbTs in learning curriculum provided new opportunities for self-directed learning. Blackboard supported personalized learning by engaging students in the learning process and by providing learning materials at any time and in any place (Dew, 2010). In this sense, learners constructed their learning environment (Mitchell & Myles, 2004) and were responsible for selecting one that could scaffold their learning of English through communication with others within social contexts (Aimin, 2013). Their individual learning is embedded in the social process and is mediated by their participation in a social process and by others in the context of language learning. When learners collaborate and participate in their environments, they enrich their language skills and develop their learning of English.

Students also reported many personal learning activities, including pronouncing sentences, listening to the new words many times, writing them down, repeating them in order to acquire them, and practicing speech. Such personal activities helped them to internalize the linguistic features they used; to focus attention on their mistakes; and to link words, ideas, and thoughts (Vygotsky, 1986). Doing so is known as a private speech process in which learners improved their language by directing the speech to the self (Lantolf, 2007). Private speech is a self-mediation process of language learning (Ellis, 2003) because a learner's developmental process moves through three general stages in

social context: from being an object-regulated process, to being an other-regulated process, and to being a self-regulated process (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

The personal learning activities such as pronouncing sentences, repeating new words many times, and practicing speech were opportunities that supported private speech process to learn and use the language outside classroom. In other words, students used private speech to practice English and to originate more social speech that either was directed to other people or was directed by others. In Chapter 2, I argued that private speech can be used autonomously by EFL learners as a means to internalize the linguistic features they use in their learning opportunities. The learners developed their cognitive function, improved their abilities to use the English language, and internalized it when they spoke to themselves (Aimin, 2013). Private speech followed a linguistic mediation to lead to self-controlled cognitive functioning.

This theme, students' autonomy, shows that students also found new autonomous ways to improve their language skills and linguistic knowledge by themselves after they were exposed to several web-based learning experiences. The findings about this theme indicate that students can continue to learn English using these unlimited resources and opportunities. In addition, using WbTs raised learners' motivation and enhanced their autonomy (Fang, 2010) in using online resources to learn EFL in Saudi Arabia. Using WbTs and the blended learning system in Blackboard at SSU supported a student-centered approach that was promoted by the four teachers' unlimited online resources. Teachers were able to customize online resources to accommodate individual needs, interests, and differences. EFL students became successful autonomous learners with teachers' guidance and support. The students needed to have enough skills to take control

of their learning and recognized the importance of their self-management, self-initiation, and self-disciplines (Liu, 2010).

### **Answer Research Sub-question 1**

My first sub-question was: *How is Blackboard used in EFL context at this university? Do these uses support English learning outside the classroom? If so, how?*

While the answer to this sub-question mostly comes from the first two themes in my findings, the other three themes have some contributions in answering this sub-question. I answer this question in two parts; (a) how is Blackboard used in EFL context at this university? and (b) do these uses support English learning outside the classroom? If so, how? I use findings of my research to answer each part under a heading represents the part.

*How is Blackboard used in EFL context at this university?* Many teachers' responses I discuss in the previous question show how Blackboard was used by EFL teachers at SSU. In addition, teachers' responses to my initial teachers' questionnaire (Appendix A) provided details to answer this part of the first sub-question. I used this questionnaire generally to discover how EFL teachers used Blackboard to support their teaching with WbTs. That questionnaire was answered by 20 EFL teachers who provided me with a clear understanding of how they used Blackboard.

My sixth question in that questionnaire asked the teachers to select their uses of Blackboard from a list of ten. I summarized their selections in Table 4.2, which shows that the main uses of Blackboard were for, what I call, administrative purposes: submitting assignments and tracking progress. The next most frequent use was for, what I



call, basic educational purposes: uploading files, adding links, and communicating with students. At least 14 teachers used Blackboard for each of these basic purposes.

Table 4.2

*Teachers' uses of Blackboard at SSU*

<b>Uses of Blackboard</b>	<b>No. of teachers</b>
Uploading web-based files	15
Adding learning links	16
Communicating with students	14
Giving feedback	7
Promoting learning outside the classroom	8
Submitting assignments	20
Engaging students in online activities	11
Tracking students' progress	17
Supplying interactive opportunities	6
Sharing ideas with students	10

On the other hand, some teachers used Blackboard for, what I call, advanced educational purposes: giving feedback, promoting learning, engaging students in online activities, supplying interactive opportunities, and sharing ideas. The number of teachers in each of these uses ranges from 6 to 11. Indeed, this was more than I had expected. I did not expect to find such number because Blackboard was a new system used at SSU. Such number means that about third to half of EFL teachers at SSU used Blackboard for advanced educational purposes.

It was expected that many teachers at SSU used Blackboard for administrative purposes or basic educational purposes, such as submitting assignments, uploading files, and posting grades. For such purposes, Blackboard was used as a storage place for “digital resources, not platforms for exchanging ideas” (Yuen et al., 2009). Those

purposes were “simply for the sake of using technology” (Yuan & Kim, 2014). Using Blackboard for advanced educational purposes was my focus in this study.

The four teachers—Abdo, Noor, Taher, and Zaki—used Blackboard to achieve these five advanced pedagogical objectives: giving feedback, promoting learning, engaging students in online activities, supplying interactive opportunities, and sharing ideas. In my answer to the main question above, many findings show that these four teachers’ and their students’ experiences about these five advanced purposes. For instance, Noor said that Blackboard was his “digital office or online desk” in which he communicated with students, directed their learning, and improved their skills. Teachers agreed with me that communicating with students to direct their learning and to improve their skills is what most EFL students need when they leave the classroom.

The four teachers used Blackboard for achieving advanced purposes. Indeed, I found that their use of WbTs promoted students to use English and exposed them to English in out-of-class activities. In addition to other purposes, the four teachers paid attention to how students dealt with these activities, gave feedback on students’ work, and directed students’ participation. Teachers reported many advantages of using Blackboard, such as saving time, planning lessons, correcting examinations quickly, giving feedback at different times, and learning from their students’ contributions.

EFL students also reported beneficial uses of Blackboard in their learning of English outside the classroom. For example, TS 1-4 said that Blackboard was “an English reference library” that helped him any time to ask questions, to respond to other’s post, to share his experiences of learning English, and to communicate with classmates. He agreed with many students that Blackboard was used as a bridge to connect them to many

web-based learning opportunities, such as YouTube's videos, Quizlet's listening activities, and Englishtown's communities.

These responses show that the four teachers' uses of Blackboard differed from the findings of Mohsen and Shafeeq (2014) who reported that the use of Blackboard focused on administrative issues rather than pedagogical significance for language learning in Saudi Arabia. Mohsen and Shafeeq (2014) studied EFL teachers' perceptions of using Blackboard applications in Saudi Arabia. They focused on teachers' perceptions more than their actual uses of Blackboard, while I focused on both the uses and perceptions. I went further by asking about uses, implications, and perceptions of WbTs, including Blackboard, in EFL teaching and learning. I looked for pedagogical uses of using WbTs to support learning English in the Saudi EFL context after the adoption of Blackboard. In the following section, the second part of this sub-question describes more pedagogical uses, or advanced educational purposes.

*Do these uses support English learning outside the classroom? If so, how?* The answer to the second part of the first sub-question is "yes." The four teachers used Blackboard in effective ways and for supportive practices. To show how, it is valuable to start with students' responses before teachers'.

I start with the last student mentioned above, TS 1-4, who said that Blackboard helped him outside the classroom: to ask questions any time, to respond to other's posts, to talk about his experiences learning English, and to communicate with classmates. He said that he also used his mobile phone and laptop computer to participate in Blackboard and to learn English whenever and wherever he wanted to. During that semester, Blackboard made English available to him because he stated that "Blackboard includes a

set of experiences and providing of English language learners with great time.” He also said that “Blackboard gave his teacher big opportunities to supply them with useful website and good files.” Blackboard encouraged him to learn English, he said (personal communication, December 6, 2015).

NS 2-3 stated that teachers can use Blackboard to suggest many exercises to use English on the Internet because students “need to use English everywhere.” He added many points about how Blackboard supported his learning outside the classroom. He said, “Everyone must participate in the Blackboard. So, everyone can learn. When they post something, I try to understand it and use it.” NS 2-3 informed me that “students ask questions and respond to each other and communicate.” “When they post things, we comment and say our thoughts on it.” He always had “the curiosity to go back to Blackboard and searching what happen there” (personal communication, December 7, 2015). These responses show how teachers structured Blackboard to provide students with activities to use English.

These students repeatedly mentioned that online activities helped them to practice their English in online settings as a result of using Blackboard in their English classes. Such activities were not available in their face-to-face classrooms. Students also talked about their teachers’ uses and practices that added benefits in addition to Blackboard. Furthermore, using their mobile phones in their learning, accessing learning activities from different places and at different times, and collaborating with classmates to boost their language show that learning environments were expanded beyond the classroom through Blackboard’s mediation.

Students recognized the importance of WbTs to expand their learning environments by adding more learning opportunities to their courses. For example, in the second students' questionnaire (Appendix D), my last question included statements that described the importance of teachers' use of Blackboard for achieving eight educational objectives. Table 4.3 shows that most students considered Blackboard important in achieving these objectives. More than 47 students of 54 selected *very important* or *important* in all but two statements. The second one from the bottom was *very important* or *important* for 41 students, while the third one from the bottom was *very important* or *important* for 43 students. In other words, 41 or more students stated that using Blackboard to achieve each of these objectives was either *very important* or *important*.

Table 4.3

*The Importance of Teachers' Use of Blackboard to Achieve These Objectives*

<b>Statement</b>	<b>V. Important</b>	<b>Important</b>	<b>Neither</b>	<b>Unimportant</b>
To include online resources and supporting websites in Blackboard.	24	23	5	0
To provide web-based opportunities to learn English outside the classroom.	19	28	3	2
To communicate with students in discussion board.	22	27	2	1
To give online feedback on your works and posts.	26	21	3	1
To upload web-based audio files and videos to teach listening and speaking.	26	22	3	1
To connect content covered in the classroom with online learning activities.	19	24	7	2
To familiarize students with using online resources to learn English.	19	22	7	3
To encourage students to be independent in their learning of English.	17	30	4	0

Most students confirmed the advantages of using Blackboard and reported experiencing similar activities and applications. However, they recognized some differences from teacher to teacher use of Blackboard. Zaki said his students were aware of different uses of Blackboard by their teachers. He suggested that there should be standard ways of using Blackboard at SSU because faculty were given the control to use Blackboard as they preferred. In other words, SSU made Blackboard available for teachers to use it in their own methods. SSU expected and encouraged teachers to utilize supporting YouTube videos or PDF files to assist students.

I do not agree with Zaki's suggestion to limit the teachers' methods to use Blackboard, because such a suggestion also limits teachers' creativity and productivity. In addition, I wonder which standards or ways should be followed to use Blackboard. Blackboard is only a tool used by a teacher. Blackboard, as any technology, cannot offer successful education itself; success depends on how the teacher uses it and supports it with different strategies (El Tartoussi & Tamim, 2009). In the first part of this sub-question above, I discuss different uses by the four teachers. One of the goals of asking this sub-question about uses of Blackboard in this study was to determine whether there were differences among teachers. With these differences in using Blackboard, teachers can find different advantages and achieve several goals for students' sake.

Using Blackboard in each teacher's own methods, the four teachers were able to deal with students' difficulties, such as the "lack of some students' experiences to use Internet-based technologies," the need for training sessions, the "necessity to have a learning center in the campus to support them," Internet-access ability at their homes, and the individual difference in learners' motivation to learn (Gardner, 2005). Teachers were

able to communicate with students at any time during the week to facilitate those issues. Therefore, Blackboard supplied EFL teachers with more abilities that empowered them to precisely respond to students' needs and reduce their difficulties. Blackboard offered a highly interactive medium of learning that could be customized to meet individual needs (Levine & Sun, 2003). Teachers used this blended learning platform to promote learning English outside the classroom and to encourage independent learning. Blackboard supported the student-centered approach because it was used not as a complement to learning but as a defining fundamental part of it (Moore et al., 2011).

The four teachers noticed some changes in the learning and teaching processes around them after using Blackboard. This agrees with DeNeui and Dodge (2006), who stated that Blackboard applications can change the way teachers teach and learners learn. Outside the classroom, Zaki used Blackboard to check his students' understanding of any lesson by the feedback he always required them to send him after every class. He also added links to different websites that provided lesson-related exercises. He tried to use Blackboard in whatever ways he could to support students' learning. For example, he uploaded a PDF file of 30 general questions to encourage his students to practice these questions outside the classroom by recording interviews with non-Saudis. His students also "interviewed foreigners in English outside the classroom, and this should be recorded and uploaded to Blackboard." Then, he guided them to listen to these interviews, comment on them, and transcribe at least three of them. He told me that his students' learning of English progressed more than it would have without using Blackboard.

Students said that interactive multimedia materials attracted their attention and created mental images that enabled them to retrieve taught information (Clements & Sarama, 2003). They enjoyed their interactive environments, multi-media applications, teamwork, connectivity, hands-on experiences, inquiry-based approaches, and self-centered learning opportunities (Barnes, Marateo, & Ferris, 2007; McLoughlin & Lee, 2007). Blackboard's adoption contributed to teachers' abilities in employing multimedia materials and interactive activities in non-face-to-face settings.

In this study, Blackboard was used to support learning of English outside the classroom in uncounted ways. Indeed, using Blackboard achieved the six aims of Osguthorpe and Graham (2003): pedagogical richness, access to knowledge, social interaction, personal agency, cost effectiveness, and ease of revision. Moreover, it supported traditional learning settings through online learning settings and resources. It was an interactive and multimedia platform that combined visual, audio, and video elements that attracted learners' attention and created mental images that helped improve the retention of information being taught (Clements & Sarama, 2003). Students reported that they spent much of their free time on multimodal English activities, such as watching YouTube videos in which students were listening, thinking, writing, and repeating new words.

Finally, this study does indeed show that Blackboard can support learning of English outside the classroom. Many findings show that Blackboard provided richer learning opportunities than classrooms, enhanced communicative activities and authentic uses of English, increased students' motivation and confidence to learn English, equipped them with the skills they needed to learn English individually, helped them focus on their



needs to learn English, boosted their communication and participation, and created supportive learning settings. Because I was interested in recognizing if EFL teachers used Blackboard to deliver “a wide variety of multimedia content, with pedantic and authentic language models” (Szendeffy, 2008, p. 4), this study finds, in fact, that EFL teachers used Blackboard in effective ways and that EFL learners had more web-based opportunities to learn English outside the classroom (Barrs, 2012).

### **Answer Research Sub-question 2**

The second sub-question was: *What are the teachers’ perceptions of their use of web-based technologies, including Blackboard, to support English learning outside the classroom?* Teachers’ perceptions were “positive.” To answer this question, I use findings from my five themes introduced above. In fact, the third and fourth themes—participants’ affective factors and teachers’ roles in blended learning—provided more details about teachers’ perceptions of using WbTs to support students’ learning outside the classroom and in online settings than other themes.

Teachers reported their positive perceptions of adopting Blackboard at SSU and how Blackboard changed their teaching approaches, environments, and learning outcomes. These changes helped to develop teachers’ positive perceptions about the usefulness of Blackboard or other WbTs to support learning of English outside the classroom. Therefore, teachers’ perceptions about WbTs were applied to their teaching practices (Ihmeideh, 2010). In other words, their feelings were reflected in their uses and practices that I discuss under my first two themes: increasing uses of online resources and authentic uses of English. For example, teachers reported that they tried more features of several WbTs, used online links to support their lessons, reported many communications

with students in English, and provided various activities that exposed students to English in authentic situations. These practices occurred as a result of positive perceptions of utilizing WbTs in their teaching approaches.

In Theme 3, I discuss three affective factors: comfort, motivation, and confidence. I describe how teachers believed that using Blackboard gave them the flexibility to work in a comfortable environment. In addition, teachers perceived using Blackboard as a motive to include more useful online materials in their teaching and to try them with their students. They also were confident enough to take advantage of web-based applications, to use different resources in their courses, and to change their teaching methods based on the benefits they discovered. They were confident to utilize more functions of Blackboard properly in their teaching. They spent time and effort in learning how to upload extra activities, to track students' participations, to approach training issues with different solutions, and to accommodate students' needs and interests.

Teachers' responses about Blackboard's flexibility, comfortable work in online environment, and their motivation and confidence in the blended learning situation indicate that teachers had positive perceptions of using WbTs to support learning English. In fact, these perceptions helped them to improve their teaching, to expand their approaches, and to motivate their students to try these resources. Teachers' perceptions, ideas, and experiences provide important insights about social context and teachers' roles.

