Developing and Piloting a Literature Course Learnable Via Blackboard for EFL Literature Instruction

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Abstract

The underlying purpose for this study was to describe how technology was used to teach a literature course developed by the researchers in an EFL context and to explore the effects of the online course on students' achievement via piloting the new course and to further gain information about the skills and reactions of students who used this new literature course while employing technology in their learning. The researchers, therefore, set to employ a qualitative/quantitative approach to describe how technology was harnessed to deliver the newly piloted literature in an EFL class and explore students' reactions to the use of technology in the EFL context. Purposeful sampling was used in selecting 30 participants for the study from Saudi students studying English as a foreign language. The features and facilities of Blackboard were fully used in the course of the study. Two semi-structured surveys were conducted with each participant, among teachers and students, during initial and final instruction weeks. As such, students' perceptions of the use of technology in the teaching of literature in the EFL classroom were assessed. Findings of the study showed the effectiveness of the Modern Literary Movements course delivered online, called the online Literature course hence forth. Qualitative and quantitative findings also showed that learning outcomes are in alignment with the course requirements, and that course assessments are in agreement with the course content and learning objectives, assignments and evaluation procedures, and the professional presentation of the e-course on the part of the course instructors. Results also proved that the course could prove effective in enhancing the participants' performance on pretesting compared to post testing results. The study ends on notes of recommendation and implications for further research.

Key words: Literature; E-learning; Piloting; Blackboard

INTRODUCTION

Using technology as an ancillary language teaching/learning medium and tool to scaffold foreign language learning for EFL students is a new-fangled teaching mode that continues to gain popularity up till today. According to Wegner, et al. (1999), the practice of using technology to deliver coursework in higher education "has seen a veritable explosion". The use of technology has not only created new opportunities within the traditional classroom, but has also served to expand learning experiences beyond the popular notion of "classroom" as an interesting, attractive and indulgently interactive media of learning and/or teaching. Therefore, language instructors are currently using a broad range of forms of technology tools to help improve understanding and delivery of their course content. Trends in technology have indeed altered the pedagogical landscape and have caused changes in the way courses are developed and delivered (Hicks, Reid, & George, 2001). Despite the fact that some scholars

(e.g., Smith & Ayers, 2006) widely think that technology may cause some impediment to the process of learning, quite adverse findings on this topic have been revealed accumulatively over the past three decades to suggest that when used appropriately, technology indeed helps improve the various aspects of learning (Ehrmann, 2002).

One field in which the effects of technology integration into the teaching arena have been realized, applied and appraised widely is in the education of students learning English as a foreign language (EFL). In this vein, empirical research conducted to examine the effects of technology-enabled teaching revealed that the use of technology helped motivate EFL learners to develop strategies for successful language learning (Mayer, 1999; Moreno, Boire, & Vagge, 1999; Jelfs & Whitelock, 2000; Mansoor, 2002). Therefore, these findings from prior research and studies have demonstrated that technology usage may lead to positive learner experiences in EFL classrooms; nonetheless, it must be explained that most of the studies were conducted in situations where simplified materials designed for EFL learners was used, and these were often ready-made courses. The question still remains as to whether this trend will persist when literature is included in the EFL curriculum.

The use of literature as a medium for language learning and/or teaching has received considerable attention at the level of theory and practice in ESL/EFL research. For instance, literature was contended to be an important method of teaching both the target language and its literature, especially in a culturally sensitive environment like Saudi Arabia (Zaid, 1999).

The views against the use of literature as a medium of language learning suggest that literary language is structurally complex, conceptually difficult to understand, and is unique to a particular culture or authentic situation, and perhaps is misinterpreted in ideologically mind-set countries inebriated by over-religiosity. Therefore, the presentation of literature-driven courses may not be commensurate with the goals of teaching language skills or grammar in the foreign language classroom via helping students meet their academic and professional needs, especially if there is an adverse trend against literature teaching in ideology-based settings (Kay, 1982). Kay (1982) further elucidates his argument as follows:

> Certainly, in so far as literature can foster an overall increase in reading proficiency, it will contribute to these goals. An evaluation of reading proficiency rests on an understanding of what is involved in the reading process…..reading necessitates the ability to interact with a text by decoding the language and comprehending the concepts presented (p. 530).

