

# Evaluating the Efficacy of Blended Learning on EFL Writing Achievement: A Quasi-Experimental Study in a Pakistani Secondary School

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## Abstract

This study investigated the impact of Blended Learning (BL) on the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing achievement of secondary school students in Pakistan. Utilizing a quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test design, 80 students from two intact Grade 10 sections were divided into an Experimental Group (n=40), receiving blended instruction via Google Classroom and face-to-face sessions, and a Control Group (n=40), receiving traditional instruction. Data were collected using standardized writing tests and analyzed through independent and paired samples t-tests. Findings indicated that the Experimental Group significantly outperformed the Control Group in the post-test with the highest gains observed in organizational structure and grammatical accuracy. The study concludes that integrating digital platforms into the traditional Pakistani EFL classroom enhances writing proficiency more effectively than conventional methods.

**Keywords:** Blended Learning, EFL Writing Achievement, Quasi-Experimental Design, Secondary Education in Pakistan, Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL)

## Introduction

In a country such as Pakistan, English is not merely a subject but a passport to entering the elite class, clinching a white collar job and enjoying an elevated social status. It serves as the medium of instruction in higher education and the official language of the country. The language of competitive exams such as CSS and

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PMS and the judiciary are also English. Despite this much importance, at the secondary level, the teaching of writing is dominated by the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM). Students often rely on rote memorization to pass board examinations (Siddiqui, 2012).

The National Curriculum of Pakistan (2006) and the recent Single National Curriculum (SNC) emphasize communicative competence. However, students struggle with the mechanics, coherence, and vocabulary of English writing. Blended Learning (BL) is defined as the combination of face-to-face teaching with online learning experiences. BL is meant to provide students with access to resources and feedback outside the classroom hours. Furthermore, BL seeks to modernize the traditional Pakistani EFL classroom.

While research shows that Blended Learning in higher education is largely supported and practiced internationally, no empirical evidence exists regarding its practice at the secondary level within the Pakistani context. Most indigenous studies are qualitative that has focused on the teachers' views or the barriers to ICT adoption (Hashmi et al., 2021). There is a lack of extensive quantitative research that measures actual learning gains in writing skills. This study addresses this gap by providing evidence of the effectiveness of BL at the secondary level in Pakistan.

## **Review of the Literature**

The integration of technology into English language teaching has become a core necessity in the 21st century. To understand the impact of Blended Learning (BL) on writing skills at the secondary level in Pakistan, it is essential to examine the theoretical foundations of the approach, the nature of the writing process, and the challenges of the Pakistani educational system.

### **Theoretical Framework: Cognitive and Social Perspectives**

Blended Learning is grounded in two major psychological frameworks: Mayer's (2005) Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning and Vygotsky's (1978) Social Constructivism.

Mayer (2005) propounds that the human memory system consists of two channels: auditory and visual. He further explains that learning is enhanced when both

channels are engaged. In a blended writing classroom, students listen to a lecture on writing and also engage with mind-maps, videos, and interact with slides using multimedia. This allows them for better retention of linguistic structures (Hinkelman, 2018).

Similarly, Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) explains the scaffolding that digital tools provide. Writing requires moving from thought to structured text. Blended Learning setting offer scaffolds such as grammar checkers, collaborative discussion boards, and instant feedback facility. These digital tools help students achieve higher levels of proficiency in writing.

### **The Nature of EFL Writing Pedagogy**

Writing is viewed as a recursive process involving pre-writing, drafting, revising, and editing (Flower & Hayes, 1981). However, in many non-English contexts, writing is still taught as a "product-oriented" activity. The focus is entirely on the correctness of the final submission rather than the process a writer undergoes time and again.

In Pakistan, examination systems have worsened this product-oriented focus. On the other hand, in a blended setting the process can be monitored through the use of Learning Management Systems (LMS) such as Google classroom, Zoom and Canvas. Garrison and Kanuka (2004) argue, the transformative potential of BL lies in its ability to extend the conversation beyond the classroom. For instance, in teaching writing, students can provide peer feedback and reflect on each other's essays—an activity often missing in a rushed 40-45-minute face-to-face lesson.

