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BLENDED LEARNING STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE ACADEMIC WRITING SKILLS IN UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT Blended learning in Malaysia has become a popular educational approach as it integrates online and face-to-face learning to provide students with a more flexible and engaging experience. Many higher education institutions have adopted this approach to meet the needs of digitally savvy students while maintaining quality education. Using the UBI20402 Academic Reading and Writing course as a case study, the paper evaluates the integration of digital tools, multimodal resources, and structured teaching methodologies to achieve CEFR B2-level learning outcomes. A mixed-methods methodology was employed, comprising the analysis of student performance metrics, surveys to capture student feedback, and instructor observations. The results highlighted that blended learning significantly enhanced students' understanding of academic writing structures and processes. These include students who found the integration of digital tools and multimodal resources highly engaging and helpful for understanding complex academic texts, whilst instructor observations revealed that structured teaching methodologies increased classroom participation, collaboration, and students' critical thinking and analytical skills when combined with digital tools. In conclusion, blended learning strategies offer a solid foundation for teaching academic writing while effectively meeting the needs of a wide range of students. Future research could explore mobile-friendly platforms and examine the long-term impact of blended learning on students' academic achievement.
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Keywords: blended writing, academic writing, synchronous, asynchronous

INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, where higher education institutions aim to give students a flexible and interesting learning experience, blended learning has become an innovative approach to education. By combining online and in-person instruction, this educational approach enables students to take advantage of technological innovations while preserving crucial classroom interactions (Jassni et al., 2024). Blended learning presents a chance to meet students' changing needs while maintaining the provision of high-quality education in a time when they are depending more and more on technology for communication and learning. Hence, it is critical to assess how well institutions are accomplishing the desired learning outcomes as they integrate digital tools, multimodal resources, and structured teaching methodologies. The UBI20402 Academic Reading and Writing course provides a valuable case study for exploring how blended learning influences students' performance in academic writing, specifically aligned with the CEFR B2 proficiency level.

Blended learning has become increasingly popular in Malaysian universities, with many institutions leveraging technological advancements to improve teaching and learning processes (Ramalingam et al. 2021; Chan et al. 2023). While the concept of blended learning was introduced in Malaysia as early as 2015 (Rahman et al., 2015), its implementation became more prevalent during the COVID-19 pandemic (Seong et al.,

2022). The crisis accelerated the transition toward digital and hybrid education, with higher education institutions integrating online platforms and remote learning tools into their curricula. As the country moved into the post-pandemic recovery phase, universities continued to embrace blended learning as a long-term strategy to improve accessibility and learning flexibility. Ramasamy et al., (2021) noted that both public and private universities in Malaysia have increasingly adopted blended learning as their primary teaching and learning approach. It was said that the shift to blended learning is consistent with global educational trends which recognised the need for pedagogical approaches that help students develop digital literacy and independent learning skills. Furthermore, in the context of language education, particularly academic writing, blended learning makes it easier to access a wide range of resources including interactive learning platforms, online discussion forums, and automated feedback systems. These elements help students to analyse and write well-structured academic essays, which is an important skill for higher education success. Several recent research studies have been conducted specifically to outline blended learning practices in a variety of settings, as well as their advantages and disadvantages (Seong et al., 2022); however, research on its effectiveness in achieving academic writing proficiency is limited. By addressing this gap, the current study examines the use of blended learning strategies such as digital tools and structured teaching methodologies in the UBI20402 course to determine their impact on students' learning outcomes.

Problem statement

While previous research has focused on blended learning in language acquisition, little attention has been paid to its specific application in academic writing courses. In this course, many students struggle to understand the main ideas of complex texts, academic writing structures, critical analysis, and argumentation, all of which are required for CEFR B2 proficiency. Furthermore, the efficacy of digital tools and multimodal resources in increasing engagement and comprehension also remains a source of concern. Thus, the purpose of this study is to determine whether blended learning strategies help students in developing their academic writing skills and meet the required proficiency levels.

