

The Effect of Blended Approach in Enhancing Students Writing Skills

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Abstract The aim of the present study is to investigate the effectiveness of the blended approach techniques for promoting EFL writing skills and changing passive attitudes towards writing into positive ones. The design of this study is pre-post, experimental-control group. The sample of this present study include first year Nursing students, Wolkite University (N = 56). They were assigned into two groups: the experimental group (N= 28) and the control group (N= 28). The experimental group students were taught using blended approach techniques, while the control group did not receive any training except the conventional method. The instruments of the present study include a writing test and a rubric for correcting it prepared by the researchers and judged by two instructors. The writing test was applied on the study sample before and after the implementation. Results of the study revealed that EFL writing skills and attitudes improved among experimental group students as a result of using blended writing techniques.

Keywords: writing skill, attitude, EFL, blended approach

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1. Introduction

Writing is one of the most important skills in teaching English as a foreign language. It reflects the power of students in mastering writing techniques, so the students need to be aware of writing as a process, product and genre as well. Learning writing also includes the learning of writing skills, rules and conventions. The goal of all writing instruction is to help students become independent and autonomous in their writing [1].

As far as the provision of English language in higher education is concerned, effective teaching is not just an issue of ‘pitching’ (another transfer metaphor) at the right level to make sense to the learners, but rather designing instruction to optimally link with existing thinking, so to shift student understanding towards the target knowledge set out in the curriculum. This makes students more autonomous, more self-regulated in their learning, and makes them lifelong learners [2]. In order to foster the development of these competences on a student level, learning environments and the English language teaching approaches in higher education need to be supportive in this respect [3]. To enable the English language teaching approach more supportive in higher education, Blended approach is currently recommended and experienced as theoretically effective approach to teaching English with the aim of developing learners’ ability to use the language in multi-dimensional aspects [4,5].

Many countries have shown a growing interest in Blended approach in writing classes due to its capacity for

engaging learners in integrated approach as a pre-requisite for the development of language competence [6]. Blended approach in writing classroom is currently advocated and practiced as a potentially effective approach to teaching English with the aim of developing learners’ writing ability [7].

According to [8], Blended approach in writing classes encourages interactive language learning through the following characteristics: 1) involve learners in real life activities 2) enable the teachers to teach the writing in an integrated manner 3) create collaborative situation among the learners 4) enhance the contextualizing texts in teaching grammar and vocabulary 5) utilize the target language appropriately and integrate assessing the performance of students with in the language teaching.

One of the main objectives of teaching English language in Ethiopia is to address students’ need by focusing on the major language skills [9]. However, this objective is not yet addressed successfully for various reasons. Among these reasons, [10] in his article elaborated that overcrowded classes, shortage of instructional materials, heavy teaching loads and teachers’ attitudes towards the using different language teaching approaches are source of the problems. [11] in his research work indicated that students’ lack of motivation, students’ preference towards grammar leaning, teachers’ low level of proficiency are the other observed problems.

In the provision of Blended approach in English language classrooms, one of the major skills that should be taken into consideration is writing skills. The provision of Blended approach in English language classrooms in recent years has been proved as an effective approach to

improve the writing skill to increase motivation to writing, and to learn how to treat writing as a collaborative social activity [12]. Writing is one of the four macro-skills that have a great significant role in promoting students' academic performance. Like the other English language skills, writing needs goal-oriented instruction. It allows writers to explore opinions and views, and make them noticeable and concrete, encourages thinking and learning, provokes communication and makes thought available for reflection.

Conversely, when we look at the existing situation on the practice of writing of Ethiopian students, one of the major difficulties Ethiopian students disclose at different levels is writing in English [13]; and the situation is worse in tertiary level. According to the findings of local research works, students writing problem basically focusses on lack of cohesion and coherence in writing, problems of tenses and shortage of basic vocabularies [14]; writing instructors could not help their students to practice writing independently due to the limitations in the teaching materials; most students who join University hardly produce paragraphs or essays which meet the required standard [15]. Moreover, the researcher has observed the above mentioned problems in practice.

