

## **The Application of Blended Learning in Teaching Writing at Thai Nguyen University of Education**



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**ABSTRACT:** This study focuses on investigating the effectiveness of Blended Learning in teaching Writing for English majors at Thai Nguyen University of Education. In order to eliminate subjectivity in the research, the author used simultaneously three means of data collection including test, questionnaire and observation. The results of the pre-test and post-test showed that students improved their Writing skills significantly after a semester of applying Blended Learning in teaching. The results of the students' questionnaire and the teacher's observations also showed the students' positive attitudes towards this method. On this basis, Blended Learning is proposed to be applied more in teaching Writing for students at university.

**KEYWORDS:** writing skills, Blended Learning, teaching writing, traditional methods, online teaching.

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Writing skill is considered as one of the four basic skills for English major students at university. For many students, writing is a difficult skill and requires regular practice and guidance. According to Byrne (1993), writing is the solitary skill in which the readers will perform it alone without any interactions or feedbacks from their partners. Unlike speech in which the speakers have support from the participants to keep the conversation going, writing skill requires the writers to take the time to arrange sentences and ideas logically. Therefore, teaching writing skills needs to have suitable approaches to help learners become active in practicing.

The 21st century has witnessed the explosion of science and informatic technology as well as its great impacts on all areas of life in general and the field of education in particular. Thanks to informatic technology, teaching activities become more flexible and diverse and help learners to access new learning methods. The new learning methods have replaced the traditional ones, which learning can take place anytime, anywhere instead of being limited to the classroom. Under the urgent requirements of the new era and the increasing learning needs of society, E-learning was born to help both educators and learners have new choices and methods to stimulate the activeness in thinking and learning processes. In the context of the Covid pandemic, e-learning has gradually proven its advantages in organizing educational activities, especially in teaching English Writing.

However, after two years of applying online teaching due to the Covid pandemic, this method has shown certain limitations compared to the traditional method. In addition, learners still need to interact with teachers and classmates during the learning process, so it is not feasible to completely eliminate traditional teaching methods to replace them with e-learning in teaching English Writing. Therefore, Blended learning, a method that combines traditional teaching and online teaching, can help teachers solve these problems.

The study aimed at investigating the potential role of Blended Learning in teaching Writing at Thai Nguyen University of Education. This study sought for the answers for the following questions:

1. What is the effectiveness of Blended Learning in teaching Writing?
2. What is the students' attitude toward Blended Learning in teaching Writing?

### **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1. Teaching Writing Approaches**

Writing is considered a difficult subject for any learners, especially learning Writing in a different language other than their mother tongue to convey the right message and at the same time be linguistically correct. According to James.D.William (2003), there are several factors affecting teaching methods including "philosophical perspectives on the relation between language and mind, the role of individuals in society, the goals of writing, and the nature of education". It is these factors that have contributed to the formation of different methods of teaching Writing, and although these methods are not really ideal, they have partly proven their effectiveness.

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According to Nunan (1991), the methods of teaching Writing can be divided into two categories including Product-oriented Approach and Process-oriented Approach.

- **Product-oriented Approach** is often used to encourage learners to imitate given sample sentences. This approach focuses on training students for proficiency in using the language with correct grammar.

- **Process –Oriented Approach** encourages learners to focus on ideas for their writing rather than care about format or accuracy of language. This method emphasizes groups- collaborative activities to stimulate and develop students' interest in Writing.

Byrne (1993) again divided teaching Writing approaches according to the problems that students face when learning Writing, including:

- **Accuracy-Oriented Approach** focuses on helping students control mistakes while writing. This method emphasizes on different steps in creating a Writing with linguistical correctness.

- **Fluency - Oriented Approach:** Contrary to the method that focuses on the accuracy of the writing, this method encourages students to focus on the idea of the essay rather than the grammar. Therefore, when applying this method, teachers can give students the feeling that they are actually writing, not doing homework.

