

A Review on Impact of Blended Learning on the English Writing Skills

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Received: 18 May 2020

Received in revised form: 16 June 2020

Accepted: 25 June 2020

Published: 1 July 2020

ABSTRACT

Writing skill is one of the important language skills in the English language. In order to overcome some challenges faced by English as Second Language/ English as Foreign Language learners, different technologies are recommended to be used, and one of the examples is blended learning approach. Therefore, the paper aims to present a review of previous studies related to the impact of blended learning on the students' writing skills in English to examine if the blended learning method can make an impact on writing skills. After using the systematic searching method, a total number of 25 articles published between 2010 and 2020 were selected in this paper. From the findings, the majority of the articles were conducted in Asian countries. Analysis of the studies revealed that blended learning had been positively welcomed in many English as Second language/English as Foreign Language contexts by instructors and students. Blended learning has also been emphasized by many scholars to be implemented in English teaching and learning since this teaching approach paved the way and opened a new window of practicing the English language in English as a Second language/English as a Foreign Language context. Finally, it is suggested to use this approach for English writing lessons, as it can develop students' writing skills.

Keywords

Blended learning, Writing skills, English language learning, English as Second language, English as Foreign Language.

Introduction

English is one of the widespread languages and used almost by all people around the world because of the constant development of technology such as the internet (Pakir, 1999). It plays a crucial role in education and student are required to use it efficiently since it is essential for all professionals and in the job market nowadays (Flanegin & Rudd, 2000). The English language contains four main skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing). Writing skill is considered an essential part of everybody's life, in business, in creativity, and scholarly activities (Keshta, 2013) but it is considered as a complex skill than other language skills since it requires comprehensive and systematic instructions (So & Lee, 2013). It requires writers to make compositions involving content, organization, structure, and mechanics appropriately to convey meaning through writing simultaneously (Brown, 2007). Therefore, English as Second Language (ESL)/English as Foreign Language (EFL) students face problems in communicating their ideas effectively because of the lack of creativity and sufficient knowledge in English writing skills (Adas & Bakir, 2013), and writing becomes much more complicated. On the other hand, Melor & Nur (2011) specified that ESL/EFL students' performance in English language skills has been unsatisfactory over the years. Therefore, to overcome this problem So & Lee (2013) suggested giving more opportunities for learners to write and activities on the components of these skills in a systematic and organized manner. In other words, writing as an important skill requires effective methods of practicing and teaching to enhance students' ability to communicate ideas and feelings via writing. Recognizing this, several associations have made attempts to find a way of improving learning and practicing English writing skills (Mourtaga, 2010).

Furthermore, research into the impact of technological resources and methods in teaching and learning has been undertaken as a result of the technology revolution. Information technology can be seen as a crucial part of foreign language education, contributing to considerable changes in ESL/EFL learners teaching and learning. Djiwandono (2013) stated that "Learning is no longer confined to the four walls and whiteboard of a classroom." Technological

advances have been implemented in education in recent years and have played an incredibly important role in teaching and learning foreign languages (Kupelian, 2001; Warschauer & Healey, 1998). Indeed, the use of technology in education has opened the way for successful EFL activities (Rahim, 2019), and it has provided hundreds of online and offline tools for EFL practices that became the fundamental component of language teaching. Also, the approaches in language teaching and learning are changed since distance learning, virtual education, blended learning, and other tools have been the significant learning platforms that have attracted teachers and learners.

One of the new approaches is blended learning, which has been practiced and applied by many high institutions all over the world. Blended learning is focusing on the use of information technologies in the creation of new learning situations that promote constructive learning and learner-centered methods. This teaching approach combines the advantages of face-to-face and online learning to suit individual differences (Bersin & Associate, 2003), which is a flexible, accessible, and meaningful way of teaching and learning (Seffner & Kepler, 2015). On the other hand, Bonk & Graham (2006) stated that this approach is not only about applying available technology, but it seeks to find better ways of supporting students and providing them with the best possible learning and teaching experiences, as well as supporting teachers. So, despite the intensive implementation of this approach in other fields, it is also linked with English teaching methodology, instructional technologies, and computer-assisted language learning (Picciano, Dziuban & Graham, 2013).

