



The role of blended learning in enhancing the writing skills of students at a selected TVET College, Vhembe District, Limpopo Province, South Africa

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the role of blended learning in enhancing the writing skills of students at a selected Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) college in the Vhembe District of Limpopo Province, South Africa. The research was motivated by persistent challenges related to academic writing among TVET students, particularly in rural and historically disadvantaged educational contexts. A qualitative case study design, guided by an interpretivist paradigm, was employed. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with three lecturers and eight students, supplemented by document analysis of students' written work and blended learning instructional materials. Data were analysed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that blended learning positively contributed to students' writing development by improving grammar, sentence construction, vocabulary usage, coherence, and overall writing fluency. However, the study also identified significant challenges, including inadequate technological infrastructure, unreliable internet connectivity, varying levels of digital literacy, limited lecturer training, and inconsistent student engagement. The findings suggest that the effectiveness of blended learning depends on the quality of instructional design, institutional support, and the integration of pedagogically meaningful online and face-to-face learning activities. The study concludes that blended learning has considerable potential to improve writing skills within TVET education when supported by appropriate resources and professional development. It recommends increased investment in technological infrastructure, lecturer capacity building, and student digital literacy programmes. The study contributes to scholarship by providing context-specific empirical evidence on blended learning and writing development within rural South African TVET institutions, an area that remains under-researched.

Keywords: Blended Learning, TVET Colleges, Writing Skills Development, Learner Engagement, Academic Writing

INTRODUCTION

It is widely held that being able to write in a clear, coherent, and critical manner is a basic skill for achieving academic success and being recognized as a legitimate participant in the production of knowledge at the post-school level. Writing is not just one of the skills students

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should master to pass the tests; in fact, it is a combination of social, cognitive, and linguistic aspects through which students interact with the discipline, create meanings, and show their intellectual leadership.¹ On the other hand, in vocational and technical education contexts, writing represents an intermediate stage between the understanding of concepts and the communication of knowledge; thus, students can use this skill to convey thoughts, evaluate practice, and hence participate in the knowledge of the workplace.

Unfortunately, academic writing is among the less proficient skills of many students in South African Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges despite its crucial role. Within the South African TVET sector, longstanding structural and pedagogical challenges have contributed to uneven student preparedness for academic writing. Many TVET students enter post-school education with fragmented schooling experiences, limited exposure to academic literacy practices, and diverse linguistic repertoires shaped by multilingual and often marginalised contexts. These challenges are particularly pronounced in rural and historically under-resourced regions such as the Vhembe District in Limpopo Province, where disparities in educational infrastructure, access to learning resources, and digital connectivity continue to shape teaching and learning conditions. Consequently, lecturers in TVET colleges frequently report persistent difficulties among students related to grammatical accuracy, sentence construction, coherence, vocabulary development, and adherence to academic conventions, all of which negatively affect students' academic progression and confidence as writers.

Recently, the blended learning model has gained increasing attention for addressing these challenges as an educational approach. Basically, blended learning is a combination of traditional face-to-face learning and learning that is carried out using digital tools and platforms. Moreover, research has shown that blended learning can lead to higher levels of student independence, student engagement, and increased learner access to various types of learning materials.²

In particular, using blended learning methods to teach writing allows students to continuously work on drafts while also being able to receive both synchronous and asynchronous feedback, collaborate with peers, and interact with multimodal texts. Therefore, these characteristics are not insignificant, as writing activity inherently involves several stages and the requirement for the presence of practice, feedback, and support.

However, there is a gap in the empirical research on the implementation of blended learning within South African TVET colleges that is even more striking given the fact that institutional and national policies encourage the use of digital technologies in post-school education. To highlight this gap, it should be noted that data from the field show that lecturers continue to work in situations characterized by a lack of technological infrastructure, unreliable internet connectivity, and very limited professional development opportunities focusing on blended learning pedagogies. Similarly, student engagement with blended learning is influenced by factors such as limited access to devices, varying levels of digital literacy, and socio-economic factors that affect participation in online learning environments. Altogether, these factors lead to a pertinent question as to whether blended learning can resolve the problem of poor writing skills in TVET colleges.

This study examines the role of blended learning in improving the writing skills of students at a selected TVET college located in Vhembe District, Limpopo Province. The paper conceptualizes blended learning not as a neutral technological solution but as a pedagogical practice that is socially situated and mediated by factors such as institutional conditions, lecturer expertise, and student engagement. The research design is qualitative and case study in nature.