Even though writing skill has substantial contribution in enhancing the students' academic performance, it could not achieve its goal due to the above mentioned challenges and conventional method of teaching some instructors frequently employ. In light of this, the rationale of conducting this research is to investigate the extent to which the effect of utilizing Blended approaches in enhancing the students writing skills.

Within this framework, in this study different innovative techniques and strategies for teaching English language in general and teaching writing skills by using Blended approach in particular were practiced.

2. Statement of the Problem

According to the Ethiopia Education and Training Policy [9], the main goal of the policy is the cultivation of citizens with an all-rounded education capable of playing conscious and active role in the economic, social, and political life of the country at various levels. In relation to English language teaching and learning, this can be realized when students are engaged in different activities at large and exposed to use the language inside and outside the classroom.

Several studies have been conducted on writing skills. Accordingly, [16] conducted case study (dissertation) to explore EFL instructors' and students' perceptions and practices of task-based writing in Haramaya University. The data for this study were collected through questionnaires, interviews and observations. Quantitative and qualitative analysis were used. The findings of the study show that teachers lacked confidence to implement task-based writing because of their students' poor writing ability. As a result, the instructors preferred to use instructor-fronted approaches in the classroom. Students' lack of awareness about task-based learning led them not to tell about the meaning of task-based writing. This in turn made it difficult to know students' perceptions of

task-based writing. However, in this study, the instruments used to gather data were limited to some features of task-based writing, experimental design method were not used and the focus of this study were limited to students' and instructors perceptions and practices of tasks in the writing course material and the study employed the case study method.

[17] Conducted research to examine the impact of blended learning in developing English writing performance of first year students and to determine the level of computer attitudes of English language instructors towards using blended learning approach to teach writing. This quasi-experimental research revealed that students of experimental group performed better in writing skills course than students of control group. Instructors' attitudes towards computers were positive but their actual use of computers was moderate.

Nevertheless, the above research focused on computer assisted leaning in improving students writing skills and the pre-test and the posttest intervention were not compared; whereas, the current study focuses on the effectiveness of blended approach in enhancing students writing skills and the pre-test and post-test intervention were compared.

[18], in his research on enhancing students' writing skills through the genre approach examined the argumentative essay writing skills. The participants of the study were second year English students. Students had already taken basic writing skill course before. The students were exposed to a genre based writing practice with their writing teacher. The results revealed out that throughout their learning, even after their exposure to genre based argumentative essay drafting, students had serious problems of critiquing or rebutting opposition views and coming up with stronger refutations. However, they were able to show progress in terms of identifying the lexicon-grammatical features and overall rhetorical (genre) structure of argumentative essays. The paired samples t-test also indicated that the students' argumentative texts written during the post-intervention phase showed significant improvements compared to the pre-intervention drafts.

Different researchers have been studied on the students writing skills activity in general. But, little research in relation to the role of genre approach, process approach, blended learning approach, task based learning, the effects of collaborative writing activity using Google Docs on students' writing abilities has been studied. However, less attention has been paid to the effect of Blended approach in enhancing students writing skills specially focusing on by using experimental studies. As a result, no comprehensive theory appears to exist. Despite the fact that importance of writing skills has been mentioned by the above research works, few researchers have studied by using experimental studies. The research works have focused on single approach rather than the blended aspect of holistic approach. Therefore, as compared to other studies this study differs from other related researches.

However, the previously mentioned researches suffer from some limitations. The first group has been paid less attention to the effect of blended approach in enhancing students writing skills specially focusing on by using experimental studies. The studies focused on single approach rather than blended approach and are limited to

any of the three approaches (process or product or genre). The second group focuses on case study and descriptive research apart from experimental. Therefore, it is not sufficiently accurate. Hence, the current research is completely different from the above mentioned research in one hand it treats the three approaches simultaneously, on the other hand the treatment and controlled groups were considered.

