Students' Perceived Impacts of Blended Learning on Writing Development

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ABSTRACT

Teaching and learning writing involves developing students' linguistic and communicative competence; however, educators continue to face challenges in identifying approaches that effectively support writing development. While various instructional models such as teacher-centred teaching, online learning, and blended learning have been explored, the specific impacts of blended learning on students' writing performance remain insufficiently studied. This research therefore examines students' perceptions of learning writing through a blended learning approach, focusing on four key areas: collaborative exchange, self-efficacy, online discussion, and face-to-face interaction. A qualitative research design was employed to collect, analyse, and interpret data. Through purposive sampling, six students who had experienced writing instruction in a blended learning environment were selected. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain insight into their experiences. Findings show that students perceived blended learning as enhancing collaborative exchange, allowing them to share ideas, seek clarification, and support one another more effectively. They also reported improved self-efficacy, as blended activities and regular feedback increased their confidence in expressing ideas and completing writing tasks. In addition, students valued online discussion platforms, which offered greater flexibility, accessibility, and comfort when engaging with writing-related content. At the same time, they emphasised the importance of face-to-face interaction, particularly for receiving clearer explanations, observing non-verbal cues, and strengthening lecturer–student rapport. Overall, the results suggest that blended learning provides a flexible, supportive, and conducive environment that positively influences students' writing development. The study offers insights that may guide educators in refining blended learning practices for more effective writing instruction.

Keywords— Blended Learning Approach, ESL Writing, Student Perceptions, Writing Development, Online Learning

INTRODUCTION

Writing remains one of the most challenging skills for ESL learners because it requires organisation, clarity, linguistic accuracy, and the ability to express ideas logically. Recent research continues to show that many learners struggle with grammar, coherence, vocabulary, and paragraph development despite years of English instruction (Wang & He, 2022). These persistent difficulties highlight the need for more supportive teaching approaches that can enhance student engagement and scaffold the writing process.

Blended learning has become a widely adopted method in higher education over the past few years, combining face-to-face instruction with online tools to create a more flexible and interactive learning environment. Studies in recent years reveal that blended learning improves writing performance, reduces anxiety, and increases students' engagement with writing tasks (Alshammari, 2023; Hidayati & Sugeng, 2023). Its multimodal nature allows students to receive continuous feedback, collaborate with peers, and access resources at their own pace.

Because students' perceptions strongly influence their motivation and participation, understanding how they experience blended learning is essential. Therefore, this study aims to examine students' perceptions of blended

learning and its influence on their writing development, offering updated insights into contemporary ESL writing practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Blended Learning

Blended learning has become increasingly prominent in higher education, especially in language classrooms, due to its ability to combine face-to-face instruction with digital learning tools. Recent studies show that students generally respond positively to this approach because it offers flexibility, immediate access to resources, and opportunities for continuous engagement beyond the classroom (Wang & He, 2022).

In writing courses specifically, blended learning has been found to enhance learners' performance and reduce writing anxiety by allowing them to practise at their own pace and revisit materials as needed (Alshammari, 2023). Students benefit from the integration of technology, which supports drafting, editing, and receiving feedback more efficiently. Research also highlights that blended learning encourages active participation since learners can engage with videos, online tasks, and collaborative platforms that support different learning preferences (Hidayati & Sugeng, 2023).

Recent work also emphasises the importance of designing meaningful blended activities. When online components are interactive and well-structured, students demonstrate higher engagement and deeper understanding of writing concepts. Collaborative digital tools, discussion forums, and real-time communication platforms help create an environment where students can explore, question, and share ideas, making the learning experience more dynamic and supportive.

Students' Perception

Students' perceptions play a crucial role in determining the effectiveness of blended learning, particularly in writing classes. Recent studies indicate that learners perceive blended learning as more engaging, less intimidating, and more helpful in allowing them to express ideas at their own pace (Ibrahim & Hassan, 2023). Positive perceptions often stem from the accessibility of materials, the ability to revisit lecturer feedback, and the comfort of interacting through online spaces.

One key factor influencing students' perceptions is the sense of increased **self-efficacy**. When learners receive timely feedback, participate in collaborative tasks, and experience small writing successes through blended platforms, their belief in their own ability improves (Huang & Boney, 2022). This improvement in confidence contributes to better performance and more consistent participation in writing activities.

