

A Conceptual Exploration of Blackboard Features Supporting Collaborative Learning in English Language Courses in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Learning Management Systems (LMSs) are widely used in higher education institutions. However, their primary role remains largely administrative, with social and collaborative features often receiving less prominence. In English language education, learners' ability to interact, negotiate meaning, exchange feedback, and share relevant information is crucial to effective collaboration. This conceptual paper explores how Blackboard features can facilitate these processes in higher education, particularly in English language courses. It references selected peer-reviewed literature published between 2021 and 2026, including studies directly involving Blackboard and related research on collaborative learning, technology-based learning, feedback, and higher education. Blackboard supports asynchronous discussions, synchronous interactions, collaborative writing, peer-feedback dialogues, and the continuation of collaborative activities across task stages. Emerging AI capabilities, particularly AI Conversation, may provide new opportunities for Blackboard-based collaborative activities, although current evidence primarily focuses on learner–AI interaction rather than learner–learner collaboration. Overall, the literature indicates that, although Blackboard offers these technological features, their mere availability does not inherently cultivate a meaningful collaborative environment. Their pedagogical efficacy depends on thoughtful task design, instructor facilitation, learner engagement, and congruence with English language learning objectives. Consequently, this paper concludes that Blackboard is a potential platform that facilitates collaborative learning, rather than a technology that independently generates collaboration without pedagogical consideration.

Keywords: Blackboard, Collaborative learning, English language education, higher education, Learning Management Systems

INTRODUCTION

The growing interest in collaborative learning in English language teaching (ELT) reflects the opportunities it provides learners to communicate using the language, negotiate meaning, exchange feedback, and co-construct knowledge through purposeful language use. In second language contexts, collaborative learning often takes the form of collaborative writing. This involves learners planning, writing, evaluating, and revising written texts together. In a meta-analysis, Elabdali (2021) found that collaboratively written L2 texts showed greater grammatical accuracy than individually written texts, although the benefits varied by linguistic outcomes and research contexts. Jiang and Eslami's research (2022) has also shown that computer-mediated collaborative

writing may contribute to L2 writing development. However, its effectiveness can vary according to factors such as task conditions, learners' proficiency levels, and patterns of collaboration.

As digital technologies have developed, collaborative practices have expanded language-learning opportunities beyond traditional face-to-face classroom settings. A systematic review of 113 primary studies by Zhang et al. (2021) illustrates the growing use of computer-mediated collaborative writing in second language education, particularly in higher education contexts. LMSs provide institutional digital environments in which communication, interaction, and collaborative activities can be organised (Kwon et al., 2021). However, the potential of LMSs to support collaboration depends not only on the availability of technological features but also on how these features are pedagogically organised and utilised by lecturers. Similarly, Li and Zhang (2023) indicate that recent collaborative-writing research increasingly focuses on peer interaction, digital and multimodal collaboration, assessment, and the processes through which learners develop writing together. Overall, these developments highlight the pedagogical significance of collaborative learning and reinforce the importance of examining how LMS environments can be purposefully used to facilitate meaningful collaboration in English language education.

LMSs have become integral to higher education; however, their use is often limited to administrative tasks such as content storage, course administration, and assessment submission, and their potential for collaborative learning remains underutilised. To address this gap, this paper explores how Blackboard features can support collaborative learning in higher education English language courses. Particularly, it examines Blackboard-supported features and activities that foster learner interaction, knowledge sharing, peer feedback, negotiation, and joint knowledge construction. The paper also considers the pedagogical affordances of these features for collaborative English language learning, briefly examines emerging possibilities associated with AI, and identifies directions for future research. The paper argues that technology alone does not create collaborative learning opportunities. Instead, collaboration depends on how available technological functions are pedagogically organised to support shared responsibility, negotiation, peer feedback, interaction, and the joint construction of knowledge.