- **Text - Oriented Approach:** this method emphasizes the importance of paragraphs as a whole, and thus students will be taught how to structure and arrange paragraphs properly.

- **Purpose-Oriented Approach:** in this method, students are encouraged to create texts with specific purposes such as writing for another classmates or writing scripts for class plays, etc.

### 2.2. Blended learning in teaching writing

#### 2.2.1. The definitions of Blended learning

There are many definitions as well as similar views of famous scholars about blended learning. Caravias (2018) has stated that Blended learning is considered the combination of traditional teaching methods and mobile learning using the support of technology. It is used in the combination with different media to complement each other and stimulate the learning process. Neumeier (2005) has similar opinion with Caravias in which Blended learning (BL) is the combination of face-to-face learning and computer-assisted learning in a teaching and learning environment.

#### 2.2.2. The application of Blended learning in teaching Writing.

Making the learner the center of educational activities is what educators have been aiming for and using different teaching methods to materialize. The combination of organizing in-class activities and online teaching brings many benefits to both teachers and students. The first benefit that Blended Learning brings can be mentioned is the students' active and creative initiative in learning Writing. Learners will have access to a variety of resources under the teachers' guidance and support to improve their own writing skills. The most noticeable limitation in the traditional writing method is that teachers can only support and respond to students' writing during class time. Meanwhile, Blended Learning can provide teachers with different ways to manage their classroom outside of class time such as through email, social networking sites or other classroom management tools like Google classroom, Canvas.... Thanks to these tools, learners can exchange with teachers and other students to comment and correct their partners' essay. As a result, learners can enhance interactions with teachers and students through classroom sessions and online classroom activities. Blended Learning can help to increase students' learning time and thus make learning more effective.

According to Ho Ngoc Khuong (2021), the combination of traditional teaching methods and elearning in universities today in Blended Learning is shown in the diagram below:

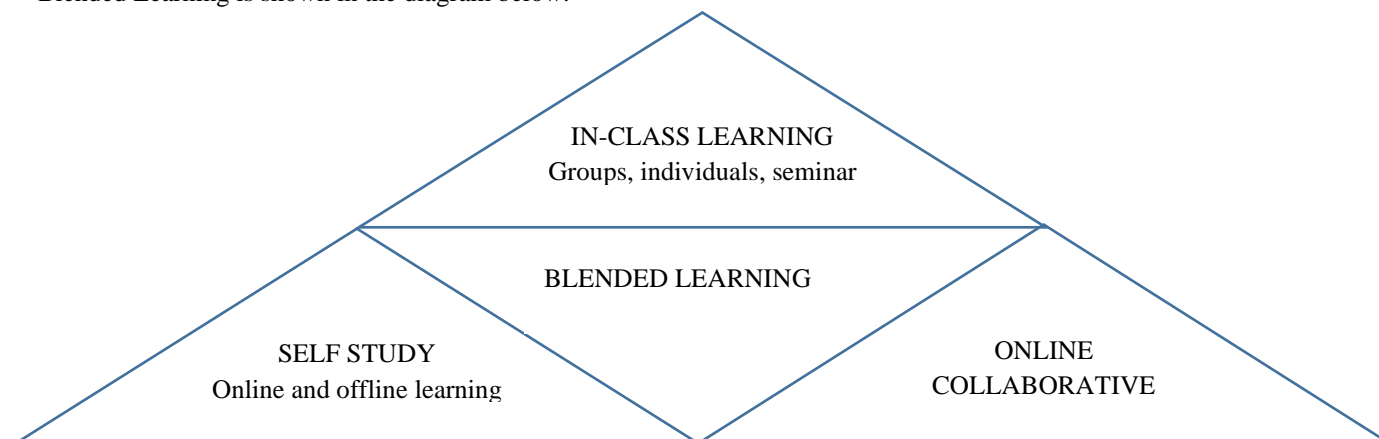


Figure 1: The model of Blended Learning

According to Figure 1, Blended Learning method contains three main types of activities, including:

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- **In-class learning:** it can be conducted in many forms of teaching activities, including group activities, individual activities, presentations, or seminars... in class.
- **Self-study activities:** It can be organized as online or offline activities of students. Learners can proceed to participate in other online or offline courses or exploit digital information or databases themselves to have further practice and improve their skills.
- **Online collaborative learning:** It requires learners to complete online learning content by participating in virtual classes on online platforms and interacting with teachers and other classmates.