Comfort level, raising motivation, and high confidence played a role in shaping the four teachers' perceptions. These affective factors influenced how teachers performed after adopting Blackboard in this Saudi EFL context. I took into consideration the role of

affective factors in the learning process because this study explored EFL teachers' and learners' reflections, responses, and perceptions of using WbTs at SSU. Participants' perceptions about a situation, their reflection on it, and their response to it affect their development and learning (Mahn & John-Steiner, 2002). The findings in the main question above demonstrate the importance of not only pedagogical aspects but also affective aspects in using WbTs to learn English in out-of-classroom activities.

The last question in the second teachers' questionnaire (Appendix B) had 11 statements about the four teacher's preferences, practices, and perceptions (Table 4.4). According to my definition of perception in Chapter 2, teachers' selections on these statements show that teachers had positive perceptions of using Blackboard in their teaching of English. Teachers selected the statements showing that their use of Blackboard *always* made them more accessible to their students at different times and *always* familiarized their learners with online learning activities. In addition, three teachers selected the statements to indicate that their use of Blackboard *always* enabled them to effectively address some student's learning needs and to give immediate support and feedback to the students. They noted that Blackboard *always* increased learners' participation in activities and discussions outside the classroom. Therefore, teachers encouraged students to use the Internet to self-learn English. Other responses ranged from *sometimes*, *often*, and *always*; no teacher chose *rarely* or *never*.

The four teachers' perceptions of using Blackboard in their teaching of English were similar. Abdo perceived Blackboard as an important supplementary factor because it provided "unlimited benefits for teacher and students to get from e-learning." Noor was motivated to use Blackboard as "a great tool that brought better chances [to students] of

participating without the pressure of time or the presence of others and better chances of practicing and learning more for those who are motivated enough to learn English.”

Taher found many resources by saying, “Out there, there are a lot of web-based learning resources; if one can utilize them in a brilliant way they serve as being the best.

Therefore, it relies heavily on one’s utilization.” Zaki perceived Blackboard as a tool to give students “an opportunity to discover various ways of learning other than the traditional ones.” Moreover, Zaki was confident to say that he

. . . had to come up with ways to engage students to do things online as this is seen as very trendy these days, not only because of the trends but because students focus much more on multitasking than we think. They are able to use technology to provide themselves with masses of information, so using this medium proves to be popular. (Zaki, personal communication, November 11, 2015)

In this study, these positive perceptions are important to develop teachers’ practices and enrich their approaches. However, I aimed to go beyond such perceptions by looking at how teachers incorporated these WbTs in their teaching. The four teachers did so, as their comments and findings in this chapter show. Their motivation, confidence, and comfort with their experiences helped them integrate these WbTs in their teaching of English. This agrees with what I discussed in Chapter 2 that motivation and expectations influence people’s perception (Fantino & Reynolds, 1975; Hellriegel & Slocum, 2007). Feng (2012) added experiences and beliefs to be interwoven as other variables that influence individuals’ perceptions. Therefore, teachers’ experiences of

Blackboard and their motivation to employ online resources helped them to develop such positive perceptions quoted above.

Table 4.4

*The Four Teachers' Responses to Question 6*

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Always</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Never</b>
I prefer online teaching than face-to-face teaching in my English course.	0	1	3	0	0
My lessons include online resources and web-based activities in the Blackboard system.	1	2	1	0	0
I use Blackboard to communicate outside the classroom with learners in my English course.	2	2	0	0	0
I encourage students to use the Internet on their own to learn English.	3	1	0	0	0
Blackboard helps me to connect classroom learning with out-of-classroom activities.	1	2	1	0	0
I give immediate support and feedback to my students by using Blackboard.	3	1	0	0	0
Using Blackboard in my English course increases learners' participation in activities and discussions outside the classroom.	3	1	0	0	0
Using Blackboard in my course makes me more accessible to my students at different times.	4	0	0	0	0
Using Blackboard in my course enables me to address some student's learning needs effectively.	3	1	0	0	0
Using Blackboard in my course familiarizes my learners with online learning activities.	4	0	0	0	0
Using Blackboard in my English course enables learners to look for online learning resources for using English outside the classroom.	0	2	2	0	0

Such positive perceptions that led the four EFL teachers to integrate WbTs in their classes at SSU emerged from their experiences of using WbTs as a tool of learning (Ajayi, 2009). The teachers perceived WbTs as a significant tool for learning how to teach English and how to provide their students with activities that facilitated a social construction of knowledge; encouraged collaboration; and afforded customized, independent learning. They dealt with WbTs as a tool for resources, communication, presentation, and writing as well as a tool for motivation (Kim, 2008).

The four teachers paid attention to their new roles that were developed after they used Blackboard. They recognized their responsibilities and worked as well-informed persons who facilitated the learning process. Their positive perceptions were associated with careful attention to their roles; this attention enabled them to succeed in applying several WbTs in their teaching (Park & Son, 2009). In other words, teachers' roles and uses of WbTs depended on their perceptions of them (Park & Son, 2009). Indeed, they translated their perceptions of WbTs into instructional approaches (Ihmeideh, 2010). Given what I discuss above, I argue that successful integration of WbTs and changes in teachers' roles to teach language were a result of teachers' positive perceptions.

It was obvious in teachers' responses that they carried out their perceptions in their teaching. Their reactions to unmotivated students by using WbTs to deal with them demonstrate how teachers behaved based on their positive perceptions of using WbTs in their courses. Because teachers believed in the role of WbTs, teachers used WbTs for about a month to motivate those few students. Moreover, teachers employed these resources to enable students to facilitate their individual differences, needs, and interests. Teachers' positive perceptions helped them to determine the pedagogical benefits of

these uses in language learning. WbTs helped teachers to create a supportive learning environment that affected students' perceptions, as I discuss in the following sub-question.

Given previous details, these positive perceptions helped improve teachers' affective factors, which in turn, helped develop teachers' roles in blended learning settings. The four teachers understood that they were required to scaffold their learners to use Blackboard's applications and functions to learn English outside the classroom. Teachers recognized several roles after using Blackboard, such as to expose learners to English learning activities in online settings, to promote their participation outside the classroom, to engage them in the discussion forum, and to create authentic uses of English that were different from classroom language. Teachers expressed their concerns about supporting their students' learning of English. They fully acknowledged their responsibilities as experts in this EFL context, persons who should guide and support EFL learners to succeed.

### **Answer Research Sub-question 3**

My third sub-question was: *What are the students' perceptions of their use of web-based technologies, including Blackboard, to support English learning outside the classroom?* As I answered the second question, all themes are integrated to answer this question. More specifically, I use findings from the third and fifth themes, which are participants' affective factors and students' autonomy, to discuss how students' perceptions were "positive" in this study.

Students informed me that they had many opportunities to use English outside the classroom, by writing in English without the fear of mistakes, by speaking "freely no

matter about grammar,” and by communicating with their teachers at any time. They liked learning English in these out-of-class opportunities because they were permitted to use English “without any constraint,” and unlike in the classroom, when more formal English was expected. One of the students wrote in the first students’ questionnaire: “I can learn English not from the school but from my using of English.” Students mentioned that they never learned English in their lives “in any other English class before this.” Students agreed that “anyone can learn English every day,” “learning English is not at school anymore,” “now the social media and Internet let you search about many learning websites or accounts,” and “even movies and music can help to develop our vocabulary.”

In the first students’ questionnaire, I developed 11 statements to learn about students’ perceptions of using Blackboard, web-based resources, and their teacher’s techniques (Appendix C). Of 32 students, 28 enjoyed using WbTs to learn English; 27 students thought that online activities should be part of language learning; 25 agreed that teachers should use the Internet to teach English in Saudi Arabia, 21 showed that using Blackboard in their English course helped them learn English; and 18 students stated that their teacher provided them with online opportunities to learn English outside the classroom.

On the other hand, only six students found difficulty in using Blackboard, and 17 students favored face-to-face instructions rather than online instructions. Such numbers told me that students had positive perceptions of using Blackboard and WbTs to support their learning of English outside the classroom. I learned later—from teachers—that students had difficulties of using Blackboard only during the first month of the semester. By the time of the interviews, they were more comfortable with Blackboard. Moreover,



several students reported that their preference to face-to-face instruction was limited to learning specific skills or doing some activities such as writing practices and editing tutors, but not to the entire course.

All of the interviewee students asserted in several ways that Blackboard played a significant role in improving learning and teaching of English in general and in boosting their learning skills in particular. They reported unlimited benefits in using WbTs to learn English throughout this study. For example, TS 2-5 was satisfied with his “teacher’s use of Blackboard although students can do more and go deep on the Blackboard.” He believed that students can use the resources available on Blackboard to continue their learning of English. Some students also used WbTs to learn other subjects and provided several stories about using English to learn other subjects. ZS 2-13 told me a story about using English to learn about his physics course.

. . . We have physics teacher who speak Arabic all the time but we didn’t understand from him. After searching on YouTube, I found an American teacher who I’ve understand from him more than the Arabian teacher. That’s makes me believe I can learn from anywhere in the world. (personal communication, December 7, 2015)

ZS 2-13 used his experience with a physics class to give me an example of using the Internet and WbTs to learn English. He believed the Internet “is the easiest way to learn English these days” and added that he learned English from YouTube because “many Arabian people who share their lessons about English on YouTube for free.”

Students valued their learning together in groups and enjoyed discussing ideas and lessons in Blackboard’s forum. They provided me with many details about how their

collaboration helped them learn English in various ways. For instance, ZS 1-8 said, “We helped each other find new ideas, and work on grammar, words, spelling, organization, and all that. We give each other feedback on everything.” AS 1-4 said, “I learned how to work with other students. I learn from them. They have different ideas, different opinions, new words, etc.” He added “When I was talking with other students, we started to have better and clear ideas, better writing, and better sentences.” NS 2-3 favored “to work with new students and learn from them” in each activity because the other students were different from him. He also mentioned that learning in groups can help students to correct their mistakes and to succeed in a “short time.” These details describe how students experienced collaboration in their learning of English and how they perceived the ways they supported each other.

Students discovered several benefits of discussing the lesson with their classmates: to practice the new vocabulary with them, to “find the meanings of words and knowledge of new words and terms,” to use English out of the “limited places such as classroom,” to “learn English so fast, with practicing,” and to share their “ideas in English.” Their collaborative learning enriched individual language skills because they supported their ideas and together discussed learning techniques. It increased their interest in learning and enabled them to perform at higher intellectual levels than when they work individually (Vygotsky, 1978).

Language learning is a collaborative achievement that occurs when learners assist and mediate each other (Ellis, 2000), similar to what students did above. The discussion board, for instance, was a situated context (Kim, 2011) in which learning was constructed through collaboration of individuals and learners scaffolded one another (Lantolf, 2007).

Nather (2014) stated that collaborative learning is very important in Saudi classrooms because ordinarily, collaborative work does not exist and students learn individually in a classroom.

Students' responses and experiences showed that many of them knew their needs and challenges. They recognized that many differences existed among them because the learning process varies from one student to another based on many reasons, including learning styles and individual differences (Coates et al., 2005). Among many examples, I elaborate on responses of three students below, to create a scenario that shows how they used WbTs to learn English based on their experiences of their needs and interests.

AS 1-4, said he did "not like to participate in online open discussions that included many participants." He was concerned about the numbers, length, and complexity of topics, posts, comments, and participants in online open forums. However, he liked to discuss topics in Blackboard because he found discussion activities in Blackboard "were supportive and did not have many comments or posts" (personal communication, December 2, 2015). I argue that it was premature to encourage AS 1-4 to participate in online open discussions because he had not received adequate preparation. Blackboard's forum was a contributory opportunity for him to participate in online discussions.

TS 2-5 used different websites and applications to have "more courses about English language." He watched any English program and tried to understand what he saw. He wrote down the new words, repeated listening to any lesson that he did not understand, and read online stories and novels. He said, "I watch a favorite channel in YouTube channel *Abu-Omer* to teach English language, and I love animation channels"

(personal communication, December 3, 2015). Many students perceived repeating lessons or videos as useful techniques that improved their listening, speaking, and memorizing.

TS 1-1 was confident about how he learned English by “listening to Islamic lectures in English.” He stated that listening to these lectures improved his English because “they were stored on my iPhone.” Indeed, he did not “know much of what they were lecturing about” but he “used to write down each new word for me so that I could comprehend.” He thought that YouTube helped him a lot because when he listened to words, he tried to spell them out before checking his spelling in Google or in his dictionary. He recognized progress in his learning. He believed that he “learn too much in English, make my English language stronger, and passion to know something new.” In addition, he described a unique technique in his participation in the discussion forum by translating Arabic proverbs into English. He “could not add more information above what they add, but I comment on their participations and save all of them to return if I need something.” He added “that doesn’t mean I didn’t participate on Blackboard but not that much. I only focus on Arabic proverbs in English; I made some of it” (personal communication, December 3, 2015).

In this study, most students recognized their learning needs and interests; they worked on achieving their learning objectives and on pursuing their plans. They used online resources to face their challenges and meet their needs, depending on their preferences. They gained the confidence to direct their own learning. They positively perceived how teachers facilitated learning outside the classroom and how they opened limitless doors for them to use English. Their practices and perceptions went in line with Liu’s (2010) students who assessed their own abilities, set appropriate goals, made

necessary adjustments to their learning plans, and understood that they needed to practice the language themselves so that they could learn it.

In addition to their positive perceptions, students valued how portable devices, mobile phones, and laptop computers enabled them to use English whenever and wherever they wanted. Perceiving these devices as learning tools led AS 1-3 to say, “People can learn English without going to classes in Saudi Arabia. They can use some Internet websites.” These digital tools were perceived as language learning tools and as an alternative resource to learn and accommodate their particular needs as adult learners to learn anytime and anywhere (Hu, 2011). Furthermore, they also recognized how their utilization of mobile devices in their learning improved their performance inside and outside the classroom because they were able to learn “anywhere-anytime” (Jaradat, 2014). Such perceptions boost their individual skills to learn English by themselves.

Students completely understood the difficulties of using English in the Saudi public life. They recognized how it was not simple to find someone who patiently would speak to them and understand their “broken English.” Therefore, students took advantage of using WbTs to practice English. They tried to learn English independently and to speak with many people in their own ways. For example, AS 1-4 said he spoke “a little English in digital games” and “I can learn every single second something new. I can practice my English in the same time. I can learn some new words; after that I’ll use it in my daily life” (personal communication, December 2, 2015). Such autonomous practice contributed to their sense of themselves as sufficiently powerful to learn, and students reported that they gradually took control of their learning and advanced their studies.

Students also recognized the differences between face-to-face classroom learning settings and online learning settings as well as between inside the classroom and outside the classroom learning settings. In addition, they distinguished between teacher-centered learning and student-centered learning. These distinctions are important for EFL students in order to proceed in their learning and to meet their needs. For instance, ZS 1-8 compared learning in Blackboard with learning in classrooms. He told me that he liked using WbTs in learning but he still preferred “old-fashioned instructions and face-to-face learning.” He was interested in finding “new ways to use English” because he had the “confidence to use English outside of classroom.” He summarized his thought by saying, “It is necessary to go to the institutes to learn English, then, it becomes easy to learn it from home by Twitter and Snapchat because many people download useful educational clips” (personal communication, December 2, 2015).

Their words are example of how students perceived the importance of formal instruction in a classroom at the beginning of a student’s journey to learn a language. Students’ recognition of these difference show how students benefit of each situation. Students realized what they learned in classroom and what they could learn and practice outside the classroom. This was supported by TS 1-1 who said, “If there weren’t classrooms, I won’t learn English because it’s the first step on my life that gave me more option to improve my English.” While students had different opinions about learning inside the classroom, they agreed that “real language learning happens out of the classroom.” This means that students sought practices of English existed outside the classroom; classroom was not sufficient to practically learn English. They recognized how their language developed when they used it in many situations outside the

classroom. NS 2-3 considered that “English inside the class is straight, and outside the class is random because I am not using grammar.” AS 1-3 mentioned that “the use of English outside the classroom has no limits where you can use the language in networking in a simplified manner which increases our skills in the language.”

These comments explain how students realized the influences of the differences between these learning settings and how each setting influenced their learning of English. TS 1-1 said, “In classrooms, students feel afraid of committing mistakes. However, behind screens, where students are non-seen, they feel more courage to participate.” Many students distinguished the differences in both settings in their words and reported their perceptions of each. In classroom, some students have stress being with teachers and other students; they do not feel comfortable in that learning setting. Outside the classroom, they practice and learn with no one around them; they have no stress.