METHODOLOGY

This paper adopts a conceptual literature synthesis to explore how Blackboard supports collaborative learning in English language courses in higher education. Relevant studies were identified through targeted keyword searches using terms such as Blackboard, collaborative learning, online collaborative learning, English language education, higher education, and Learning Management Systems. The paper primarily focuses on peer-reviewed journal articles published in English between 2021 and 2026. Studies were included based on their relevance to Blackboard, collaborative learning in higher education, online collaborative learning, English language education, and technology-based learning, with particular attention to studies directly related to Blackboard and Blackboard-supported higher education contexts in English courses. The review also included broader L2, EFL, and computer-supported collaborative learning studies that provided relevant conceptual or empirical insights.

Previous studies were examined in relation to collaborative learning experiences, the use of Blackboard in higher education, and how Blackboard has been used in practice to facilitate collaborative learning. The studies were organized around recurring themes, including asynchronous interaction, synchronous communication, collaborative writing, peer-feedback dialogue, learners' engagement, lecturer facilitation, and emerging AI-supported functionality. These themes were synthesized conceptually to examine the pedagogical affordances through which Blackboard may support collaborative English language learning.

Conceptual Background

In recent years, digital technologies have gradually reshaped how higher education incorporates collaborative learning. Online collaborative learning enhances interaction, active participation with peers, and engagement with course materials by enabling students to express ideas and negotiate meaning together in a digital environment (Shanze & Zaheera, 2025). Unlike classroom-based collaboration, where learners are usually



physically co-present, online environments allow learners to communicate, create shared work, give feedback, and collaborate with others at different times and from different places.

Collaborative Learning in English Language Education

Collaborative learning places interaction at the centre of the learning process rather than viewing learning and knowledge acquisition as purely individual activities. In virtual higher education, collaborative learning has the potential to support the co-construction of knowledge and the development of skills through learner interaction (Herrera-Pavo, 2021). However, meaningful collaboration also requires learner autonomy, appropriate group organisation, changes in the lecturer's role, and suitable technological support.

These principles are also relevant to English language learning because learners have many opportunities to express and jointly examine their developing linguistic knowledge. According to Iqbal and Mushtaq (2025), using CL techniques positively influences the reading comprehension and writing accuracy of university-level EFL students and shows a strong positive relationship between these two domains. In collaborative writing, for example, learners may discuss ideas, formulate texts, consider alternative ways of expressing meaning, evaluate one another's proposed changes, and revise shared work together. Elabdali's (2021) meta-analysis of 33 L2 collaborative-writing studies found a medium-sized advantage in accuracy for collaboratively written texts and a large advantage in rubric scores for individual writing following collaborative-writing treatment. However, evidence for other outcomes was less conclusive because of variation across the studies. These findings support the potential value of collaborative writing while also suggesting that its effectiveness should not be assumed to be the same across all contexts.

Li and Zhang (2023) further observed that the scope of collaborative-writing research has expanded alongside changing writing practices and the increasing digitalisation of second language learning. Their research agenda identified several areas for further investigation, including multimodal collaborative writing, peer interaction, collaborative-writing assessment, methodological development, and practitioners' perspectives. This body of work further suggests that the educational value of collaboration lies not only in the final written product, but also in the interactional processes through which learners negotiate, explain, question, revise, and formulate language together.

Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning

The increasing use of digital technologies in education has extended collaborative learning into computer-mediated environments. Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning (CSCL) focuses on learning in which digital technologies mediate communication and shared activity among learners. Recent CSCL research, however, has emphasised that meaningful collaboration cannot be understood only by identifying the technology used or measuring learning outcomes. Instead, attention should also focus on the interactional processes through which learners participate, respond to one another, negotiate meaning, and develop knowledge together over time.

