

Mohamed Khider University of Biskra
Faculty of Letters and Languages
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English Division



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BOUCETTA Marwa

The Use of Blended Learning Approach in Academic Writing Courses during COVID-19 era.

A Case Study of Second Year LMD Students at Mohammed Khider University of Biskra

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Submitted by:
Ms. BOUCETTA Marwa

Supervised by:
Mr. BOUHITTEM Tayeb

Board of Examiners:

Mr. BOUHITEM Tayeb	Supervisor	(University of Biskra)
Dr. REZIG B Asma	Chairperson	(University of Biskra)
Dr. BENZIDA Yasmina	Examiner	(University of Biskra)
Dr. NACERI Chahira	Examiner	(University of Biskra)

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Declaration

I declare that the present master thesis, which is entitled “The Use of Blended learning Approach in Academic Writing Courses during COVID-19 era”, is a work of my own independently with the guide of my supervisor.

This study was accomplished at the level of Mohamed Khider University of Biskra-Algeria.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to

To the members of my family

My dear mother and father

The coolest older brother Mohamed Lamine

To my dearest younger brothers: Zaki and Dhiaa

To my sweetest sister Manel who was always behind my back

To My beloved cat who always eats my food

To my Aunties, and Uncles

Finally, to my friends Amel and Zizou. And for every one whom I consider as a family.

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In the name of Allah, the most merciful

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I owe special gratitude for the members of jury for evaluating and assessing this work.

Special thanks to all my friends and classmates

Without forgetting the administration staff for their hard work

Thank you.

Abstract

Due to the advancement and use of Information and Communication Technology, foreign language learning is one of the fields undergoing significant changes. As a communication tool, academic writing can disseminate knowledge gained in a specific research field. Academic writing helps students analyze, communicate understanding, think critically and focus on skills and style. On the other hand Blended learning is the potential result of a learning system based on advanced technology at the same time combining the benefit of traditional and online environments altogether. Blended learning has been emerged all around the globe due to the outbreak of corona virus (COVID-19). Therefore, this research attempts to explore the effects of using blended learning approach on learners' academic writing proficiency especially during covid-19 era. This investigation targets both students and teachers of the English Division at Mohamed Khider University of Biskra. Moreover, the current study aims raising the attention on EFL learners' academic writing proficiency while being taught in a Blended learning environment and how teachers manage their academic writing classes using ICT tools. In order to confirm or reject the assumed data.

Key Terms: Blended learning, academic writing, ICTs, English as foreign language, COVID-19

List of Abbreviations

BL: Blended Learning

CAL: Computer Assisted Learning

CD-ROMS: Compact Disc Read-Only Memory

EFL: English as Foreign Language

EL: English Language

F2F: Face to Face

ESL: English as a Second Language

HE: Higher Education

ICT: Information and Communication Technologies

LMD: License Master Doctorate

SL: Second Language

SLT: Second Language Teaching

SNS: Social Networking Site

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

General Introduction

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19, education has been severely affected globally. The virus has created the biggest disturbance to education around the world. As a result educational institutes were shut down and this urged the educational system to emerge ICT tools, technology and blended learning as methods to facilitate the teaching/learning process. Modern technology has greatly impacted the way foreign languages is being taught in the 21st century which was not something new to adopt. There is a growing preference for merging the Internet into language classes. This is pertains to as "blended learning".

Blended learning is a strategy that combines the use of online learning and face-to-face teaching. Although it can be very challenging to completely replace the traditional teaching methods, it is a strategy that can help instructors overcome some difficulties; Therefore, as corona various is one of these difficulties that specifically affected the learning environment, it is necessary to introduce Blended Learning (BL) to provide a solution that can help students learn and utilize the various tools and techniques that are available.

Blended learning in its broad sense is an approach to education that combines different learning techniques of online educational materials in distance tutoring and traditional place-based classroom methods in face 2 face tutoring. BL is an approach that embraces the advantages of both traditional teaching in classroom and ICT supported learning including both offline and online learning. And as far as academic writing is concerned with education and how e-learning can be challenging for both teachers and students since they are not familiar with online platforms (how to use such method during such circumstances).

1. Statement of the problem

The outbreak of the COVID-19 effected many aspects in human life and one of these major aspects is education. The corona virus pandemic forced many countries around the world to close their educational institutes which had a huge impact on all students around the world. On this note, adopting online learning to maintain teaching and learning vivid was a must. This what made teachers include Blended Learning as a method approach of teaching which made learners, especially in Third world countries, have many concerns since most are not familiar with online learning or some of ICT tools on one hand and the slow internet connection on the other hand.

We have observed that this phenomenon hasn't been discussed in the English division at Mohamed Khider University of Biskra (MKUB) yet due to the circumstances of subject tackled being very much recent (COVID-19). Many students showed their complaining on the sudden moving from traditional learning to online learning in a very short time due to the corona pandemic, and how this change is affecting their academic writing proficiency when it comes to learning a foreign language. Therefore, this present study is an attempt to expose the role of blended learning approach as a significant teaching approach which combines both benefits of teaching/learning inside and outside the classroom to identify its validation on EFL learners' academic writing abilities.

2. Research Questions

Based on what have been discussed, this study raises three main research questions

Q1: Do teachers have an experience with teaching academic writing online using technological tools? And is Blended Learning included in their teaching methodology during COVID-19 era.

Q2: Are EFL learners familiar with online learning and blended learning?

Q3: Does the integrating of Blended Learning as a teaching approach improve or hinder EFL learners' academic writing abilities?

3. Research Hypotheses

Based on the research questions formulated we hypothesize that:

1. Using Blended learning can be an efficient approach in teaching academic writing during COVID-19 era.
2. when teachers' use blended learning in teaching academic writing, students would develop better proficiency in academic writing.

4. Aim of the study

The present study aims at investigating the perceptions of using of BL approach in teaching academic writing during covid-19 era and it outcomes in terms of EFL learners' writing proficiency while using technology.

Within the following study, we look forward to:

- _Investigating the implementation of blended learning in academic writing
- _Shed some light on the use of blended learning during approach COVID-19 era..

5. Research Methodology

5.1 Research Approach

The major aim of this study is to elucidate the approach of blended learning when it comes to developing academic writing proficiency. According to Houadjli (2016, p. 34) Qualitative research is concerned with subjective opinions, experiences, and feelings of individuals. In this aspect, the goal of qualitative research is to explore the participants' views of the situation being studied". Thus, we find it appropriate to opt for the Qualitative approach to enhance the subject tackled, through gathering variety of suitable data and arguments that would help in understanding the implementations of blended learning approach in the context of EFL Learners' academic writing at MKUB. Consequently, the qualitative approach will be able to deliver the appropriate analysis for such type of research.

5.2 Research Design

Based on what is related to the Quantitative approach, the most fitting design to be adopted in this study is Case Study. A case study, as Cohen et al (2007, p. 253) states "provides unique example for real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theories or principles". Therefore, a case study is able to intricate sufficient prescriptive that serve the goal of this research.

5.3 Data analysis procedure

The nature of this study is based mainly on the theoretical part. Therefore, the Descriptive research methodology is the most suitable to analyze the acquired data, because blended learning as a learning method approach is not familiar within the Algerian educational system.

5.4 Data Collection Tools

For this specific study and what have been dictated by the research approach and design, we selected to conduct two data collection tools to gather data for this research. Therefore, a questionnaire for both EFL teachers and Second year learners at MKUB was made to explore the use of blended learning as a method approach to enhance academic writing proficiency for the sake of collecting useful data in order to have a view on students' perceptions on learning academic writing through merging blended learning in their EFL courses.

5.5 Population and sampling technique

The population of this study is concerned with EFL teachers and second year students at MKUB. The sample we have opted is Convenience sampling because according to Cohen et al (2007, pp. 113-114) it "involves choosing the nearest individuals to serve as respondents and continuing that process until the required sample size has been obtained or those who happened to be available and accessible at the time". Therefore, 8 teachers will be selected as the convenience sample. Because of the nature of this study and in order for the research questions to be answered, the teachers should have something in common which is, in this case, merging blended learning as a method approach in teaching

6. Significance of the Study

The significance of the study is manifested in shedding the light on how EFL students should use technology, ICT tools, and internet for educational purposes and raising the awareness on how to be more self-dependent during the learning process online. It's also concerned with

facilitating the teaching for teachers in terms of using ICT tools to deliver lectures. Furthermore, the presented study aims to introduce EFL students to the concept of autonomy, which allows them to independently learn and share their knowledge with their peers. It will also show them how to improve their academic performance by relying on their own learning methods. More importantly, this study aims to develop effective and efficient learning methods by showing how to use technology for educational purposes.

Limitations of the study

During the course of research, we have encountered unexpected impediments that hinder our seek for accurate results. These obstacles made us feel, as researchers, disappointed and frustrated. However, we tried to do our best continuing our research for credible and fair outcomes that may shed light on spots that were put aside with less attention. Price, James H. and Judy Murnan stated that

« he limitations of the study are those characteristics of design or methodology that impacted or influenced the interpretation of the findings from your research. They are the constraints on generalizability, applications to practice, and/or utility of findings that are the result of the ways in which you initially chose to design the study or the method used to establish internal and external validity or the result of unanticipated challenges that emerged during the study»
2004.pp.66,67

Hence, these are the main obstacles we have encountered in the process of creating our research:

- The late designation of a supervisor for me. this process alone took approximately two months. At first I was designated with a supervisor whom I find very difficult to contact because the phone number given was always shutoff and the email was never

Being responded to. After the constant complains to the administration, I was finally transferred to another supervisor that I felt more comfortable with and confident.

- My infection of COVID-19 during my conduction of the research. This particular phase was very hard where I suffered from many things including physical and mental fatigue.
- The insufficient time for the completion of the research due to the first two reasons.
- Failed at getting the online questionnaire answered by 2ND year LMD students due to unknown research. We tried to publish it in different online platforms such as Facebook and telegram groups but no results.
- I opted for a questionnaire for second year LMD students; however, their schedule was not in favor for me because of the week's break. It was difficult to do the questionnaire FACE2FACE when it failed to be answered online in their Facebook group.

Lack of useful resources tackling the issue of using Blended Learning during the pandemic

9. Structure of the Dissertation

The present study is divided into three main chapters according to requirements of their variables. The first two chapters are devoted to discuss the literature provided about this area of investigation which is purely theoretical. The third chapter is concerned with the fieldwork where a major analysis of the obtained data gathered is illustrated.

Chapter One: the first chapter includes a general overview on the aspects of blended learning approach. It discusses the main aspects related to Blended Learning historical background, definitions, characteristics, advantages and disadvantages and models. Furthermore, this chapter demonstrates the obstacles faced by teachers and students in BL environment, in addition to teachers and students role in the blended learning classes.

Chapter Two: This chapter is devoted to review academic writing in general and how it is part of learner's educational developments. This chapter consists of an overview of the concept of writing and narrow to academic writing definitions and features. Moreover, it includes the relationship between academic writing and second language in terms of teaching. Lastly, it discusses constructivism as an academic writing approach and its relation to blended learning in terms of feedbacks (human feedback and computer-generated feedback) and sum up with a conclusion.

Chapter three: the final chapter is concerned with the field work conducted for this study. The data gathered via questionnaire are analyzed to discuss the major results. Furthermore, we will be comparing those results in order to confirm or reject.

Chapter One

BLENDED LEARNING: AN OVERVIEW

Introduction

Digital transformation is no longer something new in today's world, especially in higher education institutions. In fact, technology has become a vital part of any learning setting. However, digital transformation is still considered as a topical concern especially after the sudden outbreak of COVID-19 and its huge impact on all aspects of human life, especially education. With schools all over the globe redesigned because of the virus and its circumstances (pandemic), this has caused the educational system to emerge blended learning as a method approach along with ICT technologies in order to facilitate the learning and teaching process and provide a better learning environment. Furthermore, this chapter seeks to view the different aspects related to BL. In addition, this chapter also views the significance, dimensions, and designs of blended learning. Lastly, this chapter highlights the shift to blended learning in the COVID-19 era, its rationale, limitations, and communication in blended learning.

1.1 What is Blended Learning?

The aim of this section is to shed light on the aims of the blended learning approach. Accordingly, multiple conceptualizations of BL are viewed with the highlight on BL background, ingredients, and essential elements.

1.1.1 Definitions of blended learning

Blended learning (BL) as a term refers to the process of mixing various teaching tools and methods in order to create a balanced teaching experience. According to Graham (op.cit), Blended learning is a concept that combines the various elements of face-to-face (f2f) and online learning. Although it doesn't explicitly define what kinds of learning methods are used in BL, most teachers make some use of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) applications.

According to Graham (op.cit), BL is a combination between Face-to-Face and online modalities of learning. Moreover, Driscoll (2002) states that Blended learning as a combination of (F2F) learning environment held by teachers while depending on web-based technology and instructional methods. However, Williams (2003 as cited in Vaughan, 2007:81) argues that BL has existed ever since human kind had thought of teaching. Moreover, (Garrison and Kanuka 2004, & Aguilar 2012) share the same definition of BL and describe it as the integration of the traditional learning experiences with online learning supported by ICT technologies. Thus learning are working interchangeably in BL environment.

Thorne (2003) indicates that BL is an opportunity to integrate the technological advances and innovative features of online learning into the traditional learning environment. He also adds that blended learning has been acknowledged as a tool that can help improve the learning experience for students and teachers. It is also a good solution for the various challenges that arise in learning. Additionally, Lalima & Dangwal (2017) states that BL is a unique approach that combines the advantages of both traditional classroom and ICT tools. Another important definition shows that BL is an innovative approach that embraces the advantages of both traditional teaching in the classroom and ICT supported learning including both offline learning and online learning (Lalima & Dangwal, 2017).

Blended learning has been also given other terms such as *hybrid, mixed, integrative, and multi-method*. There is no specific definition of BL as it might be viewed differently by different people. Graham and Allen (2009:562) point out that these perspectives determined on the fact that “both the terms “hybrid” and “blended” imply a mixing or combining of *something*.”

It is that *something* that people do not always agree upon”. However, researchers manage to define blended learning broadly. On the other hand some tend to narrow it giving it sub-parts.

