Educational Administration: Theory and Practice
2024, 30(11), 977-992
ISSN: 2148-2403
https://kuey.net/

Research Article

The Efficacy of E-learning in English Tertiary Level Classes: The Case of the Oxford iQ Online Platform

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Citation: Alhusban, H. A., Al-Kebriti, M. & Alshehri, N. (2024). The Efficacy of E-learning in English Tertiary Level Classes: The Case of the Oxford iQ Online Platform, *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30(11) 977-992
Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v30i11.8574

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

The study investigated the perspective of Saudi learners at a tertiary level on the role of the Oxford iQ Platform in improving English language skills where English is learned in a foreign language (EFL) context. The purpose of the study was to reveal the frequency of using e-learning components and its impact on developing students' language skills from their point of view. Additionally, it explored the role of gamification especially in learning vocabulary and grammar. Furthermore, the study highlighted some of the challenges faced by the learners while using the platform. The instrument used in the study was a survey which allowed learners to comment on selected questions. It was completed by 2,491 first year participants who belonged to the Humanities, Science, Engineering, and Health tracks. The study found that the learners pointed out the positive impact of the platform on their language skills. The gamification aspects also made learners more engaged, motivated, and built a sense of competition. The intermediate groups across all tracks as well as Science Track students across all proficiency levels expressed a higher level of satisfaction more than other participants. Some of the challenges mentioned by the learners were related to the compatibility of the used browsers with Oxford iQ and the inaccessibility to some of the videos and listening audios.

Keywords: Oxford iQ online platform, English language skills, gamification, technical challenges, tertiary level

1. Introduction

E-learning is a method of learning which uses modern technology such as computers, multimedia, audiovisual aids, e-libraries, cell phones, and websites in order to convey information to learners and be compatible with the technological advancements of 21st century. The Deanship of the Preparatory Year and Supporting Studies at Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University has been making every effort to develop and keep in line with all advancements in higher education. The Deanship keeps up to date by implementing e-learning into its programs, by making an immense change to academic education, and by leading the university from a conventional institution using traditional teaching methods into a modern university. Therefore, this model aspires to advancement and excellence of teaching methods, utilizing technology in education, enhancing the quality of teaching, and meeting the continuous advancement and modernization that go along with the university's prestigious position and history.

The Department of English Language started implementing the blended e-learning program in 2014. Since then, the program has witnessed various developments and updates to become well-developed and fully-fledged enough to provide a great learning experience to students. The General English (GE) course at the Deanship of Preparatory Year and Supporting Studies is a year-long course whereby students work on all aspects of their language proficiency. In the first semester, students have between 12-18 contact hours depending on their proficiency level. However, in the second semester, the hours for English 101 are reduced

to 6-12. The number of GE hours is reduced due to the introduction of the English for Academic and Specific Purposes (ESP) course which is offered in the second semester. It is important to note that the students take GE and ESP courses concurrently. Part of the English 101 program involves guided and independent work in fulfillment of the e-learning component. Thus, students are allocated two e-learning hours each week to complete all assigned e-activities.

The department utilizes two systems to achieve the aforementioned objectives, namely, Blackboard and Oxford iQ. The university's official Learning Management System (LMS) for managing courses is called Blackboard, students are registered automatically onto the system and they can use their university accounts to log in. On the other hand, Oxford (iQ) is the online platform that comes with the *Q Skills for Success: Special Edition Series*, which are the textbooks used by the English department. Initially, Oxford iQ was a stand-alone platform which operated independently from Blackboard; teachers and students had to register using the codes provided in the book. In 2016, a single-sign-on feature was implemented in conjunction with Oxford University Press which allowed students to access the platform via a link on Blackboard. This made the platform more accessible and user-friendly as well as avoiding many technical difficulties.

The Oxford iQ platform offers students a variety of skill building activities such as reading, listening, vocabulary, grammar, extension skills, videos, discussion boards, tests, and interactive games. Additionally, a writing tutor feature is also available to guide students through the different stages of writing and demonstrate different lessons offered in each unit. Students also have access to extra resources and the audio files used in the book. Progress can be checked easily on the platform and learners are made aware if they need any extra practice. In fact, students are only required to do a couple of activities such as reading and listening comprehensions per unit, while the rest of the exercises are optional should students choose to take them. Many recent studies reported that the use of technology enhances writing skills (Torabi 2021; Waluyo 2020; Tan, Chen, and Lee 2020; Zhang and Zo 2020; Fonseca and Peralta 2019; Sutarsyah, Yufrizal, and Sudirman 2019; Sujannah, Cahyono, and Astuti 2020; Albashtawi and Al Bataineh 2020; Rosyada and Sundari 2021).

1.2 The Benefits of E-Learning

One of the objectives of e-learning is to extend the learning process beyond the classroom. This type of learning helps reduce the students' workload in class by decreasing contact hours and substituting them with more interactive alternatives. Students can practice e-activities at ease wherever and whenever they want. Implementing e-learning contributes to the creation of a flexible learning environment by using modern technologies that improve learning language skills (Lungu 2013; Alhusban 2022; Obari and Lambacher 2014; Shih 2011; Wichadee 2017; Zheng 2019; Peng and Fu 2021). Another benefit of e-learning is increasing learner autonomy. Furthermore, it allows students to acquire knowledge and experience by utilizing active learning tools. In opposition of this view, Rachels and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2018) argue that e-learning has little impact on improving English language skills such as vocabulary and grammar.