In a systematic review of 78 journal articles examining temporality in CSCL, Lämsä et al. (2021) argue that research should pay greater attention to when and how collaborative learning occurs and develops over time, rather than focusing mainly on the outcomes produced. Their review shows that collaborative activity consists of sequences of interaction and participation that may change throughout the learning process. Therefore, when investigating computer-supported collaboration, it is important to examine process data, including learner messages, interaction sequences, and emerging patterns of participation. This process-oriented perspective is particularly relevant to LMS-supported learning because observable technological activity, such as entering a discussion space or submitting a contribution, provides limited information about the quality of collaboration.

Within second language education, computer-mediated collaborative writing has become an important form of technology-supported collaboration. In a systematic review of 113 primary studies on computer-mediated collaborative writing in second language (L2) classrooms, Zhang et al. (2021) found that most studies were

conducted in post-secondary contexts, with English as the most common target language. The review also showed considerable variation in the technologies, writing tasks, learner populations, and interactional processes investigated across studies.

Further evidence highlights the importance of pedagogical structure in technology-mediated collaboration. Li and Mak (2022) conducted a ten-week technology-supported study involving 69 first-year college students who participated in collaborative reading-to-writing activities. They found a statistically significant improvement in writing scores among the lower-proficiency subgroup receiving the technology-supported collaborative intervention. These findings suggest that a well-structured online collaborative environment may particularly support learners with less-developed language proficiency. However, the educational value identified in the study cannot be attributed to technology alone. The intervention combined technological support with systematically organised collaborative reading and writing activities, scaffolding, and peer interaction (Li & Mak, 2022).

Therefore, these studies suggest that computer-supported collaborative learning should be viewed as a pedagogically structured process rather than simply incorporating technology into collaborative activities. Its educational value lies not in the digital tools themselves, but in how technology is integrated with task design, learner interaction with others, peer support, and sustained participation.

Learning Management Systems in Higher Education

Higher institutions are increasingly using Learning Management Systems (LMSs) as important institutional environments for organising digitally mediated teaching and learning. The educational value of these systems depends, at least partly, on the forms of engagement they support among staff and students. Nkomo et al. (2021), based on a systematic review of literature retrieved from Web of Science and Scopus, showed that student engagement with digital technologies has been defined and conceptualised in different ways. Their review also identified a strong reliance on self-reported measures and highlighted the importance of distinguishing students' perceptions of engagement from studies examining observable behaviour and learning processes. This distinction is particularly important in LMS research because technological activity should not automatically be interpreted as meaningful educational engagement.

Kwon et al. (2021) showed how Blackboard, a learning management system, was used in practice. Their examination of 53 Blackboard course sites showed that most courses remained at relatively low levels of LMS transformation. Only eight course sites provided communication and collaboration tools, while two of these showed little or no active use. More broadly, communication, interaction, or collaboration was evident in only 12 courses when Blackboard and associated communication technologies were considered. These included discussion boards, synchronous communication, and tools that supported group projects. In contrast, most courses appeared to use Blackboard mainly for managing course content or communication rather than as an environment for collaborative learning.

These findings are important because there is a difference between adopting an LMS, using an LMS for communication, and using an LMS to support collaborative learning. Using an LMS across courses does not automatically create collaborative learning environments. It is crucial to understand how learners discuss ideas, construct knowledge together, provide peer feedback, or participate in shared group activities on the LMS platform. Therefore, research on LMS-supported collaborative learning should examine the relationship between the technological functions available within the LMS and how educators use these functions pedagogically to support collaborative and interactive learning activities.

Blackboard-Supported Collaborative Learning in English Language Teaching and Learning

Blackboard is a learning management system (LMS) used in higher education to deliver learning materials and support communication and interaction (Darko, 2021). Evidence on Blackboard-supported collaboration in English language teaching is comparatively limited, but it provides several important insights. Alqasham (2022) examined 58 male EFL university students who participated in collaborative writing activities in both face-to-face settings and the Blackboard Chatbox within the then-Blackboard Collaborate Ultra environment.

The students generally reported positive perceptions of Blackboard-supported collaborative writing and the communication opportunities provided through the Chatbox. However, the study found no statistically significant difference in learner performance between the two instructional conditions. This finding is important because it suggests that positive learner perceptions and technology-mediated interaction do not necessarily result in greater academic achievement.