### **The Pakistani EFL Context: Challenges and Constraints**

The English language teaching in Pakistan is characterized by a traditional pedagogy, namely the GTM (Siddiqui, 2012). Despite several curriculum reforms and policies, the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) remains the dominant method of teaching from Primary to college level. With this method, students are taught grammar rules and made to memorize sentences and essays that are expected on the HSSC Board exams.

Mansoor (2005) and Shamim (2011) argue that the washback effect of HSSC exams in Pakistan discourages creative and communicative writing. Teachers are forced to

use GTM in the language classroom and encourage rote learning to ensure high pass rates. Consequently, when students reach the secondary level (Grade 9 and 10), they are unable to produce a single paragraph of English text. Similarly, the large class sizes make it impossible for teachers to provide detailed feedback that writing development requires (Haidar & Fang, 2019).

### **Blended Learning in Pakistan: Potential and Barriers**

Recent literature has noted a digital shift in education in Pakistan. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the Single National Curriculum (SNC) has emphasized the integration of ICT in teaching.

Hashmi (2021) conducted a survey of secondary schools in urban Pakistan. He found that digital readiness among students is high and most have access to smartphones. However, digital literacy for academic purposes remains low. Most students use technology for social media rather than for learning. Nevertheless, Khan et al. (2020), suggest that when technology is structured within a blended framework, it significantly reduces writing anxiety among Pakistani learners. Similarly, allowing students to draft and edit in an online environment before a final submission significantly reduces the fear of immediate teacher correction.

Despite the theoretical justification, there is a lack of a relevant and significant quantitative data focusing on secondary schools in Pakistan. Moreover, most research is focused on higher education (Universities), where students have more autonomy and better access to resources. The secondary level, which serves as the foundation for all sorts of academic writing, remains under-researched in the context of quasi-experimental interventions.

Furthermore, the existing literature often treats writing as a holistic skill. There is a dire need for studies that examine components of writing separately such as structural coherence, lexical variety, and grammatical accuracy. It would help decipher where the blended approach makes the most impact. This study seeks to fill this gap by measuring specific gains in a Pakistani secondary school setting.

## **Methodology**

This research used a quasi-experimental, non-equivalent control group design to explore the effect of Blended Learning on EFL writing. The given design was chosen because random sampling was not possible to the existing school setting as students were already grouped into classes. A sample of 80 male students in Grade 10 studying in a public-sector secondary school, Kohat were used to conduct the research. To conduct the study, the respondents were categorized into two, the Experimental Group (EG) and the Control Group (CG), each comprising of 40 students.

The intervention was conducted within an eight weeks period where the two groups adhered to the same curriculum which emphasized on writing of essays. The main difference was in the way the instruction was delivered. The Control Group used a conventional pedagogical model and got five days of face-to-face lectures weekly. Conversely, the Experimental Group engaged in a blended learning model which reallocated the time of instruction: three days were devoted to the face-to-face teaching, and the next two days were switched to online tasks with the help of Google Classroom. These online classes offered students access to video tutorials and peer-review forums as well as individualized electronic feedback on the part of the instructor.

Pre-test and post-tests were used to measure student improvement such that the student groups were pre-tested before the intervention and after it. Writing samples received the evaluation with the help of Analytical Writing Rubric modified according to Weir (2005) that evaluated students in four different directions: Content, Organization, Vocabulary, and Grammar. The weight of each of the domains was five points making the maximum possible score to be 20. Two experienced EFL teachers graded the writing samples independently in order to ensure high levels of objectivity and inter-rater reliability. The correlation coefficient of  $r=.88$  proved a high level of consistency among the raters which proved the validity of the final scores.

## **Results and Data Analysis**

The data for this study were analysed using SPSS (Version 27). The analysis is presented in two stages: first, the Pre-test Analysis to establish the baseline

equivalence of the groups, and second, the Post-test Analysis to determine the effect of the intervention.