1.3 Study Objectives

This paper aims to evaluate different features offered by the Oxford iQ platform. The main objective is to analyze e-learning components as follows: (1) the efficiency of the Oxford iQ platform, (2) its role in developing language skills, (3) students' attitude towards e-learning, (4) game-based activities, and (5) challenges faced by students from the learners' perspective.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Since e-learning platforms have become ubiquitous in almost all educational institutions, and despite the importance of having a comprehensive understanding of this learning method, it has become necessary for both educators and decision-makers to consider the following areas:

1. The findings from the study may help educators and decision-makers who use such online platforms understand learners' attitudes towards this particular method of learning. Having a thorough grasp of students' opinions is essential to successfully implementing any e-learning program.
2. The study will reveal whether students only focus on graded activities or genuinely see the benefit behind extra e-learning resources.
3. The paper also explores the major challenges faced by students while using such an online platform, so modifications can be made accordingly to avoid similar difficulties. Furthermore, the institution shall be made aware of the type of support that students need.
4. The platform's gamification aspect is also a key part of the study. The findings will help identify how students use the vocabulary and grammar games and whether they benefit from them. Consequently, this will guide decision-makers as to whether they should include or exclude these games as mandatory or optional activities.

2. Literature Review

Over the past 10 years e-learning programs have become a part and parcel of almost all university courses. Using online platforms in language teaching and learning has recently been the case of many studies and research. When studying this method in the field of education, it is of paramount importance to examine all

relevant aspects and features offered by such platforms: efficiency, added value, challenges, (Yadav, Gretter, Hambrusch, and Sands 2016; Kadirhan, Gül, and Battal 2018), learners' attitudes towards such a new system, and gamification.

E-Learning platforms are becoming increasingly commonplace in educational institutions, and their role is not only restricted to providing online resources but also engaging students in an interactive environment. In this view, Low (2017) suggests that e-learning platforms create an incentive towards learning outside of the classroom. Such tools can also promote a better student-teacher relationship and offer an appropriate learning environment. Therefore, the use of technology creates an immersive learning environment and improves the learners' outcomes. Low also argues that the prompt feedback students receive upon completing a quiz encourages students to excel while the strict deadlines push learners to delve deeper into the textbook looking for more information.

Students' attitudes and LMS design are essential in learning. Al-Rahmi, Alias, Shahizan, Alzahrani, Alfarraj, Saged, and Abdul Rahman (2018) explored the use of e-learning by university students in Malaysian higher educational institutions. They reported that e-learning tools enable students to share knowledge and interact with their peers and teachers. Moreover, they found that the design and interface of the e-learning management system both impact students' motivation levels leading to better academic performance. They stated that "the interface of e-learning and the way it is designed motivates students, leading to better participation rates. The e-learning interface makes it easy for the students to access and explore course content. It also enables them to easily use various functions and encourages them to make use of e-learning technology."

In opposition to e-learning advantages, Al-Ghamdi and Samarji (2016) indicated that the greatest challenge that students encounter in e-learning is the poor internet connection, which hinders students from accessing e-learning platforms on time. Moreover, students lack training in using e-learning tools (Coryell and Chlup 2007), which is a critical issue if learners do not know how to use them. Furthermore, learners also struggle due to a lack of technical support on campus. In another study conducted at Bisha University, Ja'ashan (2020) found that students have limited time for e-learning activities, as they are preoccupied by other assignments and preparation. The study also concluded that even though students had basic computer skills, the e-learning system was not user-friendly enough. Therefore, they require further training and technical support.

Having a well-designed and blended learning environment would contribute to enhancing the e-learning system. Blended learning in teaching languages, in some contexts, develops learners' linguistic skills. In support of this view, Banditvilai (2016) stated that learners had more independence in terms of managing their studies. Furthermore, learners benefited from e-learning or blended learning more than traditional methods as students were able to return to certain skill-building activities and exercises at any time of their choosing.

If e-learning is designed in a user-friendly way and learners are well-trained in using it, it will certainly support learner autonomy. In favor of this idea, Gluchmanova (2016) believes that using an online platform in teaching English serves the purpose of developing learner autonomy if the appropriate content is selected that meets the needs and learning habits/style of the students. Furthermore, teachers can monitor their work and progress and motivate students to take the tasks and activities more seriously. Additionally, the implementation of such a platform may generate greater satisfaction for learners, as they find it more engaging and practical by using the latest technologies in learning.

Learner attitudes are another major area that the present study aims to investigate. Sometimes learners show different attitudes towards new learning systems. Zabadi and Al-Alawi (2016) found that the students of the University of Business and Technology demonstrated positive attitudes and great willingness towards using e-learning platforms. The study also indicated that e-learning created valuable opportunities for students who were willing to continue their studies despite their spatial, financial, and social restrictions. Furthermore, Rymanova, Baryshnikov, and Grishaeva (2015) stated that the majority of students in the study showed a willingness to learn using an LMS platform, which had a positive effect on their academic results.