Feedback dialogue is another area in which Blackboard-related environments have been used in tertiary EFL education. Mohammed and Alharbi (2022) examined 28 pairs of EFL undergraduates whose feedback dialogue took place through the then-Blackboard Collaborate Ultra environment, while written drafts were produced using Google Docs. The findings showed that the dialogue was multidirectional and bimodal, involving writers, peers, and the lecturer. These interactions enabled learners to respond to feedback, negotiate revisions, improve their writing, and develop a better understanding of how feedback is provided and received. However, the level of engagement varied among learner pairs due to factors such as learner characteristics, feedback formulation, pairing and grouping, and technical issues.

Saeed and Alharbi (2023) later investigated 15 dyads of Saudi EFL learners who participated in collaborative argumentative writing and technology-mediated dialogue around teacher feedback. The study similarly used the then-Blackboard Collaborate Ultra environment for real-time peer dialogue and Google Docs for written composition. The authors identified three dimensions of collaborative engagement: cognitive, socio-affective, and behavioural. The findings showed that learners were provided with opportunities to develop aspects of feedback literacy, including the ability to evaluate feedback, appreciate its value, and manage affective responses. However, the level of collaborative engagement differed across dyads.

Hence, these studies provide a useful foundation for examining Blackboard-supported collaboration in EFL higher education. Blackboard-related environments have supported collaborative writing, peer dialogue, synchronous interaction, and feedback activities, although participation levels and quality vary across studies. These findings reinforce the view that Blackboard can provide conditions that support collaboration, rather than automatically producing collaborative learning. Based on these findings, this paper defines Blackboard-supported collaborative learning as the pedagogically purposeful use of Blackboard-mediated functions and activities to create opportunities for learners to interact, contribute, negotiate, exchange feedback, and construct knowledge collaboratively in higher education.

Blackboard Features Supporting Collaborative Learning

Blackboard provides students with opportunities to engage in collaborative coursework through asynchronous discussion, synchronous collaborative writing, peer-feedback dialogue, and emerging AI-supported activities. Across these forms, a consistent pattern emerges: technological functions can create spaces and opportunities for collaboration, but their educational value depends on how lecturers structure student participation and how learners interact within them. Kwon et al. (2021), in particular, highlight this distinction by showing that communication and collaboration tools may be available in Blackboard without being actively or meaningfully used.

Discussion Boards and Asynchronous Collaborative Interaction

Blackboard Discussion Boards provide an asynchronous communication space where learners can contribute at different times, read other participants' posts, and respond to them (Kwon et al., 2021). This temporal flexibility gives learners opportunities to consider their responses before participating in a discussion. However, asynchronous posting does not necessarily constitute collaborative learning. For asynchronous collaborative learning to occur, learners need to engage meaningfully with one another's contributions rather than merely post separate individual responses.

Although the study was conducted in nursing education rather than an English language context, it provides broader higher education evidence of Blackboard supporting asynchronous collaborative learning. Alsayed (2026) examined the application of two Blackboard forums, a case study forum and a debriefing forum, involving 38 nursing students. Students used the forums to discuss clinical cases, reply to one another, correct

errors, share knowledge and experiences, and respond to work produced by other groups. The results show that students appreciated the opportunity to communicate asynchronously, share opinions and feedback, and receive feedback from peers and teachers. The study concluded that Blackboard promotes group learning through discussion and knowledge exchange. The study shows that Blackboard discussion forums allow learners to communicate with others, respond to other learners, evaluate other learners' ideas, and develop their understanding through a structured learning experience.

Kwon et al. (2021) found that Blackboard Discussion Boards were used in courses with varying degrees of learner participation and communication. Their findings indicated more active participant roles in courses where instructors deliberately organized and facilitated discussion-board activities, while more collaborative learner roles emerged when instructors structured group projects using communication and collaborative technologies. In contrast, poorly organized or inactive tools did little to move the LMS beyond its role as a content repository or basic communication platform.