The use of literature courses for teaching language skills in the EFL classroom needs to be supported by rigorous empirical research. Therefore, research that explores the presentation of literature courses within the environments of e-learning are further needed to investigate the role of technology as a medium of presenting literature e-courses with the goal of helping EFL students' language skills. Given that little research has been conducted in this area (Pellicer-Sanchez & Schmidt, 2010), such a study is important in order to provide EFL instructors with an evidence-based frame of reference, in a context like Saudi Arabia.

1. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this study is to describe how technology is going to be used to successfully teach a literature course developed recently by the researchers in an EFL context in the College of Languages and Translation, King Khalid University and explore the effects on students via piloting the new course and to further gain information about the skills and reactions of students who are going to use this new literature course while employing technology in their learning.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study was designed to explore the effectiveness of a designed literature course to teach literary movements and reading and writing skills in integration with technology. Therefore, the study was designed to respond to the following research questions:

i. What are the perceptions of both students and teachers as per the effectiveness of technology integration in the teaching of literature on their reading and writing skills?

ii. How effective is the Blackboard learning management technology in helping students understand the literary concepts presented in the new literature course?

iii. How valid is the online Literature course for teaching key literary terms and movements as determined by the students' performance on a Literature test and their opinions and their teachers' opinions using introspective surveys?

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

3.1 Using Literary Texts in Language Instruction

The review of ESL/EFL pedagogy in classrooms showed that reading, listening, speaking, and writing are four important skills emphasized in language learning. Language textbooks provide the opportunity for practicing these essential components. However, using only textbooks in EFL instruction has been found to be insufficient. For instance, Chen, Chen, Chen and Wey (2013) found that textbooks only offered few opportunities for students to expand their vocabulary beyond the first 2,000 words and academic words. Chen and colleagues went on further to suggest the use of novels as a good written supplementary source, as literature can get learners involved in extended reading. An assessment of

the literacy skills among the Taiwanese students in Chen et al.'s study showed a significant improvement in reading scores among the participants when literary texts were included in instruction. The use of literature provides the opportunity for ESL/EFL students to interact with the language as they get to learn new vocabulary.

Furthermore, Horst, Cobb, and Meara (1998) showed that using literary readers had given rise to the acquisition of new vocabulary and the development of the learners' skill to recognise lexical associations in the literary lexicon acquired from literary readers used in the study over a period of ten days.

Additionally, researchers indicated that using literature books, especially abridged literary readers can be conducive to enhanced motivation and the stimulation of interest in reading and culture learning, eventually leading to improved fluency in the target language (Horst, 2005). In addition, literature can provide authentic learning material and realia, as well as they are available in a variety of formats, such as books, movies, CD-ROMs and other supplementary materials that can facilitate comprehension and integrate the four skills of language plus the thinking skills (Horst, 2005).

Prior research revealed that reading or using literature in ESL/EFL language learning contexts does indeed encourage vocabulary learning. Findings from prior research suggest that the use of literature for teaching reading and writing can induce the development of language proficiency levels at any level of language learning (Gareis, Allard, & Saindon, 2009). In this vein, too, integrating technology in the teaching of literature can provide sufficient scaffold to positive learning and/or teaching, especially in EFL pedagogy.

3.2 Using Multiple Technologies in Language Instruction

The rapid development of technology has pooled in a plethora of research regarding the effects of technology integration in instruction concluding that technology is important in the teaching and learning of languages, thereby encouraging the use of technological equipment such as radio, TV, cassettes, CD-ROMs, DVDs, and communicative tools such as e-mails, chat rooms, discussion boards, and other e-learning facilities (Usun & Komur, 2009). Wang (2004) also noted that integrating technology into language learning helps develop language learners' communication skills as well as build and improve their language skills in the classroom. Furthermore, the use of e-learning technology can offer students a sense of freedom, motivation, and provide them with the encouragement and positive attitudes they need for learning (Genc-Ilter, 2009; Fageeh & Mekheimer, 2013).

In this regard, Sarica and Cavus (2008) investigated the effects of using e-learning technology on EFL learning via chat rooms, synchronous and asynchronous lecturettes, and

pen pal search engines. The findings disclosed that e-learning technology helped enhance student learning. In summary, most of prior research indicates that the use of technology in foreign language learning helps improve language skills and study skills in listening (Belz, 2002), speaking (Gareis, 1997; Ginther, 2002; Dunn & Griggs, 1995), writing (Anderson & Speck, 2001), and reading (Case & Truscott, 1999). Therefore, Genc-Ilter (2009) suggests that the integration of technology in the language curriculum has become a must and that literature as well as language skills instructors emphasise the importance of using authentic and interactive activities, materials that should be selected to meet the needs and interests of the students utilising curricular activities mediated by the technology.