One of the innovative tools used in e-learning to increase motivation is the method of gamification (Rachels and Rockinson-Szapkiw 2018; Hung 2017). According to Bicen and Kocakoyun (2018), gamification can be a good aid in teaching difficult lessons or classes that students do not enjoy. This method helps to build various skills such as problem solving. Furthermore, gamification increases motivation among students, which is a major factor in language learning (Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels 1994; Pintrich and Schunk 1996). Overall, gamification in language learning motivates learners to spend extensive time on certain tasks and if learners/players get feedback, chances of learning will increase (Sykes 2018). Some of the common challenges faced by learners are related to internet connection, acquisition of computer skills, and availability of good infrastructure that serves the purpose of e-learning (Yadav et al. 2017; Kadirhan et al. 2018).

3. Methodology

The instrument of the study was a survey which consisted of five sections. The first part consisted of biographical data. The second part tackled the use of the iQ online contents. The third section included questions related to the benefits of the e-learning components in terms of their efficacy. The fourth part contained questions related to the appropriateness of the e-learning activities in terms of the learners' proficiency level. The last part discussed student satisfaction with regard to improving English language skills i.e., speaking, listening, reading, writing, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and critical thinking. Every

survey section ended with an open-ended question to elicit participants' rationale and explanation of their responses. The survey utilized a four-point Likert scale as follows: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, and Strongly Agree. The results in the close-ended questionnaire were categorically and statistically described, including the mean (M), standard deviation (SD), and the range description of the mean as follows: Strongly Disagree 1-1.70, Disagree 1.80-2.50, Agree 2.60-3.20, and Strongly Agree 3.30-4.

3.1 Validity

For the purpose of the survey validity, students were provided with an Arabic translation for lower proficiency levels to ensure their understanding of the questionnaire. Furthermore, the survey was sent to two arbitrators in the field of e-learning and language teaching, and it was modified slightly according to their feedback. The survey was created on QuestionPro, made available for three weeks, and distributed via Blackboard Announcements. After that, the raw data was filtered and processed using SPSS.

3.2 Reliability and Inferential Tests

Three statistical tests were conducted to measure the reliability of the results. First, Cronbach's alpha test was conducted to measure the internal consistency of the survey's items. Cronbach's alpha values were found to be reliable as they fell between (α = .61) and (α = .93); therefore, they were statistically acceptable (see Table 1). Second, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was conducted to illustrate if learners' responses were affected by the proficiency level variable. To detect the source of difference, an LSD test was conducted. Third, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was conducted to demonstrate whether the participants' responses were track-specific. Furthermore, to identify the source of differences, an LSD test was carried out.

Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha

N	Using the Online iQ Platform	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
1	How frequently do you use the following components in your learning?	10	89%
2	To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statement? 'This component of iQ Online is beneficial for my learning.'	11	91%
3	To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statement? 'This component of iQ Online is pitched at the right level for my learning.'	6	92%
4	To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statement? 'Using iQ Online has helped me to develop this skill.'	8	93%
5	Technical issues	2	66%
6	Reliability of using the platform	4	61%

4. Data Results

The results are divided into two main parts. The first part addresses the quantitative results, and the second one interprets the findings of the qualitative data.

4.1 Quantitative Data

The quantitative data shows the biographical information, proficiency levels, and tracks of the participants. Furthermore, it provides details on the frequency and efficacy of the iQ components from the students' standpoint considering their appropriateness for the proficiency levels.

4.1.1 Biographical Data

2,491 participants completed the survey. Tables 2 and 3 show the number of participants by level and track respectively.

Table 2: Proficiency Levels of Participants

N	Level	Count	Percentage
1	Beginner	660	26.50%
2	Intermediate	1,040	41.75%
3	Advanced	791	31.75%
	Total	2,491	100%

Table 3. Distribution of Participants per Track

N	Track	Count	Percentage
1	Health	752	30.19%
2	Engineering	391	15.70%
3	Science	811	32.56%
4	Humanities	537	21.56%
	Total	2,491	100%

4.1.2 Frequency of Using E-Learning Components

The aim of the second part of the survey was to investigate the frequency of using e-learning activities on iQ Online Practice. The Likert Scale range was as follows: Never 1-1.70, Sometimes 1.80-2.50, Often 2.60-3.20, and Always 3.30-4. The listed practice activities in Table 3 were *sometimes* used by most of the participants, and *never* used the Oxford iQ online email feature. The mean score of all items fell between 1.72 and 2.55 (see Table 4).

Table 4: Frequency of Using E-Learning Tools

How Frequently do you Use the Following Components in your iQ Online Learning?				
N	Question	Count	Mean out 4	Range
1	Oxford iQ Online Practice Activities	2,491	2.542	Sometimes
2	Oxford iQ Online Vocabulary Games (in the practice activities)	2,491	2.051	Sometimes
3	Oxford iQ Online Grammar Games (in the practice activities)	2,491	2.128	Sometimes
4	Oxford iQ Online Vocabulary Skills Activities	2,491	2.534	Sometimes
5	Oxford iQ Online Videos (in the practice activities)	2,491	2.103	Sometimes
6	Oxford iQ Online Student Book Audio	2,491	2.377	Sometimes
7	Oxford iQ Online Discussion Board	2,491	1.947	Sometimes
8	Oxford iQ Online Email Feature	2,491	1.723	Never
9	Oxford iQ Online Progress Reports	2,491	2.039	Sometimes
10	Oxford iQ Online Writing Tutor	2,491	1.955	Sometimes
Average			2.141	Sometimes

4.1.3 Efficacy of Using E-Learning Components

The aim of the third part of the survey was to examine how learners benefited from e-learning activities on iQ Online Practice. The Likert scale range was as follows: Strongly Disagree 1-1.70, Disagree 1.80-2.50, Agree 2.60-3.20, and Strongly Agree 3.30-4. The results found that the students agreed that the activities listed in Table 4 were beneficial. The mean score of all items fell between (M=2.61) and (M=3.45) (see Table 5).