Meanwhile, Caravan (2011) sees that the concept of BL is more than just a concept. It is an on-going process that teachers implement in their classrooms. The design of the “situational” instruction is based on the needs and objectives of the learners. Furthermore, (Bonk and Khoo, 2014) state that Blended learning is a type of e learning that uses asynchronous and parallel technologies.

According to the previous definitions, the term of blended learning is a combines system that includes f2f and online materials. all the above concepts can be sum up, in the following figure:

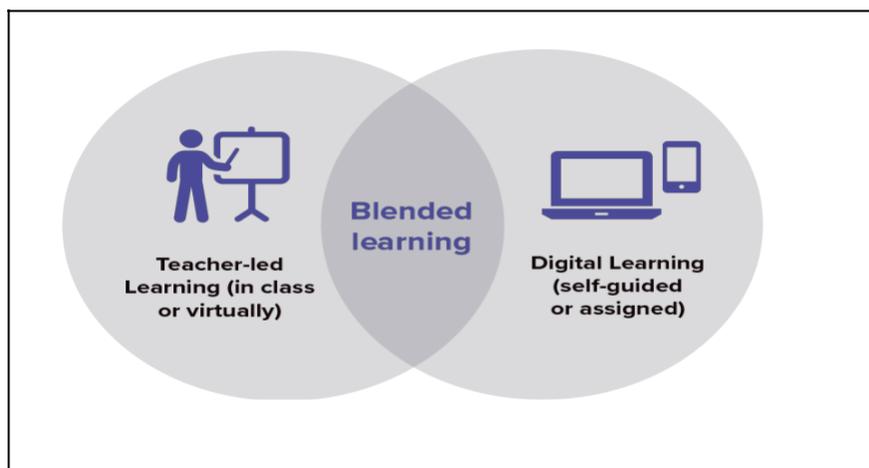


Figure 1.1: Blended Learning Concept

Blended learning is beyond than just being a method that combines virtual and physical environment components; it is a method that attempts to hold the best of the current teaching approaches and the b advantages of online teaching pedagogy as Yoon and Lee (2010 as cited in Yoon,2011) defines that “blended learning bringing together the positive attributes of online and offline education, including instructional modalities, delivery methods, learning tools”.

1.1.2 Background of Blended learning

Bersin (2004) stated that the development computer-based learning and computer-assisted learning (CAL) started from 1960's. This development is basically "the use of computer in traditional educational environment by learners". By 1970's this shift of the approach transmitted to schools and business fields in what was called "Satellite Based Live Video" (Bersin, 2004).

In 1998, the evolution of distance learning started with the use of CD-ROMS courses. However, this method was not ideal for the size of the audio and video used in the courses. (Pappas, 2015, cited in Wang & Huang, 2018). According to Pappas, Blended learning has been around since the 1990s.

Blended learning has become a mainstream concept in recent years due to the widespread use of technology-based learning. Like many other term nowadays, the exact meanings have changed. Blended learning has become the latest example of technology-based learning (Friesen, 2012)

1.1.3 Ingredients of blended learning:

Carman (2005:3-7) states that blended learning requires important ingredients for it to success. Those ingredients are backboned on Keller, Gagné, Bloom, Merrill, Clark and Gery (as cited in Carman, ibid) five ingredients for the blended learning process to be successful:

- ***Self-Pased learning***: Asynchronous learning events are designed to allow the learner to complete his or her tasks at his or her own pace. They can be created through various means, such as the use of audio and video clips, online documents, and computer-based training.

- **Collaboration:** Brown (1998 as cited in Carman, op.cit) states that human beings are social beings, and as such, they require the opportunity to collaborate with others to develop new knowledge and understandings.
- **Events:** For synchronous events, the teacher and students should meet at the same time. This model of motivation is used for these events.
- **Assessment:** Both formative and summative assessments are used to evaluate the students' knowledge and skills. To encourage self-reflection, the students will be asked various self-reflection questions. These will help them formulate their thoughts on draft.

1.1.4 Essential Elements of Blended learning

1.1.4.1 Traditional learning

Face-to-face teaching is a type of teaching that involves an interaction between teachers and their students. According to SO and Brush (2008), the traditional classroom is a place where the teacher and his/her students interact with each other (their peers). Traditional classroom is also called “brick-and-mortar” which refers to the classroom being physical.

1.1.4.2 Online learning (E-learning)

Online learning or “E-learning, electronic learning” refers to the use of ICT tools in order to enable the access to online teaching/learning resources (Arkofur & Abaidoo, 2014). According to Both Christensson(2015) and The Commonwealth of Learning (2015) , “e learning” is a broad term that refers to the usage of electronic media or devices for teaching and learning. It often refers to the delivery of content or accessing of content using ICT technologies.

1.2. The Significance of Blended learning:

Graham (2003), Allen and Ure (2005) stated that among many learning options; three main reasons lead an instructor, trainer, or learner to choose BL to enrich specific learning objectives.

These reasons are arranged as follow:

- **Further developed instructional method:** Chew and Wee (2009) characterize the idea of teaching method as a unique capacity that empowers the instructor to incorporate, change, and address content and information, utilizing approaches that are simple for the student to fathom. the successful educational practices is one of the huge purposes behind mixing courses. at the point when it comes to expanding the teaching method, educators need to give a space for utilizing Internet and distance training according to educational speculations like constructivism. "Some have seen mixed learning approaches as an implies that improve the degree of dynamic learning, shared learning and student focused systems" (Smelser, 2002). Be that as it may, when teacher utilizes comparable methodology and leave the vis-à-vis class time for application, this may offer an equilibrium of data and further develop teaching method
- **Increased access and adaptability:** admittance to learning is one of the key factors that impact the development of dispersed learning conditions (Bonk, Olson, Wisher, and Orvis, 2002). Students' adaptability and accommodation are additionally of developing significance for students with outside responsibilities. The utilization of innovation for an enormous scope and backing it by a methodology like mixed

learning will very create and work with the admittance to the data for understudies, other than the tremendous number of electronic assets when it is contrasted with course readings content.

- **Increased cost-adequacy:** cost-adequacy is a third significant justification BL frameworks in both advanced education and corporate establishments. One of them is that Blended learning approach that consolidates conventional homeroom based training with the accommodation and cost proficiency of e-learning is an option in contrast to separated e-learning (Davies, 2006). This implies that, BL frameworks give a chance to arriving at an enormous and worldwide crowd in brief timeframe with content conveyance.

1.3 Dimensions of Blended Learning

When defining blended learning, flexibility is the accurate term for it. Blended learning is the process of allowing teachers to customize classes according to the needs of their students, which makes blended learning able of connecting both requirements: the learning general and the course content. Blending can occur with different levels and multiple dimensions. This method of teaching provides competitive advantages to other methods of teaching due to its flexibility of blending. In order to customize the learning experience, Sylvester (2004) defined various dimensions where customizing can take place. These include blending off-line learning and online learning; self-paced learning and live collaborative learning; and blending 21 structured and unstructured leaning.

Furthermore, Sylvester (2004) indicated three categories of formats that encompass various components to be blended in the process of learning which are:

_ The synchronized physical formats: it consists of classroom instructions and activities.

_synchronized online formats: which contain virtual classrooms, online mentoring and live-web seminars.

_non synchronized self-paced formats: involves web/ CD-ROM web-delivered, recorded live events and videos, simulations, data-base portals and chat tools.

On the other hand, Clark (2002) stated that blended learning is a concept that consist the following five necessary elements:

_live events: consist synchronized and teacher-led learning events in which all learners participate in class-activities simultaneously like live virtual classroom.

_online content: focuses on learning competencies of the learners" individual achievements which would be at his own pace and time as in web-based learning.

_collaboration: collaboration occurs when learners communicate with each other through various settings provided for them. These include e-mails, online chats, and progressive discussions.

_assessment: teacher measurers learning transference which involves prior-assessments where it take a place before self-paced exercises, and post-assessment which occurs after online learning exercises.

_ reference materials: this involves on-the job reference materials which are essential for effective transfer and learning.

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_reference materials: this involves on-the job reference materials which are essential for effective transfer and learning.

1.4 Blended Learning design

There have never been any limitations to the principles that researchers can use to design blended learning in a way that is efficient and practicable. Watson (2008) stated that regardless of any definition, BL is a conceptual shift that addresses the overall instructional strategy. It should not be perceived as temporal construct that is only used for the sake of aesthetic. (Dziuban, et al., op.cit, p.3).

- Flexibility of designing blended learning

Due to the complexity of the concept blended learning its various interpretations and the varying understandings of its authors and teachers, the concept has become flexible enough to allow different scenarios and „situational“ design models to be formulated. Rossett (as cited in Carman, op.cit:1), claims that “the goal is to have the right theory for the right situation” where these situations depends on the target people, the level of difficulty of the mustered skill and the context preformed. Shaw and Igeneri (2006:3) states that there is no specific well defined blend. BL experience is only determined in relation to goals and constraints presented in a given situation. Masie (2006:22) generalize the application of the concept stating that "all learning is blended learning

1.4.1 Design factors

There is no specific perfect blend nor is there a set or simple rubric for making a “good” blend. all that there is are factors for the sake of achieving an effective blend. As stated by Marsh (2012).

Complementarity: the various elements of the BL experience should be rational and supplement each other. This is certifiably not a simple errand to achieve as Tabor (2005: 48) makes reference to that even experienced teachers 'battle with the topic of making equilibrium and congruity between the two organizations'.

Planning: The materials must be both methodologically and educationally determined and should be founded on understudies' necessities and inclinations about what they appreciate best. This recommends that while planning BL, instructors should not incorporate 'present day/muddled' innovations instead of 'old/straightforward' ones, however the innovation that is helpful and appropriate to the inclining circumstance.

As suggested by Aycock, Garaham and Kaleta (2002, as referred to in Kenney and Newcombe, 2011:48) to "start [BL experience] little and keep it basic" particularly that it is tedious to be overpowered with innovative worries over educational ones.

Learners' support and teacher role: academically, affectively, and technically. Students should not be left alone during online classes. The academic support is a continuous process that is carried within the physical setting to the online environment. This entails two types of support resources: the teacher answering individual questions, and peers answering each other's questions. By doing this, the teacher creates a sense of community among students and reinforces the idea that he is not the „source of all knowledge“. Such an interaction contributes to the affective support making students feel unisolated and relieved especially for shy, introverted students who can address their concerns privately to their teachers. Students must also be assisted if they are new to the technology involved.

Student-centered learning: Taking into account that numerous instructors neglect to apply a "student focused methodology" when utilizing BL, numerous creators like Oliver and Trigwell (2005) will in general respect the functional uses of the term to mistakenly catch mixed "Educating" not mixed "Learning". As such, the applications don't mirror the hypothetical premise of BL in that they center more around types of conveyance than on establishing a student focused learning environment.

1.5 Blended Learning Models

Blended learning approach comes in a broad variety of implementation models. This part defines the range of suggested models of blended learning which various researchers have talked in their studies.

Valiathm (2002) has divided blended learning into three models in terms of their drive. Firstly, skill driven learning which combines self-directed learning with teachers' support in terms of upgrading their knowledge and skills in specific topics. Secondly, attitude driven learning model, which blends multiple activities targeting the development of certain behaviors and attitudes (during group work interactions). Thirdly, the competency driven model which blends action support tools with knowledge to build classroom competencies.

Wilson, J.W .et. al. (2013) stated that blended learning is defined as six diverse models in terms of their delivery. Face-to-face model, which enables teachers to apply technology in specific situations in the classroom, it's also suggested to help students who display better mastery of their abilities more than their peers to permit them push ahead and attain better learning. They also give suited training to help teachers in fostering their skills and students who face obstacles in keeping up with the class pace especially in language learning classes. Nevertheless, the lab rotational model allows students to rotate their learning setting from traditional classroom (F2F) with their teachers to a lab on a fixed schedule.it provides the opportunity for students to learn through online resources and discover how things work. On the other hand, the flex model, which depends fully on online learning under supervision and instructional delivery of a teacher, is provided for those students who face behavioral, academic, and social challenges. It provides them with a safety learning environment. Likewise, the online lab model school involves students relying on online courses as-well-as those that they are not included in the school due to the limitations of not offering that course at school. Additionally, the students' work in the lab goes under the supervision of adults instead of teachers. Besides having courses that are not provided by the school, students have the full ability to work in a pace that suits them which meets the needs of secondary school and high school students who

search for extra courses or subject that they desire to learn where blended learning provides them just that. The last model is the online model where students do not attend mortar and brick classes but only communicate with teachers via online platforms from home. This model holds out a high level of flexibility for students who prefer to be independent.

1.6 Blended Learning in the age of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the way of teaching as it that might be continued in the post-pandemic time. Blended learning has been displayed and has become the optimal solution in future education. It combines e-learning activities allowing the gain of essential knowledge and workshops in traditional form enabling the gaining of all practical skills. Moreover, blended learning also allows increasing communication with module tutors through instant messengers in order to obtain answers to issues discussed during the online classes. In this teaching model, exams and tests can be performed as well during the COVID-19 pandemic. Blended learning has been adopted for years but its effectiveness have been shown in handling the shifts from multiple teaching and learning methods all at once.

1.6.1 Shifting from traditional learning to e-learning to BL

All through the advancement of the Web-based Instruction, numerous ideas have been created alongside BL, for example, D-Learning and E-learning/web based learning. Because of the disarray that may happen between the implications of these three ideas – as some would think of them as equivalent explanations of their disparities should be plainly tended to.

D-learning mirrors the primary presentations of Web 1.0 innovation devices into training. Toward the start, the goal was to defeated issues of understudies who lived a long way from the foundation or who consolidate among studies and work; in this way, can't go to addresses consistently. In contrast to BL , it's anything but an umbrella term 'covering correspondence courses, broadcast educating, radio station instructing, open learning, PC helped guidance, telematics, individualized learning and self-learning' (Sauve, 1993, p.102). D-learning is likewise characterized by Greenberg (1998, p.36) as 'an arranged educating/learning experience that utilizes a wide range of advancements to arrive at students a ways off and is intended to energize student communication and certificate of learning'. From these definitions, it is clear that D-learning was really "distant", for example learning was solely virtual with a concentrated dependence on innovation. The educators and the students were totally independent, and as Keegan (1995:7) call attention to, understudies are not obliged to be accessible « at a fixed spot, at a fixed time, to meet a fixed individual, to be prepared".