This distinction is particularly important in English language learning. Through asynchronous discussion, learners may need to formulate ideas in writing, read and respond to peers' contributions, compare viewpoints, clarify meaning, and develop arguments. However, these collaborative possibilities only emerge when the task requires interaction among participants. A discussion activity in which students simply post answers without further engagement with peers may demonstrate technology use, but it provides limited evidence of collaborative knowledge construction. Blackboard discussion functions should therefore be viewed as providing a possible space for asynchronous collaboration, with their pedagogical value depending on task design, response requirements, moderation, and sustained learner participation.

Blackboard-Supported Collaborative Writing and Synchronous Interaction

An important application of digital collaboration in English language education is collaborative writing, which requires learners to make joint decisions about meaning, organisation, linguistic choices, and revision. Blackboard-related research has shown how synchronous communication can support collaborative writing activities. For example, Alqasham (2022) studied EFL learners' feelings, perceptions, and performance during collaborative writing in Blackboard Chatbox and face-to-face settings. Learners generally viewed Blackboard and its synchronous Chatbox positively and reported reading classmates' comments, asking questions, responding, and interacting during the writing process. These functions create a communication environment for collaborative writing.

Blackboard-Supported Peer Feedback and Feedback Dialogue

Peer feedback is an important aspect of collaborative English language learning because it allows learners to act as both providers and recipients of evaluative information. Rather than viewing feedback merely as comments delivered from a lecturer to learners, contemporary L2 writing research increasingly considers feedback as a form of dialogue in which learners are expected to interpret, discuss, evaluate, and decide how to act upon the information they receive (Mohammed and Alharbi, 2022).

Mohammed and Alharbi (2022) provide Blackboard-related evidence from their study of 28 pairs of EFL undergraduates engaged in technology-mediated feedback dialogue. The Blackboard Collaborate Ultra environment was used to archive learners' dialogues, while learners developed written drafts using Google Docs. The study identified multidirectional interaction involving writer–writer, writer–non-writer, and writer–teacher dialogue through oral and written modes. Learners used these exchanges to interpret feedback, negotiate possible revisions, improve their writing, and develop their understanding of feedback provision. However, engagement varied considerably across pairs and was influenced by learner characteristics, the formulation of teacher feedback, grouping arrangements, and technical factors (Mohammed & Alharbi, 2022).

Similarly, Saeed and Alharbi (2023) examined 15 dyads of Saudi EFL learners engaged in technology-mediated peer dialogue around teacher feedback during collaborative argumentative writing. The study analyzed screencasts of instant peer dialogue on the Blackboard Collaborate Ultra platform, while Google Docs managed argumentative essays and teacher feedback. Their analysis identified cognitive, socio-affective,

and behavioral dimensions of collaborative engagement and showed that peer dialogue created opportunities for learners to appreciate feedback, make evaluative judgments, and manage affective responses.

Overall, feedback dialogue through Blackboard can be viewed as part of a broader digitally mediated collaborative-feedback process. Blackboard-related studies demonstrate the feasibility of synchronous peer dialogue in tertiary EFL contexts (Mohammed & Alharbi, 2022; Saeed & Alharbi, 2023).

Emerging Artificial Intelligence-Supported Functionality in Blackboard

The integration of artificial intelligence into Blackboard has introduced new functionality that creates new opportunities to support teaching and learning within the LMS. Blackboard AI Conversation is an interactive activity that includes Socratic Questioning and Role Play. Unlike learner–learner discussion, the interaction takes place mainly between a learner and an AI persona. For this reason, it differs from collaborative learning in the conventional learner–learner sense, such as peer discussion, collaborative writing, or feedback dialogue.

