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EFL instructors' interactions with their students on Learning Management System

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Abstract: Interaction is an essential requirement in language courses. However, high class population, classroom noise, and fear of public speaking among learners are just a few of the obstacles that instructors and students may face while communicating with each other. Therefore, distant and web-based education platforms can facilitate dialogues between students and instructors beyond the confines of the classroom. The study aims to determine the extent of Learning Management System (LMS) interactions between English as a foreign language (EFL) instructors and their students. In this descriptive study, 246 English instructors employed in preparatory schools across a range of state and private universities in Türkiye participated. A demographics questionnaire and a survey with 24 items were given to the participants for data collection. The findings indicated that there were three levels of interaction between EFL instructors and their students while using LMSs: high, moderate, and low.

Keywords: English as a foreign language; teachers; Learning Management Systems; interaction

It is impossible to think about an EFL classroom where there is no interaction between students and teachers. Classroom interaction is not a one-way process but an exchange between the teacher and the students. For example, the Communication Model by Malamah-Thomas (1987) suggests that the classroom interaction continues only when one party decides what to say and how to act according to the other party's message (Malamah-Thomas, 1987, as cited in Mingzhi, 2005). Classroom interaction is a cycle in which the teacher conveys the message, the learners respond accordingly, and the teacher adjusts his or her speech according to the feedback he or she gets. Interaction is advocated as the most efficient means of achieving success in the foreign language learning process. According to Tuan and Nhu (2010), learners are successful in both verbal and written communication, which is the main reason for learning a foreign language and can be accomplished through interaction. In addition, when the learners are engaged in the learning process, the learning occurs more powerfully (Stevick, 1976, as cited in Allwright, 1984). Furthermore, being fluent, realizing and revising syntax requiring adjustment, exploring grammatical sentences, and understanding more than the words' literal meanings can happen if students interact in the classroom (Swain, 1985, as cited in Hall & Verplaetse, 2000). Classroom interaction is also important to prepare students for the outside world. Savignon (1972) claims that unless learners are exposed to real-world examples in the classroom, they cannot apply their classroom knowledge to everyday life (Savignon, 1972, as cited in Allwright, 1984). Interaction not only helps learners to communicate in real-life situations but also keeps classroom functions appropriately fulfilled. Ellis (1991) declares that classroom interaction has its characteristic and specific purposes such as giving and following instructions, running individual and group tasks, and creating harmony in the classroom.

Interactional breakdowns can be encountered when utilizing LMSs. That students feel unmotivated throughout the distance learning process might be the biggest problem of interaction on LMSs. It is clear that virtual classrooms are not as intimate and warm as physical classrooms; therefore, students are not eager to communicate with each other on the screen. Furthermore, the low quality of LMSs can bring about communication-related problems. Poor quality

services such as bad display, video freezes, and low-quality sound decrease interaction quality. Last, LMSs provide limited communicative opportunities since they are mainly administrative tools. Costa et al. (2012) mention that LMSs are the archives to keep online learning materials and information; thus, they may not be very convenient for communicative purposes. This web-based software does not allow teachers to use pair and group work like in real classes. Moreover, research on teachers' interactions is inconclusive, as seen in the synthesis of prior studies below. However, a theoretical framework is drawn before presenting the literature review.

2. Theoretical framework

Interaction is a mutual action involving a minimum of two objects (Wagner, 1994), and each person's demeanor is a reaction to the other's demeanor (Reis & Wheeler, 1991). It may be defined as situations where at least two people are physically present in each other's reaction existence (Goffman, 1983). Moore (1989) notes three types of interaction: learner-content interaction, learner-instructor interaction, and learner-learner interaction. He also states that this distinction helps to solve conflicts among instructors who utilize various technological tools in teaching. Although Moore's types of interaction are valid for technology-supported learning environments, they ignore the fact that learners must communicate with the technological device itself (Hillman et al., 1994). For this reason, Hillman adds another type of interaction which is called learner-interface interaction. Regarding education, Berge (1999) defines interaction as a mutual dialogue between two or more individuals in a classroom setting aiming at instructional fulfillment or social relationship development. The value of classroom communication in EFL settings is emphasized by Allwright, who asserts that it is a fundamental component of FL classroom discipline (1984). The more communication in the classroom, the more quickly and readily EFL students will pick up the target language (Brock, 1986). According to Long's Interaction Hypothesis (1985), the creation of input which is beneficial for learning a second language is facilitated by the agreements on meaning in oral conversations. In addition, Vygotsky (1986) suggests that interactions facilitated by language encourage the continual cognitive process of internalizing language.