Considering the weak sides of the three approaches (product, process and genre) and integrating them has its own significant role in enhancing students writing skills. For instance, the product approach has its own drawback. Accordingly: the learners' background knowledge and skills are not given due emphasis, the classroom activity is mostly controlled by the teacher's centered approach & planning a text is given moderately insignificant role. The disadvantages of process approach is it gives inadequate significance to the kind of texts that writers produce; it assumes all writing activities are following similar steps (process); it provides learners insufficient input in terms of linguistic knowledge. The negative side of genre approaches is that they undervaluing the processes needed to produce a text and see learners as largely passive [19].

Hence, the properties of the effect of blended approach in teaching writing to enhance students' writing skills are still not completely understood. Therefore, this is identified as a research gap. Therefore, conducting research on this area is very significant to fill the identified gap.

3. Objectives of the Study

3.1. General Objective of the Study

The general objective of the study was to examine the effect of blended approach in teaching writing to enhance students' writing skills.

Specific objectives of the Study were:

- To examine the effects of blended approach in developing the performance of students' writing skills of the treatment group;
- To explore whether students who are involved in blended learning strategy produce better written and better organized essays than students engaging in conventional teaching methods.
- To detect whether the students' attitudes and perceptions are positively affected by involvement in blended learning strategy.

3.2. Definition of Terms

Blended learning is an approach to teaching writing skills course through mixing the three writing approach (process, product and genre approach) in order to produce a better essay.

Blended approach is a hybrid mode of teaching by considering the advantage and disadvantages of the three approaches with the method of supporting different types of interaction for the overall enhancement of students writing skills.

Traditional approach is beliefs, or methods are ones that have existed for a long time without changing and used repeatedly for a long time.

3.3. Blended Approach Strategy

The blended approach incorporates the three approaches: namely the product, the process, and the genre approach. These three approaches have a dominant role in teaching writing skills. In order to develop a real and authentic purpose for foreign language instruction, the instructor should develop units which emphasize the communication of real meaning and the interactive use of the three approaches instead of focusing on the single approach. [12] suggests that blended approach is promoted through the use of small group tasks, such as generating a list of questions for research, responding to first drafts of writing, discussing the meaning of stories, deciding how to prepare a group report and acting in a readers' theater, which can help students learn language from each other. Teachers should provide authentically-based and interesting resources and opportunities through classroom writing activities materials, and teaching strategies which utilize blended approach to express meaning and interact with others [20].

To conclude, new pedagogical approaches to writing are enacted cannot be separated from the teacher's overall "vision" of education and from the roles that discourse of all kinds plays in the life of the classroom community. To attempt to "implement" a new form of writing pedagogy, however sound it is in itself, is unlikely to achieve the desired results if all other aspects of curricular activity remain unchanged? In other words, decisions about how to help students master the 'technology' of writing cannot usefully be taken on their own for, as with reading and talking, what students learn about writing will depend upon what they use writing to do.

3.4. Types of Strategic Knowledge for Blended Approach

There are three types of writing approaches needed for utilizing blended approach writing strategy: namely product, process & genre approach. These three approaches do have their own advantages and disadvantages. By giving more emphasis on their advantages in order to enhance students writing skills the three approaches are delivered to students by means of blended strategy. One important aspect of blended writing instruction is that it doesn't only stop at knowledge but also the procedural and practical aspects as well. Process approach is the awareness of how to develop well organized writing essay by means of chronological steps. Product approach means knowing when it is wise to use correct spelling, mechanics and other relevant grammar. The third one is genre approach that gives much more focus for how the students can use their social context, existing background knowledge and other aspects of strategies. These latter two types of strategic knowledge actually come from using this knowledge to avoid passive construction while writing or revising. Students as writers should be able to distinguish between the three approaches as well as applying the distinction between them in writing. They should make use of blended approach in writing strategically. They should know how to monitor and control writing process. In this study, blended approaches were taught via instruction and practice.