Table 5: Efficacy of Using E-Learning Components

N	Question	Count	Mean out of 4	Range
1	Practice Activities	2,491	3.097	Agree
2	Vocabulary Games (in the practice activities)	2,491	2.856	Agree
3	Grammar Games (in the practice activities)	2,491	2.91	Agree
4	Vocabulary Skills Activities	2,491	3.161	Agree
5	Videos (in the practice activities)	2,491	2.817	Agree
6	Student Book Audio	2,491	2.928	Agree
7	Discussion Board	2,491	2.616	Agree
8	Email Feature	2,491	2.547	Disagree
9	Automatic Grading	2,491	3.452	Strongly Agree
10	Progress Reports	2,491	3.235	Agree
11	Writing Tutor	2,491	3.008	Agree
Average			2.966	Agree

4.1.4 Appropriateness of iQ Online Practice for the Proficiency Level

The aim of the third part of the survey was to evaluate the appropriateness of e-learning components in relation to the proficiency level. The Likert Scale range was as follows: Strongly Disagree 1-1.70, Disagree 1.80-2.50, Agree 2.60-3.20, and Strongly Agree 3.30-4. The results found that most students agreed that the e-learning components listed in Table 5 were adequate for their proficiency level. The mean score of all items fell between (M=2.852) and (M=3.046) (see Table 6).

Table 6: Appropriateness of iQ Online Practice for the Proficiency Level

N	Question	Count	Mean out of 4	Range
1	Practice Activities	2,491	3.046	Agree
2	Vocabulary Games (in the practice activities)	2,491	2.894	Agree
3	Grammar Games (in the practice activities)	2,491	2.902	Agree
4	Videos (in the practice activities)	2,491	2.852	Agree
5	Student Book Audio	2,491	2.923	Agree
6	Writing Tutor	2,491	2.932	Agree
Average			2.925	Agree

4.1.5 Proficiency Level Differences

The mean and standard deviation values of all proficiency levels were calculated independently. After that, an ANOVA test was conducted to calculate if there were any statistical differences in the results. The results were found to be statistically significant as most intermediate level learners agreed that the iQ online practice platform was effective, $F(2, 2488)=4.55$ p =.011. On the other hand, the expectancy of beginner and advanced level learners were almost the same (see Tables 7 & 8).

Table 7: Mean Scores of Proficiency Levels

Level	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	#	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	#	
Beginner	660	2.6058	.48086	.01872	2.5690	2.6425	1.09	3.81
Intermediate	1,040	2.6683	.42523	.01319	2.6424	2.6942	1.12	3.86
Advanced	791	2.6243	.43324	.01540	2.5940	2.6545	1.12	3.86
Total	2,491	2.6378	.44375	.00889	2.6203	2.6552	1.09	3.86

Table 8: ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.790	2	.895	4.558	.011
Within Groups	488.536	2488	.196		
Total	490.326	2490			

4.1.6 Track-Specific Differences

An ANOVA test was conducted to answer the following question: Is there any difference in the learners' responses across the four tracks (Health, Engineering, Science and Humanities)?

The results of the ANOVA test found that there was a statistical difference that is track-specific, $F(3, 2487)= 8.275$ p = .00 . In other words, the Science Track learners found that the iQ online practice platform was more effective for them compared to learners from other tracks. There is no difference found in the results obtained by the Health, Engineering, and Humanities Tracks (see Tables 9 & 10).

Table 9: ANOVA Test

Difference in Tracks					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	4.846	3	1.615	8.275	.000
Within Groups	485.480	2487	.195		
Total	490.326	2490			

Table 10: Post Hoc Test - Multiple Comparisons

Dependent Variable: Overall LSD						
(I) Track	(J) Track	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Health	Engineering	-.04556	.02755	.098	-.0996	.0085
	Science	-.10527*	.02237	.000	-.1491	-.0614
	Humanities	-.01850	.02496	.459	-.0674	.0304
Engineering	Science	-.05972*	.02720	.028	-.1131	-.0064
	Humanities	.02706	.02937	.357	-.0305	.0847
Science	Humanities	.08677*	.02458	.000	.0386	.1350
*The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.						

4.2 Qualitative Data

The qualitative data was generated from four questions that allowed students to express their ideas freely. The qualitative data collected learners' views on reading, writing, grammar, vocabulary skills, and the challenges that they encountered. The following section includes the wording of the questions directed to the learners and the main findings categorized in tables.

4.2.1 How do the iQ Online Reading Comprehension Activities Improve your Reading Skills?

The students reported that the iQ online reading comprehension activities contributed to their reading skills in many ways. First, the activities provided extensive practice including exam preparation, practicing reading skills, and a variety of questions with automatic feedback i.e., an answer key. Second, the activities helped to expand their vocabulary repertoire by exposing them to new idiomatic expressions and vocabulary. Interestingly, the natural human voice recordings of the reading passages were extremely beneficial to students. The learners utilized this feature to enhance their pronunciation, fluency, and accent. It seems that the students used this feature to benchmark their pronunciation against the native speakers in the recordings. Lastly, the students reported that the reading activities offered a variety of topics that were interesting and worth reading (see Table 11).