Correspondingly, according to Zhang & Zhu (2018), to find out the best environment for all students is a challenging task. However, the blended learning approach makes possible an “accessible, flexible, active, interactive, encouraging, and inspiring” teaching and learning environment (p. 268). Wold (2011) suggested that blended learning is required to be applied as a useful instructional model for practicing writing skills instead of solely using an online learning model. So, the blended learning approach in English language teaching and learning provided this opportunity to overcome this problem and enhance students’ performance in English (Wasoh, 2016). It is supposed to assist students in improving their skills and help them overcome their writing challenges and promote learning through a creative combination of teaching and learning strategies (Geta & Olango, 2016). Therefore, this study aims to review the recent related literature on the impact of blended learning on ESL/EFL students’ writing skills to provide a better understanding of the related concepts which could enhance writing skills practice.

Literature Review

Writing Skills

Writing is defined as "a basic communication skill and a unique asset in the process of learning a language" (Chastain, 1988: 244). It is a mental activity involving formulating ideas, considering how to express them, and arranging them in a way to be clear for the addressee (Sokolik, 2003) and social activity as a means of communication in which one can convey their message to readers. It is considered significant, but one of the complicated skills in language production (Akhtar, Hassan, Saidalvi, & Hussain, 2019) since it involves idea follow, capturing mental demonstrations of knowledge and practice with subjects (József, 2001). The complexity of the writing skills lies in arranging and producing a coherent, concise and readable text (Richards & Renandya, 2005) and requires organizing the idea corresponding to a specific intention (Haring, 1994; Johnstone et al., 2002).

Besides that, writing is a procedure that takes place over a certain amount of time. The writer needs more opportunities to carry out their internal feeling and process in writing skills (Sulisworo et al., 2016). It is a series of sentences organized in a particular order and connected in a meaningful way. Similarly, the sentences are interconnected to other sentence structures as a whole unity. Moreover, a full text may contain by a series of sentences that have main sentences followed by supporting sentences. It indicates that the writing is a complex cognitive activity, and writers are required to control the content, format, structure, and another related linguistic component at the level of the sentence (Flower & Hayes, 1981).

Furthermore, academic writing skills demands constant practice and students are supposed to develop their writing skills in formal instructional circumstances (Giridharan, & Robson, 2011). Mastery of the writing skill is essential for the students since it allows them to express their feeling, thoughts, knowledge efficiently. It helps the writers to express their feelings and thoughts in the meaningful form and sequence of words and mental interaction through written messages (Knoch et al., 2016; Jani & Mellinger, 2015). It also assists them in developing their confidence,

fluency, and creativity. So, getting sufficient knowledge of writing allows learners to communicate effectively in different ways to share their feeling and thoughts (Sulisworo et al., 2016).

Writing Skills among ESL/EFL Students and Its Challenges

Looking at the previous literature, lack of proficiency in writing skills of the English language has always been a significant challenge among ESL/EFL learners (Selvaraj & Aziz, 2019), and it has been recognized as a complicated process (Challob et al., 2016). This skill has some specific requirements, such as the need for vocabulary, grammar, and the ability to structure good sentences to compose good writing. Similarly, (Ghabool et al. 2012, p.130; Ramasamy & Abdul Aziz, 2018, p.2266) reported a "lack of certain skill such as proper use of grammar, conventions, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling" as another common issue in writing among ESL/EFL students. Students facing such situations lose their interest, and it demotivates them gradually to write. Therefore, failure to choose a suitable strategy to teach writing and lack of teachers' pedagogical knowledge in writing as a contributing factor that cannot produce competent writers aiming ESL/EFL students (Yunus & Chan, 2016).

Likewise, the complexity of writing and its requirements make EFL learners have negative perceptions towards writing, impede their progress, and lead them to poor writing performance. Therefore, Hussin et al. (2015) suggest online learning environments for practicing writing in ESL/EFL contexts to enable students to get writing feedback and comments from their peers and teachers at any time. It would also assist them in sharing information and experience through the online discussion. Moreover, new technologies are valuable sources of shaping students' writing skills in various ways, helps the student to grasp the opportunities for collaborating with others more efficiently, share their feeling with a larger audience. Hence, it will lead them to be competent writers with technology support such as blended learning approach.