The quick improvement of innovation and the development from Web 1.0 innovation instruments to Web 2.0 innovation applications have prepared to expand the extent of D-figuring out how to a more helpful encounter. Numerous applications, for example, Twitter, You-tube, Skype, Facebook, Blogs have been demonstrated better than the unobtrusive utilization of apparatuses like tapes, video, and letters. All in all, a development from utilizing PCs in FtF guidance, for example CALL to Web-Based Instruction (WBI). Following this development, new terms arose, for example, e-learning, web based learning, or electronic learning. This load of terms are interchangeable is some way as they allude to any realizing which is accomplished through the Internet, organization, or simply a PC (Clark and Mayer, op.cit).

Nonetheless, contrary to D-learning, E-learning will in general be more engaged by restricting the learning materials and goals, more coordinated as it is planned explicitly to fabricate students' information and abilities, and more commonsense as it guarantees the continuation of the learning interaction all through a more extended timeframe.

1.7 Rationale of Blended Learning

In a blended learning environment, students not only engage with teachers and peers f2f but also through digital means such as email, Facebook, zoom, Moodle..etc. Students who more introverted to speak when being puzzled can instead post their query as a message text or via chat. Furthermore, students can engage with teachers and classmates as anonymous. Moreover, since teachers have fewer students in each class, they can pay more time for giving an individual feedback if needed, yet they have the flexibility to give the feedback to students who are learning at home, too.

1.7.2 Advantages of Blended Learning to covid-19 era

COVID-19 pandemic has forced the schools to close their doors for months with no predicted future. However, as we still in the era of covid-19, blended learning kept the educational system going where students learn from home as well as teachers. Blended learning has facilitated the learning process as it combines both traditional and online methods in a very significant way where it includes Computer Mediated Communications (CMC). Unlike the usual chaotic FtF discussion, because students can lead the discussion at the expense of others, or because of the large number of classes, online discussions are more organized and democratic, because all

students can participate and express your voice (Harasim, 1990; Levin, Kim, and Riel, 1990, cited in Swan, 2007). Britto (2009) uses Moodle as an online teaching device, mentioning that the communication between students and teachers is better than in traditional classrooms. This is due to the interactive features of Moodle, such as posting and answering queries, requesting clarifications, providing suggestions... etc.

1.7.3 Advantages of Blended Learning to Academic Writing

- **Time:** Almost all researchers agree that writing is the most difficult skill to acquire and improve, especially for second language students (SL). For example, Nunan (1989: 35) admitted that “for all language users, learning to write frequently and expressively is the most difficult of all motor skills”. Academic writing, as a specific writing genre with all the features, has proven to be uniform. For college students, the problem is even greater. This complexity needs to provide enough time for students to practice academic writing exercises, as the saying goes "practice makes perfect people." Expansion of learning opportunities through virtual means to provide space for following students' at the most suitable and desirable time. Students can choose the most convenient time to hold a meeting online, which has extra time compared to FtF meetings. You can also provide extra time by adding asynchronous learning events, allowing students to learn at their own pace. Whether by adding time to synchronized events or in a flexible way, the goal is to make students think more about the activities they tend to solve, practice more, answer personal questions, and have more time for rational discussion.

- **Feedback:** In the case of the BL instruction, there are two types of feedback: manual feedback and computer-generated feedback. The thing to remember here is that the interactive and social nature of BL teaching makes it more beneficial than e-learning in providing feedback. In addition to this, technical features, namely computer software/equipment and web-based resources, allow to provide additional types of feedback that are not available in traditional FtF learning, namely computer-generated feedback. Britto's research (op.cit: 18) shows that both types of feedback can be used in BL. In such a study, students reported that "technology does help them write better and faster because they can... rearrange words and sentences, correct mistakes, make outlines, send copies to others, and let their peers People correct their articles. And consult dictionaries., phrases, books, indexes, and thesaurus".

- **Metacognition** The socialization characteristics of BL and the application of constructivist learning principles have the advantage of supporting higher-level thinking. Once students and teachers get together to discuss and negotiate constructively on learning materials, the learning process will change from passive listening and reading activities to more challenging activities that require critical reflection. Hudson (cited in Stacey and Gerbic in 2002, 2009: 147) emphasizes the same idea, he believes that "the foundation of thought is rooted in dialogue, giving meaning to thought based on the context of social construction."

Using Bloom's (1956) taxonomy, learning begins from low-level memorization, comprehension, and application activities to high-level analysis, evaluation, and creation activities, and goes through different levels. In this field, an important contribution is the churches (cited in Bath and Bourke, op.cit in 2008). He suggested

modifying Bloom's taxonomy (op.cit) in a way suitable for BL settings, showing that BL can be same activity. The following figure shows the review of the churches:

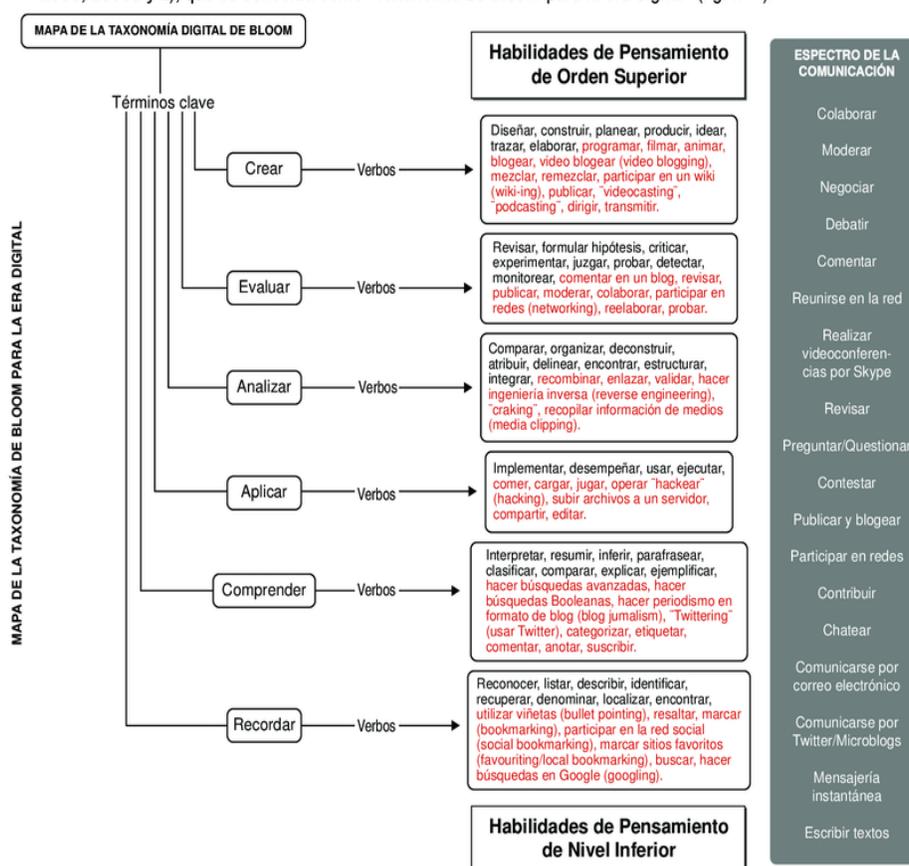


Figure 1.2: Mind Map of Bloom's Revised Digital Taxonomy (Churches, p. 2008)

Critical thinking involves problem-solving activities. Students analyze challenging problems and explain their own answers/questions or other students' answers/questions. This can be a personal task, encouraging students to establish self-management strategies by judging their knowledge and evaluating the effectiveness of their own questions and answers. It can also build

self-confidence when making decisions and develop the habit of giving yourself "internal feedback". An example of how to emphasize critical and reflective thinking is to ask reflective questions, such as "What do you think your answer is successful?" or "Do you agree with your classmate's answer? Why?"

- **Extra Materials:** An obvious advantage of teaching online is the ability to use multiple online resources that can aid the learning process. There are many websites available and they can be found through search engines like Google. They are different, some are dedicated to adding informative knowledge about a research field in written, audio and video formats, some provide explanatory knowledge, such as online dictionaries, encyclopedias and dictionaries, and those that provide explanatory knowledge for social media. Establish a social atmosphere for learning, like Facebook. Azizan (2010) expects additional resources to cultivate critical thinking, improve students' confidence and skills, develop social communication, and improve the quality of learning.
- **Flexibility:** The "Anytime, Anywhere" and "Anytime, Anywhere" functions of network-based technical equipment expand the flexibility of learning. This is very beneficial, especially in HE. Many university students sometimes cannot attend meetings in person because they may be overwhelmed by other tasks, such as work, studying other fields, injuries, and even due to the heavy courses and number of hours they study..force them to give up some lectures every day. Another problem is the traffic problem, which causes students from far away to sometimes absent from class.

1.8 Limitation of Blended Learning

1.8.1 Disadvantages of Blended

Movchan (2018) shed the light on multiple negative effects of using blended learning on teachers and students. Firstly, *High maintenance cost*. Integrating advanced technologies into blended learning projects, such as equipment and infrastructure settings, can sometimes be costly. In a business environment, this is especially true for large organizations with multiple departments or a large number of employees. Secondly, *technology dependency* is another disadvantage of BL. To achieve the learning objectives of the blended learning program, content developers use easy-to-use, reliable, and up-to-date technical tools and resources. However, because blended learning is about dependence on technology, there are limitations in the technical skills of teachers and students. Students and teachers who do not know how to use technology can face enormous barriers to interaction. Similarly, participants will face difficulties in *obtaining course materials*, so this learning strategy must have sufficient technical support. Another deficiency proposed by Caner (2012) is that the workload faced by teachers in the preparation process is a frustrating factor. Because online component design and development and F2F component planning for blended learning is time consuming for teachers. Therefore, building a blended learning environment requires enthusiastic teachers who are interested in computer skills and are familiar with the challenges blended teaching can face.

1.8.2 Challenges of Blended

As there are multiple disadvantages, the complexity of the BL instruction also presents many challenges that must be considered when designing the BL method. They vary based on design, cultural, technical and professional issues. Sait et al (2003 as cited in Alebaikan and Troudi, 2009) emphasized the cultural limitations of BL implementation and pointed out that some teachers may refuse to adopt any teaching methods, especially those involving technical methods. This resistance may be the result of certain social norms, and these societies may view Internet use as a threat to their culture. To overcome these cultural challenges of BL instruction, we can change the content and accommodate it to the society's culture. In addition to that, to guarantee the students' readiness, self-discipline and responsiveness, web-etiquette or rules must be set prior to the instruction. Also, the students can be extrinsically motivated when they are promised some rewards for their presence in the online sessions.

Conclusion

The expansion of the Internet and World Wide Web has changed the way education is conceived and delivered and Covid-19 being huge part of this expansion It is a fact that cannot be ignored. In order to accommodate the evolving needs of the Digital generations and to keep up-to-date with the current teaching methods. The last expansion of online teaching pedagogies promises education practitioners with striking benefits. Blended learning, as the most recent evolution of online teaching pedagogies, promises significant benefits to educators. We must keep in mind that the notion is still in its infancy, and it, like any other technique of teaching and learning, will take a great deal of experience before it can be adequately addressed. As a result, despite the ambiguity surrounding its uses, one must take action.

Chapter Two
ACADEMIC WRITING:
An Overview

Introduction

This chapter is devoted to demonstrate the literature related to academic writing. The chapter starts with defining the concept of “writing” in general and how the concept of it changes by time and circumstances along the three major perspectives, namely, linguistic, cognitive, and socio-cultural perspectives. Next, discussing academic writing features following the concept of teaching academic writing and its relation to second language. In addition, reviewing academic writing approaches emphasizing the “constructivism theory” and settling the chapter in the blended learning environment where type of feedback is being tackled.

2.1 What is writing?

According to Hennery Rogers (2005), writing is one of the most significant accomplishments that humans achieved. Dorothy E Zemach (2005) defines writing as a significant way of communication in everyday life especially in higher education. Ken Hyland (2009) defines writing as an activity that can beneficially prepared by work in terms of listening, speaking and reading skills. This preparation allows receptively used words to be used productively.

2.1.1 The notion of writing

Bussmann (1996: 1294) defines writing as a process utilized to record and describe spoken language. It is typically done through a system of graphic signs. This broad conception sheds the light on the conversations of writing and narrowing it as a process that arise from speaking. However, many scholars define writing by differentiating it from spoken language. For instance, Richard (op. cit.:101) sees that “written language employs a different syntax and vocabulary from spoken discourse” as he classifies written language from spoken discourses depending on syntax and vocabulary level. Therefore, writing is considered an elevated expression of language that abides by certain rules and conversations. Furthermore, Zamel (1982: 195) sees writing as a process of exploring one’s thoughts and learning from the act of writing itself what these thoughts are. In other words, writing is viewed as a process of discovering meaning. From this perspective, writing has been viewed as a social practice which has been externalized in the context of higher education incorporates academic writing as well. Moreover, academic writing is no more being viewed as assembling written assignments to be proposed to the teacher.

Coffin et. al. (2003) states that academic writing as a “social practice” can be seen in different ways. Firstly, academic writing is about relationships within the academic community which means cultivating these relationships through writing. Secondly, the various conventions and norms that govern academic writing have social roots. Lastly, the relationships that academic writing has with the teaching and learning communities are key factors that influence the success of academic writing where students learn how to write as academics through academic writing. This view of academic writing is not limited to student-teacher classroom. It also goes beyond the traditional notions of academic writing.

2.1.2 Definition of Writing

Historically, writing started to gain a unique importance in parallel with the development of the notion of "Literacy". According to Wagner (2004), definition of "literacy" has changed over the course of time. Traditionally, it exclusively meant having the ability to read and write. Within the modern view of literacy, being able to read and write has become a complex concept that has serious implications for individuals' social and cognitive functioning.

This concept is also referred to as the ability to practice various daily tasks in order to improve one's skills such as surfing the internet, reading newspaper, and writing various applications. Law and Ecke (2000:111) define literacy as social phenomenon that exists in a context. It is the capacity to use one's knowledge reading and writing skills to participate efficiently and effectively in today's complex society.