In regard to learning efficiency, Yang and Chen (2007) have demonstrated that e-learning can lead to enhanced language learning in the classroom, as well as positive attitudes towards the coursework learned in a technology-based language classroom. Huang, Chern and Lin (2009) prove the potentially improving effects of online reading facilities, such as the language learning management software (LMS) in the enhancement of comprehension of reading texts. Moreover, the effectiveness of online learning in the English language classroom has been well documented in research (Hellebrandt, 1999; Kelm, 1992; Warschauer, 1996; Irons et al., 2002; Stubbs and Martin, 2003; O'Toole & Absalom, 2003; MacDonald & McAteer, 2003; Lebel, et al, 2005; Tallent-Runnels, et al., 2006; Poole, 2006; Newsome, 2008).

Furthermore, research indicated that the speed and stability of Internet connections pose serious issues in the use of corpus for language learning. For example, Sun (2003) showed that the participants in his study had a positive attitude towards the extensive reading programme and the system in enhancing their language skills. In addition, students' Internet reading ability was improved and they became more capable of finding reading materials. These were all important for establishing learners' independence and autonomy in L2 reading.

Worldwide, there is a growing number of effectiveness research that taps into the effects of e-learning media on language learning and development as well as in other academic disciplines (Irons et al., 2002; Stubbs & Martin, 2003; O'Toole & Absalom, 2003; MacDonald & McAteer, 2003; Gilmore & Warren, 2007; Oh, 2003; Bernard et al., 2004; Crutsinger et al., 2005; Stokes et al., 2004; Tallent-Runnels et al., 2006; Poole, 2006; Tham and Werner, 2005; Newsome, 2008). In university education, there arises "the need for a holistic approach to embedding e-learning in institutional activities". For instance, Moskal et al. (2006) explained that

> The expansion of online environment presents formidable challenges to higher education. Universities must confront the demand for new pedagogies, enhanced support for both faculty and students, organizational redefinition, authentic and contextual assessment techniques (p.27).

Moreover, Lynch (2001) emphasized that "effective student and faculty preparation for the Web-based teaching and learning environment can make a significant impact on student success in their studies, thus increasing retention and curriculum completion" (p.3).

Therefore, there is a need to build on the accumulated expertise associated with conventional teaching in order to establish best practices for effective online learning and instructions and to devise appropriate pedagogical, organizational and technological paradigms that will shape the groundwork for future courses (Lebel et al., 2005; Harasim, 1995, pp.189-211).

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This employed a qualitative approach to describe how technology could be used to successfully teach a newly piloted literature in an EFL class and explore students' reactions to the use of technology in the EFL context. Purposeful sampling was used in selecting participants for the study. Contact with the participants was initiated by way of recruitment letters handed out during a class visit. Students who indicated their willingness to take part in the study were asked to complete an informed consent form prior to participation.

The study participants were comprised of 30 Saudi students studying English as a foreign language. The technological devices included the features and facilities of Blackboard. In addition, computer technology, the Internet, and an overhead projector were used in the presentation of literary materials to the students.

4.1 Description of the Instruments

The survey instruments consisted of the Instructor Reflection Survey (originally developed by (Filimban (2008)) and Arabicised and standardized by the researchers) and the Student Reflection Survey (originally developed by Newsome, 2008, adapted, Arabicised and standardized for purposes of the present study by the researchers). Both survey forms included close-ended Likert scale statements (quantitative data) and open-ended questions (qualitative data). These instruments were used to measure the factors that contribute to the effectiveness of an online course from instructor and student perspectives.

The Instructor Reflection Survey was given to three teachers in the Faculty of Languages and Translation, English Department, who were involved in blended teaching of the online literature course. All sampled teachers responded to the questionnaire. The Online Instructor Reflection Survey gathered descriptive data from the instructors in order to look for correlations between teaching experience and course effectiveness. Instructors were asked about their teaching experience, course development experience and faculty ranking. The questionnaire sought out both quantitative and qualitative data.