Blended Learning

Blended learning has long been with the traditional approach and extensively implemented in schools and at universities since the 1980s (Pappas, 2018) and has got the broad interest of researchers in the field of English language since the late 1990s (Mingyong, 2015). Besides, Sharma & Barrett (2007) stated that the term blended learning emerged in the business field to corporate training and then applied in higher education.

Blended learning is a revolution in EFL teaching and learning because of the inequitable use of the traditional method in English language teaching (Rahim, 2019). He also pointed on student-centered learning as the necessity of most institutions. Therefore, blended learning is suggested as an approach that will be able also to facilitate student-centered learning, offering the learners with collaborative tasks and provide the opportunity for teachers to design activities considering the students' needs.

It offers a range of inspiring and adaptive learning experiences and engages students in a positive and insightful learning environment (Rybushkina & Krasnova, 2015). It gets more important because of its flexibility in consent, the learner's needs, individual differences, different learning styles, competency in learning. It also provides an exciting teaching and learning environment for the English language and affects the whole process of FL learning (Challob et al., 2016). Furthermore, it provides flexible resources to make the learning environment more active, offering students a new learning experiment (Oh & Park, 2009; Davis & Fill, 2007). Moreover, it equips teachers to be more helpful in utilizing technology as well (Fakhir, 2015) and saves time (McCarthy & Murphy, 2010).

Blended learning also supports a flexible learning environment, diversity of learning style, learning competence, and learning skills (Huang, Zhou & Wang, 2006). It also helps to shift teacher-centered approach to students centered, support course management activities, offer a variety of resources for students, and improve teacher-student, student-student, student-content, student-outside interaction (Al Fiky, 2011). Finally, a variety of recent studies have shown the effectiveness of blended learning to improve writing performance. Sulisworo et al. (2016) described blend learning as a flexible approach that makes the opportunity for practicing and improving writing skills, which are still a problem in English learning.

Methodology

The researchers searched a number of articles in four journal databases, including Web of Science journal database, Springer journal database, Eric journal database, and ScienceDirect journal database and Google Scholar as well. All the journal articles identified through the mentioned databases searched and evaluated relate to the topical relevance and determined screening criteria. Moreover, the current study was restricted for the last 10 years. During the search process, the “impact of blended learning on the writing skills of ESL/EFL learners” term was used. The abstracts of the journals were investigated to find out the related studies in ESL/EFL writing at the university level. Finally, studies that were written in languages other than English, conference proceedings, and the articles were not accessible for full text were also excluded. So, the total number of 349 articles obtained from four databases and 25 articles selected based on the formulated criteria and included in the current study.

Findings of the Study

This section will present the results of the systematic review of 25 articles related to blended learning in students’ English Skill. The results include analysis of geographical distribution, temporal distribution, the research method of blended learning studies, and the effectiveness of the blended learning approach.

Analysis of Geographical Distribution

Analysis of the articles based on the geographical location shows that the majority of the studies (n=24) conducted in Asian countries. China, with the (n=4) articles, is top-ranked among countries. Besides, there is only one (n=1) article found in Europe (Finland). Similarly, only one (n=1) articles found in Africa. As indicated that there are fewer articles found from the context of African and European countries. Table 1 shows the detailed information about the study grouped based on the location.

Table 1. Geographical Distribution of Studies

Region	Country	No. studies	Studies
Asia	China	4	Mingyong (2015, February); Zhou (2018); Shao, Gao, Zhang, Yao & Geng (2015, July); Liu (2013)
	Indonesia	1	Sulisworo, Rahayu & Akhsan (2016)
	Iran	2	Arani (2012); Hosseinpour, Biria, & Rezvani (2019)
	Malaysia	2	Rahman (2018); Challob, Bakar & Latif (2016).
	Kuwait	1	Milad (2017).
	Pakistan	1	Shaikh, Lohar & Shah (2020).
	Palestine	2	Adas & Bakir (2013); Bakeer (2018)
	Turkey	1	Hos, Yagci & Cinarbas (2016).
	Viet Nam	1	Huong (2018)
	Saud Arabia	2	Al Zumor, Al Refaai, Eddin & Al-Rahman (2013); Alfahadi, Alsalhi & Alshammari (2015)
	Thailand	3	Dawilai, S., Champakaew, W., & Kamyod, C. (2017, June); Banditvilai, C. (2016); Ferriman, N. (2013).
	South Korea	1	So & Lee (2013)
	Japan	1	Miyazoe & Anderson (2012)
	Philippine	1	Mabuan & Ebron (2016).
Europe	Finland	1	Tuomainen, (2016)
Africa	Ethiopia	1	Geta & Olango (2016).