Any digital learning platform's capability to facilitate learning depends heavily on interaction (Muirhead & Juwah, 2004). Distance education offers far more opportunities for communication, and the learning process will be more rewarding for the learners if the right method of interaction is used. (Bouhnik & Marcus, 2006). Three elements are crucial to the success of online courses and learning: an organized and cogent course framework, a regular and helpful instructor-learner interaction, and a fruitful and engaging dialogue (Swan, 2001). Under this perspective, LMS is a type of software or an internet-based platform that has become a potent tool for managing an e-learning environment (Srichanyachon, 2014). Likewise, Hall (2003) describes LMS as a software product that operates the management of all academic events. According to Sejzi and Aris' definition, LMS links learners with learning materials by using a stable way (2013). Basically, an LMS is software that automates the managing, recording, and reporting of education, creating, maintaining, and delivering online courses as well as enrollment of students (Dagger et al., 2007; Simanullang & Rajagukguk, 2020;). In addition, it is an important asset (Walker et al., 2016), a computer program that uses various presentation, evaluation, interaction, and administration tools to help students learn (Ellis & Calvo, 2007). Moreover, LMSs are the core of blended learning, enabling students to access many educational materials online and supporting the traditional learning environment where students use their books and interact one-on-one with their teachers (Unwin et al., 2010).

3. Previous research

Numerous studies demonstrate that LMSs stimulate communication in the triangle of learner-teacher-school and cooperation. For instance, Holmes and Prieto-Rodriguez (2018) found that there were disparities in how students and teachers thought about how easy it was to access online materials, with students saying that it helped them learn more than the teachers did. However, both sides had the same ideas about how well LMS tools worked to make interaction possible. In another study, it was noted that the capacity to reach out to students via many ways of interaction was highlighted as a concrete improvement in classroom teaching (Walker et al., 2016). Snoussi (2019) also found that all the participants valued LMS as an interactive platform that promoted faculty-student interaction

and cooperation. Khlaisang and Songkram's (2019) study aimed to investigate what made a virtual learning platform successful and concluded that the online learning platform which combined Moodle and OpenSimulator fostered cooperation, sharing of information, and discovering new things. More importantly, students could collaborate on group projects via interactive tools in a 3D online learning system which promoted a social learning environment and real-time interaction.

According to research on learners' perceptions, they consider social networking websites to be more fruitful than LMSs. For example, Thoms and Eryilmaz (2014) found that much more communicative relations among learners were observed in the classes that utilized the online social media program. In these classes, learners felt a greater sense of belonging, connection, and pleasure, which are crucial for academic achievement. Deng and Tavares (2013) put an effort to better understand what drove students to participate and what held them back from participating in online conversations using the platforms Moodle and Facebook and concluded that Facebook's quick and natural communication environment encouraged teacher candidates to communicate while Moodle's academic tone and complicated design distanced them from using it to talk on topics unrelated to courses. Emelyanova and Voronina (2014) examined how students and instructors see and use LMS at B.A. and M.A. levels and found that all students do not prefer to utilize LMS with regard to interaction tools. Conde et al. (2014) investigated the potential benefits and cons of using Web 2.0 technologies in conventional classroom settings and that students had to be pushed to make use of the interactive tools of the LMS like wikis and forums, but the usage of additional technologies like Twitter encouraged them to participate extensively.

Research indicates that there can be discrepancies about how helpful LMSs are. For instance, Islam and Azad (2015) found that students had more favorable opinions than teachers do on the usability, utility, accessibility, dependability, and congruity of their LMS. Lonn and Teasley (2009) compared survey responses with the cumulative user records to determine whether there were any discrepancies between the two and concluded that the majority of teachers selected effective interaction as the most beneficial advantage of utilizing technology. Moreover, teachers diverged from students by more commonly ranking interactive tasks important upon questioning.

