

Role of E-Learning to meet the challenges in Higher Education Program

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Abstract

This research aims to express how Learning Management Systems has facilitated effective learning and helped in overcoming the challenges that hurdled schooling in higher education in King Khalid University. Learning Management Systems has applied Blackboard for the applications of its E-learning services. This research was a pilot study completely based on secondary data that has been collected through King Khalid University Official Website www.kku.edu.sa and through the website of E-Learning Deanship. After the collection of data, researchers have evaluated the data validity through various methods to find out how Blackboard has actually facilitated in overcoming challenges in higher education in KKU. Teachers who have been working for more than 7 years have been given in-depth interview to present their experience between phase before Blackboard and after, then their response were scaled on semantic differential. For meeting the strategic goals of KKU has not come without major challenges. Before the introduction of Blackboard University used to operate in separate campuses for male and female students and male instructors were not able to teach female students in face-to-face environments due to cultural hindrances and also different departments used studios where instructors gave lectures to female students who were watching through a television screen in the room next door. Female students were only permitted to ask questions through a telephone attached to the wall. Women also faced an additional challenge when it came to travelling to and from lectures. Another challenge was the huge geography and dispersion of campuses that was impacting instructor recruitment.

Keywords: E-Learning, Blackboard, whiteboard, face-to-face, virtual classrooms.

INTRODUCTION

King Khalid University (KKU) conveys home and worldwide learning openings on campus for male and female students. King Khalid University (KKU) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is one of the largest centers of education in the Middle East. In 2008, KKU introduced Blackboard Collaborate™ to accomplish regional and global education and instructional fineness along with a more effective stipulation of their gender-divided campus for more than 65,000 students, half of which are women. King Khalid University (KKU) is situated in the Asir region of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia comprised of 26 different campuses and 48 colleges, offering higher education to Saudi students.

It introduced an E-Learning centre in 2005 and currently provides courses in all the departments and in 2008 introduced Blackboard Collaborate™

King Khalid University (KKU) is located in the city of Abha, in the Asir region of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It is straddling 81,000 square KMs; the university is comprised of 26 different campuses and 48 colleges, offering further and higher education to its students. The university was formed in 1998 from the merger of King Saud and Imam Muhammad Ibn

Saud Islamic universities. It introduced an e-learning centre in 2005 and presently provides courses on an assortment of subjects, including medicine, pharmacy, computer sciences, engineering, Islamic studies, dentistry and education.

CHALLENGES

Meeting the planned ambition of KKU has not come without major confronts. Previously, the university operated separate campuses for male and female students. Male instructors were not able to teach female students in face-to-face environments and formerly used studios where instructors gave lectures to female students who were watching through a television screen in the room next door. Female students were only permitted to ask questions through a telephone attached to the wall. This approach was prohibitive due to many factors including the cost and maintenance of the studios and the university was resolute to develop a more practical and sustainable elucidation.

Women also faced an additional challenge when it came to travelling to and from lectures as a cultural hindrance they are not allowed to drive; female students at KKU are dependent on their male relatives for commuting for lectures and other academic activities. This was a huge barricade to education, similarly shared with disabled students who also found travelling a challenge as well as costly.

Another challenge was the huge geography and diffusion of campuses that was impacting instructor staffing. It became difficult to obtain the required number of instructors in the university.

SOLUTION

In 2005, the university established its first e-learning centre and in 2008, chose Blackboard Collaborate to integrate with the university's primary learning management system, Blackboard Learn™. Mohammad Qatrawi, Research and Development Manager at the eLearning Center at KKU state "Choosing online collaboration was a strategic decision. We had a solid, clear vision in King Khalid University, and we believe from our vision that e-learning is for everyone. It provides equal chances for all, quality, and better student experiences and keeps us up to date with best practices. So, we chose Blackboard Collaborate to support us in achieving our vision."

With this idea on education, many of the facet and capabilities of the Blackboard Collaborate™ online collaboration platform are assisting KKU with its e-learning vision. Most widely used capabilities are web conferencing for hosting virtual classrooms, the whiteboard for making classes more engaging and interactive, polling for answering questions, and instant messaging.

A feature that is particularly relevant to KKU's gender separated population is the ability to provide instantaneous collaboration through the operation of Blackboard Collaborate enterprise instant messaging. This has enabled students and teachers to work together in an informal "virtual environment," therefore they are able to chat, connect through video to have one-to-one interviews, and share their desktops with one another to exchange ideas; an enhancement to communication in all the perspective.

Over 7,000 students across 25 departments, including medicine, pharmacy, dentistry, computer sciences, engineering, education, Sharia and religion, training, and more are adopting online collaboration into their prospectus today.

The increase in adoption has been driven by their 'top-down' vision where instructors are comprehensively trained either face-to-face or more often, online. All of the content and training materials are published on the university's e-Learning Deanship website and e-learning specialists can be reached practically to help students requiring backing.