In the classroom, they recognized that they were “subjected to certain vocabularies.” The “learning is limited to education skills, such as reading and writing.” They learn “English as more academic. Everything should be right.” They thought that “classroom learning is good, but it’s not enough to improve your language” and “is a good push for students to learn talking and writing academic.” Some students reported that “many teachers put a student into a situation where he will participate because he is afraid of teacher.” These perceptions indicate that formal classroom learning is essential to start the process of language learning and provide students with the basics, which needs to continuously practice in daily life outside the classroom.

On the other hand, outside the classroom, students mentioned that they “usually heard new vocabularies.” They rarely “considered about rules of the language” when they

used English because “no one will criticize you when you make even a single mistake.” This was clearly repeated to me by the majority of students, describing how they posted many comments, answered discussion questions, and participated more in the discussion forum after teachers ignored their grammatical structures. Teachers’ behavior motivated them to practice their English, which in turn, promoted their learning of it outside the classroom. They reported that online “activities may make the learning of English more interesting than classrooms.” They “had the ability to repeat videos again and again” until they completely “understand the concept that been explained.”

Outside the classroom, students also appreciated the uses of images and videos as interactive learning environments. Some students liked to take online quizzes rather than printed-paper quizzes. For instance, TS 1-4 liked online learning activities and quizzes because “they have pictures, videos, phrases, conversations with people.” Many students enjoyed learning in those multimodal activities and how those online quizzes could be assessed automatically. Such rapid feedback enhanced their motivation to learn in today’s digital world.

As digital-generation students, they tended to be more independent in their studies (McLoughlin & Lee, 2007). When learners think about how they can learn (Lantolf, 2000), they explore opportunities to learn and revise their actions based on past mistakes (Kao, 2008). As I argued above, their skills, abilities, and ways to be independent learners allowed them to take advantage of those environmental changes for developing their learning. They were active social beings who independently participated in learning experiences around them and were being self-regulated learners who internalized what they learn independently (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).



Students' perceptions of using WbTs in their learning of English outside the classroom were developed based on their past experiences, previous learning, motivation, expectations, personality, and attitudes (Feng, 2102; Hellriegel & Slocum, 2007) and were influenced by their teachers' perceptions and teaching methods (Cope & Ward, 2002). Students' growing motivation to use those resources to learn English has resulted in long-term improvements in ability and confidence, which took more time to develop (Marek, 2008). Such motivation to improve their English supports this study's attempt to understand learners' perceptions (Gardner, 2005) because students' perception is linked with and influenced by their motivation to learn or to use learning materials (Dörnyei, 2009).

Students were very pleased about submitting their assignments electronically, discussing different topics in Blackboard, sharing their ideas and experiences to use English, and learning English in online activities. Their responses showed enthusiasm for practicing English in web-based applications, the discussion forum, YouTube, and other WbTs. Their learning of English in the PYP at SSU with Blackboard in the fall of 2015 was different from their learning of English in their previous years. To them, Blackboard was "the easiest way to actively participate and review the lesson" because they had time to think and flexibility to answer in comfortable ways. Blackboard was an efficient tool that enhanced their communication with each other and their communication with their teachers. They used WbTs wisely and creatively to interact with the English language (Blake, 2008) in many online opportunities, and the students described themselves as "being e-learners."

Evidence in this study shows that students positively perceived using WbTs, including Blackboard, to support English learning outside the classroom. They were comfortable in language learning environments, confident to continue their learning of English, and motivated to use whatever resources helped them to achieve their goals. They recognized their teachers' methods and behaviors in using Blackboard, WbTs, or other applications. Moreover, students understood their own needs, interests, and challenges as non-native English learners and as the "net generation" (McLoughlin & Lee, 2007). They sought immediate feedback, accessibility to information, an interactive environment, multi-media application availability, teamwork with others, connectivity, hands-on experiences, inquiry-based approaches, and self-directed learning opportunities (Barnes, Marateo, & Ferris, 2007).

### **Conclusion**

This chapter presents the findings of this study. It discusses these findings based on five main themes developed by participants' understanding of the changes that occurred after using Blackboard as a blended learning platform at SSU. Themes are: increasing online learning resources, authentic uses of English, participants' affective factors, teachers' roles in blended learning, and students' autonomy. It examines how these thematic findings are related to research questions based on the concepts of the theoretical framework, SCT, and the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

I argue that SSU's adoption of Blackboard was a fundamental change that, in turn, created supportive learning environments in EFL context. These environments energized EFL teachers to promote learning of English outside the classroom through the use of WbTs. Many changes in learning environments stimulated teachers to turn their

effort and time from lecturer and giver of knowledge to supporter and facilitator of learning. In addition, I argue that these learning environments provided students with endless learning opportunities to pursue their learning of English autonomously. With students' understanding of their needs and interests, students used WbTs to focus on their learning difficulties, to improve their skills and knowledge in real-life situations, and to extend their learning outside the classroom. Their positive perceptions of using WbTs in their English learning helped them to succeed in comfortable learning environments that, in turn, increased students' confidence and motivation.

## Chapter 5

This study was designed (a) to determine whether WbTs, software applications, and related activities helped EFL teachers to promote learning of English outside the classroom, after the adoption of Blackboard as a learning platform at SSU; and (b) to explore EFL teachers' and learners' perceptions of using these WbTs to learn English. In Chapter 4, I described how the adoption of Blackboard was a fundamental change that enabled EFL teachers at SSU to promote learning of English outside the classroom. That change created supportive learning environments in which participants had positive perceptions of using WbTs in EFL program. I analyzed that change to identify five major findings: (a) increasing online learning resources, (b) authentic uses of English, (c) participants' affective factors, (d) teachers' roles in blended learning, and (e) students' autonomy.

I used the findings of these themes to answer the main research question, "*How does the adoption of Blackboard in this university help teachers provide web-based opportunities and employ online resources to support students' English learning outside the classroom?*" I explored the question through three sub-questions:

- How is Blackboard used in the EFL context at this university? Do these uses support English learning outside the classroom? If so, how?
- What are the teachers' perceptions of their use of web-based technologies, including Blackboard, to support English learning outside the classroom?
- What are the students' perceptions of their use of web-based technologies, including Blackboard, to support English learning outside the classroom?

The central objective of this chapter is to discuss these findings and to elaborate on the outcomes of applying WbTs in the Saudi EFL context. This chapter starts by discussing the relationships of these main findings according to the experiences of EFL teachers and students. Then, it presents the implications of the findings to support learning of English outside the classroom. It attempts to recommend useful practices and uses of these WbTs in the Saudi EFL curriculum. Next, the chapter describes the limitations and challenges that I faced during the study. Finally, I suggest recommendations for further research before reflecting on the journey of this study and its conclusion.

This chapter relies on the concepts of SCT that are related to language learning and teaching, which are used throughout this study. These concepts include social context, authentic language input, ZPD, teachers' assistance, collaboration, students' support of each other, students' interaction, and their participation. These concepts show the importance of learning environments in creating shifts in students' surroundings, learning opportunities, learners' exposure to English, students' abilities to participate in unlimited learning practices, and their views about learning situations and teaching. Teachers and students' views, thoughts, and perceptions are influenced and formulated by learning environments and vice versa (Vygotsky, 1994). Using these SCT concepts guides the discussion of this chapter in describing how learning environments are an essential factor in teaching approaches, learning process, and language development.

### **Discussion**

**Theme 1: increasing online learning resources.** Findings of this theme suggest that using Blackboard as a LMS supports EFL learning outside the classroom. Findings

show that the four EFL teachers and their students used more and more online resources in language learning courses with Blackboard. In other words, adopting Blackboard in a language-learning course enabled these teachers and learners to employ online links, videos, and other WbTs in their course. Blackboard worked as a platform to connect them with useful websites, online links, YouTube videos, software applications, and other WbTs. The four teachers used Blackboard to extend their lessons beyond the classroom with multimedia links that boosted learning practices in online settings. Learning environments were not limited to the class settings but included daylong use of the language in students' daily lives.

Such connections might be created without any LMS since teachers and students can use these websites, links, and videos without Blackboard. In this study, some participants reported several uses of such WbTs before the adoption of Blackboard, such as Taher's use of online collaboration in a writing course and the use of learning websites by several students. However, their uses—without a LMS—were not effective and strong according to what they described. Their uses were not effective for many reasons including: some uses were personal, depending on their individual differences and skills to succeed, some uses did not follow a clear plan or objectives to achieve, many students did not find a formal connection to these online uses when their teachers used them, and teachers used only emails to send online links with no instructions or follow-up strategies. Without a platform, LMS, these uses neither supported teachers' approach to involve online resources nor promoted students' attempts to find long-term benefits.

These issues were solved by providing learning opportunities in classrooms, out-of-school online learning, and lifelong personal learning. This means that learning

opportunities existed in three settings: formal, informal, and non-formal settings (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). These settings formulate blended learning environments that engaged students in English with the support of endless technologies (Yang, 2011). In this study, a formal learning context, such as the EFL program at SSU, was connected with numerous learning opportunities and applications such as applications, online quizzes, PDF files, YouTube, the discussion forums, and different learning activities in many websites.

Students used these activities and resources to develop their language learning. Prior to using Blackboard, students learned English in classroom settings to prepare them for their future use of English, which was rarely available in Saudi public life. In most circumstances, this future use of English disappeared when students left the classroom. After using Blackboard, students found that the future use of English existed in online settings. Indeed, WbTs offered them many ways to practice their language skills and develop their linguistic knowledge. In other words, the future use of English started at the classroom's door.

Using WbTs as a part of a learning course and as a part of the curriculum means that teachers can plan their lessons in many ways and introduce the objectives of using it. Teachers can use WbTs features, such as direct message and the discussion forum, to extend their teaching time and lesson practices. In other words, teachers can include many learning activities to support their lessons outside the classroom with instructions to use these online resources because not all students know how to use these resources in their learning, particularly when using a resource or an application for the first time. Therefore, students recognize the teaching plans and objectives of these uses and have

enough guidance to follow in their learning of English, rather than depending on their individual skills.

This theme shows the changes in this EFL learning context—from regular classroom lessons to lessons supported by online resources. While learning in the classroom did not change much, learning outside the classroom changed to a great degree. The four teachers used Blackboard in different ways that shifted from using WbTs administrative purposes to advanced educational purposes, such as giving formative feedback, responding to students' posts, and sharing ideas in the discussion forum. In fact, Blackboard was a medium for extending learning outside the classroom and for expanding teaching techniques to include real-life activities related to learning objectives. In this age, classroom instruction without online resources is like food without salt, the preference of very few people. Few students and teachers still prefer the classroom instructions without engaging online resources.

Using English was a part of the daily routine of these students because the learning environment was extended to their daily lives beyond the classroom. Therefore, their use of English increased in quality and quantity in this extended learning environment. Students' learning of English came from their real practice in their lives, rather than from classroom instructions (Lave & Wenger, 1991). According to Vygotsky (1987), students' use of English in daily practices and social interaction enriched their experience of the language, improved their ZPD, and engaged them in the learning process. In other words, these practices helped students to make meaning of their own worlds through their interaction and developed their language process and thinking process in order to learn the “academic concepts” of language (Mahn, 2015).



**Theme 2: authentic uses of English.** This theme shows that the learning activities that were used by the four EFL teachers promoted authentic uses of English. Findings show that the adoption of Blackboard resulted in using various authentic learning activities outside the classroom. Teachers and students reported many changes in learning activities from teacher-based learning activities in the classroom to student-based activities in online-interactive settings. In these online interactive settings, the language forms and functions were not determined by the teachers but by students' interaction and participation.

In these new online learning activities, English was used in situations similar to real life, to learn listening, speaking, writings, and reading. Using English in these activities resembles its use in real-life actions and has the significance of its use in the real-world (Herrington & Herrington, 2006). These authentic uses of English in their daily lives connected students' thoughts with what they learned about English in classroom settings and helped to develop their thinking about the language. This authentic input of English in online resources is highly recommended for the Saudi EFL context.

Such changes in learning activities offer many types of interaction, communication, and participation. These changes produce rich learning contents to facilitate learning English in authentic situations, such as acquiring new words from its use in real-life situations when students listened to YouTube videos and participated in the forum. Therefore, these changes and the new types of learning activities expose students to real-life uses of English in social practices (Lantolf, 2000; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Zong, 2008). Using these interactive authentic activities including Quizlet and

Englishtown websites created learning environments that blend inside and outside the classroom (Levy & Stockwell, 2006). These blended learning environments motivated students and teachers to use English in their communication with each other and among the students themselves.

These environments with authentic uses of English facilitated using English for communicative purposes. Such environments changed students' thinking about using and learning English outside the classroom. Before exposing them to English in these environments, students thought that English class was the only place that provided them with opportunities to practice English effectively and develop their linguistic skills. In authentic use of English, students' thoughts and language are not controlled by teachers or textbooks. This shift in students' thoughts plays a role in mediating language knowledge and internalizing language development (Vygotsky, 1978). When students' thinking developed, their language was enriched, and their skills to use the language improved.

Adopting a blended learning platform compensates for the lack of learning opportunities outside the EFL classroom. This study finds that the Saudi EFL context can be a supportive learning context with the proper uses of available web-based resources. Such a proper use of the Internet or other WbTs can improve the learning environments, increase students' interactions with English language, and empower students' confidence to use English outside the classroom. This study verifies the power of WbTs as valuable tools for EFL education because WbTs supported participants' interactions with online content and communications with others.

The four teachers and their students reported many improvements in the learning settings that connect students to unlimited use of WbTs. In these learning settings, it is possible to build a semi-ESL context with endless online resources that were described as “digital libraries” and “online lessons” in this study. These semi-ESL settings allow students not only to follow teachers’ guidance but also to take advantage of these resources to learn independently. Moreover, students can participate in various social English activities that support their communication and collaboration. Teachers can introduce several paths of access to WbTs for promoting learning outside the classroom.

The findings of this theme suggest that English teaching succeeds if learning activities create active students who use English authentically. Today, it is recommended that EFL teachers position their students as competent rather than deficient in using and learning the language. This study shows how students shifted from the passive reception of knowledge to the active participation in real-life practices. These real-world practices allowed students to imitate authentic ways of thinking, being, reading, writing, and speaking. In these practices, students were conscious of their use of the language and were able to control their learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Such control helped them to engage their previous linguistic knowledge and communication skills in real-life practices.

This shift occurred after students recognized their teachers’ new approaches that were beneficial to students’ communication skills and linguistic knowledge. This shift enabled students to learn the language that served their purposes. In other words, they learned the language they needed in their daily lives. They also used their acquired language from classroom instruction in different online activities to learn additional

language skills needed to survive. It is a matter of fact that they developed their English because it met their needs, rather than focusing its form and structure.

**Theme 3: participants' affective factors.** Findings of this theme demonstrate the changes in the users' feelings and emotions after using WbTs in the EFL program at SSU. The adoption of Blackboard in a language-learning course blends new environments that, in turn, influence the affective factors of students and teachers. This blending process empowered formal classroom instruction with a richness of context and useful teaching strategies that bridged academic settings to daily life settings. This study finds several changes in their affective factors and compiles them into three categories: comfort, raising motivation, and gaining confidence. Changes in comfort, motivation, and confidence follow a gradual process to create positive improvements in teachers' and students' practices, uses, experiences, thoughts, and reflections.

This study shows that teachers found that Blackboard enabled them to work comfortably, motivated them to employ many WbTs in their classes, and increased their confidence in seeking more online learning materials. Teachers were interested in using WbTs in more flexible ways to achieve their objectives and to expand their techniques than they do in traditional classroom. Moreover, students found that the blended learning environments offered them a comfortable learning situation in which they managed their learning and completed their assignments. This situation raised students' motivation to use WbTs in their learning of English because they recognized many advantages that were not available in their classroom. For example, using WbTs provided EFL students with enough confidence to engage in online discussions in Blackboard's forum, to communicate with their teachers and classmates, and to explore new WbTs.

In such supportive situations, teachers and students developed positive perceptions of using WbTs to teach and to learn EFL. Changes in their affective factors about these situations influenced how they perceived Blackboard and how they utilized it. In this study, participants described their experiences, uses, thoughts, and feelings based on their perceptions of their web-based learning environments. In other words, their perceptions of using WbTs in their instructional environments modified their interpretations of their uses, feelings, and experiences. Strong positive perceptions were reflected in this study's findings, which show that utilizing WbTs in EFL learning programs develop advantageous learning environments. They found that formal classroom instruction became effective and beneficial for language learning because these instructions were extended beyond the classroom without restrictions.