Evidence from several studies suggests that learners may not always benefit from utilizing an LMS as a communication tool. First, Costley et al. (2022) investigated how constant utilization of an LMS modulated the link between learner-content, learner-instructor, and learner-learner interaction and learner achievements. A total of 362 undergraduates who were required to attend online courses as part of their major were given questionnaires that gathered data on the students' LMS usage, oral contacts, and results. They found that the favorable association between inter-student communication and student achievement was highly affected by the usage of LMS on a regular basis. The research conducted by Miguel et al. (2011) attempted to reveal whether or not learners' communicative activities in the LMS were correlated with their grades. After an examination of two years' worth of data from virtual and on-campus M.A. programs at a university, they found that learners' engagement in the LMS should have affected their educational achievement; however, the data indicated no correlation in face-to-face LMS-supported courses or asynchronous virtual classrooms. Furthermore, Denkci Akkaş (2023) carried out descriptive research to understand online education students' opinions by evaluating the efficacy of the English course offered at a public higher educational institution and found that most students felt that the available tools for writing and oral communication were inadequate compared to those for reading, listening, and grammar. In short, it became clear that the participant students did not notice any growth in their productive skills as a result of the online course provided on the LMS. Cavus et al. (2006) examined an online learning platform for the instruction of programming languages and concluded that the absence of teacher-student and peer-to-peer contact which characterizes an actual classroom was the most noticeable shortcoming of Moodle.

According to the research results, the failure of educators to utilize LMSs causes these online platforms to lose their usefulness. Annamalai et al. (2021) investigated how 203 online education learners in Malaysia felt about and

utilized LMSs by using the Technology Acceptance Model as a framework. The results revealed that there was an interaction gap between the teachers and the pupils. According to Ramayah's research (2005), many schools utilized an LMS for online education; however, most teachers merely used it to post course materials and never engaged with students through the platform's social and communication tools.

A substantial body of research reveals that LMS platforms provide student-student and student-teacher interaction in the Turkish EFL context, regardless of time and place, satisfy students, and provide a comfortable environment for discussions. For example, Ozudogru and Simsek (2021) conducted a case study to elucidate the efficacy of the LMS and ascertain the opinions of prospective freshman teachers and their professors. The data were collected by utilizing a semi-structured interview. The findings revealed that prospective teachers followed alerts, read announcements, and sent messages for communication, while lecturers interacted with others by posting news, sending messages, and reading recommendations. In the research of Karaman et al. (2009), the perceptions of students about LMS-based instructional programs were examined. The result of the research revealed that Moodle provided comfortable and multi-communication convenience. Mısırlı (2007) surveyed learners about their experiences communicating in an internet-supported setting and their contentment and feelings on the internet and computers by utilizing the free and open-source LMS, Moodle, and noted that learners' views on the internet and computers were found to be highly favorable. Learners' happiness with the course as a whole and their ability to communicate with each other through the LMS were both rated as neutral, but learners reported the greatest contentment on their ability to interact with their teachers via electronic mail.

4. Overview of the current study

Communication is the focal point of the classroom because it emerges continuously for different reasons from the moment one steps into the classroom. With the widespread use of distance education and the use of the flipped learning model by schools, the communication between teachers and students may have been interrupted. LMSs are very suitable for teachers to constantly contact their students outside of the classroom. The reason why teachers should definitely use LMSs is that these platforms enable unremitting communication outside the classroom, make it easier to share learning materials, are accessible from all kinds of technological tools, and it is possible to make students feel more comfortable speaking from behind the keyboard. Within this scope, remote and online communication tools can assist teachers in communicating with their students. In the literature, there exist numerous studies revealing the stimulating effect of LMSs on communication and cooperation among learners, teachers, and schools, the favorable impacts of the combination of gamification and LMSs on interaction, the fruitfulness of social networking websites when compared to LMSs, discrepancies about how helpful LMSs are, and the uselessness of LMSs as communication tools because of the failure of educators to effectively utilize these platforms. In the Turkish EFL context, research indicates that LMS platforms make student-student and student-teacher contact possible at any time and location, satisfy students in terms of interaction, and provide an optimal atmosphere for engaging in conversations. For this reason, this study aims to find the level of communication of EFL instructors working in university preparatory schools with their students outside the classroom using LMSs. To this end, this study aims to find answers to the following question:

- What is the level of EFL instructors' interactions with their students via LMSs?