The student reflection survey was given to 30 full time students. It was intended to gather descriptive data from students both to provide background information on the respondents' online literature course that they were enrolled in and their levels and aspects of satisfaction with this online course in terms of professionalism, the programme content and material, supplementary modules, their recommendations for improving the content of this course and recommendations for improving the appearance of the online program. The first two questions on this survey were Likert-scale type and the remaining two sought for qualitative responses.

Table 1
Instructors' Ranks

Faculty rank	No.	(%)
Assistant Professor	2	73.3
Lecturer	0	0
Instructor	1	26.7
Total	3	100

Table 2
Online Courses Taught by the Sample

Online courses taught	Frequency	(%)
Drama (ENG 332)	10	50
Novel (431)	10	50

Table 3
Overall Teaching Experience at KKU

Overall teaching experience at KKU	No.	(%)
Less than one year	-	-
1 year to less than 2 years	-	-
2 years to less than 3 years	-	-
3 years to less than 5 years	-	-
5 years to less than 10 years	2	73.3
More than 10 years	1	26.7
Total	3	100

Table 4
Teaching Experience in Higher Education Institutions

Previous teaching experience	No.	(%)
Yes	3	100
No, if no skip question #5	-	-
Total	3	3

4.2 Validity and Reliability of the Instruments

Inter-rater validation indicated the instruments were valid enough to collect the data they were meant to gather.

The reliability of the questionnaire has been determined using the Kuder-Richardson formula (21) (Brown, 1996). The reliability co-efficient computed for the 27 items was 0.991, which is a very high.

The survey was administered to (12) faculty members and junior staff members to determine its reliability,

manipulating a test-retest method. The reliability of the survey was determined using the Kuder-Richardson formula (21). The reliability co-efficient computed for the survey items was 0.926.

5. FINDINGS

5.1 Instructors' Reflection Survey

The instructors' reflection survey gathered descriptive data from the instructors as summarized in Tables 1-3.

Table 5
Faculty Ranks, Courses Taught Online, and Teaching Experience

Faculty rank	No.	(%)
Assistant Professor	2	66.7
Instructor	1	33.3
Total	3	100
Online courses taught	Frequency	(%)
Drama (ENG 332)	10	50
Novel (431)	10	50
Teaching experience	Frequency	Percent
5 years to less than 10 years	2	66.7
More than 10 years	1	33.3
Total	3	100.0

As the table above shows, 66.7% had a teaching experience at KKU from 5 years to less than 10 years and 33.3% were teaching for more than 10 years. All information from the surveys was coded for statistical analyses and entered into a computer database. Statistical procedures employed included descriptive statistics analysis for the various items on the survey (totals, percentages, means, and standard deviations).

5.2 Instructional Design and Delivery of Online Courses

The first section of the questionnaire provides an overview of the respondents' interaction with instructional design and delivery of online courses. Table 4 presents the answers. Participants were asked to respond to 5 Likert-type statements dealing with their perceptions about the Instructional design and delivery of online courses (item 1-5), and student learning outcomes.

As Table 6 illustrates, informants from among the instructors perceived the instructional design and delivery processes of online courses as positive with an overall mean score of 3.73 (SD = 0.92). There were 33.3% of the faculty who strongly agreed that the course structure and materials were well organized, with moderate mean and Std. Deviation(4±.1.00). There were also 66.7% of the faculty who didn't know that the course structure and materials were well organized, and 33.3% of the faculty agreed that the syllabus lacked coherence and interconnectedness, with the mean and Std. Deviation

respectively (3.33±.577). In addition, 33.3% of the faculty strongly agreed that the course was designed with various visual, textual, and/or auditory cues, with the mean and Std. Deviation respectively (3.67± 1.528).

Table 6
Instructors' Perceptions About Instructional Design and Delivery of Online Courses

Item	M	SD
The course structure and materials are well organized.	4.33	.577
The syllabus lacks coherence and interconnectedness.	3.33	.577
The course is designed with various visual, textual, and/orauditory activities that improve the students' learning.	3.67	1.155
The course content is appropriate and up-to-date	4.33	.577
Overall	3.73	0.92

There were 66.7% of the faculty who didn't know that auditory activities improved the students' learning, and 33.3% of the faculty strongly agreed to the statement that auditory activities improved the students' learning, with the mean and Std. Deviation respectively (3.67±1.155). In addition, 66.7% of the faculty agreed that the course content was appropriate and up-to-date, and 33.3% of the faculty didn't know that this was the case, with the mean and Std. Deviation respectively (3.67± 0.90). However, 66.7% of the faculty didn't know that the course structure and materials were well organized, and 33.3% of the faculty agreed that the syllabus lacked coherence and interconnectedness, with the mean and Std. Deviation respectively (3.33±.577).