Students also value collaborative opportunities within blended learning. Digital communication tools allow them to discuss content, exchange ideas, and provide peer feedback—elements that have been shown to strengthen writing development (Zou & Xie, 2022). Many learners appreciate the balance between online and face-to-face communication, as the blended environment provides both convenience and the clarity that comes from in-person explanations.

Overall, recent literature consistently highlights that students perceive blended learning as beneficial when the online and face-to-face components complement each other. Clear instructions, interactive tasks, and supportive digital platforms contribute to a positive learning experience and enhance students' writing development.

While existing studies consistently highlight positive learner attitudes toward blended learning, several gaps remain in the context of ESL writing. Much of the current literature focuses on evaluating writing performance outcomes (e.g., Alshammari, 2023; Hidayati & Sugeng, 2023), yet fewer studies explore how learners perceive the interaction between online tools, peer collaboration, and instructor presence in shaping their writing development.

Moreover, prior studies rarely address how learners' technological readiness, confidence levels, and communication preferences influence their experience in blended writing environments (Ibrahim & Hassan, 2023). Although some research has examined self-efficacy (Huang & Boney, 2022) and collaborative learning (Zou & Xie, 2022), limited attention has been given to the combined impact of these factors within the same instructional setting.

Another gap involves the lack of studies exploring learner perceptions using small, in-depth qualitative samples, which are better suited to understanding nuanced writing behaviours. Hence, this study contributes by examining learner experiences holistically—across collaboration, self-efficacy, online interaction, and face-to-face engagement—within a single blended writing course.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore students' perceptions of learning academic writing through a blended learning approach. Qualitative inquiry is suitable for studies that seek to understand participants' lived experiences, beliefs, and personal interpretations in real educational settings (Creswell & Poth, 2023). This approach allowed the researcher to capture nuanced descriptions of how learners interacted with both online and face-to-face components throughout the course.

Case Study Design

A case study approach was adopted because the focus of the research was on examining a real and ongoing instructional situation in learning academic writing through blended learning. Case studies are widely used in education research when the goal is to explore a particular phenomenon in depth and understand the contextual factors surrounding it (Yazan, 2022). In this study, the case refers to a group of ESL learners enrolled in a writing course that incorporated blended learning as its primary instructional design.

This design was appropriate as it enabled a holistic investigation of how students navigated digital tools, interacted with peers and lecturers, and responded to the writing tasks assigned. An intrinsic case study was selected because the intention was not to generalise findings, but to understand the case itself in a rich and detailed manner. Intrinsic case studies are typically chosen when the researcher has a genuine interest in a particular context and seeks to gain deep insight into its internal processes (Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2022).

Sampling Strategy

Purposive sampling was used to select participants who had direct experience with blended learning in an academic writing course. This sampling method is appropriate when researchers need information-rich participants who can provide detailed and relevant insights into the phenomenon being studied (Palinkas et al., 2023).

A total of **six students** were selected because they met the inclusion criteria:

1. They were enrolled in the writing course using blended learning.
2. They had completed both online and face-to-face components.
3. They were willing to participate in an in-depth interview.

Participant Demographics

Six ESL undergraduates (aged 19–21) enrolled in an Academic Writing course participated in the study. All were Malaysian learners with intermediate English proficiency based on institutional placement assessments. While all participants had basic exposure to online learning during the COVID-19 period, their technological experience differed, ranging from frequent digital tool usage to minimal familiarity with online writing platforms.

A small sample size is considered suitable for qualitative case studies because it allows the researcher to focus closely on each participant's experiences and produce meaningful, in-depth interpretations rather than broad generalisations (Guest, Namey, & Chen, 2022).

Context and Course Structure

The writing course was delivered using a blended format consisting of weekly face-to-face lectures and online learning tasks via interactive learning platforms. Additional tools used included WhatsApp for group coordination, Google Docs for collaborative drafting, Facebook groups for threaded discussions, Quizizz for formative assessment activities, Canva Whiteboard for collaborative brainstorming, Google Sites for hosting learning materials and student portfolios, and Padlet for idea sharing and asynchronous discussion.

Course assignments included paragraph writing tasks, peer-review activities, and a final essay project. Students alternated between online drafting and in-class consultations, allowing digital work to be reinforced through immediate, face-to-face feedback.

Data Collection: Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used as the main data collection instrument. This method provides flexibility for participants to express their thoughts freely while still allowing the researcher to explore specific areas relevant to the study (Jamshed, 2023). Interviews were conducted individually, allowing participants to speak openly about their experiences with blended learning, particularly regarding interaction, confidence, and writing development.