5.Method

5.1 Research context

The research design employed in this study is descriptive since acquiring additional insights into the interactions between EFL instructors and their students through the use of LMSs is essential. According to Dulock (1993), descriptive research is characterized by not controlling or manipulating any variables, describing the phenomenon in the context in which it is typically observed, not starting with any predetermined hypotheses, and choosing study participants because they already have the relevant information or characteristics. Furthermore, Seliger and Shohamy (1989) state that descriptive research often involves quantitative methods. They also declare that descriptive research

consists of five phases: research question formulation, participant selection, data collection strategy formulation, data collection, and data analysis. Based on the explanations above, employing a descriptive research design for conducting the present study is suitable. Due to reaching a large number of participants around Türkiye in a limited time and the COVID-19 pandemic, an online survey was used as the methodology to carry out the current descriptive study. Both the scale examining EFL teachers' interactions with their students through LMSs and the short questionnaire gathering participants' demographic information were merged and incorporated into a single online questionnaire in Google Forms.

5.2 Participants

The research participants were 246 English instructors employed at the Schools of Foreign Languages in various state and private universities in Türkiye. There were 178 female participants, making up 72.4% of the total, while there were 68 male participants, making up 27.6% of the total. The participants' ages ranged from 23 to 69 years old, with the mean being almost 38 years old. Among all the age groups, the highest number of participants were between the ages of 31-40. While 227 of the instructors (92.3%) participating in the study were native speakers of Turkish, only 19 (7.7%) were native speakers of English. In addition, the range of answers for the participants' level of teaching experience was from 2 to 42 years, with 10 years of teaching experience being the most common response. The majority of the participants were those who had been teaching for 11-15 years. Furthermore, 101 participants (41.1%) were employed in state English preparatory schools, whereas 145 (58.9%) were employed in private institutions. In terms of educational status, there were 81 instructors with B.A., 132 instructors with M.A., and 33 instructors with Ph.D. degrees. Slightly more than half of the participants were instructors who completed their master's degree. Regarding their administrative duty, the bulk of the instructors—192 or 78%—had no leading position in the educational institution. On the other hand, 54 (22%) were in charge of management duties in the prep schools. The hours they spent instructing varied from 4 to 30 hours per week with a mean of 19.01. Twenty-five instructors (10.2%) worked less than 10 hours, 126 instructors (51.2%) worked 11-20 hours, and 95 instructors (38.6%) worked more than 20 hours per week. In terms of weekly face-to-face teaching hours, some instructors never taught in person and those who taught 30 hours in the classroom. Ninety-two participants (37.4%) taught English face-to-face for fewer than 10 hours, 141 (57.3%) taught between 11 and 20 hours, and 13 (5.3%) taught beyond 20 hours. Lastly, 199 instructors (80.9%) taught English less than 10 hours a week online, while only four of them (1.6%) taught twenty hours or more. The rest (17.5%) taught students English remotely via online platforms for 11-20 hours a week. Furthermore, it was found that Moodle became the most favored open-source LMS used by 36.6% of respondents. Following Moodle, the second most frequently used LMS was Google Classroom with an 18% usage rate. Edmodo and Microsoft Teams ranked third with a 12% usage rate. Moreover, 84.1% of the participating instructors' (207) preference was to sign in and utilize the LMS platform from their laptops.

5.3 Tools

For the aim of data collection, an online questionnaire consisting of two parts and prepared via Google Forms was used. Participants were first asked to fill out a demographics questionnaire that inquired about their gender, age, native language, years of teaching, type of university they worked at, degree of education earned, administrative duties, number of weekly classes taught (both in-person and online), preferred LMS, and preferred device for accessing the LMS. Second, respondents were given a questionnaire adapted from Teclehaimanot and Hickman (2011). The questionnaire consisted of 24 items that investigated the various means through which instructors interact with their students using online LMSs. Using a 5-point Likert scale, participants were required, for each question, to remark on the frequency with which they utilized various modes of interaction when using the LMS ("Never", "Rarely", "Sometimes", "Often", "Always").