Research Questions

This study aims to answer the following research questions:
1. What are students' perceptions of blended learning in the context of academic writing instruction?
2. How do structured teaching methodologies within blended learning influence classroom participation, collaboration, and critical thinking?
3. How does the integration of digital tools and multimodal resources in a blended learning environment impact students' academic writing skills?

Significance of the Research

This study adds to the growing body of research on blended learning by providing empirical evidence about its impact on academic writing instruction. The findings will help instructors, curriculum developers, and policymakers to improve blended learning strategies for language courses. This study also offers useful insights into effective

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pedagogical practices by emphasising the importance of digital tools, multimodal resources, and structured teaching methodologies. Furthermore, it also paves the way for future research on mobile-friendly learning platforms and the long-term effects of blended learning on students' academic success, especially in language courses.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Blended learning which combines traditional face-to-face instruction with online educational technologies has become increasingly prevalent in higher education worldwide, including Malaysia. This literature review investigates the evolution of blended learning in Malaysian higher education, its impact on English as a Second Language (ESL) learners' writing skills, and the challenges and opportunities that come with its implementation.

The Integration of Blended Learning in Malaysian Higher Education

Over the last decade, Malaysian higher education has seen a significant shift towards blended learning. which combines traditional face-to-face instruction with online educational technologies. This was driven by national policy initiatives and pedagogical reforms starting from 2011. During the year, the Malaysian government introduced the National e-Learning Policy (Dasar e-Pembelajaran Negara, or DePAN) which encouraged higher education institutions to build both infrastructure and e-content (Hamid et al., 2021). The policy was updated to DePAN 2.0 in 2015 to emphasise innovation, lifelong learning, and the role of structured digital pedagogies Initially, the integration of blended learning was gradual, with institutions testing various methodologies such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), Learning Management Systems (LMS) and other web-based technologies to improve pedagogical effectiveness (Ramasamy et al., 2021) to improve pedagogical effectiveness. More recently, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 served as a catalyst, which hastening the integration of digital tools and online platforms into traditional education in universities.

Mahsum et al. (2021) stated that many higher education institutions have increasingly adopted information and communication technology (ICT)-based alternatives such as blended learning to ensure the continuity of teaching and learning outside of the traditional classroom setting. In recent years, the use of blended learning in higher education has grown significantly as several Malaysian universities have been at the forefront of using blended learning strategies (Drysdale et al., 2013; Maroco et al., 2016; Adams et al., 2020; Fisher et al., 2021). In addition to this, research into the effectiveness of blended learning in Malaysian higher education has produced encouraging results. Jassni et al. (2024) examined the use of web-based technologies in blended learning environments for English as a Second Language (ESL) students. According to the findings, such integration not only improved students' language proficiency but also helped them develop critical thinking and communication skills for the twenty-first century. Moreover, Thang et al. (2013) and Rahman et al. (2020) also discovered that blended learning in English language education greatly improved students' learning experiences while also meeting their linguistic and behavioural needs. In their studies, students reported that this approach provided a more flexible and supportive learning environment which helped them improve their writing skills. Overall, these findings

underscore the growing importance of blended learning in Malaysian higher education, demonstrating its effectiveness in enhancing students' language proficiency, critical thinking, and overall academic performance while providing a more flexible and engaging learning environment.

Impact of Blended Learning on ESL Learners' Writing Skills

Several studies have looked into the effectiveness of blended learning in improving ESL learners' writing proficiency in Malaysia. Hassan et al. (2021) have carried out a quasi- experimental study with 60 ESL students at a Malaysian polytechnic. Their study found that students who were exposed to blended learning performed significantly better in writing than those who received traditional instruction. The study attributed this improvement to the interactive and adaptable nature of blended learning which encourages active participation and provides access to a wide range of learning materials. Similarly, Abdul Rahman et al. (2020) used focus group interviews to investigate university students' attitudes towards blended learning in writing courses. Participants reported that the blended approach improved their writing skills while also increasing their self-confidence and interest in learning English. The combination of online resources and in-person interactions was thought to help students gain a better understanding of writing conventions and structures. Moreover, Kaur and Sandaran (2022) also conducted additional research into the impact of blended learning on young ESL learners' sentence writing skills. Using a mixed-method design, the researchers discovered that the blended approach significantly improved students' writing abilities and motivation. The combination of digital tools and traditional teaching methods resulted in an engaging learning environment that emphasised active participation and practice. Zamri and Narasuman (2023) similarly found that blended learning improved ESL students' self-efficacy and overall English ability, including writing performance. To conclude, these studies demonstrate the positive impact of blended learning on ESL learners' writing proficiency in Malaysia.