### 2.3. The benefits of Blended Learning in teaching Writing:

Learning is not just in the classroom but an ongoing and daily process. Each learning method has its own advantages and disadvantages, and no method is superior to the others. Therefore, it is necessary to combine different learning methods to maximize the advantages of each one. On the one hand, Blended Learning can help teachers manage students during out- of –class time, enhance interaction with students and help to stimulate students' initiative and creativity. On the other hand, BL enhances students' access to information, self-study and interaction in learning.

Caravias believes that Blended Learning has the following 4 benefits in teaching:

- 1) Flexibility of time: Students can freely choose their study time regardless of the regulations on study and teaching time at the university.
- 2) Lack of dependence on the time constraints of the teacher: Teachers can have more interaction time with students without class time constraints
- 3) Time for reflection: Students have more time to communicate with the teacher and other students in the class without restriction.
- 4) Meeting different needs and learning styles: Teachers can base on each student's needs and learning abilities to support without being fear for the problems of the number of students in and the duration of the lesson.

## III.METHODOLOGY

### 3.1. Design

This study uses descriptive method to conduct and collect research data. 80 third-year students of 2 English Writing classes participated in the research during a semester. These students joined in-class and online activities throughout their studies. In details, the main activities include:

**Table 1. Activities used in Blended Learning to improve writing skills**

Activities	Requirements for students
In-class learning	Students listen to the lectures and join classroom activities that the teacher requires. These activities include individual activities such as practicing writing sentences or paragraphs...; group activities such as writing correction in groups, or drafting the main ideas for their writing...
Self-study	Students are required to study materials or join other online writing classes to self-improve their writing skills according to the requirement of the teaching curriculum at Universities.
Online learning	Students are required to participate in online classes by completing assigned tasks, interacting with classmates, editing their partners' writings, joining discussion,... on the classroom management platform (Google classroom).

### 3.2. Participants

This study was conducted with the participation of 80 third-year English majors at Thai Nguyen University of Education. Students are required to participate in both in-class and online Writing activities throughout the semester.

### 3.3 Data collection

- Test: All 80 students took a Pre-Test to assess their level at the time before conducting the study. After finishing the research process, a Post-Test was carried out to evaluate the effectiveness of Blended Learning in learning Writing.
- Questionnaire: All 80 students participating in the study were asked to fill out a questionnaire after participating in research activities. The survey questions mainly focus on the students' attitudes as well as evaluate the effectiveness of Blended-learning in learning Writing.
- Observation: In order to eliminate the subjectivity in students' survey, the author also asked for the support of three teachers who are experts in teaching Writing to participate in observing and evaluating the students' participation when applying the Blended-learning approach in learning Writing.

IV. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

4.1. The effectiveness of Blended learning in learning Writing

Table 2: Results of students' pre-test and post-test

Evaluation	Score	Pre-test		Post-test	
		Number	%	Number	%
Excellent	9.5-10	0	0	0	0
Very good	8.5-9.4	0	0	6	7.5%
Good	7.0-8.4	15	18.75%	29	36.25%
Fair	5.5-6.9	30	37.5%	35	43.75
Poor	4.0-5.4	21	26.25%	8	10%
Very poor	0-3.9	14	17.5%	2	2.5%

The results of Pre-test and Post-test in Table 2 above shows a significant improvement in students' scores after a semester of applying Blended learning in learning Writing. Specifically, 6 students (7.5%) achieved “Very Good” results in the Post-test while in the Pre-test, there were no answers having this score. The “Good” result in the Post-test has increased by 16.5% compared to the Pre-test. In the “Fair” category, if 30 students achieved this score (37.5%) in the Pre-test, in the Post-test this number has increased slightly to 35 students (43.75%). In “Poor” and “Very Poor” results, there was a significant decrease, from 26.5% to 10% in the former and from 17.5% to 2.5% in the latter.