2.1.3 Writing perspectives

According to both first language (L1) and second language (L2) writing research, writing is conceptualized according to three major perspectives: the linguistic perspective, the cognitive/psychological perspective, and the socio-cultural perspective. Furthermore, even though academic writing is often referred to in its general sense, each of these perspectives focuses on particular set of academic writing element as what makes the idea of "academic writing".

2.1.3.1 Linguistic Perspectives

According to Hyland (2003:3) learning to write in SL entails linguistic knowledge, vocabulary selection, syntactic patterns, and cohesive devices. At first (1960-1980) writing was basically focusing only on language accuracy and sentence-related concerns. In other words, writing was considered as the process of producing words in a structured way that is based on systematic rules. Furthermore, the use of the audio-lingual method (ALM) was also utilized for learning English in order to implement those language-related approaches. This method is mainly based on the concept of habit formation process. In other words, it involved the memorization of sentence structures (Onozawa, 2010).

By 1970, the appearance of “guided and controlled writing” emerged a major change in ESL writing where learners would either manipulate the guided writing or imitate the controlled writing. Hyland (2003:3) sees writing as “an intricate structure that can only be learned by developing the ability to manipulate lexis and grammar”. The use of the “slot and filler” frameworks became popular among teachers who wanted to encourage students to complete sentences and change tenses. After that, they started to use free writing which allows students to generate their own texts, as Hasan and Akhand (2010: 79) explained, that students need to use their taught “skills, structures, and vocabulary” in order to expose their writing competence.

Furthermore, according to the linguistic approaches to writing, the term “writing” is only applicable to the concerns of grammar, spelling, and lexis as Kroll (1990:14) stated “writing is basically a matter of arrangement, of fitting sentences and paragraphs into prescribed patterns. Students, on the other hand, can also refer to their work as being composed of rules and regulations.

2.1.3.2 Cognitive Perspectives

From the 1980s, writing research shifted from a language-based approach to a cognitive/psychological approach. Flower and Hayes (1981:366) states “that the process of writing is best understood as a set of distinctive thinking processes” Instead of creating error-free composition, to thinking about how writers organize and process their thoughts while writing.

Furthermore, Flower and Hayes (ibid) reports that writers typically have goals and intentions for their work. This perspective encourages students to think critically and engage in problem-solving through reasoning and critique. In this sense the teachers' first responsibility is to help students develop their metacognitive awareness while writing. This includes helping them develop their writing strategies while they go through various stages of planning, organizing, translating, reviewing and turning plans into written language. Within what have been mentioned writing is defined as “the production of thought for oneself or others under the direction of one's goal-oriented metacognitive monitoring and control” (Hacker, Keener, & Kircher 2009, p.154).

In other words, cognitive approaches do not narrow its focus to merely sentence-related issues. Instead, they broaden its scope to include extended pieces of writing. Instead of copying a certain model, product-based approaches teach students how to develop their own unique paragraphs and essays that reflect their own thoughts. The structure of essays is also related to the various cognitive approaches where there is an important distinction between product-based and academic writing is that students are taught the importance of developing well-structured and well-constructed paragraphs and essays.

2.1.3.3 *socio-cultural Perspectives*

From the 1980s onwards, brand-new social and cultural perspectives on language have been presented to expand the scope of cognitive theories related to writing. Sperling and Freedman (2010:4-5) explain that scholars “scholars have been pushed to elaborate existing cognitive theories by research that was conducted in a broad spectrum of social and cultural contexts”. In other words, writing is leveled up to a more complex concept which is more of a social practice rather than a situational activity among the individual’s cognitive structure.

Sperling and Freedman (ibid:5) stated that such approaches have deemed important as they discover “how writing is learned across varied populations and for understanding the roles and relationships of writers and readers in different contexts”. Where Schmied (2011, 3) specified them as a group of “accepted institutionalized conventions of metadiscourse” which Hyland (1998) explains that “metadiscourse” is a concept is a concept that helps readers understand a text by relating it to the various components of a discourse community. According to these theories, the main problem of SL writers is not necessarily their language. Instead, it's their ability to produce writing that will meet the expectations of their academic communities. As Kern (2000, as cited in Vollmer, 2000) points out:

Sociocultural approaches to literacy disabuse us of the notion that how and why we read and write is an entirely private and individual affair. [Rather] . . . reading and writing are communicative acts in which readers and writers position one another in particular ways, drawing on conventions and resources provided by the culture. (pp.34-37)

In these approaches, the main challenge in this area is to identify the various ways that writers position themselves in their texts. By doing so, they can establish their relationship with their

readers and utilize various ways to reinforce that relationship. These include the use of various non-standard forms of expression, such as the use of conjunctions, evaluation, and hedges. As Hyland and Tse (2004:271) states that “their commitment to their words, setting up relationship with their readers, and establish their personal sincerity in thanking various people”.

These metadiscourse features of writers were revealed through various studies. These assessments were conducted to examine the various facets of the students' dissertations. Hence, the skills that are required for teaching students to cite efficiently and write a compelling dissertation are those that are referred to as "research skills".

To sum up, we see that it is difficult to come to a single definition of writing. For instance, in first and SL writing, the terms “writing” and “substance” are often used in different situations. As Weigle (2002: 3) states “the nature of writing is so varied that it can't be defined just one way”.

2.2 Features of Academic Writing

After viewing the broad perspectives on „writing“, it is important to understand what “academic” is and how it distinguishes “academic writing” as a unique genre of writing with its own rules and structures, (Bowker, 2007:4). In order to view the main features of academic writing, a variety of researchers' perspectives have been gathered as some focus on only one feature of academic writing, while others offer a comprehensive view of the various facets of academic writing.

2.2.1 Formality

When it comes to academic writing many researchers focused on the idea of “formality” as a main feature of academic publishing. Some researchers believe that specific linguistic

aspects of formal writing are generally used in comparison to informal writing. Bennett and Gorovitz (1997) declare that “for the purpose of improving students' formalness, teachers should focus on teaching some key linguistic features at the sentence-level” labeled in “Bennett rules”. In addition, the academic journal entitled “Formal Academic Writing” (2016) offers few important guidelines for learning the formality in writing in relation to what is permissive and what is to be set aside in academic writing. The mentioned guidelines are capsulated in the following table:

Formal writing "Do"	Informal writing "Don't use"
<p>1-Use Precise language and Effective Words:</p> <p>-Using denotation and connotation appropriately: Example: firm=steady (Positive). Stubborn=unreasonable (negative).</p> <p>-Precise words: Example: It was really awesome how creepy the characters in “A Rose for Emily” were. Revised: Faulkner, through his use of tone and symbolism, creates mysterious and complex characters.</p> <p>2- Present others’ arguments fairly and with an appropriate tone.</p> <p>3-Use Active Rather than Passive Voice: The doer of the action must be known. Passive voice: The law was passed in October 2007. (Who passed the law?) Active voice: Mayor Jones passed the law in order to be re-elected in November.</p> <p>4-Say it; do not say that you will say it: Faulty: In this paper, I will analyze the arguments against handgun control. Revised: Arguments against handgun control are unconvincing because . . .</p> <p>5-Use concise language.</p>	<p>1-Contractions: Example. You’re, Can’t</p> <p>2-Personal Pronouns (“I, we, our, you”) Example: In order to travel, you have to save hundreds of dollars for gasoline</p> <p>Revised: In order to travel, one has to save hundreds of dollars for gasoline.</p> <p>3-Language that is Biased: _Avoid the generic “he” by using “he or she”; labels that disparage the person or group the writer refers to. _ Use names for racial, ethnic, and other groups that reflect the preferences of each group’s members.</p> <p>4-Slang, Jargon, Clichés, and Conversational Language:</p> <p>5-Pretentious Language/Euphemisms Pretentious: To perpetuate our endeavor of providing funds for our elderly citizens as we do at the present moment, we will face the exigency of enhanced contributions from all our citizens. Revised: Citizens cannot continue to fund Social Security for the elderly unless we raise taxes.</p> <p>6-Ambiguous references Example: <i>It is not fair that administrators make all decisions that affect students in many ways.</i> Revised: <i>Administrators make all decisions for the school, affecting students’ independence and finances.</i></p>

Table2.1: What to “Do” and What “not to Do” in Formal Writin "Formal Academic Writing" Journal (2016).

2.2.2 Objectivity

Generally, written language is “objective” rather than “personal”. Therefore, it has fewer words that refer to the writer or the reader. This means that the main focus should be on the delivered information and the target arguments, rather than being personal. In other words, academic writing tends to use nouns and adjectives, rather than verbs and adverbs. However, Brett (1994) states that in the section "results" of Sociology articles talks about the various aspects of human behavior and thoughts. This is because; human actions are often performed under unknown circumstances. In order to properly study the human behavior, one must first determine his/ her own subjective beliefs and feelings which are affected by internal mental concepts.

2.2.3 Evaluation

Another significant feature of academic writing is the evaluation of the arguments and research findings. This is very basic and provides an explanation of why certain ideas were rejected or accepted. Additionally, it gives attention to the *writer's voice*. For instance, the evaluation section of a master or doctorate dissertation is often referred to as the main body of work of any research paper. It answers the various questions posed in the various sections of the paper.

2.2.4 Other features

The book “Academic Writing: A Guide to Tertiary Level Writing”, Bowker (op.cit), states that gives due reference to the attendance of *well-defined structuring patterns* such as in essays where it follows Introduction-Body-Conclusion pattern, and *published literature* as in

academic papers where the effective integration of research findings is necessary. According to Bowker (op.cit), these are very required elements in academic writing. Later on Murphy (2009) adds to the previous features “*use of borrowing techniques*”, and “*critical reading*” where Irvin (2010) confirms their significance by referring to them as “*knowledge of research skills*”.

To sum up, academic writing is a type of evaluation that aims to demonstrate the students’ abilities in various disciplines. It is typically done in the form of various assignments. Researchers differ academic writing features in which every feature is emphasized over the other as Thaiss and Zawacki (op.cit) states

many people in our field realize that “academic writing” is not as stable, unified,
 ... and that they wish to learn more about the complexity of what we call
 “academic writing”.

2.3 Teaching Academic Writing

Developing academic writing skills have become an integral part of one's life nowadays especially when it comes to social and intellectual functioning. However, academic writing is more demanded in SLT setting. Teachers grant their students conflicting advice that range between the suitable styles to use, the structural patterns to follow, the metadiscourse functions accepted in the academy, in-text-citation guidelines. Therefore, Lillis (1999 cited in Harwood and Hartley, *ibid*: 360) concludes that writing academically is “an institutional practice of mystery”. Nevertheless, in spite of the

fact that various authors studying academic writing approve that a single, all-encompassing suitable approach to teaching is not a possibility, nor is it advisable (Jordan, 1997; Leki & Carson, 1994; Raimes, 1991; Silva, 1993), we recommend that taking the characteristics proposed in the literature, a comprehensive list can be used as a guide for teachers to hold a thorough understanding of the academic writing components and for practitioners to create a curriculum that is suitable for the students at each educational level.

2.3.1. Teaching Academic Writing in the Age of COVID-19

Covid-19 virus has affected every aspect of human life including education (teaching and learning process) itself. However, in order to keep the education on going, emerging the use of technology became a necessity even though technology is not a new aspect to the educational system in which it existed and have been used for a while now.

Warschauer (2010) states that the evaluation that social technologies witnessed over the past two decades has greatly impacted the development of writing. This is thanks to technology which enabled people to improve their writing skills.

According to Ariel and Will Durant's known saying "Education is the transmission of civilization". In other words, through writing, we can transmit knowledge that has been passed down from one generation to another. Without writing, the transmission of knowledge that has been passed down through the generations is in danger of disappearing.

2.4. Academic Writing in Second Language Teaching

The significance of academic writing in second language teaching (SLT) contexts is highlighted by its various advantages to higher education (HE) learners.

2.4.1 Advantages of Second Language Writing

There are countless of reasons why writing is so essential to teach to L2 students. Various researchers consider the necessity to teach writing in SL contexts an ultimate reply to the “needs” of both learners and tutors. On the flip side, learners need to develop their writing proficiency in order to accomplish their study objectives such as pursuing advanced degrees, preparing for English proficiency exams, and participating in study programs abroad. On the other hand, many teachers have raised the institutions’ problematic issue of not adequately teaching writing to SL learners. On the light of this, Lavelle (2003) explains that many reforms at higher education in writing courses are required such as focusing on teaching different types, skills, and mechanisms of writing. He also mentions that universities usually provide students "few opportunities to hone and refine skills as [they] progress through the university" (p. 87). As consequently, as content gets more extreme and more advanced writing is demanded, the programs being followed usually provide little assistance and students find themselves unequipped to perform successfully. Moreover, writing is proved to build up the students' cognition and understanding. Additionally, Rao (2007 as cited in Ahmed, 2010) explains two ways by which EFL writing benefits learners. Firstly, it enhances students’ critical thinking skills

of summarizing, analyzing and criticizing. Secondly, it improves their reflective thinking on the English language itself.

2.4.2 Complexity of Second Language Writing

Literature has shown that learning to write is an essential skill for students who are pursuing higher education. yet, has been always one of the most complex language skills to master particularly for SL learners in higher education. On the light of this, Lea and Street (1998 as cited in Chokwe, 2011) state that literacy rate in HE is incredibly poor and academics“ cited various complaints from students about their improper writing. Furthermore, Johns (1997) noted that even with training, students still have improper academic prose. Some examples of these include: vagueness, unstructured, and impersonality.

Briefly, we can say that with the increasing number of students wanting to improve their writing skills, it has become more necessary for schools to provide effective and relevant trainings. At the same time, it requires a lot of time and effort to complete.

2.5 Academic Writing Approaches

To be specific, three general approaches of writing are considered, namely, the product, the process, and the post-process approaches. An emphasis is placed on the constructivist approach in relation to BL. Moreover, Hashemnezhad and Hashemnezhad (2012:1) sum up the evaluation of writing approaches declaring that over the past few years, product and process approaches have dominated many of teaching and writing that takes place in the EFL classroom.

2.5.1 Product-based Approach

The product approach is known since the 60s' to be mainly teacher-based approach. According to Hyland (op.cit), the product-based approaches are symbolized by four stages: familiarized writing, controlled writing, guided writing and free writing. *Familiarization* targets raising students' awareness regarding the grammatical and lexical characteristics of a selected text. *Controlled Composition* lays stress on the formula of language at the sentence-level.