Table11: Reading Skills

N	Theme	Subtopics and Keywords	Students' Quotes
1	Extensive Practice	• Preparation for tests • Variety of questions • Continuing practice • Reading strategies and skills (ex. quick reading, making inferences, …) • Multiple attempts	• Practice for the real exams • Over time, I have found out what kind of mistakes I make in reading • They provide a wide range of practice questions • Practice makes perfect • It helps me to know how to find the answers quickly • By being able to read the passage quickly • Identifying main ideas in the text • Practicing in-depth reading • Analyzing texts • I can attempt the activities more than once • Offering samples of questions to deal with • when I practice more, my mistakes decrease • Helps to develop critical thinking
2	Expanding Vocabulary Repertoire	• Acquiring new vocabulary, terminology, and idiomatic expressions	• The more we read, the more vocabulary we learn • Learning more terms • Enriching students with more vocabulary
3	Pronunciation and Fluency	• Listening to the reading recording • Enhancing fluency	• It improves pronunciation and fluency a lot • It has developed my accent • It contributes to English Language fluency • Pronouncing vocabulary correctly
4	Exposure to a Variety of Topics	• Various topics • Interesting to read	• There are interesting topics that are worth reading. • Offering different kinds of passages • The topics were appropriate and smooth

4.2.2 How Do the Writing Tutor Models Improve Your Writing Skills?

The table above shows that students benefited from the Writing Tutor Models to enhance their academic writing skills in various areas. For example, the writing structure feature provided a well-organised model for different essay genres. Moreover, these models presented authentic examples of the key vocabulary and grammar lessons taught in the book. Furthermore, they outlined the main components of the essay namely introduction, body, and conclusion. It also demonstrated subcomponents of each paragraph such as topic sentences, supporting details, conjunctions, and key vocabulary. Learners also highlighted the role of the models in showing punctuation placement and use. Lastly, students mentioned the spelling check feature which helped them avoid spelling mistakes (see Table 12). Below are two figures showing the features of the Writing Tutor. These images were taken from book 4, unit 2.

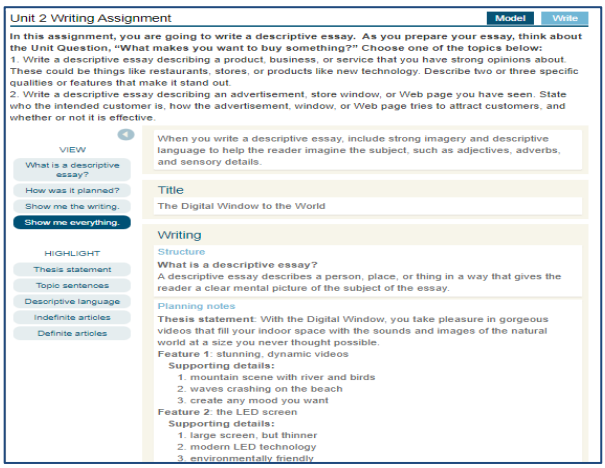

Figure 1: Writing model feature in the Writing Tutor

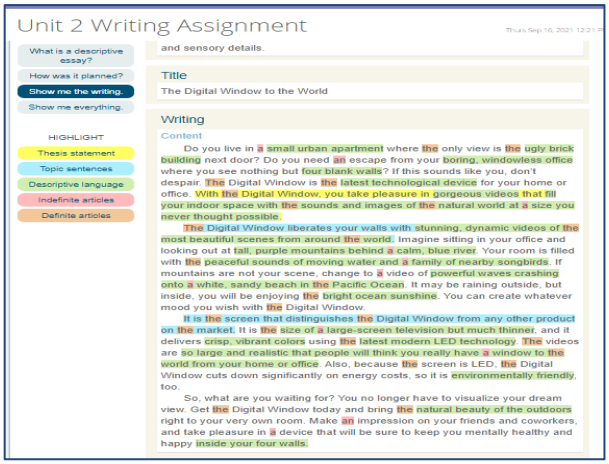

Figure 2: The Writing Tutor outline for writing a descriptive essay highlighting units grammar, vocabulary, and writing lessons

Table 12: Writing Skills

N	Theme	Subtopics and Keywords	Students' Quotes
1	Writing Structure and Models	• Providing guidance and instructions • Outline • Models to follow • Writing structure • Overall structure	• Offering numerous examples • Gives me an idea of the overall outline • Understanding the different parts of the writing • know how to organize well • Introduces students to the right method of writing • They are considered as professional models • Get a sense of the topic by following the writing structure • I can compare my writing with the models • Identifying different essay structures • To follow these models when you write essays • Provide guidance throughout the writing process. • Understanding the essay structure • Great models that are appropriate for the students' level • Ideal examples to follow as a beginner
2	Punctuation and Grammar	• Correct grammar structures • Use of punctuation	• It shows where to use punctuation • It shows how to use the correct grammatical structure • It helps avoiding grammatical mistakes
3	Spelling	• Spelling	• It helps improve spelling • Avoiding spelling mistakes
4	Highlighting Unit Lesson(s)	• Main ideas • Grammar	• Highlighting the introduction and conclusion
5	Vocabulary	• New vocabulary	• It shows how to use the new words correctly • Using the new vocabulary in appropriate contexts • Highlights vocabulary within models