Analysis of Temporal Distribution

The result of the year of each publication shows the growing interest in 2016 on the impact of blended learning on the ESL/EFL students’ writing skills. Furthermore, after considering all criteria and excluding the articles, it shows no publication in 2014 and less publication in 2019 and 2020.

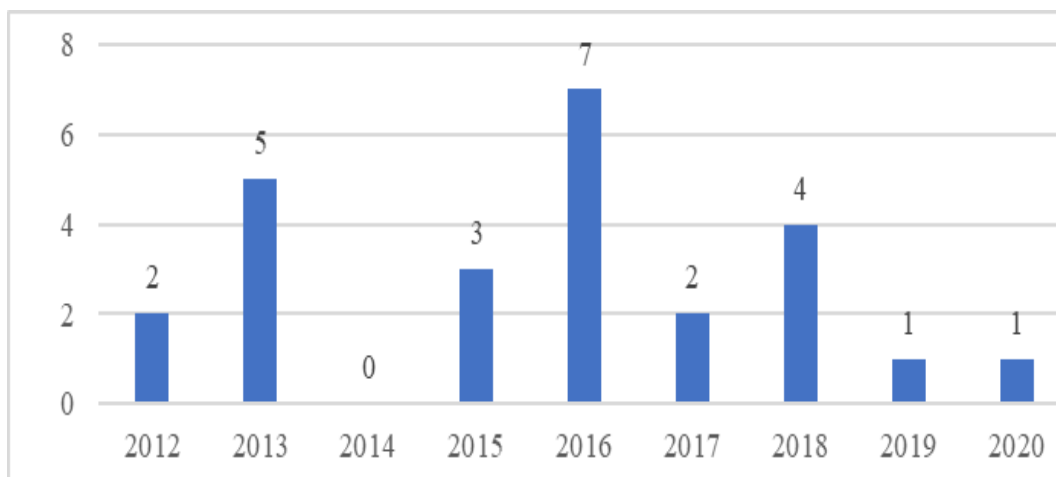


Figure 1. Temporal Distribution (number of paper and year)

Analysis of Research Design of Studies

The table below shows the frequency and percentage of the research method of blended learning studies. Based on the frequencies, more than half of the studies were quantitative (n=14), followed by (n=9) of these studies used mixed methods research approach. Meanwhile, there were two studies found with the qualitative research method.

Table 2. Frequency and percentages of the research design of studies

Design	Studies	Frequency	Percentage
Mix-methods	Hosseinpour, Biria, & Rezvani (2019); So & Lee (2013); Miyazoe & Anderson (2012); Mingyong (2015, February); Mabuan, & Ebron, (2016); Bakeer (2018); Alfahadi, Alsalhi, & Alshammari (2015); Huong (2018); Tuomainen (2016).	9	36%
Quantitative	Shaikh, Lohar, Shah (2020); Milad (2017); Adas & Bakir (2013); Zhou (2018); Banditvilai (2016); Rahman (2018); Liu (2013); Al Zumor, Al Refaai, Eddin, & Al-Rahman (2013); Sulisworo, Rahayu & Akhsan (2016) Hos, Yagci & Cinarbas (2016); wang, Shao, Gao, Zhang, Yao, & Geng (2015, July); Geta & Olango (2016); Ferriman (2013); Dawilai, Champakaew, & Kamyod (2017, June).	14	56%
Qualitative	Arani (2012); Challob , Bakar & Latif (2016)	2	8%
Total		25	100

Analysis of Effectiveness of Blended Learning Approach

The result shows that blended learning has been deemed a supportive language teaching and learning approach in ESL/EFL context. As the findings indicate, the majority of the reviewed studies point out the implementing blended learning improved English students' writing skills. There is only one study reported no statistically significant differences between the experimental and control groups on any of the dependent variables. Likewise, another study which is carried out using Facebook to increase writing skill has shown positive and negative aspects. Similarly, in another study implementing blended learning using the Embido application, no differences found in two out of five aspects of writing skills.