Beyond the Malaysian context, international study also confirms these benefits. In an experimental study with Pakistani ESL students, Mahmood, Sharif, and Aleem (2024) found that the blended learning group significantly outperformed the traditional instruction group in paragraph writing. These improvements were observed in vocabulary use, grammatical accuracy, and reflective thinking. In a different context, Ismael, Abu Bakar, and Latif (2016) looked at a collaborative blended-learning writing environment with EFL (which is closely connected to ESL) students and showed that blended learning enhanced writing performance and decreased writing anxiety. In a similar vein, Othman, Rahmat, and Ahmad (2019) emphasised that teacher preparedness and digital competency continue to be obstacles in blended ESL writing classes since teachers' lack of technology expertise might demotivate students and obstruct the advantages of blended learning.

In sum, research from within Malaysia and international sources shows that blended learning generally improves ESL/EFL students' writing abilities, particularly in terms of motivation, engagement, self-efficacy, and writing performance. However, real-world issues with teacher preparation and students' flexibility need careful execution and continuous assistance.

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Challenges and Opportunities for Implementing Blended Learning

While the advantages of blended learning are obvious, its implementation in Malaysia faces numerous challenges. Significant challenges have been identified, including inconsistent internet connectivity, limited access to technological resources, and the need for comprehensive educator training programs. Sareen & Mandal (2024) identified barriers such as inconsistent internet connectivity, inadequate technological infrastructure, and insufficient training for educators to effectively use digital tools. These challenges are especially acute in rural and underserved areas, where access to high-speed internet and advanced educational technologies is limited. Additionally, in one study, Sabre et al. (2022) found that insufficient infrastructure and technical support impede effective blended learning implementation in Malaysian higher education institutions, whilst Zulkflee et al. (2022) discovered that primary school teachers face challenges due to limited technological resources and a lack of professional development opportunities which affects their ability to effectively integrate blended learning into their teaching practices. Similarly, Namyssova et al. (2019) also highlighted additional barriers including insufficient institutional support, large class sizes, and a lack of digital literacy among students, which affected students' performance and learning outcomes in blended learning environments. Furthermore, Al-Ayed and Al-Tit (2021) emphasized that successful blended learning adoption depends not only on technology but also on institutional and student-related factors.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study used a mixed-methods research design to assess how blended learning affects academic writing proficiency in the UBI20402 Academic Reading and Writing course. The methodology combines quantitative and qualitative methods to ensure a thorough understanding of student learning outcomes, engagement, and instructor observations. The study has three main components: (1) student surveys to collect feedback on digital tools, multimodal resources, and structured teaching methodologies, (2) instructor observations to assess classroom participation, collaboration, and critical thinking skills, and (3) analysis of student performance metrics to assess academic writing proficiency.

Data Collection Methods
Data collection consists of multiple instruments:

Table 1: Instruments for Data Collection

RQ	Type of data collection	Descriptions
RQ1	Surveys	Structured questionnaires are administered to students to capture their experiences with blended learning, engagement with digital tools and perceptions of instructional methodologies. This instrument combines Likert-scale items to quantitatively measure student perceptions and open-ended questions to gather qualitative insights for thematic analysis.

| RQ2 | Instructors' Observations | Instructors document classroom dynamics, participation, and the effectiveness of blended learning strategies in enhancing students' analytical and critical thinking skills. |
| RQ1 | Students Performance Metrics & CLO Achievement Analysis | Students' assessments scores and CLO Achievement Analysis are analysed to measure improvements in academic writing skills. |

Sampling

This study included two types of participants: undergraduate students enrolled in Academic Reading and Writing course (UBI20402) and the instructors who delivered the course.