3.5. Teaching Strategy for Blended Writing Approach

The interactive nature of blended approach is viewed in its main pedagogical feature. Strategies are not learned best by reading textbooks or by listening to teachers. The strategy must address a real concern and be constructed over time with diminishing amounts of teacher assistance and increasing amounts of students' self-control [20]. To this end, the researcher recommends a four step instructional process which students are familiar with. These steps are as follows: 1. Identifying strategy worth in teaching blended approach 2. Introducing the strategy by modeling it 3. Providing adequate support for the students to try the blended approach with in continuous support 4. Helping the students work toward independent mastery of the strategy through repeated practice and reinforcement. The researcher makes use of these steps in the teaching and learning process to clarify and illustrate how they can be used. In step one, identifying strategies worth teaching means looking for strategies that are most likely helpful for students who are known as struggling writers. Using such strategies may help students overcome their writing difficulties via talking to those students about their fears of writing and how to overcome these fears, knowing their weakness in writing and trying to treat this weakness. Step two, introducing strategies by modeling them means speaking about thoughts while writing, calling a particular attention to the intended strategy asking students to compose a similar piece of writing in connection with the writing the teacher is doing. Here, the students are expected to get chances to deal their work in pairs. Step three; helping students to try a writing strategy with teacher assistance. Writing may be in the form of pair work-teamwork-individual work and some amount of it should be done with teachers' assistance as it is necessary to make sure that writers practice using the strategy being taught. Step four, helping students to write independently through repeated practices and reinforcement means giving students opportunities to strategy many times with describing amounts of writing strategies [21].

4. Methodology

4.1. Conceptual Frame Work

4.1.1. Components of the Conceptual Frame Work

Building the context

Before explaining what the cultural, grammatical and social context of writing and the application the writing activity, it is necessary to know what the learners previously know about this blended approach. The researcher asked the learners about their previous experience in relation to the idea of blended approach. Moreover, the researcher also asked them to write a short paragraph based on any kind of topic that they prefer. Furthermore, he also gave them a chance to share their own ideas with their colleagues about the paragraph that they have already written. This would give a chance for the researcher to draw a variety of learners' background knowledge that individual had in relation to the contexts.

Then, the researcher explained the importance of the social context, cultural settings and grammatical implications involving in the writing activity. At this phase students were able to express what they previously know about the writing activity and the researcher was taken an advantage of the learners' previous background or shared knowledge to set the context.

4.2. Modelling Phase

In the modelling phase the researcher started a discussion during the subsequent class, after building the context with a set of questions. This oral discussion was focused on developing learners' background knowledge by using the Functional Grammar (linguistic knowledge). In this phase the researcher and learners were analyzed the following questions: What is the purpose of the text? Who is the audience this text aims to reach? Who are the participants involved in the text? What is the structure and language feature of this text? Why we are writing this text? How can we organize the text?

After the discussion and different ideas that was given by the learners to answer these questions, the researcher was shared ideas. Then, the researcher used these to point out the important parts of each of the contents. After this, the researcher was explained the role and utilization of background knowledge, the application of selected and relevant words and the structural patterns of the text.

4.3. Join Construction Phase

At this phase of the circle, researcher and learners were worked together to construct whole examples of the writing and the researcher gradually reduce his contributions as learners gain greater control over their writing. The researcher and the learner were constructed the target texts together and the role of the researcher was changed from being the provider of all the information into a facilitator who guides learners. In this phase, the learners were empowered to create their own piece of work with the guidance of the researcher. The role of the learner was changed from an active observer into an autonomous learner who takes responsibility of his/her own learning. The aim of this phase was for the researcher to involve the learners in their own learning through the discussion and construction of a target text. The researcher was noted that learners were offered different suggestions and ideas to the person who were written the sentence and they were correct between each other if there is something written incorrectly or wrongly placed. The researcher only guide the learners when there is not a fully agreement between the group.

This phase was helped to give learners a strong foundation of the social context and the linguistic grammar points of each activities and it was helped them to move into the next phase- independent construction. Moreover, this phase was fostered discussion among students that ended up in the clarification of certain linguistic points.

4.4. Independent Construction

In this phase learners were written their second draft of each of the text. Next, the researcher was formed small

groups. Then, the researcher was asked the groups to read only the second draft of their group's members and give their peers some suggestions and advice that they found adequate for improving their peers' second drafts. This peer-editing phase was adapted to the traditional teaching and learning circle phases where the teacher is the only person in charge of giving the feedback.