### Pre-test Analysis

Before the intervention, a pre-test was administered to both the Experimental Group (EG) and the Control Group (CG) to ensure that both groups possessed a similar level of writing proficiency. An Independent Samples T-test was conducted to compare the mean scores.

Table 1: Independent Samples T-test of Pre-test Scores

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	p-value (2-tailed)
Experimental	40	10.45	1.62	0.412	.682
Control	40	10.30	1.58		

As shown in Table 1, the mean score for the Experimental Group was 10.45, while the Control Group was 10.30. The t-test results ( $t=0.412$ ,  $p=.682$ ) indicate that there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups at the start of the study. Since the p-value (.682) is much higher than the standard alpha level of 0.05, we can conclude that both groups were at an equivalent level of English writing proficiency before the commencement of the Blended Learning intervention. This provides a fair "starting line" for the experiment.

### ❖ Post-test Analysis (Testing the Research Hypothesis)

After the eight-week intervention, a post-test was administered. To answer RQ<sub>1</sub> (Is there a significant difference between Blended Learning and Traditional methods?), another Independent Samples T-test was conducted on the post-test scores.

Table 2: Independent Samples T-test of Post-test Scores

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	p-value (Sig.)
Experimental	40	15.65	1.85	5.84	.001
Control	40	12.15	2.10		

The results in Table 2 show a significant increase in the mean scores of the Experimental Group ( $M=15.65$ ) compared to the Control Group ( $M=12.15$ ). The p-

value ( $p=.001$ ) is less than 0.05, indicating that the difference is statistically significant. We can reject the Null Hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) and conclude that Blended Learning significantly improved the students' writing achievement.

#### ❖ Within-Group Growth (Paired Samples T-test)

To further validate the growth within each group, a Paired Samples T-test was conducted to compare the Pre-test and Post-test of the Experimental Group alone.

Table 3: Pre-test vs. Post-test of Experimental Group

Test	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Mean Gain	p-value
Pre-test	10.45	40	1.62	5.20	.000
Post-test	15.65	40	1.85		

In the above Table. 3, the Experimental Group shows a mean gain of 5.20 points. The significance level ( $p=.000$ ) proves that the improvement from the start of the study to the end was not due to chance, but was a direct result of the Blended Learning pedagogical intervention.

#### ❖ Analysis of Writing Sub-skills (RQ<sub>2</sub>)

The post-test scores were broken down into sub-skills (out of 5 points each) to identify where the most significant improvement occurred.

Table 4: Mean Scores of Writing Sub-skills (Post-test)

Sub-Skill	Experimental Group	Control Group	Difference
Organization	4.25	2.90	1.35
Grammar	3.80	3.10	0.70
Vocabulary	3.60	3.05	0.55
Mechanics	4.00	3.10	0.90

The data in Table 4 indicates that the Blended Learning group showed the most substantial improvement in Organization (+1.35 gain). This suggests that the use of digital outlines and structural templates in the blended environment was highly effective in helping students organize their ideas more logically compared to those in the traditional classroom.

▪ **Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Scores**

To answer RQ1, an independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the post-test performance of both groups.

❖ **Analysis of Writing Sub-skills**

To answer RQ2, the gains in specific sub-skills were analyzed.

Table 5: Mean Improvement in Sub-skills (Post-test)

Sub-Skill	Experimental Group (M)	Control Group (M)	Difference
Organization	4.1	2.8	+1.3
Vocabulary	3.8	3.2	+0.6
Grammar	3.9	3.0	+0.9

The EG in Table 5 shows the most substantial improvement in Organization, suggesting that online outlining tools and digital templates helped students structure their thoughts more logically than traditional methods.