5.4 Procedure

An application was submitted to the Educational Sciences Ethics Committee at IMU at the onset of the research, and approval was obtained. After that, the link to the 24-item online questionnaire, which includes a demographics section, was emailed to English instructors working at state or private English preparatory schools of universities all over Türkiye. A personalized email was sent to every instructor to encourage them to take the questionnaire more seriously and increase their participation. At the beginning of the online questionnaire, the participants were provided with a short text informing them about the purpose and content of the study, the duration of the questionnaire, the study coordinator and her consultant, the voluntary nature of the study, and the confidentiality of the information. The data were collected in late 2021 and the first half of 2022.

5.5 Data analysis

After the data were collected, they were imported into SPSS Statistics 21.0 for analysis. It was made sure that there were no missing data when entering the data into the program. First of all, the questionnaire items were subjected to validity and reliability testing. To determine whether or not the items on the questionnaire were valid, construct factor analysis was carried out. The varimax rotation was performed, and the %of variance for the scale was determined to be 65.19. In addition, the scale's reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha analysis, and it was found to be .89. After that, calculations were made to determine both the percentage and the frequency for every interval.

6. Results

The values in Table 1 show that EFL instructors' level of interaction with their students through LMSs is high, medium, and low. The first way EFL instructors communicated at a high level was by giving feedback on students' academic work including assignments, tests, grades, and overall performance ($\bar{x}$=4.25). Additionally, instructors often uploaded course materials and files to the LMS platform ($\bar{x}$=4.20). Instructors stated that they often made announcements on the LMS platform ($\bar{x}$=3.87). They also expressed that they were often alerted either via email or the LMS platform when their students responded ($\bar{x}$=3.82). Sharing class timetables was another high level of interaction method with students for instructors ($\bar{x}$=3.80). Furthermore, instructors often sent their students periodic reminders about their tasks via LMSs ($\bar{x}$=3.59). Moreover, the usage of e-mails as a means of interaction with students was one of the ways that EFL instructors used most often ($\bar{x}$=3.40).

The findings reveal that EFL instructors working in English preparatory schools use some interaction channels with a medium frequency. For instance, they sometimes took advantage of the video conferencing options ($\bar{x}$=3.34). Also, instructors sometimes had students be informed about teacher posts as well as they were sometimes notified about students' responses on LMS ($\bar{x}$=3.32). Besides that, they benefited from the application of the LMS they used so that they could stay informed about the alerts from their pupils ($\bar{x}$=3.09). Moreover, they communicated with their students by commenting on their students' posts on LMS ($\bar{x}$=3.02). Instructors claimed that they sometimes utilized reporting tools to monitor students' performance ($\bar{x}$=2.99). Furthermore, instructors declared that they sometimes sent personal messages to their students through the LMS ($\bar{x}$=2.95). The findings further showed that instructors sometimes utilized the live chat function of these online platforms ($\bar{x}$=2.80). Additionally, they expressed that they sometimes liked what their students had posted on the platform to show their appreciation ($\bar{x}$=2.73). Lastly, interactive games ($\bar{x}$=2.63) and to-do checklists ($\bar{x}$=2.60) were sometimes used by EFL instructors to track their pupils' progress.

Instructors prefer some interactive methods at a low level. First, the creation of polls to get insight into the perspectives of learners on a certain issue was rarely chosen as an interaction way by EFL instructors ($\bar{x}$=2.42). In addition, they said that they rarely contributed to the forums by creating discussion topics ($\bar{x}$=2.34). They further stated that they rarely gave badges when students succeeded ($\bar{x}$=1.97). According to the statistics, EFL instructors

rarely made use of blogs to create an interactive environment between them and their students. Finally, it was clear that EFL instructors rarely preferred encouraging their students to register external blog links on LMS ($\bar{x}$=1.94), utilizing blogs as a collaborative assessment tool ($\bar{x}$=1.86), registering external blogs on LMS ($\bar{x}$=1.83), and adding blog entries on their class page on LMS ($\bar{x}$=1.77).