4.2. Students' attitudes towards Blended-Learning in learning writing:

To get a better view of students' attitudes towards the application of Blended -Learning in learning Writing, a survey was carried out with 9 statements, in which each question has 5 options from 1 to 5 (corresponding to strongly agree, somehow agree, neutral, somehow disagree and strongly disagree).

Table 3: Students' attitudes towards the application of Blended-Learning in learning Writing.

No	Statements	1	2	3	4	5
1	Blended -Learning can help me to learn Writing better	46%	22%	15%	11%	6%
2	When applying Blended Learning, the Writing lessons become more interesting and creative.	31%	35%	18%	9%	7%
3	Students are more active and creative in their learning activities	28	42	17	5	8
4	Students are encouraged to develop independent learning skills.	32	39	10	11	8
5	Students have easier access to learning materials	45	27	13	6	9
6	Students receive feedback and comments on their writing more frequently.	47	31	15	7	0
7	Students become the center of teaching and learning activities	39	36	4	11	10
8	Teachers should apply Blended-Learning more in Writing to increase the effectiveness of teaching activities.	44	32	2	6	16
9	Students can easily arrange their study time for activities outside of the class time	44	25	17	12	2

According to the survey results in Table 3, the majority of students agree that Blended Learning can help them learn Writing better than traditional methods (with 68% agreeing) while only 17% disagree and 15% have a neutral opinion on this. The view "Students are more active and creative in their learning activities" received 70% approval from students and 71% of students also agreed that Blended-Learning could help them improve independent learning skills. The combination of traditional and online teaching methods also provides students with a good opportunity to access a richer source of learning materials, which is strongly agreed by 45% of students and somehow agreed by 27%. In addition, 78% of students also thought that Blended-Learning made it possible for them to get feedbacks on their writings from teachers more frequently while 7% somehow disagree and 15% had newtral opinion. Another strength of Blended Learning that received 75% of the students' approval is that they can become the center of teaching and learning activities. From the benefits that Blended Learning brings to learning and teaching Writing, 76% of students agreed that this method should be applied more while 22% showed their disagreement and only 2% with neutral opinion.

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### 4.3. The results of teacher's observation in the application of Blended Learning to teach Writing.

The combination of traditional and online teaching methods brings many benefits to students. However, there were still a few students who were not aware of the positive effects it brings to improve their Writing skills.

As observed during a semester of applying Blended Learning to teach Writing, many students expressed excitement when they could join more activities outside Writing class. One of the benefits of Blended-Learning that students were most interested in was its high level of interaction between teachers and students. In most of the activities in online teaching and learning platforms, students show their active participation in exchanging ideas, discussing with teachers and classmates to correct and give comments on their classmates' writing.

Teachers' feedbacks also had a clear effect when students reduced mistakes through each article. With the characteristics of the large number of students in a class in Vietnam, it is quite difficult for teachers to respond and pay attention to each student in class. Therefore, Blended Learning helps teachers to promptly support each student in improving the quality of his writing.

## 5. CONCLUSION

It can be seen that the combination of traditional and online teaching methods has contributed to limiting the disadvantages and promoting the strengths that each method brings, especially for Writing which is considered to be highly academic and difficult for students. After a semester of study, Blended Learning has proven its usefulness in supporting the teaching of Writing at the University and at the same time it has also received a high appreciation and positive attitude from students. Creating a learning environment that is highly interactive, dynamic and adaptable to the new technology era is its outstanding feature that both teachers and students acknowledge.

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