In this study, their perceptions help to understand how teachers and students thought and viewed using WbTs in blended learning environments. Learning about perceptions show the role of environments, Blackboard, WbTs, experiences, teaching approaches, instructional objectives, students' skills, and learning strategies to develop and modify their perceptions at SSU. Learning about their perceptions discloses insights about how the learning occurs, what happens outside the classes, and what happens in EFL learning process at SSU as a result of adopting Blackboard. Among these insights, EFL teachers and students confirmed that better opportunities to learn English existed outside the classroom than inside the classroom. Indeed, learning of English was an outside classroom-based process more than an inside classroom-based process. The classroom works as an incubator in which teachers recognize new teaching techniques to guide their students to learn outside the classroom.

The four teachers' positive perceptions led them to develop many skills to employ WbTs and to negotiate meaning with their students because unpredictable questions can be asked at any moment. Their perceptions mediated that they became advisers, facilitators, and guiders of personalized student learning. They were not the source of information and givers of knowledge. Therefore, teachers learned how to teach online, how to become an effective online teacher, and how to develop needed skills for blended learning courses. Today, modern teaching approaches move from teacher-centered to student-centered; there, students influence the content, materials, activities, and pace of learning. Teachers might adopt the role of a manager of the learning environment, facilitator, tutor, and learner in classroom settings and online settings.

Following these modern teaching approaches increases students' confidence to be independent learners. Independent learners can find frequent applications of English in their daily lives that might change their thinking about using English in both academic and social practice. In these frequent applications and learning practices of English, Mahn (2015) stated that students can depend on their background and experience and use their understanding and thinking to proceed in their learning of the language.

**Theme 4: teachers' roles in blended learning.** This theme indicates that teachers develop specific roles in blended learning environments. Using Blackboard at SSU modifies teachers' roles by focusing on roles of (a) facilitating students' learning rather than giving them knowledge, and (b) dealing with students' difficulties and individual differences. In blended learning environments, most teachers' tasks and practices belong to these two main roles: facilitating rather than lecturing, and dealing

with students' difficulties and individual differences. These two roles included their pedagogical practices and teaching approaches in classroom settings and online settings.

This study shows that teachers' roles were improved and teachers had many facilities to succeed in performing these roles. Blackboard, as a blended learning platform, helped the four teachers to fulfill their new roles by supporting students' learning of English outside the classroom, by preparing learning activities that accommodated individual differences, and by facilitating students' independent learning. This study illustrates how the four teachers had more flexibility to use several online resources in their teaching; were motivated to take advantage of WbTs features in their lessons; and gained confidence to evaluate their experiences, practices, expectations, and plans of utilizing more WbTs in their teaching practices.

The findings show that teachers were willing to use more and more WbTs in their teaching to succeed. They also explored new applications or features in WbTs to continue their attempts in developing their courses. Teachers were optimistic as a result of working in productive environments; they described their future plans to use more WbTs such as creating a teaching account on Snapchat for their classes and uploading relevant "snaps" for discussing and learning. This study suggests that when the four teachers found useful settings in which they succeeded in their roles, they tried new teaching ways to boost their students' development, such as Taher's attempts to use Google Drive for collaborative writing and Noor's use of Quizlet for individual difference in learning new vocabulary.

The four teachers' positive perceptions of using WbTs helped to change their roles and modify their techniques in blended learning environments. These teachers

anticipated changes in their pedagogic roles inside and outside of the classroom, in their needs for different skills from their regular classroom-based skills, and in learning many things at once. Outside the classroom, they recognized that they did not control the language uses and practices and needed to balance their participation in online activities. Therefore, they made great investments of time, effort, and commitment to adopt these new roles, to provide students with access to rich virtual learning settings, and to push them to progress beyond their existing knowledge (Mahn, 2015).

The study emphasizes the importance of dealing with students' difficulties and individual differences in using English in the blended EFL context. For instance, students needed to find virtual speakers to chat with them in English, needed to improve individual learning skills, and needed to find appropriate links or videos with no unacceptable images. When teachers supported students to meet these needs, students achieved several learning objectives and were motivated to have more practice. In addition, students differ in their skills, abilities, learning strategies, learning styles, and their ZPD. For example, some students prefer individual learning activities while some prefer learning in groups. Therefore, this study verifies that teachers need to accommodate different learning styles and individual differences in order to take advantage of blended learning environments. These environments supply teachers with ways to deal with students' difficulties and individual differences.

These environments provided deep learning for each EFL student through dynamic interaction among the teacher, knowledge, content, and the students. The environments also energized students' participation by making them active agents and improved their motivation to socialize with others. Students produced authentic, coherent



discourse that went beyond academic language and grammatical accuracy in classroom settings (Mahn, 2015). Moreover, students collaborated with teachers and with each other to complete many activities, scaffolded their ZPD, and led them to attain the highest possible cognitive levels (Lantolf & Appel, 1994).

**Theme 5: students' autonomy.** The findings of this theme describe the students' abilities to use WbTs to continue their independent learning by using WbTs by themselves. This study finds that the adoption of Blackboard at SSU gradually familiarized students with using more WbTs features in various ways, rather than Blackboard's features. EFL students realized that there was a rich context around them that facilitated their learning of English on a daily basis. Regardless of the formal EFL learning settings at SSU, the findings show that EFL students used English in informal and non-formal settings by themselves. For example, most interviewee students used English in playing online video games; in chatting with people; in discussing forums and blogs; and in Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. Students' use of English was a social process that included valuable English terms, words, phrases, lessons, and videos.

Students considered these WbTs, particularly YouTube, as a large classroom and open resources because WbTs offered learning with entertainment and allowed learning in different methods not available in classroom, and by people other than their teachers. Their frequent connection with WbTs was a shift that exposed them to authentic practices of English in their daily lives. This study finds also that students used social networking services to learn English by communicating with native speakers across the world. This suggests that WbTs energized students to study English themselves outside the classroom

by learning how to speak, to acquire new vocabulary, to look for online lessons, and to practice their skills—reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

This study underscores the importance of the learning environments in changing students' skills, motivation, confidence, learning strategies, and language development. If students find the environments supporting them and enabling them to achieve their goals, they become motivated and confident enough to enrich their language skills independently. In other words, such environments enable students to seek more online opportunities for practicing their English by themselves in their daily lives. They recognize the advantages of using WbTs and obtain more benefits because they assume increased responsibilities for their learning. Indeed, students can customize their individual learning based on their personal needs, interests, and skills. In some instances, students can learn without teachers, as students reported in this study. For example, students can self-correct their spelling mistakes in several ways; learning with a friend or in groups, using Google, and activating automatic correction in their mobile phones.

This study illustrates the importance of students' collaboration in learning contexts to support future individual learning. In collaborative settings, students practice language skills, scaffold each other, develop their skills, provide formative feedback, and share their abilities and knowledge. In other words, collaborative learning expands students' ZPD, supports one another's knowledge, and builds each other's language and vocabulary (Mahn, 2015). In addition, collaborative work helps students to do the tasks by themselves in the future and connects these tasks to their everyday lives. Students also realize how their input and contribution influence the collaborative learning activities in which they participate. Collaboration changes students' perceptions about the learning

process by influencing their linguistic skills, pushing them to invest more time in online learning than they have in a regular class, and participating in the learning experience around them to actively learn (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

In today's digital life, education requires and encourages students' independent learning, particularly with adult students. While it is difficult for language learners to depend completely on themselves to continue their learning, and while the traditional classroom and teacher-centered approaches do not provide enough support for language learning, blended learning environments can create the difference. Students still need a good teacher to help them learn and to provide them with paths to succeed when necessary. Although an infinite amount of data and resources exist online to learn, students need teachers to facilitate the use of these data, particularly in EFL contexts. In Saudi EFL programs, teachers rarely succeed in online settings by using traditional teaching methods, such as grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods. But they likely will succeed by adopting WbTs that promote lifelong learning processes that require use, practice, and interaction with people in social settings.

This study finds that blended learning environments include features and advantages of, not only regular classroom, but also online settings and resources as well as combining teacher-centered approach and student-centered learning. This study shows that Blackboard provides teachers with options to shift between teacher-centered and student-centered approaches depending on learning situations and students' needs. Teachers are able to move back and forth between being classroom facilitators to being creators of independent language students. Since students have a wide range of experiences and backgrounds, teachers can design activities that take into account

individual differences so that students can choose what works for each of them (Al-Musa & Al-Mobark, 2005). Based on their choice, students actively master their basic linguistic skills and obtain higher-order thinking abilities.

### **Relationships of Findings**

The findings of this study support previous studies that showed the usefulness of WbTs to mediate language use, practice, and communication in language learning courses (Blake, 2008; Compton, 2009; Watson & Hempenstall, 2008). Taking advantage of WbTs in language learning settings encouraged Comas-Quinn (2011) to state that more and more language learning schools engage different technologies in their curriculum and adopt learning approaches that blend face-to-face instruction with online activities and technology-based instruction. In this study, the findings suggest that SSU followed the same track by adopting Blackboard, which became a fundamental change in its EFL program. This change created a blended learning system that worked as a means to improve the quality of the Saudi higher education institutions (Alebaikan, 2010).

That change at SSU developed consequent changes that helped me to generate five main themes of this study's findings. I built these themes on the theoretical framework of this study, which relies on SCT concepts related to language learning, such as social context, ZPD, teachers' assistance, and students' collaboration. I consider the findings of first two themes—increasing online learning resources and authentic uses of English—as the foundation of the findings of other themes. Indeed, the changes that resulted in the first two themes influenced affective factors, roles, responsibilities, and contributions of EFL teachers and learners who participated in this study. These changes

positively contributed to the social context, learning environments, and teaching approaches of SSU.

The four teachers' use of online resources not only supported their lessons with WbTs in various ways but also developed different views of teaching and learning. This helped teachers reduce teacher-centered techniques; deepen students' ZPDs (Mahn & John-Steiner, 2002); and deal with language development as a unit, rather than as language divided into its components. Such use created a new teaching context that provided social interaction in online settings and developed mutual relationships with their students and great understanding between student and teacher. The four teachers were willing to develop their students' language and to scaffold their knowledge by providing different-level learning activities and different-skills learning practices.

By the same token, teachers' use of online resources also helped students to learn, understand, think, and achieve what they could not accomplish in the face-to-face classroom. This use created a shift that allowed for students' input and participation and boosted student-centered approaches. In online settings, students focused more on communication skills and authentic use of English, not on mastery of grammatical structures and forms. Because students found a less threatening environment (Warschauer, 1996), these communication settings promoted students' exchanging ideas, asking questions, making comments, and seeking new resources. More importantly, they obtained a new type of teachers' feedback that provided them with instruction, guidance, and support, rather than the graded feedback that typically existed in the classroom. While interacting in these practices and collaborating to perform them, students learned the language that was mediated by others in the context of language learning. Then,

students internalized linguistic forms and functions and were able to use them independently (Khaliliaqdam, 2014).

Looking at the findings of the five themes of this study, I see a relationship that exists among them in which they influence each other. Given the above reflection, I argue that this relationship is circular, for three reasons. First, the first two themes confirm that using WbTs changed EFL contexts from neutral classrooms into supportive learning environments. The adoption of Blackboard helped to create many opportunities to use the language outside the classroom. Second, these learning environments and opportunities influenced the affective factors of EFL teachers and students who, in turn, developed positive perceptions of using WbTs to support learning English outside the classroom. Third, these positive perceptions assisted teachers and students to experience new practices and to develop several roles that were compatible to today's digital life. The following sections discuss these three factors in detail, show the way they are circular, and elaborate on the previous reflection.

**Supportive learning environments.** This study finds that teaching and learning processes in the EFL context become more beneficial when using online settings with traditional classrooms. More specifically, the findings of the first two themes show that the adoption of Blackboard in EFL program constructed new interactive environments that introduced authentic activities for using English. Using WbTs in a language learning program blends regular teaching approaches in classrooms with online learning opportunities. Such blending produces useful learning environments that encourage EFL learners to practice English in many opportunities outside the classroom. In other words,

this blending supports EFL teachers with new opportunities to engage their learners in innovative ways to learn English.

The new blended learning environments reduce the disconnection of the inside and outside of EFL classrooms. These environments have new approaches to teaching and learning—rather than the traditional teaching methods of sending information to students' minds without use and practice. In the Saudi EFL context, students mostly use and learn English inside the classroom in which they encounter “academic concepts” (Mahn, 2015). Outside the classroom, students are not exposed to “everyday concepts” (Mahn, 2015) needed to use English because most of the scenarios necessary to successfully acquire English language skills are lacking (Al Shlowiy, 2014). Indeed, English is not embedded in Saudi public life, and EFL learners have limited exposure to English (Alshumaimeri & Alzyadi, 2015).

This study finds that the new environments compensate for these lacks by suggesting endless activities and uses of WbTs and by enabling EFL teachers to vary their teaching methods following “an enlightened eclectic approach” (Brown, 2007). This approach scaffolds students' language and develops their second-language skills by motivating them to accomplish specific learning tasks based on their interaction in a more natural way. This approach connects students' thoughts and feelings of academic concepts that students acquire in the classroom with their thoughts and feelings of everyday concepts that students experience outside the classroom (Vygotsky, 1987). This connection mediates students' cognitive development so that students can move into a higher level of thinking and learning through their ZPDs.

The new blended learning environments develop a learning context around students, starting from their classrooms and moving to their homes. This context depends on WbTs to expose students to English in real-life interactive activities in which students communicate with people across the Internet and communicate with English materials in their daily lives. These activities are presented in online resources and are available, on a daily basis, to EFL students to promote their learning of English outside the classroom (Jin & Deifell, 2013). In such a context, the findings illustrate that teachers and students are able to improve their practices and experiences because they have more options not only for teaching approaches and activities but also for students' learning opportunities and language skills.

This study shows the importance of learning environments to learn the English language as well as the relationship between the learning environments and the students. The web-based environments play a crucial role in engaging students in a variety of online uses, activities, and features in which students communicate their thoughts and feelings to their peers and teachers. These engagements help students to learn English by using it in social life, increase their interactions with the English language, meet their needs to use English outside the classroom, support their participation in many forms of communication, and motivate them to continue learning. Students interact and negotiate meaning in natural ways, rather than consistently provide short answers to teacher's questions in classroom settings.

Learning environments influence language learning because learning is developed in shared activity and through social interaction. Learning environments influence students' thoughts, practices, and feelings about learning and learning materials in these



environments. Learning environments also determine how students learn and think and how their minds develop. Therefore, learning English is a social event resulting from interaction and the relationships between the learner and the environment (Vygotsky, 1978). Indeed, learning English is a socially mediated process that occurs through meaningful social interaction with other people and through participation in activities (Lantolf, 2006). In this study, blended learning environments played a role in stimulating students to learn English in new social settings, influencing their language learning, and developing their linguistic skills. According to Vygotsky (1978), these environments may have influenced students' cognition to develop positive perceptions of and relationships with these environments. Then, students were stimulated to learn and practice their learning on their own in order to improve their individual language skills.

In such learning environments, students are presented with many opportunities to use English and to collaborate in their learning outside the classroom. Students find instant access into many WbTs so that they can participate in various helpful learning practices and to work together in meaningful communicative activities. This study confirms that learning English requires EFL students to participate in English learning activities with other people (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001). The more frequently the students use English socially in their daily lives, the more they learn it and learn about its structure and academic uses, such as what EFL students reported about posting and writing in the discussion forum about their English lessons. This study also suggests that WbTs can provide online English learning activities to support students' collaboration, which in turn progresses their ZPDs from their actual developmental level to their potential developmental level.

In Chapter 2, I discuss how participation supports the developmental processes of language learning (Lantolf, 2006) because participants are immersed in concrete and meaningful communicative activities with other members of a speaking community. Second language scholars consider participation as one of the main factors in understanding the process of language learning (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). Participation links students' daily experiences with academic knowledge and develops active learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This study shows that WbTs promoted a shift in students' roles: they moved from being a passive receiver of knowledge to being an active participant in creating that knowledge. In other words, WbTs enabled students to use their current knowledge in their participation in social life that required them to think and to proceed beyond their knowledge.

In EFL contexts, students' participation in learning activities is limited both inside and outside the classroom. Before using Blackboard at SSU, EFL teachers' attempts to involve online resources did not always succeed because their attempts were personal with no official connection to the curriculum. However, the adoption of Blackboard provided EFL teachers with the official support they needed to improve their lessons, as I show above. Therefore, EFL students looked at learning English as a part of their everyday lives, rather than as a classroom subject in which they only submit written assignments. It was a great change in students' beliefs to use English for achieving communication tasks performed outside the classroom. In these tasks, students paid less attention to the language accuracy and focused on successful communication and participation. Doing so supported students' motivation and made the language relevant to them because they used it in real-life experiences with no restrictions from their teachers.