The interview protocol was developed based on guidelines for qualitative interviewing, ensuring that questions were open-ended, neutral, and aligned with the research objectives. Semi-structured interviews are appropriate for educational research because they allow researchers to probe deeper into participants' explanations and obtain rich, detailed responses (Queen & Klenke-Boush, 2024).

All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and later transcribed for analysis.

Data Analysis

The transcribed interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. This method is commonly used in qualitative studies to identify patterns, categories, and themes across the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2023). The researcher followed the standard six-step procedure: familiarisation with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and producing the final report.

Themes were developed inductively, allowing the findings to emerge naturally from students' narratives rather than being imposed by existing theories. This approach provided a genuine representation of participants' perceptions and experiences.

Trustworthiness and Validity

To ensure the quality and credibility of the study, several trustworthiness strategies were implemented, guided by contemporary qualitative research standards (Nowell et al., 2023):

Credibility

Member checking was conducted by sharing summarised findings with participants to confirm accuracy and ensure that interpretations reflected their actual views.

Transferability

Thick descriptions of the research context, participants, and blended learning environment were provided so readers can determine the applicability of the findings to similar settings.

Dependability

A clear and transparent audit trail was maintained, documenting decisions made throughout data collection and analysis. This improves the study's procedural reliability.

Confirmability

Researcher reflexivity was practised to minimise bias. Field notes and reflective memos were kept to ensure that findings were grounded in participant data rather than the researcher's assumptions.

FINDINGS

The findings of this study revealed four major themes that describe students' experiences with blended learning in their academic writing course: **(1) Collaborative Exchange, (2) Self-Efficacy, (3) Online Discussion, and (4) Face-to-Face Interaction.** Each theme reflects how students perceived blended learning as influencing their communication, confidence, and writing development.

Table 1. Summary of Themes Across Participants

Themes	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6
Collaborative Exchange	/	/	/	/		/
Self-Efficacy			/	/	/	
Online discussion	/	/	/			
Face-to-Face interaction				/	/	/

Collaborative Exchange

Students consistently highlighted that blended learning increased opportunities for **collaborative exchange** with peers and lecturers. They valued the balance between online platforms and classroom activities, which made it easier to work together, exchange ideas, and clarify content. This aligns with recent studies showing that blended learning environments promote stronger peer collaboration through shared digital platforms and structured group tasks (Zou & Xie, 2022).

Student	Quotation
S3	"Blended learning approach really enhances my interaction with my lecturer and friends."
S1	"We had a lot of fun working together, sharing our information, and supporting each other."

Students felt the blended approach made group work more manageable because they could discuss online and later refine their ideas during face-to-face meetings. These interactions helped them strengthen their writing performance by receiving feedback from multiple sources.

Self-efficacy

Another important theme was the development of **self-efficacy**. Many students reported that blended learning

made them more confident in expressing ideas and completing writing tasks. This growth in confidence often stemmed from repeated practice, clear feedback, and opportunities to participate in both online and classroom activities. Recent research supports this, noting that blended learning enhances learners' writing self-efficacy through continuous digital and face-to-face feedback cycles (Huang & Boney, 2022).

Student	Quotation
S3	"I had the opportunity to express my opinions and present with greater confidence."
S4	"It increases my confidence when I'm able to share my opinions and ideas without restrictions."
S5	"Yes, blended learning allows me to share my knowledge with others."

These comments indicate that blended learning enabled students to see their own progress, which strengthened their sense of ability in writing and communication. The mixed learning environment gave them more space to practise without feeling judged or rushed, which helped build their overall confidence.

Online Discussion

The third theme focuses on **online discussion**, which students viewed as an accessible and less intimidating space for communication. Participants explained that interacting online—through WhatsApp, Facebook, or learning platforms—helped them retrieve information quickly, ask questions freely, and understand lessons better. This supports recent findings that online components in blended learning promote learner engagement by offering comfortable, student-friendly communication channels (Rahimi & Fathi, 2023).

Student	Quotation
S1	"I prefer online communication because it provides access to more information."
S2	"It helps me understand things more easily."
S6	"Online communication requires a strong internet connection to be effective."

Despite technical challenges, students still saw online discussion as beneficial because it provided continuous access to support and explanations. These findings mirror current literature that emphasises online tools as key contributors to collaboration and idea generation in blended writing environments (Miftah, 2024).