Table 1. The level of EFL instructors' interactions with their students via LMS (n=246)

Items	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Mean	Standard Deviation
10. I provide feedback on my students' assignments, quizzes, grades, and performance.	7	6	32	73	128	4.25	.97
	2.8	2.4	13.0	29.7	52.0		
2. I post class materials and documents.	4	10	31	88	113	4.20	.92
	1.6	4.1	12.6	35.8	45.9		
1. I post announcements.	4	19	60	83	80	3.87	1.00
	1.6	7.7	24.4	33.7	32.5		
19. I am notified of student responses via email or in my LMS classroom.	21	21	37	67	100	3.82	1.28
	8.5	8.5	15.0	27.2	40.7		
3. I post classroom schedules.	14	30	44	61	97	3.80	1.24
	5.7	12.2	17.9	24.8	39.4		
11. I send my students reminders on their assignments.	21	23	57	78	67	3.59	1.22
	8.5	9.3	23.2	31.7	27.2		
7. I send my students emails.	16	40	71	66	53	3.40	1.18
	6.5	16.3	28.9	26.8	21.5		
20. I use video conferencing features.	51	19	46	54	76	3.34	1.50
	20.7	7.7	18.7	22.0	30.9		
18. I let my students receive notifications about my posts.	46	29	40	62	69	3.32	1.46
	18.7	11.8	16.3	25.2	28.0		
24. I use the mobile LMS application to be aware of notifications from my students.	52	35	54	48	57	3.09	1.45
	21.1	14.2	22.0	19.5	23.2		
8. I comment on my students' posts.	45	43	55	66	37	3.02	1.33
	18.3	17.5	22.4	26.8	15.0		
22. I use reporting tools to monitor my students' performance.	42	38	80	52	34	2.99	1.26
	17.1	15.4	32.5	21.1	13.8		
6. I send my students private messages.	33	47	88	53	25	2.95	1.16
	13.4	19.1	35.8	21.5	10.2		
5. I use live chats.	61	45	56	50	34	2.80	1.37
	24.8	18.3	22.8	20.3	13.8		
9. I like my students' posts.	59	48	65	46	28	2.73	1.31
	24.0	19.5	26.4	18.7	11.4		
21. I utilize plugins for gamification / interactive games.	64	47	67	51	17	2.63	1.26
	26.0	19.1	27.2	20.7	6.9		
23. I create to-do checklists to monitor my students' progress.	66	50	67	41	22	2.60	1.28
	26.8	20.3	27.2	16.7	8.9		
13. I create polls to get the opinions of my students on a specific topic.	68	62	75	25	16	2.42	1.18
	27.6	25.2	30.5	10.2	6.5		
4. I create discussion topics on forums.	71	65	74	25	11	2.34	1.13
	28.9	26.4	30.1	10.2	4.5		
12. I give my students badges according to their achievements.	123	48	42	24	9	1.97	1.18
	50.0	19.5	17.1	9.8	3.7		
16. I encourage my students to register for external blog links on our course page.	115	63	40	23	5	1.94	1.09
	46.7	25.6	16.3	9.3	2.0		
17. I use blogs as a collaborative assessment tool.	121	62	43	16	4	1.86	1.02
	49.2	25.2	17.5	6.5	1.6		

15. I register external blogs on our course page.	124	62	41	14	5	1.83	1.02
	50.4	25.2	16.7	5.7	2.0		
14. I add blog entries about our course regularly.	137	54	33	18	4	1.77	1.04
	55.7	22.0	13.4	7.3	1.6		

7. Conclusions and discussion

In the light of the findings, several conclusions can be drawn. In the first place, the degree of interaction between EFL instructors and their students via LMSs exhibits variability at high, moderate, and low levels. In addition, the most preferred mode of interaction by EFL instructors on LMS platforms is giving feedback on the homework, tests, grades, and overall performance of learners. However, EFL instructors do not publish blog posts on their courses in LMSs frequently as a way of interacting with their learners. Second, EFL instructors who work in higher education institutions mostly use LMSs for content delivery. They always share course materials and schedules, provide students with constructive criticism on their work, send out reminders and emails about their course, and post-class announcements on LMS platforms. Nonetheless, they use those digital learning platforms for social learning purposes quite rarely. The interactive features of LMSs such as the creation of polls, utilization of discussion forums, allocation of badges for notable achievements, and incorporation of blogs are mostly neglected by educators teaching English in prep schools in Türkiye.