The findings show that without using a LMS, such as Blackboard, in a learning institution, it is hard to encourage students to participate in online learning activities and to engage them in virtual discussion about their course work. Without using Blackboard, it is hard for teachers to engage online resources in their courses. Using online resources with no clear, official connection to learning lessons does not stimulate many students. The reverse is also true: using Blackboard in an EFL context grabs students' interest in using English and participating in various types of learning activities. While the EFL curriculum did not change at SSU, the ways that these four teachers used Blackboard changed the learning process.

**Teachers' and students' perceptions.** This study finds that blended learning environments affected teachers' and students' perceptions, expectations, participation, interaction, and engagement (Zhao & Yuan, 2010). The learning environments influenced the affective factors of EFL teachers and students who, in turn, developed positive perceptions of using WbTs to support learning of English outside the classroom. These environments helped teachers and students to build an understanding of using WbTs in their daily lives for educational purposes. Teachers and students recognized the connections between classroom instructions and online resources and the way Blackboard worked as a bridge to connect them with these settings. These connections to online resources influenced teachers' and students' experiences, practices, thoughts, and interactions with and within these environments.

This study finds that experiences, social environments, and interactions in these blended learning environments developed positive perceptions (Covey, 1989). The development of these positive perceptions was influenced by experiences, previous

learning, motivation, expectations, personality, and attitudes (Hellriegel & Slocum, 2007). Because perceptions are connected with and influenced by thoughts, perceptions play a role in shaping one's thoughts (Cope & Ward, 2002). When EFL learners found supportive environments offering meaningful activities to learn English and to practice their language, their thoughts and perceptions of the environments influenced the way they participate in these activities.

EFL teachers' positive perceptions of using WbTs assisted them in integrating WbTs in their classes at SSU. The findings show that teachers perceived various advantages resulting from their integration of WbTs including social interaction, collaboration, and self-learning. Similarly, Ajayi (2009) showed that the teachers perceived using an asynchronous discussion board as a significant tool for learning how to teach. Ajayi stated that the asynchronous discussion board was used to construct knowledge in the institutional social context, to encourage collaboration, and afford customized independent learning. These positive perceptions mediated shifts in teaching approaches to provide suitable instructions that reinforced required skills in each learning situation. These perceptions influenced teachers' capabilities to help their students' movement into and through the next layer of knowledge or understanding.

In addition, findings about teachers' perceptions in using WbTs at SSU agree in parts, and disagree in other parts, with the findings of Kim's (2008) study about perceptions of 10 teachers using CALL in their classrooms. My findings agree that WbTs function as (a) a tool for resources, communication, presentation, writing and (b) a motivator. On the other hand, the findings do not agree with Kim (2008) regarding teachers' practices. Teachers in Kim's study used computers as instructional tools for the

teacher's use, not as a learning tool for students' use, because they perceived computers as only a supplemental and optional tool; they used a teacher-centered teaching paradigm. In my study, teachers perceived WbTs as a learning tool and as a motivator to learn English outside the classroom.

In my study, the findings show that teachers perceived WbTs as tools to save their time, to include more learning activities in their lessons, and to allow them to follow up their lessons outside the classroom. The same perceptions were reported by Hammond and Gamlo (2015) who studied how teachers used ICT in one of the Saudi universities. The majority of teachers reported that ICT helped them to save a great deal of class time. Teachers covered more materials in class, had time for extra reinforcement activities, and reused learning materials in future classes. Moreover, about third of the teachers were described as "extended users"; they were more proactive, were feeling their way to use ICT, supported learning outside the classroom, and tended to express greater concern for their relationships with students. These extended users of ICT had positive perceptions similar to what I found with EFL teachers at SSU.

Teacher-student relationships play a pivotal role in the learning process and influence the students' perceptions of teaching practices and their behaviors toward learning activities. Blended learning environments and collaborative learning help teachers to build respectful relationships with learners in order to make provisions for students' needs and expectations, to lift their motivation, and to reduce their fears and anxieties (Brown, 2007). Such relationships enable teachers to convey their positive perceptions to their students through their teaching approaches and practices. Students' perceptions of using WbTs depend on their teachers' perceptions and approaches (Wiebe

& Kabata, 2010). The findings show that students' perceptions were influenced by their teachers' positive perceptions and experiences. EFL students at SSU had positive perceptions of engaging WbTs in their learning of English outside the classroom rather than avoiding them.

In such environments that rely on a collaborative teacher-learner relationship, learners' cognitive and social factors—internal and external—support their language learning and linguistic knowledge (Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978). The findings show that learners understood their needs, recognized their skills in learning English, and acknowledged the opportunities around them. They also recognized that the four teachers were not the source of all information needed to learn the language. Therefore, learners sought practical applications and activities outside the classroom in addition to lessons and oral explanations inside the classroom. They always considered how to use English in real-life situations, how to find more opportunities to practice their skills, and how to be exposed to English in online settings.

Students' perceptions as well as their individual attempts to learn English are as important as teachers' approaches (Brown, 2007). The blended learning environments help EFL students to continue their learning beyond the walls of the school because they understand the importance of their individual efforts. Indeed, this study suggests that students can take their responsibilities for pursuing their learning, starting in the classroom with the teachers and continuing beyond the classroom without the teachers (Brown, 2007). Students described many advantages of such blended learning situations that supported their learning experiences. This is in line with the findings of Alebaikan's (2010) study about students' perceptions of blended learning in Saudi Arabia; Alebaikan

found that students perceived blended learning as a potential alternative to other successful learning experiences.

In blended learning environments, students' individual attempts to learn English outside the classroom receive more support by WbTs. This support does not exist continuously in either regular EFL classroom or pure online setting. This study finds that students appreciated how blended learning environments included both settings in which students can achieve their objectives, improve their skills, succeed in a short time, and seek teacher's assistance when necessary. Likewise, Al-Qahtani (2013) studies the students' perceptions of these three settings in Saudi Arabia: face-to-face classroom learning, online learning, and blended learning. Al-Qahtani found that students' achievements were better in the blended learning settings.

EFL students' positive perceptions of using Blackboard to learn English are comparable to students' perceptions in the study of Srichanyachon (2014) who explored EFL students' perceptions of using LMS along with traditional face-to-face learning. Srichanyachon focused on understanding the factors that influenced the adoption of LMS based on users' own experience. Srichanyachon found that a positive relationship existed between students' perceptions of using the Internet as a learning tool and their perceptions of using LMS.

In contrast, the findings about teachers' and students' positive perceptions in this study differ from the findings of Johnsona et al. (2010), Schmid and Schimmack (2010), and Wiebe and Kabata (2010). Johnsona et al. (2010) found that most learners and teachers were convinced that using technology was not necessary to learn or teach language, although they appreciated the benefits of technology in language classrooms.

In the study of Schmid and Schimmack (2010), all teachers reported that the use of technology did not enhance their teaching in a significant manner, although teachers appreciated a few benefits of using technology. Wiebe and Kabata (2010) reported that teachers and students had different perceptions of using CALL materials in teaching and learning Japanese. Teachers did not always understand students' perceptions of their teaching with CALL materials. The reverse was true. Moreover, students had positive perceptions of interacting with CALL materials, while teachers' perceptions varied.

This study finds that students' positive perceptions also mediated shifts in their learning, practices, and uses of English on daily basis. After students used WbTs and were exposed to blended learning settings, they realized that learning is a participatory process and took some degree of responsibility for their independent learning. The students' input and contributions made a dynamic learning environment and created a warm and supportive relationship with their teachers and colleagues, such as when they provided feedback to each other. They believed that they learned how to be resourceful in developing their language by finding useful resources. They perceived their own steps taken to learn English are, as Brown (2007, p. 68) states, "as important as teacher's methods or more so." Therefore, they engaged their cognitive processes, developed their thoughts, and improved their skills to use English in different situations.

**Developing new practices.** This study finds that EFL teachers and students develop new practices when they positively perceive the blended learning environments. In these supportive environments, teachers and students have no place to hide; teachers are supported with various WbTs to develop and enrich their teaching materials and students are encouraged to think, speak, read, write, and communicate in English. In



other words, blended learning environments offer beneficial features and resources for teachers to promote their students' learning, linguistic knowledge, self-direction, interactivity, and collaboration and to develop students' ZPDs, thoughts, and cognitions. Moreover, these environments immerse students in rich, natural, and meaningful activities to acquire English spontaneously.

In blended learning environments, EFL teachers recognize that the adoption of Blackboard is not the final destination. The findings show that the adoption of Blackboard is a process that requires consequent procedures such as updating teaching approaches, utilizing online resources, and dealing with new students' needs and difficulties. In this study, while teachers recognized that WbTs did not offer successful teaching itself, they realized that their success in teaching depended on how they used WbTs to plan their lessons and to obtain support from these resources (El Tartoussi & Tamim, 2009). Teachers also understood how to select online activities that were compatible with in-class tasks for enriching their teaching strategies (Yuen et al., 2009). Such selection means that the use of Blackboard can modify learning curriculum, teaching approaches, course delivery techniques, and roles of the teacher (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008).

The findings show that the four EFL teachers used Blackboard as “platforms for exchanging ideas” (Yuen et al., 2009) about lessons and linguistic knowledge. That use of Blackboard provided their learners with diverse experiences that enhanced their language skills (Watson & Hempenstall, 2008). Indeed, these teachers' practices at SSU illustrate the importance—in the 21st century—for teachers to remain current with evolving classroom materials and teaching methods (Soonhyang, 2006) and to employ

WbTs and digital applications in their teaching environments (Ya Ni, 2013). The key challenge is how learners and teachers can make the most of these WbTs in the learning process and develop the skills necessary to succeed in using them.

Using blended learning systems at SSU changed the status of the teachers—from giver of knowledge to enabler, facilitator, and guider of learning—and their relationship with their students—from a one-way relationship to dynamic, mutual relationships. Such changes shifted the students' status from that of being instructed with little space for interaction to being the center of the educational process. Importantly, this new status encouraged teachers to develop their teaching and to look for training because they realized their need to learn and to pursue advances in teaching in blended learning environments. The four teachers also learned from their own students and felt comfortable in using students' ideas and contributions. The four teachers experienced slow but steady changes from teacher-centered approaches to a more richly student-centered learning environment and changes in the teaching objectives, academic outcomes, course contents, and the examination system; the Saudi EFL context requires such changes in teacher's role, teaching materials, learning outcomes, and learning environments in the entire educational system.

In Chapter 4, I describe how teachers used Blackboard to expose their students to English in many online activities outside the classroom. Such exposure is required for EFL learners in Saudi Arabia because English is rarely used in the Saudi public life. Exposure to language in everyday practices is necessary for language learners, particularly in the EFL contexts in which learners need to listen to and to speak English in the social world around them. They need to use English to communicate and

participate in learning activities. In this study, students learned how to communicate with people and participate in language learning activities around them through the guidance of their teachers, who were the experts in this situation (Lantolf and Appel 1994; Lantolf 2000).

The findings also show how teachers' guidance, help, advice, and demonstration play a crucial role in developing students ZPDs and in directing them to progress in their learning, particularly when using new WbTs or approaches. For example, it was not a smooth process to facilitate collaboration and interaction between a teacher and a learner and among learners themselves in Blackboard. In online learning contexts, it is not sufficient to provide students with collaborative activities to seek their interaction and participation. Teachers, themselves, need to interact and collaborate with students and engage in the learning process. Teachers should clarify the activities and explain the requirements to complete them. When students understand how to proceed in learning activities, teachers can reduce their support, observe how students learn independently, and provide support again if necessary. The four teachers reported such techniques and appreciated the way these techniques worked with many students in their classes. The teachers found that after students practiced the language with their teachers or peers, they were later able to use that language independently (Vygotsky, 1987).

In blended learning environments, EFL students also recognized how these environments offered more learning opportunities to promote their learning than face-to-face classrooms. For example, my findings show that EFL students appreciated discussing topics in Blackboard's forum, learning in groups, and communicating with others in English. These practices motivated students to read, write, speak, and share

ideas with others more than they did in the classroom (Lee, 2009). Students also gained the confidence to depend on themselves in their learning when they used WbTs to write, post, or comment. The findings show that online settings reduce students' anxiety to perform several activities such as writing the assignments and reflecting on teachers' feedback.

The findings about collaboration and learning in groups indicate that WbTs succeeded in originating encouraging environments in which EFL students discussed lessons, shared ideas, debated questions, and developed their language together. Collaborative learning increased students' interest in learning and prepared them to perform at higher intellectual levels than when they worked individually (Vygotsky, 1978). When students work together, they maximize their own learning as well as each other's learning (Yang & Chen, 2010). In Saudi Arabia, EFL students need to experience collaborative learning because usually they are taught to learn individually and rarely learn in groups (Nather, 2014). This study showed that it was valuable to engage students in collaborative learning in online settings in which they develop their individual skills, perceptions, and ZPDs, depending on their peers' knowledge and experience (Shayer, 2002).

Collaborative learning also helped EFL students to depend on themselves more than on their teachers. EFL learners at SSU recognized the differences between these collaborative learning activities and activities they traditionally followed in English classes. In Saudi Arabia, most language learning programs use teacher-centered techniques in which students rarely speak, collaborate, or interact with their peers and teachers (Al-Seghayer, 2015). After SSU's students used Blackboard in their English

classes, they reported different scenarios that were built on students' collaborations and were student-centered techniques including discussing grammar rules, memorizing new vocabulary, and correcting their mistakes. They realized that they were able to use English in various situations in their daily lives after they practiced it with each other. In addition, students noticed a change in their thinking skills due to a higher level of motivation and more engagement in the learning process around them.

These findings agree with what Montasser (2014) stated in his study about using a collaborative language learning (CLL) approach to encourage Saudi EFL learners in writing classes. Montasser found that using CLL supported learners by scaffolding their ZPD, lowering their writing anxiety, and enabling them to successfully complete any writing assignment. Montasser stated that students liked using many WbTs, such as blogs, wikis, and discussion forums, in writing classes. Students developed positive perceptions of the CLL approach in developing their language skills in general, and in developing their writing skills in particular. They found that those WbTs encouraged them to learn from their peers, to develop their writing skills, and to reduce the number of their mistakes.

The same results existed with EFL students at SSU as well as in another study by Shehadeh (2011) about students' perceptions of collaborative writing in the English program at an Emirati university. Shehadeh found that students reported improvement in their learning of English, enhancement in their speaking ability, and increased self-confidence. Students perceived collaboration as a tool that improved their writing quality, content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. Shehadeh (2011) showed

that the peer-scaffolding experience enhanced not only students' writing competence but also their speaking ability and self-confidence.

The findings of this study show how students' motivation grows by using these online resources to learn English. Students' growing motivation also leads to take advantages of these resources to learn English, to maintain long-term improvements in abilities, and to develop self-confidence (Marek, 2008). They perceived learning as a part of everyday life and a lifelong learning process, rather than as a one-time course or a school subject. Students find blended learning environments more motivating than classroom environments because students can see themselves achieving the goal of learning English. The goal of learning English is to use it in their daily lives. Blended learning environments include any time or effort students spend to support their learning of English outside the classroom. Therefore, students' practices, times, efforts, and thoughts to learn English developed an outside-the-classroom structure that integrated learning activities, physical or virtual, that students perform as either class requirements such as assignments or non-class requirements such as chatting in digital games.

This study teaches me that in blended learning environments, the learners' role is greater than the teachers' role. Students bear the responsibility to learn independently and from others. They are motivated, have confidence in themselves, and have good relationships with people around them in learning settings. Blended learning environments boost critical thinking, support creative learning, and deepen students' understanding of the world around them. These environments work as a social mediator that aids the development of cognition, thought, and mental tools that, in turn, support language learning (Mitchell & Myles, 2004) and extend one's abilities to interact with

surroundings, to communicate with others, and to analyze realities (Vygotsky, 1978). Indeed, these environments scaffold students to reach the highest possible cognitive levels through interactions that help them learn, understand, and achieve what they could not accomplish without such scaffolding.

In summary, this study finds that SSU's adoption of Blackboard modified the learning context of its EFL program. This program became blended learning environments that included learning opportunities and connected formal EFL classroom to two learning settings outside the classroom: informal and non-formal learning (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Therefore, EFL teachers were able to employ these changes in their teaching in order to promote students' learning of English outside the classroom. EFL students recognized these supportive environments and took advantage of available opportunities to enhance their practices and to succeed in their learning of English. The study also finds that EFL teachers' and students' use of various methods to accomplish their modified roles and responsibilities in blended learning settings was positively perceived. Positive perceptions were central to facilitating most changes that occurred after using WbTs in the EFL program at SSU.