Therefore, drawing on classical behaviorism, modeling strategies were used and considered advantageous for applying and memorizing lexical and grammatical structures. As Zamel (1983:165) states, "the product approach was prescriptive, formulaic, and overtly concerned with correctness". On the other hand, *guided writing* offers students some limited freedom to make some changes on their writings using their own creativity meanwhile *free writing*, as Pincas (1982 as cited in Badger and White, 2000:153) states "in free writing, students utilize the writing skill as a piece of a pure activity such as a letter, story or essay".

2.5.2 Process-Based Approach

Unlike product-based approaches that narrow the task of writing to acknowledging syntax and lexis, ESL researchers figured that "writing was a highly complex process, made up of various sub-processes. Therefore, it seeks to answer the question "how to teach writing", rather than "what to teach" in writing". Hence, writing is considered the result of inquiry and discovering meaning rather than through remembering knowledge.

In order to develop their writing skills, students are cultivated to think of the purpose and audience for their work. They are also expected make multiple drafts in order to propose their thoughts in their final product. According to the process theorists, the writing process is a sequence of steps starting with pre-writing and ending with rewriting. Many different models of the process are being developed

2.5.3 The Constructivist Approach

Constructivist approach sets the learners for problem solving situations while they are being an active role in creating knowledge *individually* and *socially* built on their own experiences. Therefore, it relates to both cognitive and social-construction of knowledge. It focuses on the “product” as it concentrates on how the production is upgraded through both the kind of input provided that must be complex, challenging, and the type of interaction students receive. It also focuses on the most beneficial part of the process approach which is "the revision/feedback" part.

Throughout the academic writing community, constructivism goal is that learners consider knowledge as an outcome of a “meaning-making search” in which learners involved in a process of constructing individual interpretations of their experiences. On the other hand, “experiential learning” and the constructions that result from the examination, questioning and analysis of tasks and experiences consists the heart of this approach. Constructivism, then, emphasizes "knowledge construction" rather than "knowledge transmission". Additionally, The Constructivist Approach is a “learner-centered” approach. Nevertheless, for this autonomous, self-learning to take place, students must be engaged in meaningful and relevant activities. Errors should also be tolerated as regarded as part of the process. A wide range of activities and

settings are provided to promote metacognition, critical thinking, reflection, and awareness. This enables students to take their prior knowledge, transfer it to new situations, and re-construct it as they notice the contradiction between their existing understanding and what they are experiencing. Constructivism refers to both cognitive constructivism and social constructivism which are respectively developed by Piaget and Vygotsky.

2.5.3.1 Development of Web-based Instruction and Constructivism

Constructivist theories have been more influential among the digital zone. The development of the Web-based Instruction has opened many possibilities for the practical application of the ultimate theories of constructivism. As stated by Murphy (2007), technology is the way to debunk the constructivism criticism which states that “it stops short in theory and does not propose any practical usage”. She also explains that many researchers and teachers in the present age utilize constructivism rules in online environments only in order find new teaching models. Moreover, She states (ibid:3) that “technology is increasingly being touted as an optimal medium for the application of constructivist principles to learning. Numerous online environments and technology-based projects are showing that theory can effectively guide educational practice”.

When talking about the development of the digital environment, one can deduce two era of development: “the cognitive era” -recognized for the widespread of Web 0.1 applications- and the “socio-cognitive era” -recognized for the Web 0.2 applications-. Web 0.1 applications are advantageous as they build up the learner’s cognitive structures. They help learners to consider the information they read/write through a computer-based or a Web-based environment more deeply. For instance, word processing tools and checking applications are one of these application tools which they help in improving the written

production by checking spelling and Grammar. Other devices such as videos, CD-ROMS, and online sites allow for the features of uploading and downloading documents of several formats.

All of the previously mentioned technological devices concentrate on “*the transmission of content*” to the reader; a content which can be revised by the writer and given a deep search by the reader in several sites and tools.

The introduction of the Web 0.2 tools have altered the way *content* is delivered. The reader is no more seen as passive recipient of the information but user who collaborates with other members of the virtual community in order to negotiate the content. Therefore, both cognition and social relations are working together

It is within the framework of the web 2.0 instruction that constructivism is to be applied. In the context of SLL and academic writing in particular, learners and teachers can gather in a social milieu when they can receive and provide feedback related to their writing products. The researcher depicts the relation between constructivism theory and web-based instruction in the following figure:

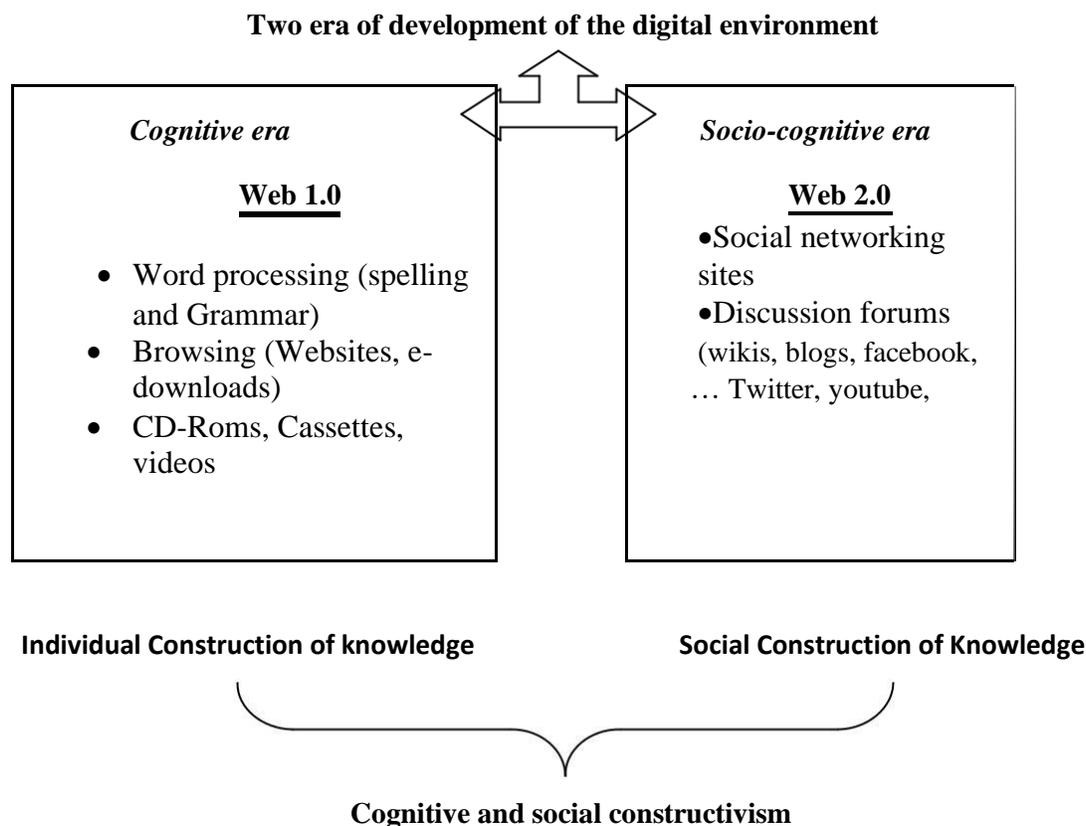


Figure 2.1: Development of Web-based Instruction and Constructivism

2.5.3.2. Constructivism in Relation to Blended Learning

From what we have seen, the constructivist approach is the most fitting for BL environment. As mentioned by (Bathand Bourke op.cit:7), BL experiences has to be participative not just interactive. In this sense, cognitive and collaborative constructions of knowledge are working together. Therefore, constructivism allows for both cognitive and social constructions and hence it follows the philosophy of BL. BL, on the other hand, allow the authentic environment and audience, the sources needed for negotiation to settle.

In this context, Almala (2006) in the words of Li, Chu, Ki & Woo (2012:162) argues that “electronic communications between and among groups have been found to support an effective constructivist instructional strategy that fosters social negotiation”. Al-huneidi and Schreurs (2012), also acknowledge that applying the constructivism approach in BL make overcoming the criticism of BL which states that it focuses more on the teacher than the student.

In addition, constructivism tenets support active learning which the cornerstone of BL. is the idea behind encouraging students to solve challenging tasks in collaboration is that higher levels of interaction facilitate remembering the information by storing it in the long-term memory. The following figure is adapted from Dale’s Cone of learning and tends to explain the relation between constructivism, memorization, and active learning.

2.6. Constructive Learning Community in Blended Learning

Feedback has been shown to be very beneficial in terms of acquiring and maintaining a good writing skill. This part aims to explain the advantages of using electronic feedback in a constructivist- BL environment.

2.6.1. Electronic Constructive Feedback

Although it is widely acknowledged that providing students with feedback is one of the most important tasks of an ESL teacher, many problems arise under the “physical classroom” setting from being time consuming to the difficulty of providing feedback to each student individually. In other words, feedback has become an integral part of education and not only limited to F2F classroom but extended to. It has been suggested that we explore various methods of feedback in this section to improve the effectiveness teaching methods especially during covid-19 era.

2.6.1.1 E-Feedback (Electronic Feedback)

According to Tuzi (2004:217), E-feedback is a written form and transmitted via the web. Furthermore, E-Feedback is an effective feedback method that can improve a person's confidence and creativity. It can also lower their anxiety and improve their writing revisions. (Tuzi, 2001, Tuzi, 2004, Matsumura & Hann, 2004).

E-feedback encourages students to share their thoughts and ideas with each other. It helps them improve their work by getting multiple feedbacks. In the online learning community, various applications are utilized to provide students with various features and services. Researchers usually foster their feedback using web-applications such as blogs, wikis, Moodle, zoom...ect. In the online learning community, various applications are utilized to provide students with various features and services. Zhu (2012:128) states that “through online collaborative written assignments, group discussions, debates and critiques of arguments, students can enhance knowledge construction”. On the other hand Tuzi (2004) states that e-feedback leads to a very significant changes at the sentence/paragraph levels. He continues “while writing online, students feel that their writings can reach a wider audience which involve more than their peers and instructor”.

2.6.1.2 E-C-Feedback (Electronic Constructive Feedback)

Digital students receive two types of E-C-Feedback: computer-generated feedback, and human feedback. Computer-generated or in other form automated feedback" provided by a computer. multiple of software programs are readily available that can generate immediate evaluative feedback on student writing such as word-processing, consulting web-based resources

Computer-generated feedback may also refer to the electronic assessment techniques that facilitate the teacher's task of rating students' academic texts. Schultz (2000) provided a study in which this study explores the role of computer-mediated feedback in shaping peer writing revisions. It was found that, while physical feedback resulted in more detailed revisions, the feedback received through computer-mediated feedback was more constructive. According Lee (2001), non-native students often engage in feedback construction regarding both content and form. They also make use of negotiation strategies to resolve misunderstandings.

2.6.2. Types of Electronic Constructive Feedback

2.6.2.1 Human feedback

Human feedback contains three types of feedback: *teacher feedback*, *peer feedback*, and *internal feedback*.

- ***Teacher Feedback*** : teacher using BL must take the role of a facilitator, but s/he must monitor his/her students' discussions, correct any mistakes arise, answer students questions, and sometimes teach students how to form a constructive criticism rather than giving mere complements or refusals. Within the virtual setting, teachers can answer each student' questions individually with ease. Asking questions to teachers is the most recognized form of feedback-seeking behavior. Taking the case of the physical classroom, however, students hesitate to ask questions due to possible embarrassment or losing face. (Fassinger 1995; Hwang et al. 2002 as cited in Arbaugh and Hwang, 2009). In addition to that, the over-crowdedness of the classroom makes it difficult to make sure

that all questions are being answered. In order to overcome these problems, students can privately address their concerns in a virtual setting using synchronous chat. This also permits teachers to answer all questions and foster the social relations with all students.

- **Peers Feedback:** Since BL aims to encourage community, the collaborative construction of knowledge and featuring an active role of the learner, much of the discussion of e-feedback in BL settings tend to focus on e-peer feedback. We can mention the study carried out Liu and Sadler (2003) which aims at comparing the quality of peer feedback received in a traditional and electronic environment and their overall effect on revision. By classifying students into an experimental group which used a pen-and paper peer editing and a control group which used e-peer review, the technological group manifested the larger number of over-all and revision-oriented comments.
- **Internal Feedback:** Self-monitoring means one's ability to examine and correct his/her oral or written production on his/her own. It can be viewed as a long-term goal when students “will repair their own communication breakdowns and produce the target language accurately and fluently without guidance” (Allwright & Bailey, 1991:107). According to Zimmerman and Risemberg (1997), writing is a self-initiated, self-planned, and self-sustained cognitive activity. It is imposed by internal factors such as the writer’s knowledge, skills, goals, intentions, and topic selected. Therefore, while writing down one’s thoughts, the writer becomes self-regulator when he manages those factors, and provides himself each time a personal feedback at a metacognitive level. Using such an internal feedback, the writer evaluates to what extent his/her writings reflect the constraints imposed.

2.6.2.2 Computer-Generated Feedback

- **Word-Processing**

While conducting writing activities within a virtual setting, students can at any time benefit from word-processing applications. These applications are advantageous in many ways. They can edit a text easily without having to retype it for a second time. They include features such as font application, spell checking, Grammar checking, a built-in thesaurus that provides words meaning provides words' meanings, their synonyms and opposites, automatic text correction, collaborative editing, and graphical user interface such as images and diagrams. These applications may also foster students' metacognition, self-monitoring, and self-awareness each time they get to know their erroneous productions and what their correct versions are.

- **Using Online Resources**

Apart from the software programs that are –or can be- directly installed on a computer, there exist a growing number of online resources that can be exploited by students to assist them in the process of self-editing. This includes search engines such as Google which make it easy for students to search for useful websites such as Grammar websites, online libraries, online dictionaries, Google books, and Online Writing Centers. More targeted text-retrieval sites can help students clarify the strong sectional restrictions of specific words in more specific and relevant contexts. These include WordPilot 2000, Check my words and Word neighbors (Milton, 1999, 2004, 2006 as cited in Hyland and Hyland, 2006). All of these online resources play a significant part in shaping the Digital Natives’ cognitive constructions of knowledge.