Table 3. The frequency and percentages effectiveness of blended learning approach

Effectiveness	Studies	Frequency	Percentage
Improve	Adas & Bakir (2013); So & Lee (2013); Arani (2012); Miyazoe & Anderson (2012); Mingyong (2015, February); Zhou (2018); Dawilai, Champakaew & Kamyod (2017, June); Huong (2018); Banditvilai (2016); Milad (2017); Hos, Yagci & Cinarbas (2016); wang, Shao, Gao, Zhang, Yao & Geng (2015, July); Al Zumor, Al Refaai, Eddin, & Al-Rahman (2013); Bakeer (2018), Geta & Olango (2016); Rahman (2018); Liu (2013); Alfahadi, Alsalhi & Alshammari (2015); Challob, Bakar & Latif (2016); Mabuan & Ebron (2016); Shaikh, Lohar, Shah (2020) and Tuomainen (2016).	22	88%
Not Improve	Ferriman (2013)	1	4%
Others	Sulisworo, Rahayu & Akhsan (2016); Hosseinpour, Biria & Rezvani (2019);	2	8%
Total		25	100%

Discussions

This section will discuss the results of geographical distribution, temporal distribution, the research method of blended learning studies, types of intervention, and effectiveness of the blended learning approach. Blended learning has been positively welcomed in most of the educational settings in ESL/EFL context. The findings revealed that the implementation of this learning approach in 14 countries in Asia (refer to table 1) had a significant impact on enhancing students' writing skills and other contexts as well. Besides that, the analysis of temporal distribution showed a growing interest in 2016. Moreover, for the research method of blended learning studies, the result indicated that the majority of the studies carried out using a quantitative research method followed by experimental research design in general. Furthermore, the majority of the studies pointed out the positive impact of blended learning on English students' writing skills.

The analysis of the articles showed that the scholars obtained a positive result of implementing blended learning using many types of interventions available for practicing language learning and language skills. Many types of online platforms applied to investigate the benefits of integrating blended learning in developing writing abilities. For instance, MOODLE (Adas & Bakir, 2013) a prototype of an instructional model writing in blended learning which combines an offline class with an online class using CMC tools, such as e-mail, bulletin board system (BBS), blogs and chatting programs (So & Lee, 2013), Blogs to blended learning writing class (Arani, 2012), discussion forums, blogs, and wikis (Miyazoe & Anderson, 2012), computers, the Internet, Autonomous Learning Network Platform and Social Networking Service (Mingyong, 2015), BL learning mode based on Connectivism and Writing Process (Zhou, 2018); Problem-Based Blended Learning (PBBL) (Dawilai et al., 2017), online learning course (Huong, 2019), e-learning strategies (Banditvilai, 2016; Bakeer, 2018), Web-Quests (Milad, 2017). Additionally, online activities (Hos et al., 2016; Geta & Olango, 2016; Alfahadi et al., 2015; Shaikh et al., 2020; Tuomainen, 2016), Weibo and WeChat (Wang et al., 2016), blackboard learning management system (Al Zumor et al., 2013), online activities (e-forums, emails, and websites) (Abdul Rahman, 2018), a bulletin board (Ferriman, 2013), google, email, and online dictionaries (Liu, 2013), blogs and online Viber discussion (Challob et al., 2016). Moreover, Bl using email (Mabuan, & Ebron, 2016), Facebook (Sulisworo et al., 2016), and finally Edmodo mobile application (Hosseinpour et al., 2019).