### **Implications**

In this section, I discuss the implications beyond the study's results, recommend best practices in the Saudi EFL classroom, and present suggestions for future EFL teachers, learners, and policymakers. I recognize how teachers and students use WbTs and the Internet in their lives and what types of websites and applications they prefer. In addition, it is obvious that teachers favor modern teaching trends and students favor digital-based learning methods. More importantly, I realize that students and teachers in

this study were open to get out of their comfort zones by trying new ideas or exploring different ways. They are ready to shift their practices, approaches, and environments in order to achieve their objectives.

The previous discussion and analysis included large numbers of ideas that might be used in any English classroom in Saudi Arabia. Regardless of the age and gender of students, because this study ignores such demographic variables, the findings suggest that EFL teachers can take advantage of online resources, depending on the teachers' needs and objectives. Teachers have to determine the most effective ways to guide EFL learners to succeed in today's digital learning settings. In addition, students' interaction with WbTs is changing dramatically due to the recent forms of connectivity and communication, such as the ubiquitous WiFi networks. While WbTs advance and make the world smaller and smaller, the EFL curricula are still behind due to many barriers that prevent EFL learning and teaching in Saudi Arabia from succeeding in the 21st century.

Given the above reflection, I divide the implications of this study into three parts: for teachers, for students, and for policymakers. Because I discuss many implications for teachers and students throughout this study, I focus on the implications for curricula designers and policymakers in this section more than in the first two implications. It is also important to elaborate more on the implications for curricula designers and policymakers because teachers and students are required to follow the guidelines of schools and leaders. I discuss these implications for the Saudi EFL context in general and in particular for adult male learners in Saudi higher education. My aims for these implications are to promote learning of English outside the classroom and to increase the proficiency level of English in learners, either in public schools, PYP, or higher



education. For example, it is my aim to enable newly-accepted students at SSU to achieve the English requirements of PYP in no more than one year. My ultimate goal is to clarify that learning English is not only an inside-classroom-learning process in Saudi Arabia.

### **Implications for Teachers**

This study discusses many implications for EFL teachers in blended learning settings. Teachers can integrate a LMS in their teaching approaches to mediate the learning process in advanced academic practices in order to acquire much better learning outcomes rather than using it for administrative purposes. It was not Blackboard itself that helped to improve the learning environments in this study but how the four teachers used Blackboard to incorporate several online resources. I do not believe that any WbTs can achieve educational objectives without a teacher's control and guidance. Therefore, I recommend that EFL teachers take advantage of using Blackboard or other WbTs to improve their teaching approaches and to change the dynamics of relationships with their students. This study finds that teachers were more open to the students' choices, needs, preferences, and interests than they were in traditional classrooms. Teachers play a vital role as being the mediators who adapt teaching features, curriculum, and materials in order to suit their learners.

In this study, I find many implications for myself as a teacher, for 16 other EFL teachers at SSU, and for EFL teachers in general. I find that teachers need to learn about students' learning styles, individual differences, and their interests. This is because students have different learning experiences, various learning paths in the classroom, and unique ZPDs (Vygotsky, 1978). Knowing these differences helps teachers determine the nature of their teaching in order to enable students to achieve their potentials in future

learning (Mahn, 2015). Teachers can adopt required learning opportunities to develop each student's ZPD, to provide formative feedback for each one, to support their social lives outside the classroom, and push each one to think beyond his knowledge. Moreover, teachers need to improve their relationships with students based on interaction and collaboration procedures rather than on hierarchical-structure relationships and authority procedures in classroom settings. The students are likely to engage in many learning situations where the teacher uses dialogue and does not play a dominant role of being the only source of knowledge.

In blended learning settings that use many WbTs, the findings of this study show a change in teachers' abilities to support students in their learning of English beyond the classroom. In these settings, learning English can happen at any time and in every place because it is not connected to classroom settings only. Teachers' roles in these settings include facilitating, guiding, providing links, or suggesting activities, unlike their roles in face-to-face settings, to give knowledge and deliver lessons. This study recommends teachers to use the Internet and WbTs to perform their roles, to enrich their practices, and to supervise their students' learning. Doing so enables the teachers to maintain a balance between teacher-centered and student-centered approaches as well as between their traditional roles as knowledge givers and new roles as knowledge organizers.

For example, the teachers of this study made it clear when and how to deal with mistakes in grammar or spelling because mistakes were concerns in students' participation and communication. EFL teachers can encourage learners' communication in online settings with no concern for grammatical rules or spelling mistakes. On the other hand, teachers pay attention to the rules of grammar and spellings in formal

academic learning. This means that the focus of each activity differs based on the teaching objectives. When teachers encourage informal communication, they do not focus on these rules but on meaningful uses of the language. When they teach academic writing in a formal classroom, they focus on these mechanical structures.

Other implications come from the use of authentic, interactive, and collaborative activities in learning settings. These activities provide many advantages for teachers and students. For students, many reasons mentioned throughout the study, I encourage teachers to take advantage of these activities to introduce and offer equal opportunities. For example, these activities allow learners, particularly those who do not speak up in class, to have a voice because such activities appear in a democratic online environment (Ryan & Scott, 2008). Moreover, investing time and effort in these activities offers supportive learning settings that allow teachers to develop and prepare appropriate materials as well as to provide timely and effective feedback to students.

Because Saudi EFL learners lack interactive and collaborative activities to learn English, teachers can use WbTs to employ interactive techniques and collaborative procedures. This study describes many multimodal activities, interactive tools, and collaborative tasks, particularly for writing and speaking skills. These activities, tools, and tasks create a pedagogical shift in regular EFL programs by allowing students to find connections between what they learn inside the classroom and what they practice and acquire outside the classroom. This shift helps students to take advantage of their formal learning in the classroom by using it in their daily lives.

One of the main findings of this study is using WbTs to support students' autonomy to learn English. One of the advantages of using Blackboard is that teachers

are able to encourage students to be self-motivated and self-directed in their learning. Some online learning activities and experiences cannot be used in the classrooms or with teachers. For example, students did not feel comfortable to reflect on lessons or ask questions in the classroom but they were comfortable doing so in the discussion board. Teachers have the ability to direct the learners to the online learning opportunities that cannot be offered elsewhere. Teachers are advised to include features that contribute to students' autonomy and facilitate independent work.

Finally, teachers can overcome several difficulties related to students' needs and differences with a variety of WbTs, such as using the Quizlet website to support acquiring new vocabulary by one of the teachers in this study. In addition, teachers are able to face the problems associated with training issues by following the strategies of trial and error, as Zaki reported above. They might solve these issues by sharing their challenges with colleagues, by searching for online training sessions, or discussing them in virtual forums and groups.

### **Implications for Students**

This study has implications for EFL students in Saudi Arabia, particularly adult students. This study finds several alternatives to overcome the lack of using English outside the traditional classrooms, the lack of practicing speaking and listening skills, and the lack of communicating in English. With WbTs and blended learning platforms, students are able to take advantage of many opportunities to expose themselves to English in a variety of scenarios. WbTs afford students opportunities to develop their linguistic skills at their comfort level and to maintain stronger relationships among themselves and with their teachers or others through social networks. Moreover, students

are able to interact with native speakers of English in various online social experiences by chatting, writing, or speaking in English. More importantly, students can use WbTs to access learning materials and course information at any time and in any place (Al-Musa & Al-Mobark, 2005).

Another implication is the fact that succeeding in learning EFL does not require classroom or textbooks over long periods of time. In other words, after students receive enough classroom instruction and knowledge, they can follow their own ways to practice their language in unrestricted paths in open social life. Outside the classroom, students are not restricted to completing assignments or submitting compositions. Some students reported that they did not need teachers or schools to learn English after they learned the basic rules of the language. Therefore, students strengthen their classroom learning and academic instruction by connecting them to their daily-life experiences and practices. Such connections play a serious role in developing students' ZPDs and thoughts as well as meaning and understanding of their experiences (Vygotsky, 1987).

Learning English can follow customized learning strategies that fit each student's learning styles, preferences, and characteristics. Individualized learning helps students to accommodate their needs and achieve personal goals. WbTs support individualization in learning and allow students to prioritize their needs, interests, and challenges. To do that, some students are advised to follow their teacher's guidance and facilitation, while some are not. In the blended learning environment, some learners demand clear guidelines and management from teachers. I discuss throughout this study that teachers are experts who take into account individual differences and learners' preferences and as facilitators of learning rather than as only givers of knowledge. Teachers recognize which student needs

to focus on particular contents, to have additional supporting materials, to study structuring rules, or to repeat the whole lessons. By the same token, students recognize their own roles in this environment as active participants who should contribute to their learning and increase their input to the context around them.

The last implication for EFL learners is the ability of each student to find the best way to learn English in real-life situations and social practices outside the classroom via these technologies and resources. All students in this study reported their experiences to “figure out your favorite things, websites, [and] movies to learn English” (AS 1-3, personal communication, December 6, 2015). This student added an example by saying, “I had a problem with my car. So, I watched 11 videos about maintenance with English subtitles in [the] weekends. You connect your study with what you really like and you gonna love it more.” This comment shows how students can use these resources to learn more and to face their difficulties. In Saudi Arabia, blended learning and online resources can boost EFL students’ enthusiasm, skills, and ability to learn English and to rely on themselves in their learning.

### **Implications for Policymakers**

This study also has implications for the EFL policymakers, which include education developers, curricula designers, and leaders in high positions. The findings of this study show that using WbTs offers many benefits to teachers and students, including their positive perception, greater confidence, higher motivation, improved roles, and additional exposure to English. WbTs change the teaching process by providing opportunities for teachers to support their teaching approaches and for students to improve their skills in real-life situations and to extend their learning outside the

classroom. WbTs change the learning process by accommodating the needs of an individual learner, the needs of the teachers, and the needs of the educational institutions.

One of the main implications is to improve the beliefs about using WbTs in the learning process. Some educators and leaders still do not believe in the role that WbTs plays in today's education. Some leaders hesitate to involve any type of technology in their curricula or schools. Some policymakers consider such WbTs as not necessary for academic purposes. Other educators think using WbTs wastes time, destroys the learning process, and distracts students (Blake, 2008). The findings of this study might change these beliefs because WbTs open new doors for language learning and teaching, create meaningful and stimulating learning settings, involve students in interactive and collaborative activities, and overcome several pedagogical issues. WbTs create ongoing technological developments that drive formal learning contexts in traditional classrooms to online settings that include informal and non-formal learning (Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

Using online learning resources, adopting Blackboard, or implementing WbTs in the Saudi EFL context is not a substitute for school, textbooks, and teachers. It is a blended learning that complements the fixed schedule of classes and teachers' efforts with WbTs and students' efforts. While many Saudi universities have adopted different blended learning platforms over the past few years, today's education requires such adoptions in the public education in elementary, intermediate, and secondary schools. Today's education needs to prepare for an interconnected society and the availability of high-speed Internet connectivity everywhere. This requires rapid improvements in

educational plans, requirements, and systems to provide blended learning through Blackboard or any other LMSs.

This study recommends reforms in Saudi EFL teaching and learning by implementing blended learning settings and WbTs to manage, support, succeed, and achieve desirable academic outcomes. The undeniable advantages of using WbTs at SSU encourage me to suggest using WbTs properly in the Saudi EFL classrooms, textbooks, and curricula. I invite policymakers to adopt LMSs, such as Blackboard, in all EFL programs in Saudi Arabia. LMSs work as an education bridge to connect EFL populations with WbTs and online settings. Doing that might require policymakers to conduct more studies or surveys to:

- evaluate how this new learning environment is compatible with the uniqueness of the Saudi sociocultural environment and education system;
- explore the readiness of the “net generation” (McLoughlin & Lee, 2007) students to use this new trend and to continue their learning independently;
- consider the significance of using WbTs, including LMSs, on the teachers’ and learners’ experiences;
- listen to the students’ perceptions of using WbTs to enhance the learning process, improve their skills, strengthen their knowledge, and boost their motivation; and
- listen to teachers’ perceptions of using WbTs to improve their teaching approaches and to cope with their teaching challenges.



While this study finds answers to these concerns, I argue that the first step is to adopt a LMS to create blended learning settings that connect daily-life practices with academic practices. Then, I recommend more studies later to improve the adoption process. This study suggests that blended learning and online resources offer an excellent EFL learning experience, provide the users with flexibility, support teachers to succeed, develop students' thoughts and language, and enable learners to continue their education. More importantly, blended learning and online resources support the Saudi EFL female students to learn English while maintaining cultural values and traditions. Using WbTs and blended learning setting is a clear achievable solution for Saudi EFL female learners because education policies follow a gender-segregation system in Saudi Arabia.

In respect to learners, this study describes how Saudi EFL students can succeed in the 21st century. This study provides policymakers with knowledge about what EFL learners usually do outside the classroom, what out-of-class activities learners are interested in, what type of learning they prefer, how to increase students' learning motivation, how to engage them in English-related learning groups, and how to help them achieve their needs. This study also illustrates that EFL learners still need classroom and traditional instruction to acquire basic knowledge in formal settings and, then, to facilitate their learning outside the classroom. Online settings lack some aspects that exist only in face-to-face formal classrooms. In formal classrooms, teachers can produce the activities that are well matched to students' interests outside the classroom. Traditional classroom learning serves as a foundation of what learners do outside the classroom, either informal or non-formal learning. Therefore, each learning setting supports the other to achieve the EFL learning objectives because each setting might not be sufficient to stand alone in the

Saudi EFL context and because no single learning setting can perfectly meet the needs of a group of students.

Learners in this study became open to their teachers' choices for their classroom and their own choices for their personalized learning. Policymakers are encouraged to allow, if they cannot provide, teachers to follow new teaching models to cater to the various types of learning styles that meet the needs of the "net generation" (McLoughlin & Lee, 2007). Policymakers are encouraged to take advantage of these facts: students use personal digital devices all day; new English learning software and applications are developed continuously; the growth of Internet access and availability in schools and classrooms; EFL students familiarizing themselves to communicate with native speakers rather than to travel to NES countries; and WbTs are able to fortify learning experiences by reaching into new individuals, resources, and services. Native digital students must be offered satisfactory support, guidelines, and environment that develop their study skills.

In respect to teachers, this study enables policymakers to consider how EFL teachers are advised to perform their roles in blended learning settings. In blended learning settings, teachers are the major factor in the success of this new learning setting. Policymakers must lift teachers' motivation and confidence to ensure successful teaching experiences and high students' outcomes. Because many EFL teachers have not been introduced to online learning, it is recommended that policymakers evaluate teachers' technical skills prior to adopting any LMS or blended learning course. Based on that evaluation, careful training might be offered to teachers who lack the required skills. New education policies should look at how WbTs shape educational trends, sustain

communication relationships between teachers and tech-savvy students, and change the way the teachers teach.

In the Saudi education system, teachers adhere to certain curricular guidelines set forth by a centralized administration. Teachers' roles are often controlled by managers, supervisors, curriculum, syllabus, policymakers, and, then, by students' needs or the teachers' themselves. In such contexts, this study has an implication for policymakers to support a paradigm shift in teachers' roles, perceptions, and beliefs—a shift from the traditional teacher-centered approach, as a dominant EFL teaching approach, to the student-centered approach, as a successful EFL pedagogy in the 21st century. Such a transformation influences teachers' pedagogical adoptions of WbTs and enables them to use WbTs for delivering learning materials and for enriching students' learning experience. Policymakers should look at EFL teachers as facilitators of more student-centered learning activities and of maximum opportunities to interact in meaningful contexts. Teachers are the knowledgeable persons who expose their students to English in authentic activities through the active use of WbTs as well as provide their students with comprehensible input and collaborative learning needed to succeed in the Saudi EFL context.

Ultimately, in the information age, policymakers should not panic about how, when, and where to begin. No obvious beginning points exist to start using WbTs in the Saudi EFL classroom. If Blackboard, or any LMS, helps, support using it in our schools. After adopting a LMS, teachers and students can begin using several WbTs based on others' reviews and experiences with no sequences. They can swap WbTs to pursue their

teaching and learning objectives and can report their findings to policymakers for evaluation.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Although I have done my best to design the study carefully and thoughtfully, inherent limitations can arise when conducting any type of research (Creswell, 2007). These limitations may include threats to research trustworthiness, which could come from the researcher, the research design, setting, or participants. I discuss possible limitations in these categories in this section.

**The researcher.** I am a Ph.D. student conducting this research for my dissertation. The quality of my study depends heavily on my research skills and is affected by my personal biases. I may have unintentionally influenced the results due to my own personal beliefs or experiences. While I paid attention to every single step I took in this study, I am a novice researcher who still has much to learn about conducting academic research. I am in my early years of scholarly studies and scientific projects. My novice status existed in all steps I followed. This study took more than a year, from preparing its proposal to writing this report. During this time, my personal perceptions, assumptions, expectations, and experiences may have influenced my understanding, thoughts, and interpretations.