Alubthane (2026) examined the direct use of Blackboard AI Conversation. The qualitative study involved 18 postgraduate students and combined focus-group interviews with an analysis of 360 conversational turns generated through Blackboard AI Conversation activities involving Socratic questioning and role play. The findings indicated that perceived human-likeness, enjoyment, and immediate interaction could encourage active and, in some cases, self-initiated engagement.

The focus on an actual Blackboard AI function rather than generative AI in general provides empirical evidence of students' engagement with Blackboard AI in higher education. However, its relevance to the present paper is limited, as Alubthane (2026) focused on postgraduate students in higher education rather than learners specifically enrolled in English language courses, and the interaction examined was primarily learner–AI rather than learner–learner collaboration. Therefore, the study does not provide direct evidence that AI Conversation facilitates collaborative learning in English language courses on the Blackboard platform.

Pedagogical Affordances of Blackboard for Collaborative English Language Learning

Prior studies suggest that Blackboard can provide several interconnected pedagogical affordances for collaborative English language learning. These affordances are not automated outcomes of the platform itself; rather, they emerge when Blackboard functions are incorporated with purposeful collaborative tasks, lecturer facilitation, and reciprocal learner participation.

First, Blackboard-supported environments can provide opportunities for dialogic participation. Discussion spaces and synchronous communication allow learners to make contributions, respond to their peers, and extend communication beyond a single classroom discussion. However, Kwon et al. (2021) highlight that communication technologies become pedagogically meaningful only when activities are well planned, organised and actively facilitated. Therefore, the presence of an interactive function should be distinguished from the collaborative processes that may develop through its pedagogical use.

Second, Blackboard can facilitate collaborative language learning and knowledge construction. Collaborative writing involves more than simply exchanging messages, as learners also work together to construct a shared product. Wider L2 research suggests that collaborative writing can develop learning when interaction and task organization are carefully structured (Elabdali, 2021; Li & Mak, 2022). Blackboard-specific findings from Alqasham (2022) also show that synchronous communication through Blackboard can provide learners with opportunities to exchange comments, questions, and responses during collaborative writing. At the same time, the study shows that technological participation does not necessarily result in better performance.

Third, Blackboard provides an environment for dialogic engagement with feedback and iterative revision. Blackboard-related studies have shown that technology-mediated feedback dialogue can involve interpretation, negotiation, revision, and socio-affective engagement (Mohammed & Alharbi, 2022; Saeed & Alharbi, 2023). Wider L2 research further supports that collaborative processing of corrective feedback can support revision, with Mujtaba et al. (2021) reporting more successful revision behavior among those who processed feedback

collaboratively than those who processed it individually. These findings do not imply that Blackboard itself creates such outcomes; instead, they provide an empirical basis for understanding the collaborative processes that Blackboard communication environments may be pedagogically configured to support.

A further affordance concerns iterative revision and the continuity of collaborative activity over time. Online environments allow learners to retain, revisit, and respond to peer contributions at different stages of the writing process. For example, Li and Hebert (2024) found that L2 university writers used online peer interaction to seek clarification and reflect on feedback while revising persuasive texts. Pham (2022) similarly demonstrated that computer-mediated and face-to-face peer feedback produced different patterns of learner commentary and revision. These findings suggest that technology-mediated peer collaboration can extend beyond the simple exchange of comments by supporting peer contribution, interpretation, feedback, revision, and reflection across different stages of a learning activity. This interpretation is consistent with Lämsä et al. (2021), who emphasise that computer-supported collaborative learning should be examined as a process that develops over time rather than primarily through final outcomes. In English language teaching, Blackboard tools can support this continuity by allowing discussion, peer response, revision, and reflection to take place across different stages of a collaborative activity. However, the availability of digital records alone does not ensure sustained collaboration. Meaningful continuity depends on tasks that require learners to revisit, reconsider, and build on both their own and their peers' contributions.