4.2.3 What is the Reason Behind Doing the Optional Activities (such as iQ vocabulary and grammar)?

Table 13 shows that students were interested in completing the optional activities for a variety of reasons. Students used gamified activities as seen in Figures 3, 4, 5, and 6. First, the learners mentioned that these activities offered further practice that would enhance their language skills and help them with exam preparation. Second, these optional activities expanded their vocabulary and widened their knowledge. Other students highlighted that the optional activities enabled them to become autonomous learners. Few students, on the other hand, were encouraged to complete such activities by their teachers. Finally, the gamification

aspect of some of these optional activities – such as vocabulary and grammar games motivated students to complete them (see Table 13).

Table 13: Vocabulary and Grammar

N	Theme	Subtopics and Keywords	Students' Quotes
1	Further Practice	• Enhancing language skills • Great preparation for tests • Checking for understanding	• I do them to enhance my English and bridge any gaps • To improve my language and make it better. • To practice for the test • To develop my English and learn new skills. • To practice and measure my level • Possibly to check my understanding after studying grammar • To improve my grammar and vocabulary skills • To keep up with what I am taught in lectures. • To check for understanding and to revise • To enrich my linguistic experience
2	Expanding Knowledge	• Acquiring new vocabulary • Widening knowledge horizon	• To gain knowledge • To increase my vocabulary horizon and use grammar • To develop and acquire knowledge and information • To expand vocabulary and widen my knowledge horizon
3	Autonomous Learning	• Self-learning	• To enhance my level on my own • To improve my skills by myself • For the purpose of self-development
4	Recommended by teachers	• Recommended by teachers	• I did them because the teacher had asked • The doctor asked us to do them • They were requested
5	Fun and Interactive	• Fun • Interactive • Exciting • Immersive	• They are fun activities • Because they are very interactive • I personally enjoy learning through exciting ways

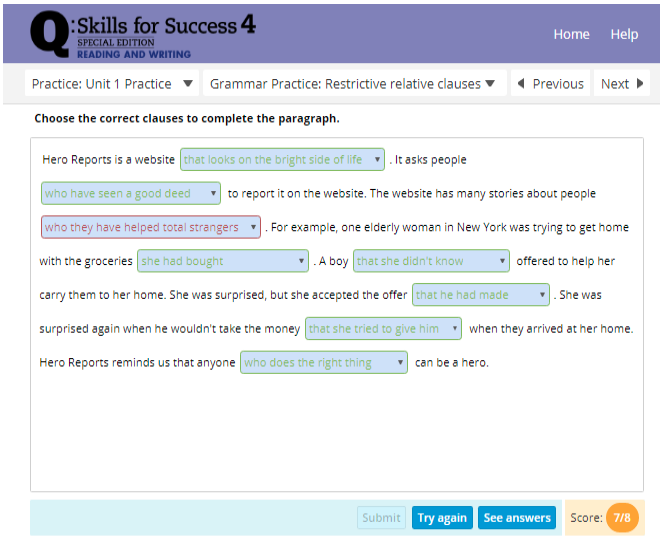

Figure 3: Grammar Practice (optional activity)

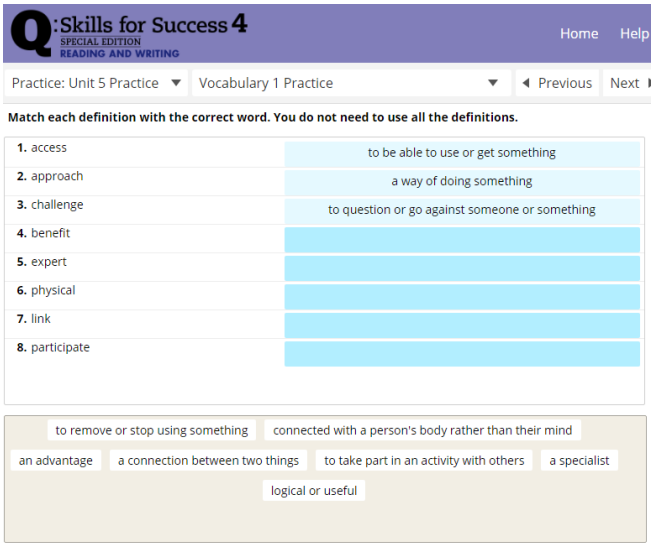

Figure 4: Vocabulary Practice (optional activity)

Figure 5: Grammar Game (optional activity)

Figure 6: Vocabulary Game (optional activity

4.2.4 Technical Issues Faced by Learners

The major technical issue faced by learners was the internet connection. The students reported poor connectivity, slow internet speed, and bad Wi-Fi coverage. The second technical issue was inherent with the OUP platform itself, such as the platform freezing, answers not being saved, and the small size of the iQ page. Another major problem was the incompatibility of some browsers with the platform. For instance, the platform was not compatible with Safari browser, and other browsers had to be updated in order to function properly. The students also pointed out that videos and audio sometimes could not be played due to the browsers or plugins (see Table 14).