8. Pedagogical implications

Several pedagogical implications can be made from the results of this study. First, the primary contribution of this study is the evidence it offers for EFL instructors to interact with their students through LMSs. This means that EFL instructors and their students can engage in meaningful dialogues via numerous interactive ways in LMS platforms. The findings are consistent with prior research in the literature which shows the usefulness of LMSs for interaction (Holmes & Prieto-Rodriguez, 2018; Snoussi, 2019; Walker et al., 2016) and their power to improve the quality and quantity of traditional education (Rutter & Matthews, 2002; Saunders & Klemming, 2003). Second, the findings of the current study revealed that LMSs are primarily utilized by EFL educators for content sharing. The modes of interaction that instructors employ with their students at a medium level include video conferences, mobile applications, receiving and sending notifications, report tools, live chats, commenting on, and sending private messages to students. At a low level, instructors make use of interactive components of LMSs such as forums, blogs, and polls. Researchers similarly conclude that LMSs are most often used for the uploads of course materials, occasionally for interaction between teachers and learners, and barely for online evaluation or cooperation among learners (Blin & Munro, 2008; Garrote & Pettersson, 2007; Mahdizadeh et al., 2008; Woods et al., 2004). To be more specific, Iqbal and Qureshi (2011) claim that teachers value notice boards and course-related data sharing or transferring more than tools for assessing and tracking pupil success. On the other hand, the findings contradict the views of Hazari (1998) who advocates the importance of allowing learners to interact with one another and their teachers through interactive tools like message boards, real-time chat sessions, and e-mails in digital learning environments. In addition, Henderson (2003) claims that taking advantage of the discussion forum function of LMSs is important since it can transform inactive students into engaged contributors.

9. Practical recommendations

Some recommendations can be implemented after considering the results of the current study. First, it is essential that educators have an incentive, and they are also fully encouraged by the educational institutions they work for to utilize LMSs. Conventional education can be switched to distance learning due to force majeure such as epidemics, pandemics, or natural disasters. In these circumstances, LMSs can help educators to continue educating their learners. In addition to this, LMSs enable learning to happen without the constraints of time and place. Second, these online platforms can be properly integrated into the curriculum or coursebooks, thereby making printed course materials

more interactive. Third, schools may prefer to implement LMSs having mobile applications since young teachers frequently use mobile LMSs, and mobile phones are indispensable for the new generation of students. In this way, students and teachers can access these virtual learning platforms faster and easier. Fourth, it is recommended that educators utilize LMSs not solely for the dissemination of instructional resources but also for fostering social interactions among students in light of the results of the present study. Finally, the integration of gamification into LMSs is an essential aspect that should not be underestimated, and further attention should be given to using interactive games on LMSs. Incorporating games into the FL learning process will likely raise both students' motivation and engagement in face-to-face education and distance learning.

10. Limitations and recommendations for further research

Several limitations are encountered in this study. Firstly, only 246 EFL instructors who work in prep schools of state and private universities in Türkiye are eligible to participate. Second, the study is confined to a descriptive research design which consists of a demographic background and a 24-item questionnaire. The findings of the current study have prompted several recommendations for future academic research. Initially, a more applicable study across various contexts may be conducted by augmenting both the sample size and duration of the data collection process. In addition, the findings of this study reflect a one-way communication that is the degree and ways of communication that EFL instructors communicate with their students through the LMS.

Future research can offer different perspectives by investigating whether students use LMSs to communicate with their teachers and each other and how effectively they find these platforms as a way of communication. In addition, future researchers may apply a mixed method or a qualitative research design to understand better the utilization of virtual learning environments for communication by educators and learners.

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12. Disclosure of Conflict

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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