Thus, learners had another opportunity to reflect on their weaknesses or areas of improvement by reading their peers' suggestions. With regard to the content that learners could include in their suggestions or advice, learners would not have to follow a format. In fact, they were free to decide how to write their piece of advice. In this peer-editing sub-phase, learners' was asked to analyze all the elements that are part of the writing analysis: moves, types of verbs, vocabulary, circumstances or context and cohesion.

This phase was given learners not only the opportunity to criticize in a constructive way their peers' work, but also to learn from their peers' errors and self-correct their own mistakes. It was another tool to reinforce what they have learned in previous phases and build up stronger bases to write their final version.

The amount and quality of the suggestions and advice that learners were written for their peers, as well as the level of commitment that learners were shown to this task, was remarkable. It is clear that cooperative peer editing will have a positive effect on each learners' writing process.

In this last phase, the learners were submitted their final version on time and they were expressed how useful and practical it was to include in their writing process the use of a blended learning platform.

4.5. Research Design and Methodology

The current study comes to examine the effectiveness of using the blended approach to writing on developing university students' writing skills. The study followed the quasi-experimental design. Two groups were chosen from the first year students. One was served as treatment group and the other one as control. The researcher was conducted one semester class course with the treatment group. Moreover, the researcher was administered a pre-test and post-test to the treatment and control groups to test the effect of using the blended approach to teach writing, which was applied to the treatment group. The treatment group was taught by the researcher using blended learning approach and control group was taught by conventional learning method. The study was followed both quantitative and qualitative research method. The quantitative research method was used for close ended questionnaire whereas qualitative research method was used for test.

4.6. Instruments of Data Collection

The main study variables were students writing skills performance test scores and attitude scores. To obtain the actual data from participants, the researcher used pretest and posttest scores of students on writing performance and attitude scale scores of teachers and students after

conducting class with treatment classes. The pre- and post-tests was constructed in relation to the intended and covered contents of the writing session including the additional contents that was developed by the researcher. To measure the students' attitude towards blended approach attitude items (Questionnaire) were developed. The items was adapted and structured by drawing on the relevant literature on students perceptions of attitudes toward the use of blended approach.

4.7. Pre Test

The main objective of the pre-test was to find out if there was any significant difference in blended learning strategy between the treatment group and the control group in writing skills course. The pre-test took 1 hour for writing essay. In pre-test the same title is given for all students to develop an essay. They are given a chance to write down an expository essay.

4.7.1. Post test

The main objective of post-test was in order to find out if there was any significant difference between the control and the treatment group in blended learning strategy in their writing abilities at the end of the experiment. Just as the pre-test, post-test was prepared for both groups. Similarly, the post-test took one hour for writing an essay.

4.7.2. Writing Essays

In the pre-test and post-test, all students in both groups were asked to write an essay on the following topic: "The Benefits of Internet". This prompt was specially chosen because it was more or less equivalent in difficulty and familiarity for all students in the two groups. The students were given 60 minutes to complete their essays. Since they had finished only one semester of university studies, they were considered to be at the lower-intermediate level.

4.8. Analysis and Findings

The main purpose of this study was to examine whether applying a blended approach in one particular classroom could improve and develop the students' writing skills. In this part the findings and results of the study are presented through analyses of the data obtained using the two different methods employed in this study. These data consist of the following: 1) the pre- and post-test scores allocated to the essays written by the students in both the treatment and control groups; 2) the students' responses to the blended learning approach questionnaires. The pre-and post-test scores of the students in both the treatment and control groups were used to answer the first research question 'Would students who are involved in blended learning strategy produce better written and better organized essays than students working conventional teaching methods?' While the data obtained from the pre-and post-tests of the students' questionnaires were used to answer the second research question 'Are students' attitudes and perceptions positively affected by involvement in blended learning strategy?'