Conclusion

In a summary, the various writing theories that have been established are adequate to demonstrate the complexity of writing, especially if the goal is to teach a highly "academic" genre of writing with all of its sub-components. The constructivist theory, on the other hand, has been shown to incorporate both product and process approaches and to go beyond basic knowledge transfer. As a result, if constructivist theory is used in conjunction with the potential benefits of the BL experience and the proper aspects of academic writing, we are likely to get a thorough and efficient teaching experience especially to overcome the covid-19 circumstances.

Chapter Three
Field Work and Data Analysis

Introduction

The aim of this research work is to investigate the use of blended learning in improving students' academic writing proficiency during covid-19 era. Another purpose within this study is to know teachers perspectives on blended learning as a main method approach of teaching academic writing during the said era. In addition this chapter highlights both the learning process in a blended learning environment and higher educational systems. This chapter is also dedicated to the fieldwork and the analysis of the provided data. Moreover, as an attempt to answer the research questions provided in order to confirm its hypothesis. The data gathered from the research tools namely students and teachers' questionnaires will be analyzed. Firstly, A questionnaire conducted with teachers at the division of English in MKUB. The purpose of the Questionnaire is to get the teachers tackle this sensitive area of investigation that is added to a brand new circumstance, and to discover their opinions about some factors that might influence the academic writing in a BL environment. Secondly, a questionnaire for second year students of English at MKUB. The intended purpose of this questionnaire was to explore students' point of view on academic writing being taught in a BL environment and its effects on their writing proficiency during covid-19 era. Unfortunately, the questionnaire regarding the students was not used due to unexpected circumstances namely related to students (and I), therefore the data analysis concerns the teachers' questionnaire only.

3.1 Teachers Questionnaire

3.1.1 The Administration of Teachers' Questionnaire

We have designed an online questionnaire for gathering data. The questionnaire have been sent via email to eight teachers at Mohammed Khider University of Biskra. Those teachers demonstrate their collaboration by providing us with valuable and important responses so it serve our research; because it capture the teachers perceptions, opinions, and experience towards the implementation of BL as a method approach and whether it foster learners' writing in teaching and learning English as a foreign language or not.

3.1.2 Description of the Teachers' questionnaire

The teacher's questionnaire is consisted of four sections, and each section includes different types of questions. The first section is about background information of the teachers including the gender, educational degree, teaching experience. However, section two of the teachers' questionnaire is about teachers' insights concerning blended learning in EFL classes. In this section, teachers have been asked about different items related to their students and blended learning method. Furthermore, the third section of the questionnaire stands for teachers' perception on blended learning during COVID-19 era.

Finally, the last section of the questionnaire is related to teacher's perceptions about the impact of using blended learning to cultivating students academic writing and it includes four main questions and suggestions from teachers.

T: represents teacher

3.1.3 Analysis of the Teachers' Questionnaire

Section One: Background Information

Item 1. Gender:

Table 3.1: Teachers' Gender

Option	Respondents	Percentage
1. Male	4	50%
2. Female	4	50%
Total	8	100%

From the above table we recognize that the male teachers whom 50% are even with the female teachers who is also 50%, this means that the males teachers are EQUALLY addicted to technology as females ones.

Item 2. Age :

Table 3.2: Teachers' Age

Option	Respondents	Percentage
1. Above 20	01	12.5%
2. Above 30	02	25%
3. Above 40	05	62.5%
Total	08	100%

From the above table we notice that 5 of the teachers are in their 40s or more representing 62.5 %; meaning having more experience in the educational system than those in their 30s which represent 25% of the sample and those in their 20s; representing 12.5% of the sample.

Item 3: Highest education level:

Table3.3: Teachers' educational Degree

Option	Participants	Percentage
1. Magistrate	05	62.5%
2. Doctorate	02	25%
3. Postdoctoral	01	12.5%
Total	08	100%

This question is mandatory and all of the teachers have answered it from the table above we notice that the majority of participants have Magister degree, i.e. 62.5% representing 5 teachers. Only one teacher is postdoctoral with 12.5% and two doctorates with 25%. These results indicate that most of the teachers are “Old School”; meaning they are less likely to be interested or fully comprehend the concept of blended learning in the modernized educational systems nowadays.

Item 4: How long have you been developing teaching experience?

- 10 years
- 12 years
- 15 years
- 10 years
- 05 years
- 05 years
- 08 years
- 07 years

Item 5: How do you rate your expertise in using technology and Internet?

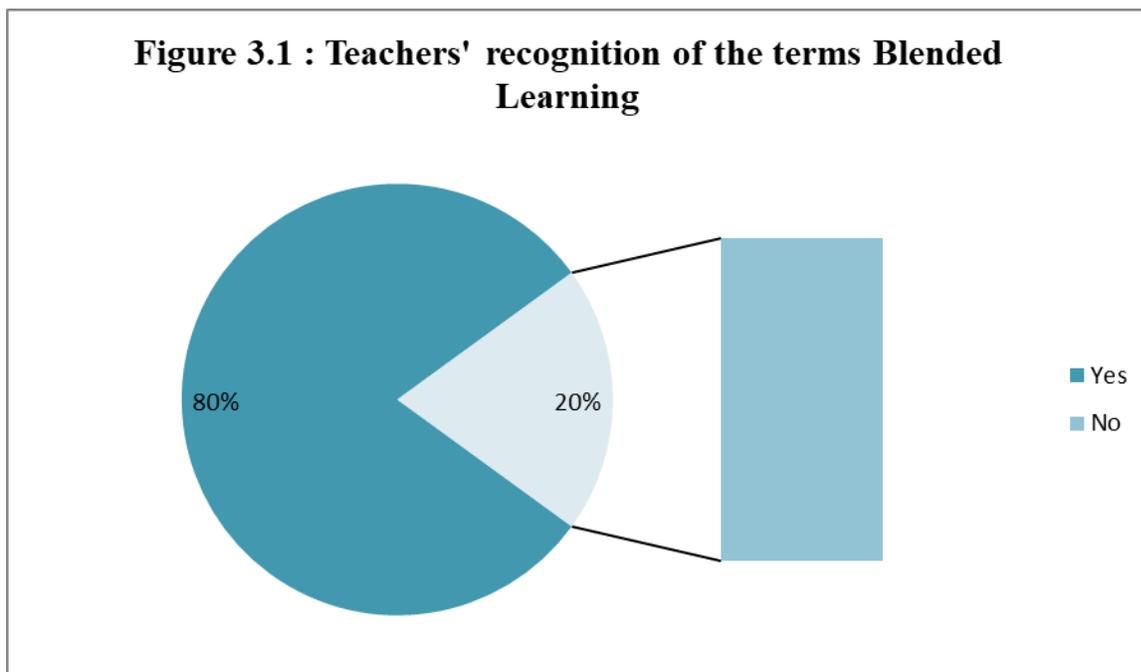
Table 3.4: Teachers’ expertise in using Internet

Option	Participants	Percentage
Excellent	02	25%
Moderate	04	50%
Good	02	50%
Poor	00	00%
Total	08	100%

From the previous table we notice that half of the teachers (04) are familiar with technology; however, they need to work more on their utility of it. Nevertheless, The other half is divided equally between “Good” and “Poor” which indicates the appealing fact that new generation of teachers are well formed concerning using technology and internet and vice versa.

Section Two: Teachers insight on Blended Learning

Item 6: Have you heard of the term blended learning before?



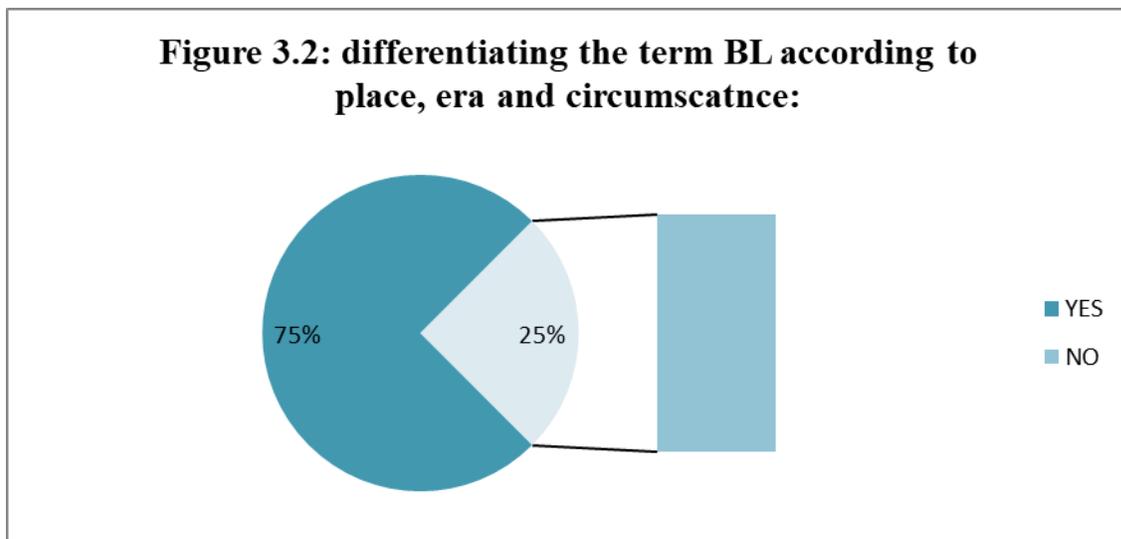
_If yes, how do you define blended learning according to your knowledge:

all of the six teachers had approximately the same definition for blended learning which is summarized into : “It is a method of teaching that integrates technology and digital media with traditional instructor-led classroom activities, giving students more flexibility to customize their learning experiences.”

Other details mentioned:

- the teacher drives the instruction and augments with digital tools
 - students cycle through a schedule of independent online study and face-to-face classroom time.
 - Most of the curriculum is delivered via a digital platform and teachers are available for face-to-face consultation and support.
 - All of the curriculum is delivered via a digital platform but in a consistent physical location. Students usually take traditional classes in this model as well.
 - Students choose to augment their traditional learning with online course work.
 - Students complete an entire course through an online platform with possible teacher check-ins.
- All curriculum and teaching is delivered via a digital platform and face-to-face meetings are scheduled or made available.

Item 7: Is it possible to differentiate Blended Learning definition according to place, era, and circumstances as they arise?



Item 8: What do you think are the main challenges that are facing/faced you when delivering online courses?

Table 3.5: Main challenges facing teachers when delivering online courses

Option	Participant	Percentage
a. Being isolated	00	00%
b. Lack of learners feedback and engagement	01	12.5%
c. Technical issues with online teaching tools	03	37.5%
d. not familiar with the full use of distance learning	02	25%
e. slow internet connection	02	25%
Total	08	100%

From the above table we notice that the most dominant challenge faced by teachers when delivering online courses is “the technical issues with online teaching tools”. The last two options of this question were chosen equally as the second main challenge. The last hinder was the “lack of learners” feedback and engagement” chosen by only one teacher. this result represent the struggle of using technology in modern classrooms.

Item 9: What type of ICT tools you use for your students’ evaluation such as online task/quiz?

Table 3.6: ICT tools used for online evaluation

Option	Participant	Percentage
a. Desktop and laptop	06	75%
b. phone	00	
c. Moodle	01	12.5%
d. Zoom	01	12.5%
TOTAL	08	100%

Item 10: Do you usually use ICT tools for your students' evaluation such as test/quiz?

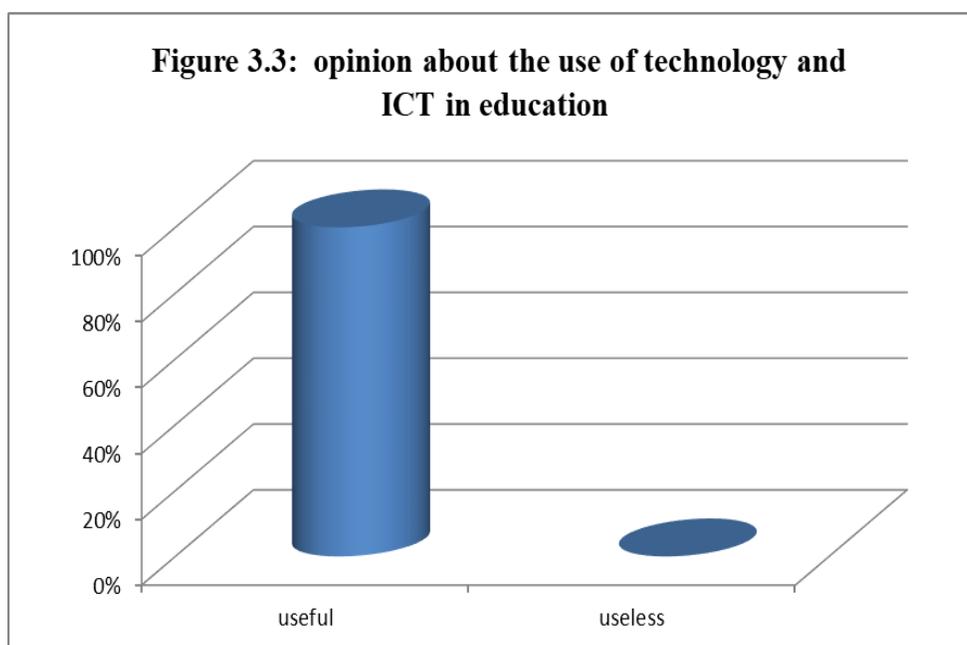
Option	Participants	Percentage
a. Always	00	00%
b. Often	00	00%
c. Sometimes	03	37.5%
d. Never	05	62.5%
TOTAL	08	100%

The table represents the frequency of usage of ICT tools for online evaluation. The latter reveals questionable results which are demonstrated in the almost absence of any Technological instruments when evaluating students' performances. The majority of teachers (5/8) DO NOT use ICT tools for the purpose of evaluation. Only three teachers answered with "Sometimes" that indicates shading ICT tools for assessment unless it's needed for specific situations or modules.

Item 11: What's your opinion on the use of digital technology and ICT education?

Table 3.7: opinion about the use of digital Technology and ICT in education

Option	Participants	Percentage
a. Useful	08	100%
b. Useless	00	00%
TOTAL	08	100%



Both, the table and figure, show that all of the teachers agree on the usefulness of utilizing ICT tools in education; however, in the previous question most of them do not use it. The confusion relies in the background of teaching approaches and methods they are adopting; therefore, the idea of integrating such as a new “Thing” as Technology can be intimidating.