Student Participants: A purposive sampling method was used to target students enrolled in the UBI20402 course. The sample consisted of approximately 557 undergraduate students from a Malaysian university, ensuring a representative mix of learners participating in blended learning. The students involved in the study were those enrolled in the UBI20402 Academic Reading and Writing course during the Semester February 2024/2025. Students' opinions of blended learning and how it affected their writing growth were gathered using a questionnaire that was sent out at the end of the semester. All answers were anonymous and participation was entirely voluntary.

Instructor Participants: Five instructors were also consulted to provide deeper insights into the effectiveness of blended learning strategies in teaching an academic writing course. Their involvement had two purposes: [1] To provide observation data by using a standardised observation checklist designed specifically for this project. Throughout the 14-week semester, the teachers completed the checklist in both face-to-face and online classes, documenting students' involvement, teamwork, and critical thinking skills, and [2] To collect feedback via a separate teacher survey from the student questionnaire. This brief poll featured an open-ended question about instructors' experiences utilising blended learning in academic writing courses.

Overall, the study triangulated impressions and classroom evidence by collecting data from both students and instructors, which strengthened the findings' validity.

Data Analysis

This study used qualitative and quantitative methods to investigate the impact of blended learning strategies on academic writing. Three main methods were used to gather data: student surveys, teacher observations, and student performance evaluations. There were two sources that provided the qualitative data: open-ended survey answers, which revealed how students felt about blended learning, and instructor observations which captured student involvement, participation patterns, and obstacles in both online and in-person sessions. The teacher observations were carried out by members of the research team who also taught the UBI20402 course during the February Semester 2024/2025. As these five instructors were active in both teaching and research, processes were developed to improve the reliability and dependability of the observational data. A standardised observation protocol that was in line with CEFR B2 academic writing descriptors and markers of blended learning engagement (e.g., participation, collaboration, contact with

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digital tools) has been created by the research team. This was done to improve dependability since it minimises researcher bias and guarantees consistency among classroom observations (Cohen et al., 2018). In this stage, Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase Thematic Analysis Framework was used to evaluate all qualitative data thematically. This paradigm, which is frequently employed in blended learning research, facilitates a thorough and methodical analysis of student feedback and classroom experiences (Nowell et al., 2017).

Meanwhile, the quantitative data consisted of students' scores from four important tests in the UBI20402 Academic Reading and Writing course. For the first assessment, students were given academic papers to complete the Reading for Input Quiz which assessed their comprehension and proficiency in academic reading. Assessment 2 (Reading Matrix) is an analytical activity meant to evaluate students' abilities to detect primary ideas, supporting information, and organisational structure in academic texts. Assessment 3 (Essay Outline) is an assessment of students' abilities to organise academic writing in accordance with CEFR B2 organisational requirement. Lastly, the final Academic Essay (Assessment 4) is a full-length academic essay that assesses coherence, cohesiveness, paragraph development, critical analysis, and linguistic accuracy. Descriptive statistics such as mean scores and standard deviations were used to assess overall student performance and detect accomplishment trends. In addition, CLO (Course Learning Outcome) achievement percentages were also examined to identify areas of strength and progress within the cohort.

Ethical considerations

Prior to the start of data collection, all student participants gave their informed consent. Students were made aware of the study's objectives, confidentiality protocols, and their freedom to leave at any time without facing repercussions for their grades.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
This section presents the findings of this study which investigated the impacts of blended learning strategies on academic writing proficiency in the UBI20402 Academic Reading and Writing course. The discussion connects these findings to the research questions and literature review by providing a thorough analysis of student learning outcomes, engagement, and instructional effectiveness. The findings were divided into three parts as below:

[1] *RQ1: Students' Perceptions of Blended Learning in Academic Writing Instruction*