Finally, emerging AI-supported functionality introduces a conceptually distinct affordance. Alubthane (2026) demonstrates that interaction through Blackboard AI conversation can be sustained through Socratic questioning and role-play, while also presenting risks such as cognitive overload and repetitive interaction. At present, such functionality may be viewed as a potential scaffold or preparation tool before learners participate in collaborative activities. However, further research is needed to determine whether AI Conversation can enhance learner-learner collaboration in English language courses.

Therefore, these affordances support a central argument of this conceptual paper: Blackboard provides a platform where collaborative learning can be planned and implemented accordingly to support the teaching and learning process in higher education; however, collaboration is pedagogically enacted rather than technologically guaranteed. How collaborative learning takes place through Blackboard depends on the alignment of technological functions, task design, reciprocal learner participation, shared objectives, feedback processes, and lecturer facilitation.

Future Directions

Kwon et al. (2021) reveal that the availability of communication and collaboration tools in Blackboard does not necessarily result in active collaborative use. At the same time, wider L2 research shows considerable variation in the ways digitally mediated collaborative writing is designed and investigated (Zhang et al., 2021). Future studies should therefore examine current Blackboard environments within authentic English language courses and identify the pedagogical conditions under which discussion, group interaction, collaborative writing, and feedback dialogue develop into meaningful collaborative processes. This is particularly important because some existing Blackboard-related EFL studies were conducted using the then-Blackboard Collaborate Ultra environment, while the technological configuration of Blackboard continues to evolve.

The interaction between collaborative task design, learner proficiency, grouping arrangements, and assessment within Blackboard-supported English language courses also requires more systematic investigation. Existing research on technology-mediated L2 collaboration shows that these conditions can influence both the nature and outcomes of collaborative activities. Jiang and Eslami (2022) found that task characteristics, dyadic composition, and learner proficiency were associated with differences in outcomes in computer-mediated collaborative writing. Similarly, Zhang and Chen (2022) found that assessing both the collaborative process and the final written product encouraged more substantial collaboration than assessment focused mainly on the product. Blackboard-specific research should therefore examine not only which feature is used, but also how its pedagogical use interacts with task characteristics, learner characteristics, assessment expectations, and lecturer facilitation.

In terms of methodology, future studies should move beyond relying mainly on learner perceptions, broad measures of technology use, or end-of-course outcomes. Research on digital engagement suggests that participation includes behavioural, cognitive, and affective dimensions (Nkomo et al., 2021), while Lämsä et al. (2021) emphasise that computer-supported collaboration should be examined as a process that develops over time. Blackboard studies could therefore combine discussion records, interaction logs, collaborative texts, revision histories, peer-feedback exchanges, classroom observations, interviews, and language-learning outcomes. Longitudinal and mixed-methods designs conducted across complete courses or multiple semesters may also help determine whether learners' collaborative behaviour becomes more reciprocal, autonomous, and productive as they gain experience with Blackboard-supported activities. Such studies could provide a clearer distinction between participation on the platform and meaningful collaborative learning.

The AI-supported functionality of Blackboard creates another research area that requires careful investigation. Alubthane (2026) provides evidence concerning Blackboard AI Conversation, but the study focuses mainly on learner–AI interaction and does not establish that the tool supports learner–learner collaborative English language learning. Future research should therefore examine whether AI-supported Socratic questioning or role-play can function as scaffolds for later human collaboration. For example, studies could investigate whether AI-assisted preparation influences the quality of subsequent peer discussion, collaborative writing, argument development, or feedback dialogue. Experimental or mixed-methods studies could compare collaborative activities preceded by AI-supported preparation with similar activities conducted without such preparation. Importantly, this line of research should continue to distinguish conceptually between human–AI interaction and collaborative learning among human peers.

The role of the lecturer in transforming Blackboard functionality into collaborative pedagogy should also receive greater attention. Kwon et al. (2021) indicate that more pedagogically developed uses of the LMS were associated with deliberately structured learner interaction and more active instructional involvement. This reinforces the importance of pedagogical design rather than technological availability alone. Future research could therefore examine lecturers' decisions regarding task design, group formation, facilitation, assessment, feedback, and the selection of Blackboard functions for particular English language learning objectives. Such investigations may help explain why similar technological affordances produce different patterns of learner interaction across courses and institutions.