Justification:

- Educational technology can foster collaboration. Not only can teachers engage with students during lessons, but students can also communicate with each other. At the same time, technology enables one-on-one interaction with teachers.
- Teachers can create lessons based on student interests and strengths. An added benefit is that students can learn at their own pace. When they need to review class material to get a better understanding of essential concepts, students can review videos in the lesson plan
- Creating engaging content can involve the use of AR, videos, or podcasts. For example, when submitting assignments, students can include videos or interact with students from across the globe.
- Teachers can leverage technology to achieve new levels of productivity, implement useful digital tools to expand learning opportunities for students, and increase student support and engagement.
- Technology can foster an increase in the quantity and quality of students' thinking and writing. Perhaps one of the best documented successes with computers in education is in developing students' writing.
- Teaching is now more than a lecturer in front of a blackboard and technology has been an integral part of its development. It has transformed education and the way that people learn and retain information.

Item N° 12: Thoughts about video enhancing learning via Zoom?

For this question 6 teachers left a question mark in the answering space due to their lack of comprehension for what is required since they probably do not use it as much as the other 2 teachers

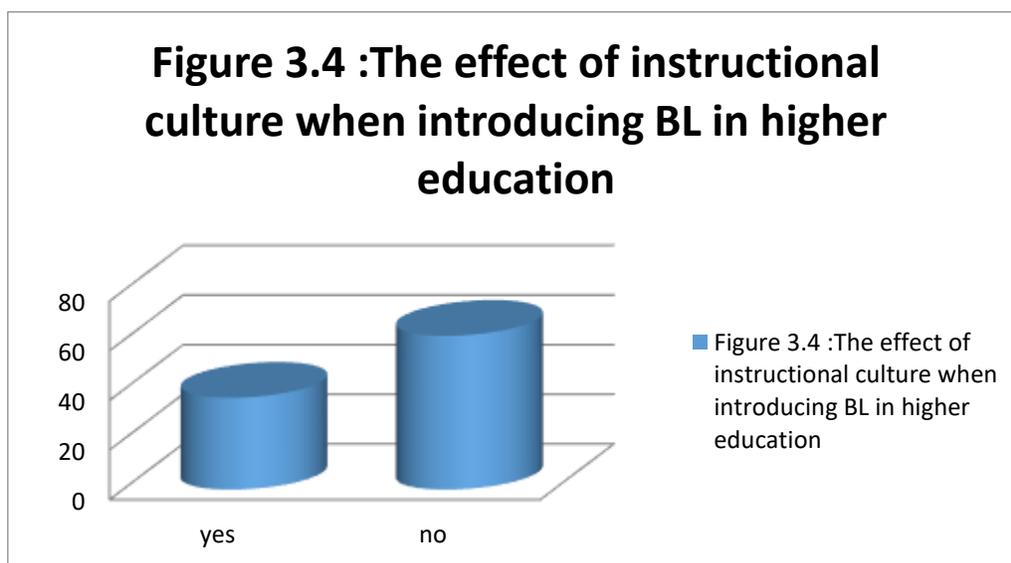
- It allows students to be more involved and interested when offering a technological tool for learning such as zoom
- Zoom is a newly discovered app that has made the process of teaching and learning easier. Both students and teachers can be comfortable using this app since it does not require much of physical efforts such as actually being present in face 2 face classrooms

Item 13: what are the challenges facing online classroom management?

- Creating a learning environment at home can have a significant impact on students. A bustling household can be very distracting. Students, like remote working parents, need a quiet space that supports concentration and engagement.
- it can be challenging to keep students engaged and focused in a physical classroom and this is amplified further in the virtual setting. Unable to simply walk around their classroom, teachers cannot see if students are engaged in the task t hand or distracted by online games or videos.
- students need social interaction with their peers and virtual learning means that many may feel isolated at home and cut off from their friends.
- Millions of people around the world are experiencing technical difficulties because of the high usage rate of online learning systems, and other digital tools. The platforms are

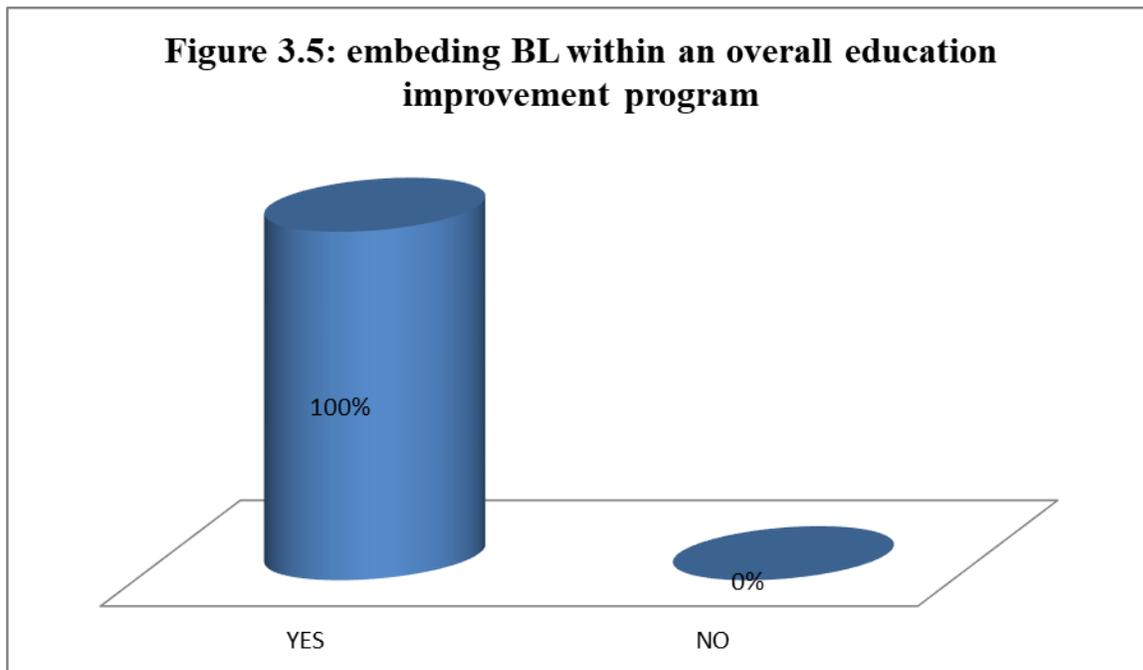
- overloaded poor quality video and audio, internet problems. Internet connection is either unstable or the current data plan is not enough to cover the progressive e-learning needs. Students in both urban and rural areas are struggling with this issue.
- It's hard for teachers, students, and parents to start using a learning management system or any other digital tool out of nowhere without additional training.
- This rather psychological factor is still highly affecting students' motivation and learning progress. Being in the classroom, students got used to instant eye-to-eye communication with each other allowing reacting together, sharing the experience which is now fading away
- Lack of parental support at home or unfavorable home learning environment that affects learners.
- The crashing online system, as unfortunately it does happen often

Item 14: Do you think instructional culture effects the introduction of Blended Learning in higher education?



From the above Histogram we notice that three teachers answered with “Yes” representing 37.5% of the population whereas six teachers answered with “No” representing 64.5% of the population.

Item 15: Do you think Blended Learning should be embedded within an overall Education improvement program as the corona virus circumstances remains?



All of the teachers seem to agree with integrating Blended Learning within the education system as the corona virus remains.

Section three: Teachers' Perceptions on Blended Learning during COVID-19 era

Item 16: To what extent were you familiar with online teaching before COVID-19 outbreak?

Table 3.8: Familiarity with online teaching before covid-19

Option	Participants	Percentage
a. Familiar	01	12.5%
b. Unfamiliar	07	87.5%
TOTAL	08	100%

The above table shows that the majority of teachers are not familiar with online teaching before the pandemic; therefore, it is fair to say that there is a noticeable lack in using technology when teaching. Only one teacher stated that is familiar with online teaching.

Item 17 : Based on your teaching experience during pandemic, state the major differences between Face 2 Face learning and E-learning?

- online courses, many learning exercises and course materials involve diverse communication skills such as reading written content, consume video and audio content, and interact with others in a variety of communication styles.
- There are lots of time-saving ways to add frequent and meaningful feedback through using both written and multimedia strategies.
- While different from a face-to-face course which also involves more in-person dialogue and conversations, an advantage of an online course is that you can generally communicate more ideas as well as clear, comprehensive messaging given that students

may view, reread and review again and again. In a face-to-face course, they may have only had that one time it was said during class.

- Discussions in the online environment may offer more opportunity for students to think about, research and even draft their ideas into researchable topics
- Online courses are often more personal and individualized
- Numerous technology-based learning opportunities are offered This is different than a traditional face-to-face course, which may rely more heavily on traditional lecture-style delivery of content and classroom-based learning exercises.
- Teaching online becomes less about teaching information and more about facilitating student efforts to think critically, applies and makes sense of new knowledge.
- Active and frequent participation from everyone

Item 18: What major challenges that faced you moving from F2F to online teaching?

All of the teachers agreed that the lack of technology awareness and technological frameworks are complicated for their mindsets since they have never been exposed to it as such manner.

Item 19: In what way have your lectures and pedagogy changed since the outbreak of covid-19?

For this question the participants had two different types of answers. The first one states that there is no noticeable changes regarding the lectures nor the pedagogy the only change is distributing the lectures in form of PDFs or Word via Moodle along with assignments to be done for practice. This was noted by 6 teachers

The second respond belong to only two teachers; saying that they have changed their type of lectures adding more details and more exercises to coop with the absence of physical classroom

lectures. Adding to this matter, they stated that they have searched for more practical ways to deliver the lessons in a way that everybody understands with minimum efforts.

Item 20: Do You think Blended Learning Methodology succeeded like it was hoped since the outbreak of COVID-19?

Table 3.9: The success of BL methodology since the outbreak of COVID-19

Option	Participants	Percentage
a. Yes	01	12.5%
b. No	07	87.5%
TOTAL	08	100%

Explain:

- Lack of technology awareness
- Misuse of online platforms
- Students are not committed to it
- Different mindsets for teachers make it hard to cooperate in terms of making online learning work

Item 21: What are your thoughts about the jump from fully online learning during pandemic vs e-learning after pandemic?

The answers were divided into three sections:

- No difference
- Only going back to face2face classrooms with the support of online platforms
- We are still during the pandemic so nothing changed so far.

Section Four: Teachers Perceptions about the impact of using Blended Learning in cultivating students' academic writing

Item 22: Tick yes or no to the following statements!

Statements	yes	no
1. do you have any experience in applying blended learning techniques in teaching academic writing	00%	100%
2. do you think COVID-19 circumstances are impacting positively on academic writing approach	37.5%	62.5%
3. do you think blended learning can enhance EFL learners academic writing in higher education	37.5%	62.5%
4. do you think we can assess academic writing skills through online examinations	12.5%	87.5%
5. do you think using blended learning will have a positive impact on students' academic writing achievements in a further use	37.5%	62.5%

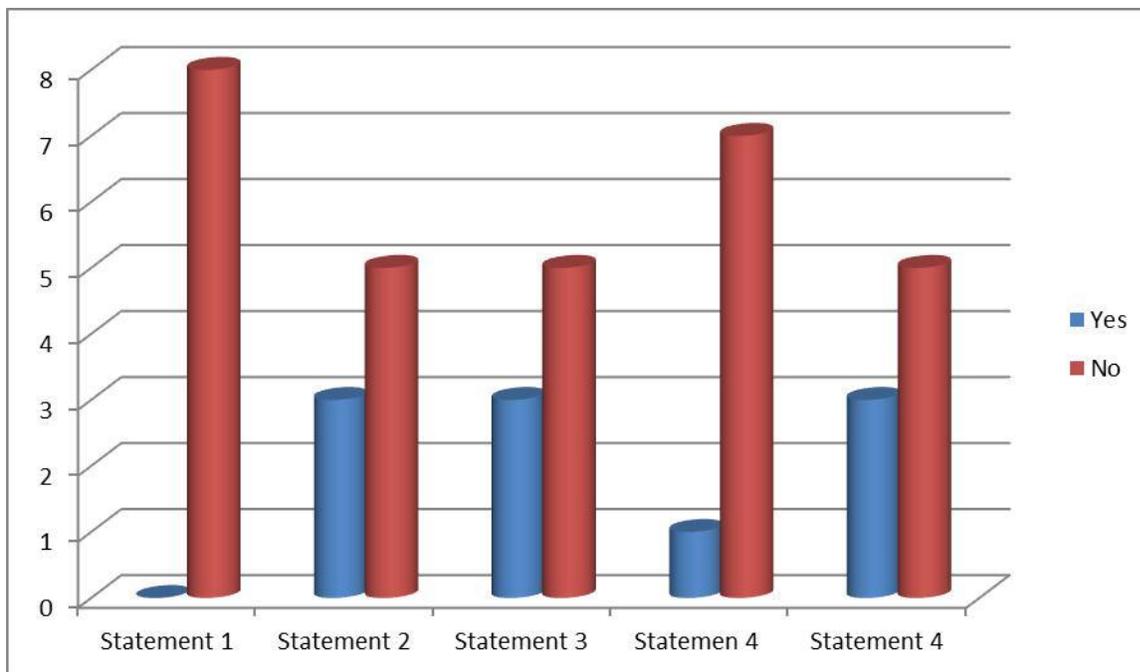


Figure 3.6: Answering with “yes” or “no” on the statements

From the above table and histogram we deduce that the majority of instructors have no experience whatsoever in using blended learning for academic writing. Furthermore, it is challenging for teachers to create content for academic writing lessons that is delivered via web platforms because it demands students' involvement and it's also hard for assessing their written production concerning integrity. The other minority are more optimistic for the use of Blended learning as a method of teaching foreign languages. As far as academic writing is concerned, they believe that blended learning can enhance students writing achievements and allow them to develop it more in several ways.

Item 23: During applying e-learning how do you manage group work activities during your academic writing lectures?

The participants stated that they avoid using group activities for its complicated nature; and they wait for them and the students to be familiar first with the process of online learning. In addition, it requires more time to control group activities and divide the work evenly for fair assessment.