In addition, I may have affected my participants' responses when I was present during data collection at SSU. They may have said what they thought I wanted to hear. They may have drawn positive pictures of situations that were not altogether positive. Such concern may have occurred in their responses to interviews and follow-up questions after I told them about my research purposes and interests in the pre-interview individual

meetings. However, I believed that semi-structured interviews and friendly meetings might reduce the effect of my presence. In analyzing data, I assured that findings were coded and shaped by the participants' responses and not my bias. I reviewed them to confirm that the findings reflected the understandings and experiences from participants, rather than my own preferences.

**Research design.** Research design includes sample, data collection, data analysis, and findings. This study is limited to the EFL context at SSU, the setting in which it was conducted, and to the participants who voluntarily took part. Because it is an introductory study that uses qualitative research methods, the results of the study might not be generalizable to any larger population.

**Setting and participants.** Participants of this study were EFL teachers and students at SSU. The study started with many teachers and students who answered questionnaires; it ended with interviews with four teachers and nine students. They were purposively selected from the group of individuals who voluntarily completed the questionnaire and based on my criteria that selected who used Blackboard and WbTs more than others. The interpretations presented in this study depended on these participants' responses and experiences. Therefore, other EFL teachers and students at SSU, who did not participate, might have quite had different responses. This could affect the generalizability of the results.

This study did not include demographic variables, such as age and background of participants. Such variables might have made differences in study findings. However, the goal of this study was to explore the new blended learning environments and create the basis of future investigations. Learners were mostly from the same background and of the

same age. My participants were adult male students preparing for higher education. Saudi education is a gender-segregated system. This study might not represent other EFL settings in Saudi Arabia such as those in public education—elementary, intermediate, and secondary schools—or female institutions.

While other Saudi settings may require different research designs or investigations, the findings of this study would be also of great value for those settings. For example, female students can benefit from these findings more than male students in Saudi Arabia because of culturally-related issues. According to Alshumaimeri (2008), the integration of WbTs in the Saudi EFL classroom indicates that female teachers place greater importance on using computer to teach English and report positive attitudes towards technology. Alebaikan (2010) found that the blended learning environment offers females the flexibility to continue their higher education while maintaining their own cultural values and traditions.

Having said that, I may not have collected all the information necessary to understand the issues I investigated. Such a specific setting and a limited group of respondents cannot support the generalization of the research findings to other settings in Saudi Arabia or in other EFL settings in other countries. The results might only be generalizable to similar settings or a similar population with the same conditions described throughout this study.

**Data collection.** This study involved initial questionnaires, second questionnaires, interviews, and follow-up questions with teachers and students. Limitations came from different items in data collection. First, some responses to closed-ended questions in questionnaires were not accurate, particularly when participants responded to the

statements. For example, a student selected the option (less than one year) to answer the question, “How many years have you been learning English in school?” This choice showed that some participants, particularly students, did not pay attention to the questions or choices. The possible answer is either (6-10 years) or (more than 10 years), because students start learning English in the fourth grade in Saudi Arabia. Some participants used one scale-option, such as *agree*, to state their opinions about given statements. Such mistakes are common in research. It is possible for a participant to select options randomly or write wrong answers. This student did not answer open-ended questions. Therefore, I did not include such random, wrong, and inaccurate answers in my data.

Second, some responses to open-ended questions in the questionnaires did not provide clear ideas. I found some answers in Arabic, although the questionnaires were in English. In addition, I felt that a few responses from students were translated by Google translator, such as an answer included *electronic toys* to mean videogames or digital games. In Arabic, we use one term, equivalent to toys, to mean both physical games and digital games. It was obvious that this answer was written in Arabic in Google translator to get the English equivalent, then was pasted as a response to the question. In addition, many participants skipped answering some open-ended questions. I believe that was because open-ended questions require time to think and write the answers, particularly from students.

Third, responses to questionnaires—mostly from students—included many abbreviations, such as “f” for “if,” “wthng” for “watching,” and “thro” for “through.” Some used emoticons: such as “☺,” which means smiley face, and “^\_^,” which means “I am pleased.” Although many responses were short and included simple vocabulary,

many spelling mistakes existed, such as “bicos” for because, “izi” for easy, and “shay” for shy. It looked as if the students wrote the words as they pronounce them.

Fourth, students’ responses to my interview questions were short, repeated, and not completed. I was challenged to obtain more details from them. I asked follow-up questions after most of their answers. I did not think that I would need to probe students to get detailed answers. To me, the questionnaires and interviews were in English might have affected participants’ understanding of questions, especially students’ understanding. Most students did not seem to be able to express their feeling and opinions freely. On the other hand, teachers did not find difficulties, but I think they would express more easily and comfortably if I used Arabic. This leads me to discuss another two points below under other limitations heading.

**Data analysis.** This study followed a thematic analysis of participants’ responses and experiences. Data analysis was a long process that included many steps. This process might be tedious; I might have rushed or skipped important details. This behavior might make it difficult to interpret the data completely or to work carefully with it. If so, limitations might occur. However, I attempted to do no practice that might cause limitations. I followed a carefully planned process and took care of all details. As I discuss my data analysis in Chapter 3, I illustrated how careful I was in dealing with all responses received. I immersed myself in data from the time I began collecting it. I established credibility throughout the entire process of analyzing by using a peer examination technique (Merriam, 2009) and by sharing the thematic findings with my co-chairs of dissertation committee.



**Other limitations.** Other limitations include research language and research familiarity. I discuss them separately.

**Research language.** The previous limitations discussed in data collections illustrate that participants would respond better if they used the Arabic language. In students' questionnaires, some responses to open-ended questions were in Arabic. In pre-interview meetings, some students asked about the possibility to be interviewed in Arabic. They felt that Arabic would enable them to speak freely and comfortably. Answering in English was non-preferable choice because of their short responses or incomplete sentences.

If students spoke in Arabic, they might produce richer responses. Those students might have been able to give more detailed and potentially interesting responses if they had used their first language. They were still learning English, their abilities to convey their thoughts were limited, and their abilities to complete tasks were impeding (Kim, 2011). It was understandable that their English may have prevented them to express their perceptions and views as fully and clearly as they might do in their first language.

I decided to conduct the study in English in order to use direct quotations without the need for translation. It helped the study to explore the status of English, as it is the medium of instruction in the PYP at SSU. On the other hand, using the Arabic language would involve different documents and procedures for IRB process at UNM as well as more time to prepare those documents. Translation process also requires special skills and abilities to convey participants' meaning, experiences, and perception, as in this study.

I am bilingual and could do fairly accurate translations if necessary, but I chose not to do so because translation was not guaranteed to be free of problems and limitations. Therefore, using English would yield more comprehensive results and direct findings as well as exploring students' level of English in real situations through questionnaires and interviews. In addition, using English was a motivation to find serious students who wanted to participate and an indicator of their recognition of research projects (the department chair, personal communication, December 9, 2015). My study was the first one conducted with SSU students.

Participants' proficiency in English varied. Teachers produced semi-fluent English with detailed responses while students' level of English proficiency ranged from intermediate learners to pre-advanced learners. Most students' responses were short or not in complete sentences. I accepted such responses and provided various interpretations, but they might not produce rich results.

***Research familiarity.*** Another limitation comes from the lack of research awareness in Saudi Arabia. Knowledge of participants, particularly students, about research procedure is imperfect in Saudi Arabia. In the meetings before the interviews, I discovered that students were not familiar with meeting for research purposes. From my experience, research culture is not common among Saudi students. Research is not considered a part of the curriculum in Saudi public education. Therefore, rare information is available in literature about the Saudi EFL context, particularly from and on students.

In Saudi education, students rarely have the opportunity to express their opinions verbally. Teacher-centered approaches and lecturing techniques play a role in limiting the students' abilities to share their experience in more detail. These habits could affect the

students' participation in qualitative research and considered limitations to my study. However, I overcame such limitations by using probes in the interviews to encourage them to expand their answers and provide more details.

On the other hand, leaders and teachers have little or no experience of being involved in research, although my four teachers were comfortable expressing their opinions. In higher education, research is considered a new trend in many Saudi institutions. Research courses are still limited and faculty rarely involved their students in their studies for publication or promotion purposes.

My interview meetings with students went in different ways. They often asked me about the reasons and goals of my study and questions. Although I asked mostly the same questions from the interview guide, my interviews with students differed from one to another. I noticed some differences among students such as in their speaking and understanding. They possessed different levels of English proficiency. Two students were talkative while some hesitated to express their views. Three of them needed clarifications or paraphrasing to enable them expressing their ideas.

Moreover, cultural influences might affect their responses. In pre-interview meetings, I had a hard time explaining the goal and focus of my study. I faced many questions and concerns relating to their privacy; only two students of nine allowed me to record their interviews. Privacy concerns might also have restricted their responses. In addition, in Saudi Arabia, teachers are a given figure of authority. Students might have been affected by this authority when they dealt with me. They knew that I was a faculty member conducting my Ph.D. studies about using technologies to teach and learn

English. However, I assured them in all meetings that their participation and responses would not be graded or contributed to any course or requirement at SSU.

Finally, limitations exist in any research. The responses were candid and valid and provided answers to research questions. Limitations of this study are discussed to improve this research and to suggest further research. In other words, the results and limitations of this study can serve as a springboard for further research.

### **Directions for Future Research**

This study describes how the adoption of blended learning platform supported the learning of English outside the classroom at SSU. Its scope is limited in terms of setting and participants. Although this study explores a limited EFL context in Saudi Arabia, it paves the way for more exploratory studies. In addition, recent use of Blackboard and WbTs in the Saudi EFL context requires more exploratory and descriptive investigations. Based on my literature review of using blended learning and LMSs in the Saudi EFL context, much further research is needed. I provide a general discussion of some recommendations for future investigations within this area in this section before listing some topics in the particular at the end of this section.

As mentioned throughout this study, many important issues were not addressed. They might be explored in future research to achieve a fuller understanding of teaching and learning in blended EFL context. Because few previous studies exist about this context and because Blackboard adoption is still new emerging in many Saudi institutions, more studies will help to identify the characteristics of this context after the adoption of the blended learning approach. This context requires more studies that produce more reliable understanding of current educational trends. Doing similar studies

with different participants and in different educational settings across Saudi Arabia will increase the validity and reliability of this research. It will also reinforce the literature about the Saudi EFL context.

This study attempts to fill the gap by examining the perceptions of both EFL teachers and students of using WbTs, including Blackboard. This study opens many ways to contribute to and promote the teaching and learning of EFL in Saudi Arabia. However, further investigation about EFL teachers' and students' perceptions of using Blackboard or WbTs is required. In particular, their perceptions of using specific WbTs, such as YouTube or Snapchat, will provide more insights about how and why participants of my study showed a strong preference for online aspects of their English courses.

Different research designs could be used in future studies. This study may suggest some methodological changes to implement in future studies. In addition, from my literature review, I learned that studies in Saudi context use quantitative designs and scientific paradigm while qualitative research is rarely used.

Qualitative research will support our understanding of the nature of this EFL context, teach us about different uses and perceptions of WbTs in this EFL context, provide a comprehensive description and analysis of the practices, and enable us to make predictions for what may need to happen. Case studies or observation techniques would be typical selections to produce in-depth studies and broad data. Observing teachers and learners in their use of WbTs will contribute to add accurate knowledge to this context and to help understanding perceptions in deep.

On the other hand, statistical research will also provide useful studies with numbers and variables. Quantitative studies might focus on different variables or

demographics, such as age and gender that were not covered in my study. Such variable might make a difference or add new findings, particularly with this new trend of adoption Blackboard in the Saudi EFL context. Quantitative studies also will help researchers to conduct empirical experiments to determine the effect of WbTs on teachers' and students' uses, perceptions, and performances. Researchers might investigate the relationship between perceptions and achievement, between perceptions and a specific skill, or between teachers' roles and students' responsibilities in the blended EFL learning context.

For specific focus and interest, studies should focus on students' needs and challenges, particularly culturally based difficulties. For example, this study might be replicated in any female setting. In Saudi Arabia, education follows a gender-based system. Female staff run the female campuses and female faculty teach the students. In very few cases in higher education, male faculty teach female students through a closed-circuit TV (Alebaikan, 2010). The number of female students who study English for academic purposes is increased. Therefore, future studies might investigate the needs and settings of female students in female institutions related to using WbTs.

More opportunities for future research would be to look at a specific EFL skill, such as speaking or listening. WbTs help to switch the focus from reading-writing approach to speaking-listening approach and from eyes to ears. Future researchers might study whether the blended EFL learning context can balance the focus on these four skills. One simple but appreciated addition to future studies would be to compare the findings of this study with possibilities to engage these findings in the future courses and curricula in Saudi Arabia.

Future researchers might avoid the difficulty of using English with students, as in this study, by conducting studies in the Arabic language. Using Arabic might enable students to express their perceptions and views more fully and clearly. This would require an investment of time and effort in creating professional translation services. The translation process is challenging because researchers pay attention to ambiguous Arabic words in questions and answers that require appropriate equivalent English words. In addition, these studies will be self-reported, and different factors may influence students' responses, perceptions, and views. These possible future studies would contribute to the knowledge base that would improve EFL context, curriculum, and instruction based on WbTs.

My study was conducted at the beginning of Blackboard adoption at SSU. It grew the seeds for many future studies. I summarize my suggestions for future studies in these specific topics:

- Replicate this study in the same location and participants to determine how Blackboard works after a period of time. It also might be desirable to provide teachers with professional training sessions before conducting the study.
- Replicate this study in different locations or with different participants to compare and contrast the findings.
- Replicate this study with random participants—no criteria for teachers or students—to see whether participants provide similar responses. Then, compare and contrast the findings with this study.

- Explore the perceptions of students and teachers in public education, such as secondary school, if they use Blackboard or other blended learning platforms in EFL.
- Investigate how Blackboard or blended learning can be experienced in private institutions or commercial language centers where students pay to learn English.
- Explore which, how, and why WbTs are used by EFL teachers in other Saudi universities.
- Investigate the challenges of using blended learning platforms and courses to deliver training for supporting the implementation of these platforms.
- Identify the impact of utilizing these web-based tools and online resources on student engagement and/or achievement.
- Observe how EFL learners experience WbTs and uses of English in different online settings.
- Study the dynamics of how the relationships of teachers and students change after the adoption of Blackboard or WbTs in the Saudi EFL context.
- Examine how the findings and significances of this study support EFL learners to pass the PYP in one year by completing the requirements mentioned in Chapter 1 and not to repeat the course in the third semester or be dropped from SSU.



### **Reflection on the Study**

My interest in studying the role of LMSs, such as Blackboard, or any WbTs in EFL teaching and learning started about five years ago. After using several LMSs, similar to Blackboard, in my Ph.D. studies, my interest has grown. Although my professors used them differently, each system provided me with beneficial ideas as a teacher and as a learner. Those differences of my professors' uses and the differences among LMSs themselves called my attention to the role that these WbTs can play in English teaching and learning in Saudi Arabia. My interest in LMSs, blended learning, and WbTs was a result of being a graduate student and as an EFL teacher simultaneously.

When I began this study, I was primarily interested in understanding whether the adoption of Blackboard at SSU helped teachers to support English learning outside the classroom. When Blackboard was used as a pilot project at SSU, I knew that it had value and offered pedagogical benefits. EFL teachers were “thirsty to this good move” (Zaki, personal communication, December 9, 2015), enthusiastic, and highly motivated to utilize Blackboard in their classroom. This study teaches me that blended learning through Blackboard or any LMS is a valuable educational system for the Saudi EFL context. Such a system changes teaching and learning processes by creating supportive blended learning environments that connect inside-classroom learning with outside-classroom experiences.

I have no doubt that using WbTs will become the main education trend for EFL education in public and higher education in the near future. This study teaches me that language learning is an everyday-life process that requires basic linguistic knowledge in the classroom, authentic practices to develop the language, and collaborative work to help

students use English individually in the future. WbTs supply EFL teachers with new approaches that support each teaching strategy and each learning style. WbTs supply EFL learners with rich settings to encourage them to think beyond their knowledge by which their cognitive abilities grow. I learned that this is a shift to interactive environments that tie classroom instruction to online resources.

The journey of this study does not reach its final destination. The findings of this study pave the way for more studies and experiments. While this study was my initial challenge to create a strong background in this field, it provided me with many suggestions and implications for future investigations. Because this study can afford many opportunities to achieve different research objectives, it motivates me to improve my research abilities and critical thinking skills. As a result of conducting this descriptive study, I believe that I have the potential to contribute to the literature about how to incorporate WbTs in the Saudi EFL classroom and how to support students' learning.