The survey results from 557 students show an overall positive perception of blended learning in the academic writing course. A significant 81% of students agreed that the blended approach provided more flexibility in managing their learning schedules, allowing them to balance academic tasks more effectively. Furthermore, 75% believed that combining online and face-to-face instruction improved their learning experience compared to traditional methods. 69% found online discussions and interactive activities to be more interesting, whilst 22% of students mentioned issues such as

inconsistent internet access and technical difficulties which occasionally slowed their learning progress in the course. A summary of these findings is presented in Figure 1.
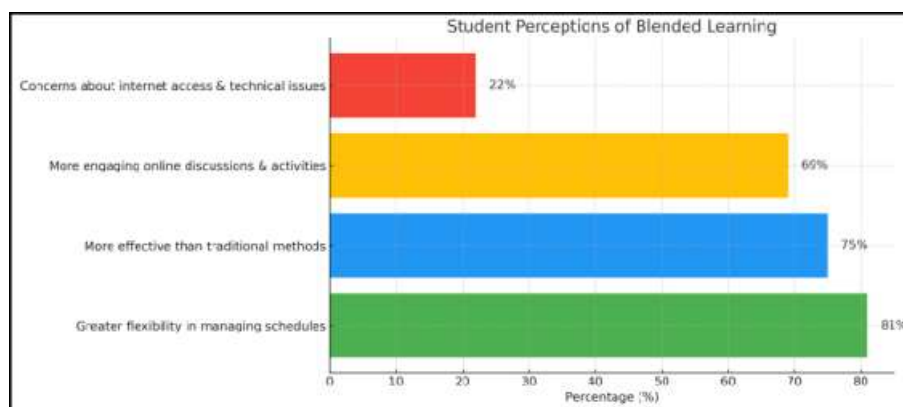

Figure 1: Students Perception of Blended Learning in Academic Writing Instruction

Along with this, thematic analysis of open-ended responses revealed three key themes that highlight students' experiences with blended learning in academic writing as in Table 4.

Table 4: Students' Experiences with Blended Writing in Academic Writing

No	Theme	Descriptions
1	*Increase Motivation and Engagement*	*Students felt more engaged due to interactive digital tools and flexible learning formats.*
2	*Improve confidence in writing*	*Many students indicated that blended learning helped them to gain confidence in their writing skills by allowing them to revisit instructional materials online.*
3	*Challenges with Internet Access and Technical barriers discussion*	*Some students experienced frustration with unstable internet and connections, particularly during synchronous online discussions.*

Based on the table, the analysis showed that many students reported increased motivation and engagement due to the interactive digital tools and adaptable learning formats. Furthermore, the ability to review instructional materials online also increased their confidence in writing, whereas some students encountered difficulties, particularly with internet access and technical barriers which occasionally hampered their learning experience. These findings are consistent with previous research showing that blended learning increases student engagement and confidence in writing skills (Liu, 2013; Banditvilai, 2016).

Besides this, 82% of students felt that structured teaching methodologies such as guided discussions and scaffolded writing tasks improve their classroom participation. In addition, many students valued having structured guidelines or organised formats for discussion. These clear frameworks taught them on how to participate effectively, organise their thoughts, and communicate their ideas more confidently. Moreover, 76% of students also agreed that structured peer and instructor

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review activities improved their collaboration skills by increasing their engagement in providing and receiving constructive feedback. In terms of critical thinking, 71% of students said that analytical writing exercises helped them strengthen their arguments and evaluate sources more effectively. However, some students (18%) expressed concern that structured activities hampered creativity because they felt constrained by predefined formats and rules.

RQ2: Influence of Structured Teaching Methodologies on Classroom Participation, Collaboration, and Critical Thinking Skills

Instructor observations supported the survey results as they demonstrate that structured teaching methodologies have significantly improved classroom participation, collaboration, and critical thinking.

Enhanced Classroom Participation

Over the course of a 14-week semester, instructors observed that structured teaching methodologies significantly increased student participation. By providing clear guidelines and structured activities, students felt more confident in contributing to class discussions and engaging with course materials. Instructors also noted that students who were previously hesitant to speak became more active, particularly in guided peer discussions and consultations. Besides, the use of blended learning tools such as discussion forums and interactive writing tasks has further encouraged participation by allowing students to prepare their responses before engaging in live discussions. According to the teachers' weekly observation reports, this preparation led to more significant contributions during in-person conversations.