Taken together, these directions point towards research that views Blackboard not simply as an institutional LMS, but as a pedagogically configured environment whose collaborative value develops through the interaction of technological affordances, instructional design, lecturer facilitation, and learner participation. Future research should determine which Blackboard-supported practices facilitate meaningful collaboration in English language learning and teaching.

The Limitations of This Study

The major limitation of this study is its conceptual rather than empirical nature. The study synthesises and interprets existing literature instead of generating primary empirical data. Therefore, causal relationships between Blackboard features and collaborative English language learning cannot be established, and the findings cannot be automatically generalised across higher education settings. This limitation is important because how technology use and collaboration are understood and applied varies considerably across studies. Kwon et al. (2021) showed that Blackboard communication and collaboration tools were used differently across courses, while Zhang et al. (2021) found substantial variation in technologies, tasks, contexts, and methodological practices in computer-mediated L2 collaborative-writing research. Nkomo et al. (2021) similarly emphasized the importance of distinguishing self-reported perceptions of technology engagement from observable learning engagement. Therefore, the affordances identified in this paper should be understood as theoretically and empirically informed possibilities rather than validated causal effects of Blackboard.

A second limitation concerns the limited body of empirical research directly involving Blackboard, collaborative learning, English language education, and higher education. Although Alqasham (2022), Mohammed and Alharbi (2022), and Saeed and Alharbi (2023) provide evidence directly relevant to EFL contexts, some of this research examined the then-Blackboard Collaborate Ultra environment and therefore

reflects the technological conditions available at the time. Empirical evidence directly linking contemporary Blackboard AI functionality with collaborative English language learning also remains limited. Alubthane (2026) provides valuable empirical evidence concerning Blackboard AI Conversation; however, the study involved postgraduate learner–AI interaction in a general higher education context rather than learner–learner collaboration within English language courses.

A further limitation is that this paper is a conceptual synthesis rather than a systematic review. The literature was selected according to factors such as recency, relevance, scholarly quality, and conceptual contribution, with particular emphasis on peer-reviewed studies published between 2021 and 2026. However, the paper does not claim exhaustive database coverage or the use of formal systematic-review screening procedures or meta-analytic methods. Future systematic reviews could use predefined database searches, transparent eligibility criteria, formal quality appraisal, and systematic coding to provide a more comprehensive overview of empirical research on Blackboard-supported collaborative learning in language education.

CONCLUSION

Blackboard provides a range of technological affordances that can support the design of collaborative learning activities in English language courses in higher education. Asynchronous discussion, synchronous communication, peer-feedback dialogue, and collaborative writing can create opportunities for learners to exchange ideas, negotiate meaning, engage with feedback, and participate jointly in language-related activities. Emerging AI-supported functionality may further extend the interactive possibilities available through Blackboard. However, its direct contribution to learner–learner collaborative English language learning remains insufficiently established. These technological features should therefore be viewed as enabling tools for collaborative activity. Their pedagogical value depends not simply on their availability in Blackboard, but on how they are integrated into activities that require meaningful reciprocity, shared responsibility, negotiation, and active learner participation.

Hence, Blackboard’s potential to facilitate collaborative learning depends largely on intentional pedagogical design, appropriate task structure, lecturer facilitation, learner participation, and alignment with English language learning objectives. Blackboard can provide an institutional environment in which collaborative activities are initiated, sustained, and connected, but meaningful collaboration ultimately develops through interaction among learners rather than from the platform itself. Beyond its administrative and repository roles, Blackboard can therefore support dialogic participation, collaborative writing, peer feedback, and joint knowledge construction. This standpoint positions Blackboard as an enabling LMS environment that supports collaboration through purposeful pedagogical use and meaningful learner interaction.

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