4.9. The Judges and Judging

The essays of the students from both treatment (experimental) blended learning and control conventional learning groups before and after sixteen weeks' involvement in the writing class were rated and marked by two English language teachers. The raters were given a version of [22] rubric to use. The rating of the essays was based on six categories of writing: organization, development, cohesion, vocabulary, structure and mechanics. Since each of the six categories included ten levels, the students' essays were marked out of 60. After finishing marking the students' essays, a satisfactory coefficient was reported for these two markers. The researcher produced a mean score for each student in each category derived from the scores of the two markers.

Table 1. Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	56	100.0
	Excluded	0	.0
	Total	56	100.0

Table 2. Reliability statistics for treatment group Cronbach's alpha for the two judges

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	No. of Items
.829	.876	4

Table 4. Correlations of pairs of variables

		Second Marker Total pretest result	Second marker post test result	First Marker Total pretest result	First marker post test result
Second Marker Total pretest result	Pearson Correlation	1	.551**	.744**	.450*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.002	.000	.016
	N	28	28	28	28
Second marker post test result	Pearson Correlation	.551**	1	.783**	.924**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002		.000	.000
	N	28	28	28	28
First Marker Total pretest result	Pearson Correlation	.744**	.783**	1	.749**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	28	28	28	28
First marker post test result	Pearson Correlation	.450*	.924**	.749**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.016	.000	.000	
	N	28	28	28	28

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

In addition, the next table, which is concerned with consistency between the judges, indicates that there were no great variations in mean, variance or Cronbach's alpha. Utilizing scoring rubrics in writing assessment denotes the significance of rubrics as practical and useful means to assess the quality of writing tasks. Rubrics are set to help scorers (judges) evaluate students writing performances and provide them with very vivid descriptions about organization, development, cohesion, vocabulary, structure and mechanics. They are also practical for the purpose of describing one's competence in logical sequencing of ideas in producing a paragraph, use of sufficient and proper grammar and vocabulary related to the topic.

Table 5. Consistency between the judges

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Second marker post test result	67.4286	256.254	.699	.795
Second Marker Total pretest result	79.9643	380.702	.741	.771
First Marker Total pretest result	78.2143	421.360	.750	.798
First marker post test result	62.6071	292.766	.692	.774

Table 3. Reliability statistics for control group

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	No. of Items
.883	.903	4

The next table is concerned with the correlations of pairs of variables, shows that the consistency of the judges' ratings was between 0.50 and 0.90. The correlation coefficient, r , is a summary measure that describes the extent of the statistical relationship between two interval or ratio level variables. The correlation coefficient is scaled so that it is always between -1 and +1. When r is close to 0 this means that there is little relationship between the variables and the farther away from 0 r is, in either the positive or negative direction, the greater the relationship between the two variables.

The Pearson correlation coefficient measures the strength of linear association between two variables. The Pearson correlation coefficient, also known as the product moment correlation coefficient, is represented in a sample by r , while in the population from which the sample was drawn it is represented by ρ . The coefficient is measured on a scale with no units and can take a value from -1 through 0 to +1. If the sign of the correlation coefficient was positive, then a positive correlation would have existed.

The intra-class correlation coefficient is a number, usually found to have a value between 0 and 1. It is a well-known statistical tool. It refers to correlations with in a class of data (for example correlations with in repeated measurements of weight), rather than to correlations between two different classes of data.

The intra-class correlation coefficient is recommended as one measure (among others) of the reliability of an experimental method. It is sensitive for example to the extent to which subjects (individuals) keep their ranking order in repeated measurements. Moreover, it may indicate the ability of an experimental method to detect and measure systematic differences between subjects. This abilities limited since those differences may be more or less masked by individual variations of random nature within subjects and by errors (uncertainties) of random nature and biases (systematic errors) in the method of measurement.

It is evident from Table below that the variance between the two judges was very small, which indicates that their results were consistent and that they agreed with each other. This makes the judges inter-rater reliability is the extent to which their ratings agree each other. This also clearly indicates that the two judges while they are marking each of the results obtained from the respondents the marking variation based on the rubric is very small. So that, this shows the results were consistent and there is a clear consent among each other in scoring.