ADVANTAGES

Blackboard Collaborate has helped KKU to conquer many of its challenges around enhancing the quality of education, improving access to teaching and resources, and helping to manage a gender divided campus. Furthermore, the use of Blackboard Collaborate has helped to save the university and its student's significant time and money. Studying can now be done distantly, thereby removing the major issues around travel and a gender-divided campus is all most solved, as well as creating more equitable distribution of faculty talent across campuses through virtual learning. It also makes teaching more resourceful as instructors only need to be in one place, do not need to commute to campuses physically. KKU has eradicated the need for establishing new studios, which has saved the university investment on this.

Finally, by using Blackboard Collaborate, the university has been able to select some of the best faculty members available from around the world and the quality of instruction and student outcomes have enhanced. There is no longer deficiency of competent and qualified instructors for some of the courses.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research was a pilot study completely based on secondary data that has been collected through King Khalid University official Website www.kku.edu.sa and through the website of E-Learning Deanship. After the collection of data, researchers have evaluated the data validity through various methods to file result how blackboard has actually facilitated in overcoming challenges in higher education in KKU. Teachers who have been working for more than 7 year have been given in-depth interview to present their experience between phase before Blackboard and after, then their response were scaled on semantic differential. Closed ended questions were framed to find out the effective of LMS and to know if really it has facilitated the KKU in overcoming challenges for higher education. Respondents were the real time users of LMS facilities and they could file all minute errors and advantages too. The table 1 shows 5 Points Scale from strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree.

Table 1: Result Analysis for affectivity of LMS in KKU for Higher Education

Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Do you think LMS has effective application in Higher Education?	5	4	3	2	1
Do find LMS applications effective in KKU	5	4	3	2	1
Do think Elluninate live is effective medium for course instruction?	5	4	3	2	1
Do you think LMS has solved the problem of Gender divide?	5	4	3	2	1
Do you find LMS effective for Assessment Methods?	5	4	3	2	1
Do you think LMS has Quality services?	5	4	3	2	1
Do you think LMS has solved the problem of online learning for the students commuting from remote areas?	5	4	3	2	1
How would you rate your experience with LMS?	5	4	3	2	1

Respondents were also asked to rate the level of quality, of various tools of LMS for King Khalid University for Higher Education.

Table 2: Result Analysis for Quality service of LMS Blackboard tools in King Khalid University for Higher Education

Questions	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor
Elluminate Live	5	4	3	2	1
Trigity Tool	5	4	3	2	1
Assignment	5	4	3	2	1
Content Area	5	4	3	2	1
Assessment Tools	5	4	3	2	1
Course tools	5	4	3	2	1
Communication Tool	5	4	3	2	1

Respondents were asked to rate the frequency of using a particular LMS Blackboard tool in instructing their Modules.

Table 3: Result Analysis for frequency of using service of LMS Blackboard tools

Questions	Every Time	Almost Every Time	Occasionally	Almost Never	Never
Elluminate Live	5	4	3	2	1
Trigity Tool	5	4	3	2	1
Assignment	5	4	3	2	1
Content Area	5	4	3	2	1
Assessment Tools	5	4	3	2	1
Course tools	5	4	3	2	1
Communication Tool	5	4	3	2	1

RESULT

Blackboard Collaborated to integrate with the university's primary Learning Management System and it has changed the entire teaching pedagogy and supported the University in achieving its vision. Blackboard capabilities are web conferencing for hosting virtual classrooms, the whiteboard for making classes more engaging and interactive, polling for answering questions, and instant messaging that has helped the instructors and students to learn without time and distance barrier. Also Blackboard has abolished the KKU gender divide and now female students can not only ask questions but can contribute equally with male students under virtual venue. Digital library on Blackboard has not only enhanced learning but also facilitated both teachers and students to access to reference books and journals instantly. After evaluation the response researcher could file the results that even if the frequency of using a particular service of LMS Blackboard is not very prevalent but they know the advantages of the applications of those tools and when needed in the situation of students coming from remote areas or students who are disable and in the condition of gender divide these tools could be used effectively. Blackboard Collaborated to integrate with the university's primary Learning Management System and it has changed the entire teaching pedagogy and supported the University in achieving its vision. Blackboard capabilities are web conferencing for hosting virtual classrooms, the whiteboard for making classes more engaging and interactive, polling for answering questions, and instant messaging that has helped the instructors and students to learn without time and distance barrier. Also Blackboard has abolished the KKU gender divide and now female students can not only ask questions but can contribute equally with male students under virtual venue. Digital library on Blackboard has not only enhanced learning but also facilitated both teachers and students to access to reference books and journals instantly.

CONCLUSION

Blackboard has facilitated instructors to communicate learning materials in various methods like videos, presentations, etc also assessment methods has been refined and became time effective on Blackboard. Some popular assessment methods used by keen instructors are Quizzes, Online exam, Question mark, Assignment, Blog, Discussion forum and Journals. Now with the help of Blackboard access to teaching and resources has become easier, and it is helping to manage a gender divided in the university additionally, the use of Blackboard Collaborate has helped to save the university and its student's significant time and money as for now learning can be carried out in remote areas too.

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