Improved Collaboration and Peer Interaction

The use of structured methodologies encouraged students to collaborate more effectively. Instructors reported that structured group activities such as peer reviews, guided brainstorming sessions and small-group discussions have improved teamwork and idea sharing. Students were more willing to give constructive feedback to their peers when given clear rubrics and structured review guidelines. Despite this, digital platforms such as Google Docs and the institutional learning management system (LMS) known as eCampus also helped to facilitate collaborative learning by allowing students to interact asynchronously in exchanging ideas and refining their work prior to class discussions. By examining shared papers, keeping track of version histories, and watching in-the-moment exchanges during synchronous online sessions, instructors kept an eye on these cooperative activities. With the help of these monitoring techniques, teachers were able to spot unmistakable signs of better teamwork: students shared ideas more often, offered helpful criticism using the provided rubrics, and showed a greater readiness to edit their work in response to criticism from peers.

Development of Critical Thinking Skills

Instructors also highlighted on how structured methodologies helped students to develop stronger critical thinking skills by breaking down complex academic concepts into manageable steps. This was observed using the structured observation checklist created specifically for this study, where observations were conducted throughout the course of the 14-week semester. Structured approaches such as guided text analysis exercises, class discussions, and scaffolded writing assignments demonstrate how the students to delve deeper into academic arguments. Through guided text analysis exercises, class discussions, and draft reviews, instructors kept an eye on students' analytical processes both in-person and virtually. They did this by looking at students' contributions in LMS discussion boards, Google Docs revision histories, and responses from digital pre-class assignments. These sources of evidence allowed teachers to assess how successfully students deconstructed difficult academic ideas, examined textual data, and developed preliminary arguments. It has been discovered that structured resources like guided inquiry frameworks, scaffolded writing assignments, and step-by-step templates help students to interact more fully with academic information. However, some instructors noted that a few students became overly reliant on structured templates, limiting their ability to develop independent critical thinking skills.

Besides this, a brief survey was given to each of the five teachers participating in the course in order to supplement the observational data and gain a deeper understanding of their viewpoints. Unlike the student survey previously discussed, this instructor survey concentrated solely on instructors' experiences utilising blended learning techniques to teach academic writing. *"How do you feel about conducting academic writing classes using blended learning strategies?"* was one of the survey's open-ended questions. Table 5 displays the condensed answers.

Table 5: Instructors' Perspectives on Teaching Academic Writing with Blended Learning

Instructor	Response Summary
Instructor 1	*"Blended learning has improved student engagement, but some students rely too much on structured templates instead of developing their own ideas."*
Instructor 2	*"The use of digital tools has enhanced participation and writing quality, but students need more guidance on independent critical thinking."*
Instructor 3	*"I find blended learning effective in fostering collaboration, but striking a balance between structure and independent learning is challenging."*
Instructor 4	*"Students are more confident in writing tasks and discussions, yet some struggle to transition from guided exercises to self-directed work."*
Instructor 5	*"Blended learning supports interactive learning, but technical difficulties and varying student adaptability can affect the overall effectiveness."*

Overall, the findings show that while instructors generally saw blended learning as beneficial, they also encountered difficulties in balancing structure and fostering independent learning among their students.

RQ3: The integration of digital tools and multimodal resources in a blended learning environment on students' academic writing skills

The response to RQ3 which investigates the impact of digital tools and multimodal resources on academic writing is based on two primary sources: (i) student assessments, and (ii) Course Learning Outcome (CLO) achievement analysis. The assessment data

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provide quantitative evidence of student performance improvements where the CLO analysis highlights on specific areas of success and challenges in academic writing.

(i) Student Assessments

The analysis of student assessment marks indicates a positive impact of digital tools and multimodal resources on academic writing proficiency. The findings were derived from the grade distribution and overall score analysis of the final examination for the course in the Semester February 2024/2025 session. The average score of 72 with a standard deviation of 8 suggests that most students performed within a consistent range, demonstrating competency in academic writing skills. However, variations in scores suggest that some students may still require additional support in key writing areas. Overall, these findings also align with the CLO achievements where students effectively structured arguments and analysed specialised texts.