Table 14: Technical Issues

N	Theme	Subtopics and Keywords	Students' Quotes
1	Connection	• Poor connectivity • Slow internet speed • Wi-Fi availability	• The university's Wi-Fi is very poor • Wi-Fi is not always available • Weak internet • Slow internet speed
2	Platform Issues	• iQ does not respond • Answers are not saved • Accessibility • Page size	• The platform freezes • After I answer and close the page, there is no grade so I redo it • I cannot open some activities. • Some pages take too long to load • I cannot see everything on the page sometimes • The questions do not show up • The page size is too small
3	Browser and Mobile/Tablet Issue	• Incompatibility • Requiring update • Crashing	• The browser closes on its own • Some activities are incompatible with my iPhone • I cannot access iQ from my mobile • It is not compatible with all browsers • I want to open it on my iPad but it refuses • It does not support Safari which is the main browser on MacBook
4	Video and Audio	• The files cannot be played	• I can't play the videos • The audio does not work • There is an issue with playing the pronunciation

5. Discussion

This paper aimed at investigating different features of e-learning on the Oxford iQ online platform. The present study discusses the frequency of using the e-learning components, its role in developing English language skills, and gamification. Furthermore, it sheds light on the challenges faced by the learners.

5.1 Frequency of Using the Oxford iQ Online Platform

The study found that most of the iQ online practice components (see Table 4, Items 1-5 and 10) were only sometimes used. This finding indicated that leaners were not interested in doing e-learning components especially if they were not mandatory or included in the grading scheme. For the supplementary materials (see Table 4, Items 6-9), they were also sometimes used except for item 8 i.e., using the Oxford iQ email feature. The aforementioned feature was nearly never used by most learners. In general, implementing e-learning as part of the teaching methodology should be based on how students "will accept and choose to use" technology within the e-learning program (Coryell and Chlup 2007: 266). The reason that led to the infrequency of using the online activities was that they were optional and only two of them were mandatory and graded i.e., reading and listening comprehensions. Furthermore, the students were given the choice to do whichever activities they felt like practicing. Overall, most of the activities were infrequently practiced.

Coryell and Chlup (2007) added that some learners may have been opposed to the integration of e-learning components as they had limited computer skills and needed to be provided with alternatives such as paper-based activities. However, the lack of computer-skills might not be the cause behind the infrequent use of the optional e-learning activities in the context of the present study. Perhaps the learners were being prepared to study to obtain specific scores rather than for the sake of language acquisition. Another reason could be that the listed activities were not monitored by the teacher or done in their presence, so the learners eventually ignored them (Mardiah 2020: 50). On a different note, Peng and Fu (2021:70) believe that in a blended learning environment, motivation "empowers students to persist at learning tasks and achieve desired learning

outcomes." In short, motivation and obtaining good computer skills are two integral factors that assist the students to engage in e-learning activities.

5.2 The Role of E-Learning in Developing Language Skills

Although learners only sometimes did the online activities, they admitted that it had a positive impact on their learning experience especially since they used the automatic grading feature. In other words, the automatic grading tool helped learners track their progress and boosted their motivation level to improve their skills. They simply had to select the specific language skill and practice based on their needs and areas of development. Overall, the iQ online Oxford platform was found to be effective for users perhaps because it was integrated in a traditional learning environment which resulted "in increasing students' language proficiency" across all four language skills - speaking, writing, listening, and reading (Peng and Fu 2021: 62). In the same manner, other studies have reached the same conclusion (Lungu 2013; Obari and Lambacher 2014; Shams 2013; Shih 2011; Wichadee 2017; Zheng 2019; Peng and Fu 2021).

5.3 Students' Attitudes Towards E-Learning Game-Based Activities

5.3.1 Gamification

To begin with, gamifying vocabulary and grammar increased users' motivation (see Table 4, Items 2 & 3). In line with this finding, Fithriani (2021;146) reinforced that gamification is certainly useful for learning vocabulary in "three aspects: learning outcomes, enjoyment, and motivation." Similarly, Shadiev, Hwang, and Liu (2018) also mentioned that using technology has helped learners develop their knowledge of writing and grammar. Many studies reported that using digital-game-based activities such as Duolingo (Rachels and Rockinson-Szapkiw 2018) and Kahoot (Hung 2017) enhanced the learning experience. In short, gamification was found to be useful as it allowed engagement, interaction, and creating a sense of competition which motivated learners to learn and win.

5.3.2 Reading Skills

The findings from the qualitative data shed light on the efficacy of e-learning as it assisted students in improving their reading skills. Furthermore, Raj, Chin, Mogindol, and Apolonius, (2016) indicated that learners who had experience with e-learning had improved their reading skills. In the present study, learners have provided specific details on how they have enhanced reading sub-skills such as identifying main ideas, understanding vocabulary, and skimming (see Table 11) (Darling-Aduana and Heinrich 2018). Participants provided specific skills as follows:

Identifying main ideas in the text

By being able to read the passage quickly

Contrary to this finding, Waluyo (2020) reported that learners' reading comprehension skills had not significantly improved through the computer-assisted language learning system. After having conducted a cross-sectional study, the author explained that although his participants moved to the next proficiency level, their scores in the pretest and posttest indicated no progress in this particular skill. The reason behind this finding in his study remained unexplained and further investigation is required to look into this area of research.