Besides, the review showed that blended learning impacts the overall structure of the writing skills and its components. Adas & Bakir (2013) reported that Bl improved significantly the students' ability using a topic sentence, spelling, and grammar, using the punctuation marks appropriately, capitalization, and able to develop better coherent paragraphs. In another study, the new teaching model impacted the writing skills developed in terms of content relevance, content sufficiency, organization structure, and language expression (Zhou, 2018). He also mentioned that the traditional teaching approach could not effectively improve the students' English writing ability. Moreover, Milad (2017) applied a blended course using WQs. The student equipped with writing skill and were able

to produce a composition in terms of coherence and cohesion. In other words, they were able to write considering morphological relationships through grammatical cohesion and sequence of the ideas using the transition to achieve coherence. Similarly, in a study, Shaikh et al., (2020) reported that BL had a positive impact on writing skills the students' writing skill improved significantly in terms of mechanics, content, grammar as well as vocabulary. Moreover, it also had a positive impact on some aspects, especially in improving the skill of shaping and organizing the ideas into written form (Sulisworo et al., 2016). Finally, it has impacted and improved the organization, grammar, structure, content, vocabulary, and spelling skills of the students (Geta & Olango, 2016).

However, some studies did not show any significant effect of BL using online platforms in enhancing students' writing skills. In a study conducted by Ferriman (2013) using Nicenet, a common type of asynchronous CMC (Online discussion boards) at a Thai international college found that that the experimental group had higher means on six of the nine outcomes. However, none of the outcomes was statistically significant. Similarly, Sulisworo et al. (2016) conducted a study using Facebook, and the negative aspect of this approach was lack of increase in the student's skills in Flavor aspect and Mechanics aspect due to time restrictions in learning. Moreover, blended learning using Edmodo mobile application did not promote all five aspects of the writing skill in the same manner. Three aspects of writing, namely organization, vocabulary, and mechanics, were improved. In comparison, there were no differences between the two groups regarding the other two aspects of writing, including content and grammar (Hosseinpour, Biria, & Rezvani, 2019). Nonetheless, the majority of the studies perceived favorably by the participants and found it useful for developing their writing skills.

Furthermore, it has also impacted the other skills in the English language, together with writing skills. The participants reported that their language skills had been partially improved. The review showed that BL impacted vocabulary and Listening (Hos et al., 2016); grammar, and listening (Dawilai et al., 2017); pronunciation and communicating skills (listening and speaking), vocabulary and knowledge of English grammar (Huong, 2019); listening, speaking, reading (Banditvilai, 2016). Similarly, Al Zumor et al. (2013) reported that participants in this study consistently noted the clear advantages of this new experience in developing their writing skills and enriching their English vocabulary, spelling, listening, grammar, pronunciation. Also, Bakeer, (2018) reported in his study that the newly introduced approach to students facilitated the learning experience, improved their linguistic capacity, and enriched their knowledge and understanding in language use. It indicates that implementing BI arises the possibility of enhancing other skills as well.

Conclusion, Implication, and Limitations

The study reviewed 25 studies related to the impact of blended learning on ESL/EFL students' writing skills. It is found that blended learning received much attention as a way of teaching and learning English and has a positive impact on enhancing student writing skills. Implementing blended learning instead of traditional and online teaching approaches result in many benefits for instructors and students. It supports flexible teaching, and learning environments result in the significant development in language learning, language skills particularly writing skills. It provides opportunities for ESL/EFL learners to develop their self-learning, manage their learning, help them be independent learners, motivate them to practice the language authentically, and engage in the learning environment. It also promotes interaction between students with collaborative activities. Furthermore, it enhances students to shape and organize their idea, develops sub-skills such as writing content, grammar skill, and vocabulary knowledge. More importantly, it helps students to reduce anxiety and emotional pressure creating a positive psychological atmosphere. Nonetheless, despite benefits, researchers encountered some challenges in terms of implementing blended learning in the ESL/EFL context and suggested to be investigated through further studies.

In this paper, there are some limitations. Only 25 articles are reviewed published between 2010 and 2020. Thus, in the future, more articles with more keywords should be considered and reviewed to generalize the findings. In parallel with this, the result showed that the majority of the studies carried out investigating the effectiveness of blended learning in terms of students' perspective. So, more research needs to be done to investigate teachers' perspectives regarding the challenges that they face implementing blended learning in teaching writing skills. Besides, for the implication of the study, ESL/EFL teachers can refer to the result of this review to identify the positive impact of blended learning using different types of interventions. Since implementing blended learning requires awareness of instructors on their students' needs and train them on self-learning. Researchers can also refer if they are interested in identifying the impact of blended learning on English writing skills.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to thank the Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) for their support in making this project possible. This work was supported by the Research University Grant Program: [Q.J130000.2653.18J20] initiated by UTM.

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