Table 6. Intra class Correlation Coefficient

	Intra class Correlation	95% Confidence Interval		F Test with True Value 0			
		Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Value	df1	df2	Sig
Single Measures	.548	.364	.724	5.856	27	81	.000
Average Measures	.829	.696	.913	5.856	27	81	.000

It is obvious from the above tables that agreeable or satisfactory correlation co-efficient was found for the first and second markers, since the first marker's scores correlated closely with those of the second marker. This result indicated that it would be unnecessary to employ a third marker to adjudicate between any differences found in the ratings given by the first and second markers, as originally planned.

4.10. Essay Scores in the Pre-test

Table 7. Comparing overall pre-test scores of essays written by students in the treatment Blended learning group in the control conventional group

	N	SD	Mean	Mean Difference	T	P
Pre-test: Treatment Blended learning Group	28	.85	16.9			
Pre-test: Control conventional Group	28	1.4	18.7	1.8	1.3	.178

The results presented in Table above show that the mean of the total score obtained by each student in the treatment Blended learning group in the pre-test was 16.2, whereas the corresponding mean for each student in the control conventional group was 18.6. The mean difference of 2.4 was not significant (independent-test: $t = 1.3$, $p < .178$).

4.11. Attitudes and Perceptions at the Pre-test

Since the questionnaire was concerned with comparing the pre-test attitudes of students in different groups, the independent t-test was utilized. Data from all questions from the blended approach writing questionnaires were analyzed and the results showed that there was no significant difference between the attitudes and perceptions of students in the treatment blended learning group and those of students in the control conventional group ($t = .77$, $p < .447$). As shown in the next Table below, the mean of the total score obtained by each student in the treatment blended learning group in the pre-test was 45.4, whereas the mean of the total score obtained by each student in the control conventional group in the pre-test was 45.3, with a mean difference of 0.1. Therefore, the results showed that there was no difference between the perceptions of students in the treatment blended learning group and those of students in the control conventional group before sixteen weeks' involvement in the writing class.

Table 8. Comparing pre-test scores relating to attitudes of students in treatment and control groups towards blended learning

	N	SD	Mean	Mean Difference	T	P
Pre-test: Treatment Blended learning Group	28	8.1	45.4			
Pre-test: Control conventional Group	28	5.7	45.3	0.1	.77	.447

The results from the pre-test thus ensured that, at the beginning of the instruction period, the two groups did not differ in essay scores or in attitudes and perceptions, and that any differences between the groups at later stages could only be ascribed to the differential treatments they received.

Table 9. Comparing overall pre- and post-test essay scores of students in the treatment blended learning group

	N	SD	Mean	Mean Difference	T	P
Pre-test: Treatment Blended Learning Group	28	4.3	16.2			
Post-test: Treatment Blended Learning Group	28	8.1	29.4	13.2	10.6	.000

The results confirmed the hypothesis that there would be significant differences in students' essays before and after involvement in the blended learning strategy. The raters' scores for the students' writing were then

analyzed separately for the six elements of organization, development, cohesion, structure, vocabulary and mechanics covered in Paulus' rubric. The paired t-test was used since this involved testing the same group twice.

5. Conclusion

This dissertation is one of the studies to have investigated the impact of using blended learning as a strategy to improve the English writing skills of students. This study adopted as a theoretical basis which emphasizes the role of instructors in developing the skills of less advanced individuals through blended learning approach. This model was found useful and effective in teaching and learning writing skills. The results showed that blended was beneficial for the pre-writing and revising stages of writing and less effective in the editing stage, which is concerned mainly with structure and mechanics. The attitudes and perceptions of students had also developed after their involvement in blended approach. Therefore, Blended learning approach improves students' skills and develops students' attitudes towards writing in English.

6. Recommendation

On the basis of recent research findings, it is advisable to suggest these recommendations to researchers, English as Foreign Language teachers: The researcher recommends that EFL teachers use blended approach in their teaching, since it enhances students' writing skills. Due to the important role that EFL teachers play in teaching writing skills, the researcher recommends that English Language department organize pre-service and in-service training programs for teachers in the use of blended approach and principles in their daily classroom practices. Curriculum designers are recommended to include blended approach in the English textbooks. Well-designed activities and tasks should be included in the teaching material.

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