(ii) CLO Achievement Analysis

Table 2: CLO Achievements for UBI 20402 (Academic Reading and Writing)

	Course Learning Outcomes	*Score*
CLO1	*Identify ideas, opinions and the writers' viewpoints or stances in a highly specialised text*	*2.8 (Good)*
CLO2	*Write an essay with a systematically developed argument supported by relevant details*	*2.94 Good)*

The overall CLO1 achievement (2.8/4.0) suggests a strong ability to analyse academic texts but highlights the need for further scaffolding in critical reading skills, whereas the CLO2 achievement (2.94/4.0) indicates that students were generally successful in developing structured academic essays, yet some struggled with integrating evidence effectively. Predominantly, the integration of blended learning tools also likely contributed to this performance by providing interactive learning experiences, real-time feedback, and structured methodologies.

Discussions

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research that supports the use of blended learning strategies in academic writing instruction. Alsalhi et al. (2021) and Barros et al. (2017) found that blended learning improves student engagement and writing proficiency through interactive learning environments (Geta & Olango (2022). These findings can be interpreted using three interconnected mechanisms. First, the course's scaffolding and organised templates reduced cognitive burden during hard activities (for example, essay planning and text analysis), allowing students to focus on higher-order processes like argumentation and revision. When scaffolds are gradually removed, students can apply similar procedures to unguided tasks, which explains the observed improvements in writing organisation and analytical confidence. Second, multimodal resources and digital tools (recorded lectures, interactive forums, and collaborative documents) provided multiple input channels as well as immediate opportunities for

drafting, feedback, and revision, promoting iterative writing practice and assisting students in quickly internalising academic conventions. Third, the blended modality which combined asynchronous preparation and synchronous conversations gave students time to consider and construct responses before speaking where it improves the quality of contributions during live sessions and boosts peer review processes.

These interpretive explanations are supported by previous empirical and review research. For example, Banditvilai (2016) and Alsalhi et al. (2021) found that blended designs boost student autonomy and access to interactive materials, resulting in increased language skills and learning outcomes. The flexibility provided by blended formats has also been noted in systematic reviews where Müller and Mildenberger (2021) describe how shifting parts of instruction online can allow for self-paced study and targeted remediation, whereas De Bruijn-Smoldersm and Prinsen (2024) discovered that online components in blended courses promote self-regulated learning -- an important mediator of improved revision and editing behaviours in writing tasks. Similarly, Owston and colleagues' research on blended course proportions suggests that well-designed blends (with proper alignment of online and face-to-face activities) are likely to result in higher engagement and performance (Owston et al., 2018). Overall, when compared to previous research, the findings of this study emphasise the benefits of blended learning while highlighting areas for improvement.

However, persistent barriers also moderated these benefits. Several students reported connectivity issues and limited access to devices, which constrained their ability to engage fully with online components; this finding mirrors documented digital-divide challenges in blended implementation (Alsalhi et al., 2021). Instructors' reports also indicated that some learners became reliant on structured templates, limiting independent critical thinking on unguided tasks in which it is an effect that suggests scaffolding must be intentionally tapered and complemented with explicit instruction on transfer and self-regulated strategies (Müller & Mildenberger, 2021; De Bruijn-Smoldersm & Prinsen, 2024).

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that blended learning strategies improve academic writing proficiency by increasing student engagement, organisation, and confidence in writing. The findings are also consistent with previous research which found that digital tools and multimodal resources help students in improving their writing skills by allowing them to structure arguments more effectively and engage with complex academic texts. Furthermore, structured teaching methodologies have been shown to enhance students' participation and collaboration, creating an interactive learning environment conducive to academic growth. In relation to this, future research should investigate the long-term effects of blended learning on writing proficiency and critical thinking skills, particularly through longitudinal studies. This is because blended learning has the potential to provide a dynamic and equitable approach to academic writing instruction.

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