5.3 Student Learning Outcomes

Table 7 shows the mean scores of the respondents on their perceptions of the expected student learning outcomes and the standard deviations thereof.

Table 7
Instructors' Perceptions About Student Learning Outcomes

Items of the Survey	Mean	Std. deviation
Learning outcomes are clearly explained.	4.33	.577
Tasks are clearly defined.	3.00	1.732
Sufficient time for achieving outcomes.	3.33	.577

The informants agreed that learning outcomes were clearly set and explained (M = 4.33, SD = .577), sufficient time was allotted to the tasks geared towards achieving better learning outcomes (M = 3.33, SD = .577) and that learning tasks were clearly defined (M = 3.00, SD = 1.7).

5.4 Assessment and Evaluation

Table 8 below shows the mean scores of the respondents on their perceptions of assessment and evaluation methods associated with the online literature course and the standard deviations thereof.

Table 8
Instructors' Perceptions About Assessment and Evaluation in the Online Course

Items of the Survey	Mean	Std. deviation
Assessments are haphazard.	3.33	.577
How students will be graded in the class is clearly explained	3.67	1.155
Assignments with appropriate levels of difficulty are provided.	3.33	.577
Feedback on assignments is provided within a reasonable timeframe	3.00	1.732

The informants agreed that the online literature course provided clear information on how the students were graded in the course (M = 3.67, SD = 1.155), but they also agreed that some assessments were haphazard (M = 3.33, SD = .577) while some other assessments were graded in terms of difficulty levels (M = 3.33, SD = .577), and they also agreed that feedback on assignments was provided within reasonable time frameworks (M = 3.00, SD = 1.73).

5.5 Student Empowerment

Table 9 below shows the mean scores and standard deviations of the perceptions of the informants with regard to the survey section Student Empowerment.

Table 9
Instructors' Perceptions About Student Empowerment in the Online Literature Course

Items of the Survey	Mean	Std. deviation
The students are given opportunities to express themselves.	3.33	.577
The students are given opportunities to share their cultural backgrounds.	4.33	.577
The students are given a voice in how they will be graded.	3.3333	.57735

The informants agreed that the online literature course provided opportunities for the students to share their cultural backgrounds (M = 4.33, SD = .577) and they also agreed that the students were given a voice in how they were assessed and graded during the course (M = 3.333, SD = .57735). The instructors also agreed that the students were given opportunities to express themselves during the course (M = 3.33, SD = .577).

5.6 Social Presence

Table 10 below shows the mean scores and standard deviations of the perceptions of the instructors as regards social presence in the Literature course delivered online.

The informants agreed that the online Literature course provided opportunities for the students to share their postings onthe discussion board of the Blackboard system (M = 4.33, SD = .577). They also agreed that the students were given opportunities for positive interactions during the course (M = 3.67, SD = 1.155). The instructors also

agreed that the students were given opportunities forin-depth thinking, merging with the e-learning community, and expressing their identities without anonymity to avoid unethical practices in discussion board postings during the e-course (M = 3.33, SD = .577, respectively for each of these factors).

Table 10
Instructors' Perceptions About Social Presence in the Online Literature Course

Items of the Survey	Mean	Std. deviation
Students are encouraged to post a self-introduction on the discussion board.	4.33	.577
Students are required to think in-depth about a subject.	3.33	.577
Anonymity can lead to cheating and other unethical practices.	3.33	.577
Students are given opportunities for positive interactions with other students.	3.67	1.155
Students are helped to feel part of a learning community.	3.33	.577

5.7 Study and Thinking Skills

Table 11 below shows the mean scores and standard deviations of the perceptions of the instructors as regards study and thinking skills in the Literature course delivered online.