Item 24: How do you control the academic integrity of your students in a distance and blended learning environment?

For this question six teachers stated that they use plagiarism checker. The other two wrote "to be honest, I do not know exactly how"

Item 25: Under what condition do you think blended learning really improves writing abilities?

- The students must be motivated to improve their level by practicing and checking online websites for creative writing
- Using plagiarism checker for authentic pieces of writing to avoid confusion
- Relying on credible online sources

Item 26: Further suggestions

- Thank you
- Long questionnaire, difficult to answer and needs time
- Good luck
- Good questions
- Best of luck
- Teachers and students should work together equally for better teaching/learning process

Conclusion

This chapter was mainly devoted to the fieldwork of the present study. The first section of the latter discussed substantially the research design and methodology, in addition to the reason behind choosing the methodology of the current research. This chapter dealt with the findings of only data collection methods, which is a questionnaire for EFL teachers. The data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed by using descriptive method since the study is qualitative. Finally, all the results have been discussed in order to answer the research questions and to confirm the suggested hypothesis.

General Conclusion

Applying Blended Learning in Foreign language teaching and learning is becoming a must, especially since the outbreak of COVID-19 and its huge impact on the learning process. As a result, we suggested the present study as an attempt to tackle two main theoretical frameworks, BL and learners academic writing proficiency. Moreover, shedding the light on the learning environment and how blended learning can be an efficient method approach to be used. Furthermore, through this study we tried to explore BL as a method approach starting by defining its components including its definitions, background, and its advantages and limitations beside other elements. On the other hand devoting the second chapter to emphasize the writing generally and academic writing specifically and how academic writing approaches, specifically the constructivist approach effects on the community in BL. Finally this chapter as devoted to the field work where we re-explained the purpose of this research through the rational of the study.

This study focused on the main criteria used when teaching and learning academic writing in a BL environment. After analyzing the results and discussing the finding of the data gathering tools, we will be checking whether these results confirm or reject the hypothesis formulated earlier in the study.

Starting with the first hypothesis: “using blended learning can be an efficient approach in teaching academic writing during COVID-19 era”, as far as the first hypothesis is concerned; and by relying on teachers’ answers, we conclude that EFL teachers at UMKB agree with the concept of blended learning being the perfect method for such circumstances, yet, third world countries are not familiar with the use of ICT tools and high depending technology. Moreover, the many sabbaticals facing them when teaching online is more than what the traditional classes hold.

According to the results, teachers claim that the difficulties facing them such as slow internet connection, lack in the use of advanced ICT tools and the lack of feedback from students makes a huge rock in the shoe. Yet, they agree on adopting blended learning being a useful approach in teaching during covid-19 era. Therefore, this hypothesis is confirmed

that when teachers use blended learning in teaching academic writing, students would develop a better proficiency at it. Through analyzing the data available about student engagement in online teaching and the use of a blended learning environment, we found that teachers are facing many difficulties, and how it challenging can be to teach students especially in an online environment. Therefore this hypothesis is rejected.

The present study explores teachers' attitude towards blended learning and how it can affect learners' academic writing proficiency. According to teacher's response to data gathering tool, we also discussed the usage of ICT tools and how blended learning environment at MKUB is going. Only one hypothesis was accepted meanwhile the second one was rejected. We respectfully declare that this study is still open for further research in the field of FL teaching.

Pedagogical Recommendations:

Based on the results this study has aimed to provide some pedagogical recommendations as future implications of blended learning to be adopted in order to help researchers, teachers and students in the English division at the University of Biskra

For teachers:

- Teachers have to keep updated and start using more of ICT tools in order to be able to apply the correctly and with no difficulties, moreover they should try to make the blended learning learning environment more motivating and fun for students such as using the available online tools and application.

- Using blended learning is becoming a must, even though it faces some difficulties for teacher,

yet they have to manage the class in more professional way.

For students:

- Blended learning can be beneficial when students use it in the right way and in their educational favor
- Students need to be involved in traditional classes rather than online classes should be fixed in order to overcome any unexpected circumstances in the future

for policy makers:

_training teachers to use ICT tools in order to facilitate the use of blended learning

_conduct seminars relevant to the use of blended learni

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Appendixes

Appendix 1

Students' Questionnaire

Dear students,

The following questionnaire is part of a research work concerned with investigating the significance use of Blended Learning (mixed method) in teaching/ learning English language specifically academic writing courses during COVID-19 era. This questionnaire is designed to explore your viewpoint and stance regarding the merge of Blended Learning as a teaching approach and as a mixed-mode instruction inside and outside the classroom. Your well-defined and truthful answers will remain anonymous as they help us gather important and valuable data in order to get a realistic assessment to attain a master's degree.

Pick the appropriate answer and make full statements when needed.

Thank you for your collaboration.

Prepared by:
BOOCETTA Marwa

Supervised by:
Mr. BOUHITEM Tayeb

Definition of key terms:**Blended learning:**

Blended learning is the combination of traditional face-to-face learning systems and computer-mediate learning (Graham, 2006).

It is also a style of education in which students learn using technologies and online media as well as the traditional learning. It blends the advantages of both online method (with ICT tools) and traditional method. It also shifts from teaching to learning and from teacher- centered class to student-centered class.

ICT:

ICT stand for Information and Communication Technology. It refers to all communication technologies from internet, computers, social networks, to other media applications and services.

Section One: Background Information

1. Gender

a. Male

b. Female

2. Age

a. Above 20

b. Above 30

c. Above 40

3. How do you rate your level in English?

a. Advanced

b. Good

c. Average

d. Poor

4. How do you rate your expertise in using technology and Internet

a. Excellent

c. Moderate

b. Good

d. Poor

Section Two: Students insight on Blended Learning

5. Have you heard of the term blended learning before?

a. Yes

b. No

_If yes, how do you define blended learning according to your knowledge

.....

6. Do you have an easy access to internet when it is needed?

a. yes

b. no

7. How often where you absent from online classes/handing online tasks?

a. never

b. rarely

c. sometimes

d. very often

e. always

8. What type of ICT tools are you familiar with the most?

a. Desktop and laptop

c. E-mail

b. Phone

d. Moodle

9. How often do you use ICT tools in your leaning?

a. always

b. often

c. sometimes

d. never

10. Thoughts about the use of e-learning and blended learning in higher education?

a. Useful

b. useless

Justify, please

.....

11. Do you consider Moodle an easy tool to use?

.....

12. What do you think are the challenges facing learning English language online?

.....

13. Do you think learners need an incremental expose to Blended Learning before diving into it?

a. Yes

b. No

Please explain!

.....

14. Tick the elements you think were the hardest in Blended Learning experience?

Elements	(✓)
1. The use of ICT tools in learning	
2. Accessing to lectures online	
3. The use of self-directed learning during online classes	
4. communication online with classmates and teachers	
5. the jump from traditional learning to E-learning to blended learning	
6. the timing and quantity of time provided online	
7. the integration between face-to-face lectures and online sessions	
8. online discipline	
9. balancing between face-to-face learning and online learning	

Section Three: Students' Perceptions on Blended Learning during COVID-19 era

15. To what extent were you familiar with online learning before COVID-19 outbreak?

a. familiar

b. unfamiliar

16. Do you think blended learning made the learning process easier during COVID-19 era?

a. Yes

b. no

.....
.....

17. What major challenges that faced you moving from teacher-centered method to learner-centered method in online learning during pandemic?

.....
.....

18. Did you experience any major obstacles while learning in a Blended learning/e-learning environment since the outbreak of covid-19?

.....
.....

19. Do You think Blended Learning Methodology succeeded like it was hoped since the outbreak of COVID-19?

a. Yes

b. No

Explain please

.....
.....

20. Was it challenging to move from traditional to fully online classes during pandemic?

a. Yes

b. No

If yes, what was the most challenging part?

.....
.....

Section Four: Students Perceptions about the impact of using Blended Learning in cultivating their academic writing

21. How do you rate your academic writing proficiency?

a. Very high

b. High

c. Intermediate

d. Low

e. Very low

22. Have you been given the chance to assess your own writing?

a. Yes

b. No

23. Are you satisfied with the way academic writing is being taught lately?

a. Yes

b. No

24. Do you see that the use of blended learning have improved your academic writing?

a. Yes

b. No

Explain please

.....

25. What factors of blended learning do you think improves your academic writing proficiency? Tick yes or no to the following statements!

Blended learning factors	✓
1. Encouraging Self-assessment during online classes	
2. Flexible ability to access to lectures anytime	
3. The use of websites, grammar checker, and documents during online classes	
4. Ability of memorizing information	
5. Self-awareness and self-correction to mistakes	
6. Teacher and peers feedback during online classes	

26. Do you have any further suggestions?

.....

.....

.....

Thank you.

Appendix 2

Teachers' Questionnaire

Dear teacher,

The following questionnaire is part of a research work concerned with investigating the significance use of Blended Learning (mixed method) in teaching/ learning English language specifically academic writing courses during COVID-19 era. This questionnaire is designed to explore your viewpoint and stance regarding the merge of Blended Learning as a teaching approach and as a mixed-mode instruction inside and outside the classroom. Your well-defined and truthful answers will remain anonymous as they help us gather important and valuable data in order to get a realistic assessment to attain a master's degree.

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Supervised by:
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ICT:

ICT stand for Information and Communication Technology. It refers to all communication technologies from internet, computers, social networks, to other media applications and services.

Section One: Background Information27. **Gender**b. Male b. Female 28. **Age**a. Above 20 b. Above 30 c. Above 40 29. **Highest Education level**a. Master b. Magistar c. Doctorate d. Postdoc 30. **How long have you been developing Teaching Experience?**

.....

31. **How do you rate your expertise in using technology and Internet ?**c. Excellent c. Moderate d. Good d. Poor **Section Two: Teachers insight on Blended Learning**32. **Have you heard of the term blended learning before?**a. Yes b. No **_If yes, how do you define blended learning according to your knowledge**.....
.....33. **Is it possible to differentiate Blended Learning definition according to place, era, and circumstances as they arise?**a. yes b. no

34. What do you think are the main challenges that are facing/faced you when delivering online courses?

- f. Being isolated
- g. Lack of learners feedback and engagement
- h. Technical issues with online teaching tools
- i. not familiar with the full use of distance learning
- j. slow internet connection

35. What type of ICT tools do you often use in your class?

- c. Desktop and laptop
- c. Moodle
- d. Phone
- d. Zoom

36. Do you usually use ICT tools for your students' evaluation such as online task/quiz?

- e. always
- f. often
- g. sometimes
- h. never

37. What's your opinion on the use of digital technology and ICT education?

- a. Useful
- b. useless

Justify, please

.....

38. Thoughts about video enhancing learning via Zoom?

.....

39. What are the challenges facing online classroom management?

.....

40. Do you think instructional culture effects the introduction of Blended Learning in higher education?

.....

41. Do you think Blended Learning should be embedded within an overall Education improvement program as the corona virus circumstances remains?

Section Three: Teachers' Perceptions on Blended Learning during COVID-19 era

42. To what extent were you familiar with online teaching before COVID-19 outbreak?

c. familiar

d. unfamiliar

43. Based on your teaching experience during pandemic, state the major differences between Face 2 Face learning and E-learning

.....

44. What major challenges that faced you moving from F2F to online teaching

.....

45. In what way have your lectures and pedagogy changed since the outbreak of covid-19

46. Do You think Blended Learning Methodology succeeded like it was hoped since the outbreak of COVID-19

b. Yes

b. No

Explain please

.....
.....

47. What are your thoughts about the jump from fully online learning during pandemic vs e-learning after pandemic?

.....
.....

Section Four: Teachers Perceptions about the impact of using Blended Learning in cultivating students' academic writing

48. Tick yes or no to the following statements!

Statements	yes	no
1. do you have any experience in applying blended learning techniques in teaching academic writing		
2. do you think COVID-19 circumstances are impacting positively on academic writing approach		
3. do you think blended learning can enhance EFL learners academic writing in higher education		
4. do you think we can assess academic writing skills through online examinations		
5. do you think using blended learning will have a positive impact on students' academic writing achievements in a further use		

49. During applying e-learning how do you manage group work activities during your academic writing lectures?

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.....
.....

50. How do you control the academic integrity of your students in a distance and blended learning environment?

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.....

51. Under what condition do you think blended learning really improves writing abilities?

.....
.....

52. Do you have any further suggestions?

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.....
.....

ملخص الدراسة

يهدف هذا البحث إلى لفت الانتباه على دور المزج بين الطريقة التقليدية والطريقة المعاصرة في ترقية الاستقلالية في التعلم أو ما يعرف بالتعلم الذاتي بين أقسام اللغات الأجنبية في فترة وباء كورونا الذي اجتاحت العالم و الذي قيد التعليم كافة. بما ان الجامعات الجزائرية، ونخص بالذكر جامعة محمد خيضر بسكرة لان الأساتذة من ضمن قطاعات التربية و التعليم حيث ان الاساتذة يعانون من صعوبات وتحديات في مهنة التدريس عن بعد التي يمكن أن تكون حاجزا يمنعهم من تأدية عملهم بنجاح. علاوة على ذلك فان العديد من طلبة اللغة الانجليزية لا يفضلون الدراسة باستعمال التعليم عن بعد لكونه مفهوم جديد و معقد. ولهذا فقد قام البحث بوصل التعلم الذاتي وتأثيره على الكتابة الذاتية للطلبة. هذه الدراسة تهدف ايضا لاستكشاف مواقف الطلبة والاساتذة من تأثير التعلم المختلط على الكتابة الذاتية و تعلم اللغة الانجليزية كلغة اجنبية الاجنبية في الجامعات، خاصة جامعة محمد خيضر بسكرة. كما يهدف إلى إظهار تأثير التعلم المدمج على اسلوب الكتابة لدى متعلمي اللغة الانجليزية و كيفية تحكم الاساتذة في التعليم التقليدي و التعليم عن بعد. كما يقوم هذا البحث بتسليط الضوء على قدرة الاساتذة والطلبة استعمال الادوة التكنولوجيا في التعليم و التأثير على اساليب الكتابة. يأتي هذا البحث بنمط وصفي حيث يقوم هذا البحث باستبيان طلبة و اساتذة على نطاق جامعة محمد خيضر بسكرة.