### **Concluding the Study**

This study explores and describes the adoption of Blackboard in the English program in a Saudi university. The purposes of this study were to (a) determine whether WbTs, software applications, and learning activities helped EFL teachers to promote learners' uses of English outside the classroom after the adoption of Blackboard as a learning platform, and to (b) learn about EFL teachers' and learners' perceptions of using these WbTs to learn English.

This study finds that adopting Blackboard (a) increased online learning resources, (b) had authentic uses of English, (c) impacted participants' affective factors, (d)

improved teachers' roles in blended learning, and (e) encouraged students' autonomy.

These five main findings answer research questions:

- Main question: How does the adoption of Blackboard in this university help teachers provide web-based opportunities and employ online resources to support students' English learning outside the classroom?
  - Sub-question 1: How is Blackboard used in EFL context at this university? Do these uses support English learning outside the classroom? If so, how?
  - Sub-question 2: What are the teachers' perceptions of their use of web-based technologies, including Blackboard, to support English learning outside the classroom?
  - Sub-question 3: What are the students' perceptions of their use of web-based technologies, including Blackboard, to support English learning outside the classroom?

This study asserts that WbTs, including Blackboard, have the potential to offer an excellent learning experience in Saudi Arabia. The majority of the participants of this study expressed positive perceptions of their use and experience of WbTs to learn English outside the classroom. In addition, this study shows the usability of blended learning settings in the Saudi EFL context and the readiness of the net-generation EFL students for these settings. It finds that WbTs have a strong impact on teachers' roles and learners' responsibilities in the Saudi EFL context. It also illustrates that WbTs receive more intention and popularity to play a critical role in today's digital education.

The findings of this study contribute to the body of knowledge about using LMSs, WbTs, and blended learning system in an EFL context. The findings help policymakers to adopt more LMSs and WbTs in EFL programs in public and higher education. Curricula developers in Saudi Arabia are also encouraged to choose more meaningful activities and tasks that meet many students' needs, interests, and learning styles. In addition, findings about teachers' and students' uses, experiences, perceptions, and choices lead to create an optimal learning environment in many ways for Saudi EFL learners. This study shows that the learning of English is not only an inside-classroom-learning process in Saudi Arabia.

## Appendices

### List of Appendices

- Appendix A First Teachers' Questionnaire
- Appendix B Second Teachers' Questionnaire
- Appendix C First Students' Questionnaire
- Appendix D Second Students' Questionnaire
- Appendix E Interview Guide
- Appendix F Participated Students' Study Numbers



13	I encourage students to use Internet in their own English learning.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14	I provide learners with online opportunities to learn English outside the classroom.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15	I think web-based activities should become part of language teaching.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
16	Online environments support English learning outside the classroom in Saudi Arabia.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
17	My students communicate with people beyond the classroom in English through online resources.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
18	My students self-improve their English skills by using the Internet.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
19	I use social media (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp) to communicate with my EFL students.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

3. How many years have you been using these web-based technologies in your teaching of English?

*Click on the box that best describes your time using the listed technologies*

Web-based Technologies	No Use	Less than 1 year	1 – 5 years	6 – 10 years	More than 10 years
Blackboard	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
LMSs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
YouTube	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
TED	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Learning websites	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Facebook	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Twitter	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
WhatsApp	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Virtual groups	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Digital games	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Chats	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Blogs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Discussion forums	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Skype	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4. Have you used other web-based technologies, websites, or applications not mentioned above in your teaching of English? If so, what?
5. How are you using Blackboard this semester?
6. You use Blackboard in your teaching to ... *Select all that apply*
- |  |                             |
|--|-----------------------------|
| - Upload web-based files                 | - Add learning links        |
| - Communicate with students              | - Give feedback             |
| - Promote learning outside the classroom | - Submit assignments        |
| - Engage students' in online activities  | - Track students' progress  |
| - Supply interactive opportunities       | - Share ideas with students |
| - Other(s), please specify ... ..        |                             |
7. How do you use Blackboard to support your students to learn English outside the classroom?
8. I might contact you to learn more about your experience. Could you please write down your name and email?
- Name: .....
- email: .....



## Appendix B

### Second Teachers' Questionnaire

In a few sentences, please answer the following questions:

1. Do you provide learners in your English course with opportunities to learn English outside the classroom? If so, how?
2. What are the advantages or disadvantages of using Blackboard in your teaching of English?
3. In your English course, what your objectives to use online activities?
4. What innovative activity have you created, if any, to promote EFL learners' English communication outside the classroom after the adoption of Blackboard in this university?
5. How do your students use Blackboard in your course?
6. Respond by clicking on the box that best corresponds to what you do regarding each statement:

Statement	always	often	sometimes	rarely	never
I prefer online teaching than face-to-face teaching in my English course.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My lessons include online resources and web-based activities in the Blackboard system.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I use Blackboard to communicate outside the classroom with learners in my English course.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I encourage students to use the Internet on their own to learn English.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Blackboard helps me to connect classroom learning with out-of-classroom activities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I give immediate support and feedback to my students by using Blackboard.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Using Blackboard in my English course increases learners' participation in activities and discussions outside the classroom.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Using Blackboard in my course makes me more accessible to my students at different times.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Using Blackboard in my course enables me to address some student's learning needs effectively.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Using Blackboard in my course familiarizes my learners with online learning activities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Using Blackboard in my English course enables learners to look for online learning resources for using English outside the classroom.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

---

7. I might contact you to learn more about your experience. Please write down your name and email. Thank you.

Name: .....

email: .....

## Appendix C

### First Students' Questionnaire

1. How did you learn English? *Select all that apply*
- a. in schools
  - b. abroad, in other countries
  - c. online courses
  - d. other(s), please specify .....

2. How many years have you been learning English in each of the following context?

*For each context, click on the box that best describes your answer*

Context	No Use	Less than 1 year	1 – 5 years	6 – 10 years	More than 10 years
School	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Outside the classroom	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Internet	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Abroad	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

3. Do you feel comfortable using English outside the classroom?

Yes No  
Why?

4. Do you look for opportunities to use English in everyday life?

Yes No  
How?

5. You use English to ...

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Text</li> <li>- Email</li> <li>- Tweet</li> <li>- Read</li> <li>- Comment</li> <li>- Blog</li> <li>- Join groups</li> <li>- Other(s), specify: .....</li> </ul> | <span style="float: right;"><i>Select all that apply</i></span> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Listen to news</li> <li>- Watch YouTube</li> <li>- Chat with people</li> <li>- Surf the internet</li> <li>- Write journals</li> <li>- Play digital games</li> <li>- Talk to people</li> </ul> |
|--|--|

6. In what other activities do you use English besides the activities mentioned above? Please describe.

7. Respond to the following statements by clicking on the box that best describes what you do:

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
It is difficult to use Blackboard.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I prefer face-to-face instructions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

than online instructions.

- |  |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| I do NOT communicate with my English teachers outside school.  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I use Blackboard to communicate with my classmates.  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Using Blackboard in my English course helps me learn English.  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I enjoy using web-based technologies to learn English.   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| My teacher does not provide me with online opportunities to learn English outside the classroom.         | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I think online activities should be part of language learning.   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Teachers should use Internet to teach English in Saudi Arabia.   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I use English to communicate online with other people.   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I use social media (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp) to communicate with other students and my teacher. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
- 

8. For what purposes do you use English in the Internet?

*Select all that apply*

- a. Learning                      b. Fun                      c. Other(s), specify .....
9. How important is English in your daily life outside the classroom?
- a. Very important.  
b. Important.  
c. Not very important.  
d. Not important at all.

Why?

10. I might need to contact you later on to learn more about your experience. Please write down your name and email. Thank you

Name: .....

e-mail: .....

## Appendix D

### Second Students' Questionnaire

1. How often do you use these web-based technologies to learn English?

*Click on the box that best describes your using of the listed technologies*

Web-based Technologies	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
YouTube	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
TED	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Learning websites	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Facebook	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Twitter	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
WhatsApp	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Virtual groups	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Digital games	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Chats	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Blogs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Discussion forums	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Skype	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Instagram	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

2. What are other web-based technologies, online activities, and Internet applications not mentioned above that you use to learn English?
3. How do you use these technologies to learn English outside the classroom?
4. How does the Internet provide you with opportunities to practice speaking skills of English?
5. If your English teachers use online resources in their teaching with Blackboard,
  - a. Which resources do they use?
  - b. How do these resources help you learn English?
6. How important is it for English teachers to use Blackboard to do the following?

*Click on the box that best describes the importance of each statement*

Statement	Very Important	Important	Neither	Unimportant
To include online resources and supporting websites in the Blackboard.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

To provide web-based opportunities to learn English outside the classroom.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To communicate with students in discussion board.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To give online feedback on your works and posts.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To upload web-based audio files and videos to teach listening and speaking.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To connect content covered in the classroom with online learning activities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To familiarize students with using online resources to learn English.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To encourage students to be independent in their learning of English.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

---

7. I might need to contact you later on to learn more about your experience. Please write down your name and email. Thank you.

Name: .....

email: .....

## Appendix E

### Interview Guide

This paper includes potential interview questions about how using web-based technologies and applications to promote English learning and use outside the classroom. However, most questions will be built on those in the questionnaires. It has 2 parts; questions for teachers and questions for students. Some questions have the same focus or goal.

#### Part 1: Teachers' Interview questions

How does the adoption of Blackboard in this university help you provide web-based opportunities and employ online resources to support students' English learning outside the classroom?

How do you describe the online aspects of your course? What are the advantages-disadvantages?

What have you learned by using Blackboard in your teaching?

What have you done to achieve SSC expectations about including "extra supporting materials (Videos, You tubes, PDF files, etc.) to assist students in their learning?

What are the effects of using web-based technologies on English language learning?

What are the changes that you have noticed in the learning and teaching processes, due to the use of Blackboard in your course?

What efforts do you try to make your online classes interesting after this change?

How do you use Blackboard to extend EFL learners' interactions outside the classroom? How does Blackboard help you to promote students' use of English to communicate with peers and instructors outside the classroom?

What are your collaboration strategies used in online courses?

How does Blackboard facilitate the way you teach?

Have you tried any of these free learning websites?

*BBC learning English, British Council, Duolingo, Livemocha, Easy World of English, Many Things, Dave's ESL Café, The California Distance Learning Project, Activities for ESL Students, Oxford University Press, MyEnglishTeacher.eu, PhraseMix, Voice of America, How do you do?, Talk English, Lets Talk In English, English Club, and Listen and Write?*

If so, why and how?

How do you encourage your EFL learners to:

- cooperate in the learning processes around them,
- interact with each other,
- share learning responsibilities,
- provide feedback, and support each other?

How do you engage EFL learners in uses of English outside the classroom?

How do you create collaborative learning environment?

How do online contexts provide EFL learners with different opportunities to learn English?

Do you encourage your learners to join groups in which they can post, comment, review, or share their experiences in different activities?

## **Part 2: Students' interview questions**

How does the adoption of Blackboard in this university help your teachers provide web-based opportunities and employ online resources to support students' English learning outside the classroom?

What are activities that might engage you in the online courses? Why?

How might taking this class benefit your future use of English?

Can you talk about your English learning experiences in Blackboard?

How do you describe your participation in Blackboard of your course?

Tell me about activities that you have done in Blackboard?

How do you use English in the Internet?

What are the factors that prevent you from participations in online activities?

Do you post, comment, review, or share their experiences in different online activities & websites?

What are the factors that encourage you to participate in online activities?

How do you communicate with other students? How can you communicate in the learning process around you?

Is learning English through BB more difficult than learning in a F2F class?

Does learning through Internet make you realize that you can learn from anywhere in the world?

Do you use Bb to ask questions, respond to other's post, and communicate? How?

How does the use of the Blackboard make learning English more convenient?

How do online contexts provide you different opportunities to learn English?

Do your teachers encourage, give feedback, support, comments...?

Describe what you experienced and how you felt about the following:

- Interaction with students and lecturer in English
- Using online discussions
- Looking for opportunities to use English

Where do you prefer using English rather than Arabic?

Do you engage in any particular activities to try to improve your oral skills, listening skills, reading skills, writing skills, vocabulary, and grammar in English outside the classroom?

If yes, what are they?

If a friend told you that he wanted to find ways to improve his English without enrolling for a course, what activities would you advise him to do? Do you do any of these activities yourself? Why or why not?

## **Questions for teachers and students**

How is Blackboard used in this university? Do these uses support English learning outside the classroom? If so, how?



How do you perceive your use of web-based technologies, including Blackboard, to support English learning outside the classroom?

What activities do the student and teachers report using to support lifelong English language learning?

Which of these activities are reported to be most widely used?

Which activities do they believe are most helpful?

What beliefs do they have about using English outside the classroom?

Do these beliefs affect their out-of-class activities in English?

## Appendix F

### Participated Students' Study Numbers

Table F1

*Abdo's students participated in 1<sup>st</sup> questionnaire*

Study #	Notes
Abdo's student 1-1	
Abdo's student 1-2	
Abdo's student 1-3	Invited to interview
Abdo's student 1-4	Invited to interview
Abdo's student 1-5	Invited to interview
Abdo's student 1-6	No name provided

Table F2

*Abdo's students participated in 2<sup>nd</sup> questionnaire*

Study #	Notes
Abdo's student 1-3	Participated in 1s questionnaire
Abdo's student 1-4	Participated in 1st questionnaire
Abdo's student 1-5	Participated in 1st questionnaire
Abdo's student 2-1	
Abdo's student 2-2	
Abdo's student 2-3	
Abdo's student 2-4	No name provided
Abdo's student 2-5	No name provided
Abdo's student 2-6	No name provided
Abdo's student 2-7	No name provided
Abdo's student 2-8	No name provided
Abdo's student 2-9	No name provided
Abdo's student 2-10	No name provided
Abdo's student 2-11	No name provided
Abdo's student 2-12	No name provided

Table F3

*Noor's students participated in 1<sup>st</sup> questionnaire*

Study #	Notes
Noor's student 1-1	
Noor's student 1-2	No name provided
Noor's student 1-3	No name provided
Noor's student 1-4	No name provided
Noor's student 1-5	No name provided

Table F4

*Noor's students participated in 2<sup>nd</sup> questionnaire*

<b>Study #</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Noor's student 2-1	Invited to interview
Noor's student 2-2	
Noor's student 2-3	Invited to interview
Noor's student 2-4	
Noor's student 2-5	Invited to interview
Noor's student 2-6	No name provided
Noor's student 2-7	No name provided
Noor's student 2-8	No name provided

Table F5

*Taher's students participated in 1<sup>st</sup> questionnaire*

<b>Study #</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Taher's student 1-1	Invited to interview
Taher's student 1-2	
Taher's student 1-3	
Taher's student 1-4	Invited to interview
Taher's student 1-5	
Taher's student 1-6	
Taher's student 1-7	
Taher's student 1-8	No name provided
Taher's student 1-9	No name provided

Table F6

*Taher's students participated in 2<sup>nd</sup> questionnaire*

<b>Study #</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Taher's student 1-1	Participated in 1 <sup>st</sup> questionnaire
Taher's student 2-1	
Taher's student 2-2	
Taher's student 2-3	
Taher's student 2-4	
Taher's student 2-5	Invited to interview
Taher's student 2-6	
Taher's student 2-7	
Taher's student 2-8	No name provided
Taher's student 2-9	No name provided
Taher's student 2-10	No name provided
Taher's student 2-11	No name provided

Table F7

*Zaki's students participated in 1<sup>st</sup> questionnaire*

<b>Study #</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Zaki's student 1-1	
Zaki's student 1-2	
Zaki's student 1-3	
Zaki's student 1-4	
Zaki's student 1-5	
Zaki's student 1-6	
Zaki's student 1-7	
Zaki's student 1-8	Invited to interview
Zaki's student 1-9	Invited to interview
Zaki's student 1-10	
Zaki's student 1-11	No name provided
Zaki's student 1-12	No name provided

Table F8

*Zaki's students participated in 2<sup>nd</sup> questionnaire*

<b>Study #</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Zaki's student 2-1	
Zaki's student 2-2	
Zaki's student 2-3	
Zaki's student 2-4	
Zaki's student 2-5	
Zaki's student 2-6	
Zaki's student 2-7	
Zaki's student 2-8	
Zaki's student 2-9	
Zaki's student 2-10	
Zaki's student 2-11	
Zaki's student 2-12	
Zaki's student 2-13	Invited to interview
Zaki's student 2-14	No name provided
Zaki's student 2-15	No name provided
Zaki's student 2-16	No name provided
Zaki's student 2-17	No name provided
Zaki's student 2-18	No name provided
Zaki's student 2-19	No name provided

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