Table 11
Instructors' Perceptions About Study and Thinking Skills in the Online Literature Course

Items of the Survey	Mean	Std. deviation
Students are required to think in-depth about a subject.	3.67	1.155
Students are required to analyze, synthesize, and interpret information.	4.33	.577
Students are required to problem solve.	4.33	.577
Courses can help students develop critical and creative thinking.	3.33	.577

The respondents agreed that the online Literature course required the students to analyse, synthesize, and interpret information provided in the e-course (M = 4.33, SD = .577). They also agreed that the students were required to practice problem-solving during the course (M = 4.33, SD =.577). The instructors also agreed that the students were given opportunities for in-depth thinking, merging with the e-learning community, and expressing their identities without anonymity to avoid unethical practices in discussion board postings during the e-course (M = 3.33, SD = .577, respectively for each of these factors).

5.8 Course Alignment

Table 12 below shows the mean scores and standard deviations of the perceptions the instructors expressed as regards course alignment in the Literature course delivered online.

Table 12
Instructors' Perceptions About Course Alignment in the Online Literature Course

Items of the Survey	Mean	Std. deviation
Assignments that reflect student interests and abilities are provided.	4.33	.577
Learning outcomes are in alignment with the course requirements.	3.33	.577
Course assessments are in agreement with the course content and learning objectives.	3.33	.577

The respondents agreed that assessments in the online Literature course reflected student interests and abilities in the e-course (M = 4.33, SD = .577). They also agreed that learning outcomes are in alignment with the course requirements (M = 3.33, SD =.577). The instructors also agreed that course assessments are in agreement with the course content and learning objectives in the e-course (M = 3.33, SD = .577).

5.9 Students' Survey
Merits of the Online Literature Course

Table 13 below shows the mean scores and standard deviations of the perceptions of the students as regards the benefits of the online Literature course as defined in the students' survey; these are the accessibility of the e-course, its flexibility, teachability, and student-centeredness.

Table 13
Merits of the Online Literature Course

Merits of the Online Literature Course	Frequency	Percent
Accessibility	12	40.0
Flexibility	5	16.7
Teachability	7	23.3
Student centeredness	6	20.0
Total	30	100.0

A higher percentage of students (40%) agreed that the online Literature course was readily accessible to them via Blackboard. They also agreed that the course was teachable (23.3%) and it was flexible (16.7).

5.10 Demerits of the Online Literature Course

Table 14 below shows the mean scores and standard deviations of the perceptions of the students as regards the disadvantages of the online Literature course as defined in the students' survey; these are isolation, lack of face-to-face interactions, time restrictions, and lack of technological skills.

Student informants agreed that the disadvantages of the online Literature course were isolation, which is the students' disconnectedness in the virtual environment of the delivery medium, with them relying most on asynchronous interactions, followed by lack of face-to-face interactions, which is quite related to isolation, and technological deficiency of the students lacking

technological skills in the order of their percentages of agreement. Figure 1 below sums up these drawbacks of the online Literature course.

Table 14
Demerits of the Online Literature Course

| Demerits of the online literature course	Frequency	Percent
Isolation	10	33.3
Lack of face-to-face interactions	9	30.0
Time intensiveness	4	13.3
Lack of technological skills	7	23.3
Total	30	100.0
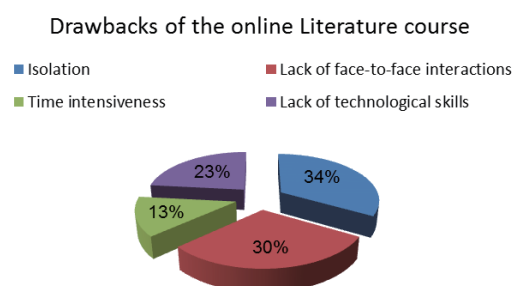
Figure 1
Demerits of the Online Literature Course

5.11 Students Evaluation of Instructors' Professionalism

Students agreed that their online Literature course instructors were on time for all online appointments (63.3%). They also responded to emails in a timely fashion (63.4%). Then they also agreed that their instructors' explanations of the Literature course were interesting in terms of content (56.6%). Finally, they agreed to some extent that their teachers were helpful and courteous (30%). Figure 2 below sums up these findings.
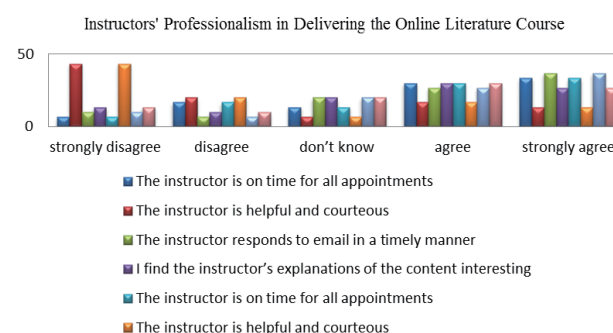