Face-to-face interaction

Although students appreciated the flexibility and comfort of online communication, they still valued **face-to-face interaction** as an essential part of their writing course. Participants felt that in-person lessons helped them understand explanations more clearly, observe non-verbal cues, and receive immediate responses to questions. These perceptions reflect recent research showing that face-to-face interaction remains vital in blended learning because it provides clarity, emotional support, and lecturer presence (Lim & Wang, 2022).

Student	Quotation
S3	"If we are unsure about something, we can ask the lecturer directly."
S5	"Being able to make eye contact helps me understand the lesson more clearly."
S6	"Face-to-face communication allows me to interpret body language, emotions, tone, and reactions more clearly."

Overall, students believed that face-to-face sessions complemented online learning by reinforcing understanding and fostering stronger lecturer–student connections. This balance made the writing course more engaging, structured, and supportive.

While perceptions were largely positive, several participants expressed concerns about aspects of blended learning. Two participants noted that online platforms sometimes created communication delays, especially when peers were unresponsive. Others mentioned difficulty managing multiple digital tools simultaneously, which occasionally led to confusion about task instructions.

One student shared that excessive reliance on online discussion made them feel "disconnected" from classmates, suggesting that blended learning may reduce social presence when not balanced appropriately. These unfavourable perceptions highlight the need for clearer scaffolding and stronger instructor monitoring in online components.

DISCUSSION

The findings reinforce existing scholarship suggesting that blended learning enhances writing development through interaction, flexibility, and multimodal communication. However, this study extends previous work by showing how these elements interact from the learner perspective.

The analysis reveals that collaborative exchange is strengthened not only by online platforms but by the interplay between asynchronous communication and in-person refinement. This hybrid pattern supports deeper processing of feedback—an insight that previous performance-oriented studies have not emphasised.

The study also adds nuance to discussions of writing self-efficacy. While confidence increased through repeated practice, students' self-belief was closely tied to the availability of multimodal feedback rather than the mode of instruction alone.

Furthermore, although online platforms facilitated comfort and flexibility, students' mixed perceptions suggest that digital communication may also create barriers when social presence is low or when technology is unstable. This highlights a need to balance convenience with human connection—a tension underexplored in past research.

By integrating these dimensions, the study helps address the literature gap concerning how learners experience blended writing instruction beyond performance metrics.

LIMITATIONS

This study has several limitations. First, the small sample size limits transferability, although it aligns with qualitative inquiry. Participant demographics, such as varying levels of technological proficiency, may have influenced their perceptions. Second, data were drawn from a single writing course in one institution, which may affect contextual generalisability. Third, the study relied solely on self-reported perceptions; observational or performance-based data could strengthen future analyses.

FUTURE RESEARCH RECOMMENDATION

Future studies may investigate blended learning in writing courses using larger or more diverse samples, or compare learners across fully online, hybrid, and traditional modes. Longitudinal studies could explore how sustained blended exposure influences writing performance and confidence over multiple semesters. Additionally, further research could examine specific digital tools—such as AI-assisted feedback systems, collaborative platforms, or multimodal writing environments—to identify which tools yield the strongest support for writing development.

CONCLUSION

This study examined students' perceptions of learning academic writing through a blended learning approach, focusing on collaborative exchange, self-efficacy, online discussion, and face-to-face interaction. Overall, the findings show that students responded positively to blended learning and believed that the combination of digital tools and classroom teaching supported their writing development in meaningful ways.

Students highlighted that blended learning strengthened interaction with peers and lecturers, creating more opportunities for collaborative exchange during writing activities. They also reported increased self-efficacy, as the blended environment allowed them to express ideas more comfortably, participate actively, and recognise their own strengths. Online discussion platforms offered flexibility and constant access to information, helping students clarify doubts and stay engaged in the writing process. At the same time, face-to-face sessions provided essential guidance, personal support, and clearer explanations—elements that students felt were necessary for understanding writing tasks in depth.

The findings align with recent research indicating that blended learning is most effective when online and face-to-face components complement each other. When designed purposefully, blended learning can enhance interaction, build learner confidence, and create a more supportive and engaging writing environment. This study contributes to ongoing discussions about the role of blended learning in ESL writing instruction and highlights the need for educators to adopt approaches that integrate technology meaningfully rather than superficially.

Moving forward, educators and institutions may consider providing structured online resources, clear feedback mechanisms, and opportunities for collaborative learning to maximise the benefits of blended learning for writing development. Future research could explore how different digital tools influence writing outcomes or compare blended learning with other technology-enhanced models to gain deeper insights into effective writing pedagogy.

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