5.3.3 Writing Skills

How do the writing tutor models improve your writing skills? The writing tutor was an essential component of the e-learning program. The study found that it boosted the learners' writing skills. Waluyo (2020) believed that the course design had a significant impact on enhancing the learners' writing skills. In total, the author found that 70% of the 983 participants have shown progress. Furthermore, Torabi (2021) elaborated that a digital platform called Google Classroom (GC), revealed that it was effective and helped learners improve their writing accuracy. There are many studies that have reported similar findings by Fonseca and Peralta (2019), Sutarsyah (et al. 2019), Sujannah (et al. 2020), Albashtawi and Al Bataineh (2020), Rosyada and Sundari (2021). Comments from the present study, (see Table 12), include specific details as follows:

Understanding the essay structure

Great models that are appropriate for the students' level

It shows where to use punctuation

Zhang and Zou (2020) in their article entitled *Types, Purposes, and Effectiveness of State-of-the-Art Technologies for Second and Foreign Language Learning* reported that employing the best technology was effective in improving learner ability in speaking, listening, writing, and vocabulary. In addition to understanding essay structures and punctuation, vocabulary and grammar are important constructs in enhancing writing skills. The finding from the quantitative and qualitative data revealed that learners felt that e-learning improved their knowledge of vocabulary and grammar. These findings are inconsistent with Rachels and Rockinson-Szapkiw's (2018) study in which they illustrated that the platform that was under study, Duolingo, "had little effect on enhancing vocabulary and grammar learning." They further explained that the reason for the limited effect is attributed to "the similarity between the Duolingo-based learning and the traditional face-to-face instruction in providing scaffolding to the learners."

5.3.4 Listening Skills

Learners who used the Oxford platform alluded that it had a positive impact on their listening skills. In a different study, which investigated the role of listening skill technology, Tan et al. (2019) found that learners' listening comprehension improved due to the use of technology in an L2 context. A similar finding was reported by a study conducted by Waluyo (2020; 175) in which the author demonstrated that intermediate and advanced learners improved in listening, grammar, and writing skills more than reading skills. The author indicated that the reason learners have improved in these skills more is that they had regularly practiced them in every English class which was not the case for vocabulary and reading. In short, regular practice in class as well as on the platform is the reason that boosts learners' skills.

5.3.5 Speaking Skills

Speaking seemed to be the least improved skill among the others as indicated in the qualitative data. The participants mentioned two areas in which their overall speaking skills had improved, namely, pronunciation and vocabulary. The participants said:

It improves pronunciation and fluency a lot
It contributes to English Language fluency
Pronouncing vocabulary correctly

Most importantly, learners improved in the aforementioned areas while practicing reading, vocabulary, and grammar activities.

5.3.6 Tracks and Proficiency Level Differences

Ramadan (et al. 2019) found that the learners' attitudes towards e-learning components is correlated to their proficiency level. Two interesting findings were explored in this study that need further investigation. First, the intermediate level learners across all tracks voted that the e-learning platform was very effective; however, beginner and advanced students did not express the same level of satisfaction. Second, the other finding was that the Science Track learners found e-learning more effective than the rest of learners from other tracks. Unfortunately, the present study was limited in providing explanation and further details are required for these two findings.

5.3.7 Technical Challenges Encountered by Learners

The challenges found in the qualitative data were mainly due to internet connectivity, platform-related issues, browser compatibility, and issues with playing video and audio files. In this digital world, nothing is more frustrating than the lack of internet or slow Wi-Fi connection. It evidently slows down the learning process and learner productivity. A more serious challenge mentioned by the learners was an inherent glitch that was related to the iQ online Oxford platform itself. Sometimes, learners pointed out that their answers were not saved upon submission, or that they were unable to access some activities due to the incompatibility of their browsers. As a matter of fact, some activities were incompatible with cell phones, tablets, iPads etc. Furthermore, learners indicated that sometimes they could not play video or audio files on the platform. Thus, these issues might have affected learner motivation but did not minimize the overall positive impact of e-learning activities in terms of learner experience. Findings from other studies reported similar remarks such as a lack of computers, inadequate software, and poor internet connection (Yadav et al. 2016; Kadirhan et al. 2018).

6. Conclusion

The results of this research have led to the conclusion that learners who used the Oxford iQ online platform were satisfied with it, and that it has helped them improve their English language skills efficiently. It was effective as students were given the opportunity to practice activities as many times as they needed and at their own pace. In terms of using activities on the platform that were not part of the overall e-learning grade breakdown apart from reading and listening comprehension activities, only a few students across all tracks and levels made use of such activities. The study stressed the positive role of the platform, specifically gamification and student report features. Most importantly, the learners expressed that the gamified activities were fun, engaging, and competitive which resulted in their efficacy from their perspective.

The limitations of the study were driven from the results of the statistical tests which highlighted that the intermediate level learners found the platform more useful than the beginner and advanced level learners. Furthermore, the Science Track students found the iQ online platform more effective compared to the other tracks investigated in this study. These two results need further investigation perhaps by conducting interviews with students from all levels to shed light on their reasoning. Future studies may measure the impact of e-learning on learner progress using accurate assessment tools to figure out whether they correspond with their views or not. Another limitation of the study was that the qualitative data did not include questions on how listening and speaking skills were improved via the platform. Briefly, to provide a better experience for the leaners, the platform should be designed to meet the compatibility of the most recent and used browsers such as Safari. It is recommended that intensive e-learning training for learners should be provided, especially for the lower proficiency levels at the beginning of the academic year (Coryell and Chlup 2007).

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