Figure 2
Students' Evaluation of Teachers' Professionalism

5.12 Students' Evaluation of the Online Literature Course

The highest percentage of agreement responses indicated that students felt like mastering the online course materials and thought they were able to apply what

they were learning in the future (66.7). Then they agreed that the online programme ran smoothly (63.3%). In terms of its appearance, the informants thought that the online programme was attractive and easy to read (56.7%). They, almost on the same level of agreement, they thought the online course was more convenient than its regular version (56.6). Finally, the student informants least agreed that they had plenty of experience with computers before taking the online Literature course (23.3%). Figure 3 below summarises these results.
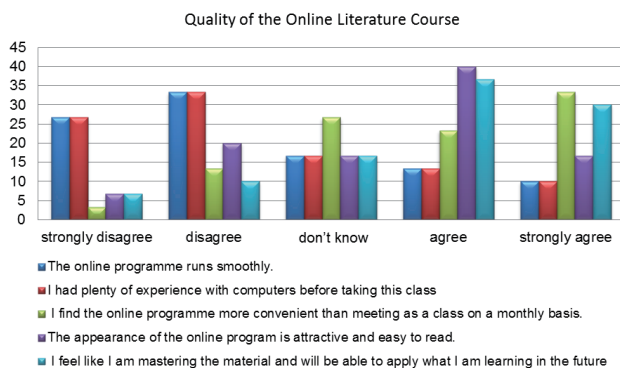
Figure 3
Students' Evaluation of the Quality of the Online Course

5.13 Results from the Pretest/Posttest

The purpose of conducting a pretest/posttest assessment was to gauge if there were any significant differences between the levels of the students before they took the online Literature course and after they took it in order to evaluate the effects of the online Literature course and whether there were significant improvement and progress in the level of the students after the course delivery had ended. The results of the test were analysed using the SPSS.

A paired-sample *t*-test is performed to analyse students' performance on the online Literature course on pretesting and posttesting as per each question of the test; the reason for this is that the Literature test was in the form of essay questions whose answers were scored independently.

The statistical results in Table 15 below reveal that there is a significant difference between the performance of the students before they took the online Literature course and their performance after they had taken that online course to the good of the post-test administration which showed significantly improved enhancements in the performance of the students (p = 0.000).

The table above shows the t-test results for the differences in mean scores on the literature test given to the experimental group twice to compare pretest versus posttest scores. Findings showed that the experimental group's mean scores (M = 62.77, SD = 6.4) were significantly higher on posttesting than the pretest mean scores (M = 43.47, SD = 6.47); the t-value for the overall score on pretesting/posttesting comparisons is -27.19. Such findings led the researchers to conclude that the instructional e-learning medium is significantly more

effective than the traditional method in presenting and teaching the Literature online course. More specifically, the pretest results of the students had a mean of 43.47, while their mean scores increased to 62.77 on the post-test. This increase is illustrated in Figure 4 below which sums up the findings of pretest/posttest comparisons.

Table 15
Dependent-Samples T-Test Comparing the Pre-Test and Post-Test Results of the Group

Test Items		Mean	N	SD	T test	*P*
Question 1	q1Pre Test	4.47	30	.819	-21.651-	.000
	q_1Post Test	6.37	30	.809		
Question 2	q_2Pre Test	4.40	30	.855	-12.003-	.000
	q_2Post Test	6.43	30	1.104		
Question 3	q_3Pre Test	4.17	30	.791	-13.581-	.000
	q_3Post Test	6.30	30	.837		
Question 4	q_4Pre Test	4.40	30	.855	-20.149-	.000
	q_4Post Test	6.27	30	.828		
Question 5	q_5Pre Test	4.43	30	.858	-13.574-	.000
	q_5Post Test	6.60	30	1.102		
Question 6	q_6Pre Test	4.33	30	.711	-14.748-	.000
	q_6Post Test	6.33	30	.802		
Question 7	q_7Pre Test	4.47	30	.819	-15.766-	.000
	q_7Post Test	6.47	30	.860		
Question 8	q_8Pre Test	4.40	30	.855	-3.440-	.002
	q_8Post Test	5.07	30	1.363		
Question 9	q_9Pre Test	4.23	30	.774	-9.780-	.000
	q_9Post Test	6.47	30	.860		
Question 10	q_10Pre Test	4.17	30	.791	-15.057-	.000
	q_10Post Test	6.47	30	1.042		
Overall Score	Pre Test	43.47	30	6.474	-27.191-	.000
	Post Test	62.77	30	6.409		
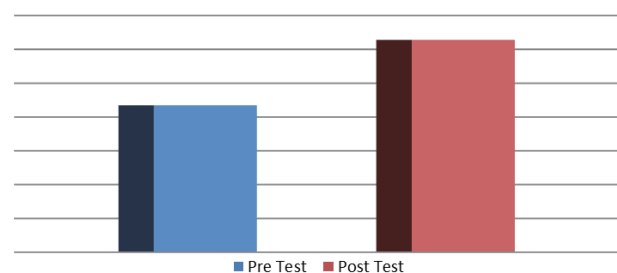
Figure 4
**Mean Scores of Students on Pretesting and Posttesting**