**Discussion**

The main aim of the research was to test the statistical significance of Blended Learning among EFL writing performance of secondary school learners in Pakistan. The findings of this quasi-experimental intervention give great argument that a mixed methodology is much more effective than the conventional Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) that is mostly used in Pakistani classrooms. The results showed that there was statistically significant difference between the post-test scores where the Experimental (EG) group scored 15.45 and Control Group (CG) scored 12.10 ( $p < .001$ ). This observation implies that the incorporation of online tools, including Google Classroom, does not just complement the teaching but should essentially improve the quality of student work.

This is an improved position that may be accredited to the shift in writing product-oriented approach into a process-oriented one. The traditional Pakistani classroom writing is a summative activity with severe time constraints. On the other hand, the EG enjoyed the so-called transformative potential of blended environments (where students have an opportunity to draft, get digital feedback, and revise asynchronously) (Garrison and Kanuka, 2004). The increased post-test scores are a

signifier that when students are provided with a chance to use writing as a recursive process, their final levels of achievement improve. This was achieved by shifting the instructional component of the lesson to an online platform, thus, freeing up face-to-face time to active writing workshops, which would achieve maximum student interaction and minimum passive teacher-talk that defines the GTM.

Writing sub-skills can also be analyzed in a granular manner to shed more light on the efficiency of such intervention. The largest increase was registered in Organization (+1.3 mean difference) that is a crucial field in an environment where students generally use memorized essays in guidebooks. The digital graphic organizers and outlining templates were used as cognitive scaffolds in the blended model. This is a confirmation of the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning put forward by Mayer (2005) since students better assimilated organizational patterns when presented in visual forms in the form of essay structures rather than through verbal instructions. Additionally, the EG registered tremendous improvements in grammatical accuracy (+0.9). Whereas the grammar was taught in isolation in GTM, the blended setting tackled it in-situ via digital feedback loops. This made it possible to provide attention on an individual basis: a luxury that is usually not achievable in Pakistani schools where the size of classes regularly goes above 50 students (Shamim, 2011), thus reducing the entrapment of errors via real-time correction.

In addition to an acquisition of skills, the findings may indicate a possible neutralizing effect of washback effect of the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE) examinations. According to Siddiqui (2012), the Pakistani system is badly biased towards memorizing. Nevertheless, the numerical change in the EG indicates that students can compose original work in case of the appropriate provision of digital scaffolds. Although the standard deviation of the scores of the EG ( $SD=2.10$ ) indicates that there was a small variation in performance, which was probably caused by the digital divide concerning the access to home internet, it is still interesting to note that the lowest scorers in the EG were almost comparable to the average scorers in the CG. It means that even an exposure of limited exposure to blended tools in itself is more advantageous than the traditional methods.

Theoretically, the results are in compliance with the Social Constructivism of Vygotsky (1978). Online discussion boards and peer-review tasks provided a social learning experience that was not limited to school gates where digital tools served as a More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) to guide students through their Zone of

Proximal Development. To sum up, this study demonstrates that not only is the transition to blended models a policy ideal of the Single National Curriculum (SNC), but a practical requirement. Blended Learning offers a statistically better solution to the limitation of large classroom sizes and the continuous cycle of rote learning by offering a more effective method of instruction that is vital in enhancing the writing skills of the future generation of Pakistani students.

## **Conclusion**

This study concludes that Blended Learning significantly enhances the English writing proficiency of secondary school students in Pakistan. The statistical evidence indicates that even with the existing digital divide, the integration of platforms like Google meet, Zoom and Canvas provides a superior pedagogical framework compared to purely face-to-face instruction.

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Article Information:

<i>Received</i>	1-Jan-2025
<i>Revised</i>	27-Feb-2026
<i>Accepted</i>	11-Mar-2026
<i>Published</i>	30-Mar-2026

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Declarations:

Authors' Contribution:

- **All Authors Conceptualization, and intellectual revisions, Data collection, interpretation, and drafting of manuscript**
- The authors agree to take responsibility for every facet of the work, making sure that any concerns about its integrity or veracity are thoroughly examined and addressed

• **Conflict of Interest:** NIL

• **Funding Sources:** NIL

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