Thus, pretest/posttest comparisons indicate that there is large difference between the overall mean scores of the students to the advantage of posttesting means cores. This proves the improvement and progress in the level of performance of the students using the online Literature course in the Blackboard environment. The findings also provide evidence that e-learning of literature, using

Blackboard is conducive to improved performance of the students. This is also in line with some prior research which indicated that e-learning can lead to enhanced language learning in the classroom, as well as generate positive attitudes towards the coursework learned in a technology-based language classroom (e.g., Yan & Chen, 2007; Huang, Chern & Lin, 2009).

Findings from the students' survey indicate that the students were generally positive towards the use of the online Literature course, using the facilities of the online delivery medium of Blackboard. They agreed that the online medium of Blackboard was particularly useful for making the coursework accessible, flexibly learnable and teachable, making it more student-centred rather than teacher-based. The findings also demonstrated that the online Literature course was professionally delivered by punctual, helpful teachers. Students' results from the qualitative survey also indicated that students had positive perceptions as to the smooth running of the online Literature course, its convenience and flexibility and its attractive appearance compared to the traditional textbook. These findings are congruent with prior research showing that students learned much better online literary materials than the conventional literature and criticism books (Horst, 2005; Horst et al., 1998; Chen et al., 2013).

Interestingly, experimental participants did not report serious difficulty in gaining access to computers and the Internet, as they used the campus labs during class time or off-campus at home, though they reported that they entered the course with not much adequate computer skills. This finding is opposed to Sun's (2003) investigation which recognized that Internet connectivity and speed posed major problems in literary corpus use for classroom teaching/learning applications.

Numerous explanations for these findings, some briefly cited in the text of the literature review, can be offered here. First, differences in the amount and type of emphasis by the instructor on online course work in each class may have had an effect on students' perceptions of the favourable uses of literature and literary movements available in the online Literature course. Therefore, having received more direct training and practice in the Literature e-course, the participants in this study may have been better positioned to develop favourable perceptions about the course, the professionalism of instructors during online delivery of the course and the quality of the online programme, and in time, they tended to develop and build more enhanced skills to access, acquire and enhance their literary and critical knowledge about the Literature e-course.

5.14 Limitations of the Study

It must be acknowledged that this study has certain limitations. First, the sample size was small both for the instructors sample and the students' sample; as such, the number of participants was limited by enrollment rates at this particular semester when the e-course was pilot-tested. Second, this study was conducted on male participants, due to restrictions to or difficulties with doing gender comparative experimental studies in the region where the study took place. There is no co-education in Saudi Arabia, especially at college level due to cultural and religious restrictions.

5.15 Recommendations & Pedagogical Implications

If students are to study the history of literary movements, online courses that are modifiable in terms of content knowledge and skills of literary criticism can replace the traditional "use and dispose" materials that used for short periods of time as the former are easy to access and use, and more importantly, are easy to develop and enhance electronically. Attitudes towards CALL, the use of Blackboard, and the use of online literature courses can then be assessed using appropriate scales.

Generally, based on findings from this study, and the previous research here reviewed, the present study recommends the extension and expansion of e-learning endeavours, including language e-courses and online Literature courses in ELT higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia. In particular, the researchers recommend that faculty members and students be trained in the use of the online language management system of Blackboard for pedagogical purposes. In addition, the university administration may consider equipping the KKU campus with more e-learning labs, EFL learning software compatible with and appropriate for use on Blackboard.

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