In this study, a case study method was used as a qualitative inquiry into the pedagogical strategies employed at a TVET college. It employed semi-structured interviews as its primary source of data collection from both lecturers (N=3) and students (N=8). To support and verify the evidence obtained

¹ Ken Hyland, *Teaching and Researching Writing* (Routledge, 2015); John Burville Biggs, Catherine So-kum Tang, and Gregor Kennedy, *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*, vol. 4 (Open university press Maidenhead, 2011).

² D. Randy Garrison and Norman D Vaughan, *Blended Learning in Higher Education: Framework, Principles, and Guidelines* (John Wiley & Sons, 2008); Charles Dziuban et al., "Blended Learning: The New Normal and Emerging Technologies," *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education* 15, no. 1 (December 15, 2018): 3, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-017-0087-5>; Charles Graham, "Emerging Practice and Research in Blended Learning," in *Handbook of Distance Education*, 2013, 333–50.

through interviews, document analysis of the students' written work and teaching materials for blended learning was also conducted.

Overall, this study aims to produce first-hand, contextualized experiences and insights of the various stakeholders in the teaching and learning of writing in TVET settings. To be more detailed, the study is designed to provide answers to the three main questions: firstly, how do lecturers and students perceive blended learning in the teaching and learning of writing; secondly, how do blended learning activities facilitate the acquisition of the fundamental writing skills such as grammar, coherence, and vocabulary; finally, what role do institutional and structural conditions play in either enabling or limiting the pedagogical potential of blended learning.

This study aims to contribute to academic debates on blended learning, writing pedagogy, and vocational education in the following ways: on a theoretical level, it pushes the limits of socio-cultural and constructivist theories of writing development by investigating the impact of digitally mediated learning environments on interaction, scaffolding, and knowledge construction in TVET contexts. Theoretically, these are sociocultural and constructivist perspectives. At the practical level, the results are expected to improve teacher instructional practices, provide a framework for institutional planning and professional development activities, and be a reference for making evidence-based decisions on the integration of blended learning into the writing curriculum. Ultimately, the study aspires to be a torchbearer for the enlightenment of the transformation of writing pedagogy in the TVET sector through promoting blended learning as an effective method of improving students' academic writing skills that should be institutionally supported and meticulously planned.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study builds on sociocultural and constructivist views of learning, while also bringing in ideas from social cognitive theory. From these angles emerges a way to examine blended learning's role in shaping writing abilities. Interaction matters; so does guided support, along with timely responses and student initiative. These elements unfold within technical and vocational education settings. The combined theories help reveal how learning gains take shape across digital and face-to-face spaces.

Social and Cultural Influences on How People Learn

Learning gains shape through shared experience, according to Vygotsky, where talk, joint effort, and tools shaped by culture guide how thinking grows.³ Rather than unfolding alone inside one mind, knowledge takes form via involvement in routines handed down and reshaped across communities. Written expression emerges in settings defined by rules and expectations, growing out of conversation, example setting, responses from others, and gradual engagement; this idea echoes Hylands.⁴

One central idea in socio-cultural thought is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), the gap between a learner's independent performance and their potential when supported by someone more experienced.⁵ Instead of working alone, students often progress through help such as instructor comments, group work with classmates, sample texts, or carefully designed assignments. Because blended learning mixes face-to-face settings with online platforms, it creates varied opportunities for contact, step-by-step support, and repeated practice in writing.⁶

In TVET settings, learners frequently arrive with varied levels of reading and writing ability; here, ideas drawn from socio-cultural perspectives gain relevance. Learning tools like online course portals, message boards, or shared document spaces act as bridges, shaping how communication unfolds outside face-to-face sessions. Through these means, students access ongoing input on their work, encounter examples of strong written expression, and engage alongside classmates in joint writing efforts, slowly advancing through stages of growing competence.⁷

³ Lev S Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, vol. 86 (Harvard university press, 1978).

⁴ Hyland, *Teaching and Researching Writing*.

⁵ Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*.

⁶ Garrison and Vaughan, *Blended Learning in Higher Education: Framework, Principles, and Guidelines*; Graham, "Emerging Practice and Research in Blended Learning."

⁷ Dziuban et al., "Blended Learning: The New Normal and Emerging Technologies."

Constructivist Learning Theory

Learning unfolds not as passive absorption but through doing, questioning, and revising, shaped by each person's history and context.⁸ Because individuals build understanding differently, what matters most is how they link fresh ideas to what they already know. As thinking takes shape in writing, early attempts give way to improvement through repeated effort. Feedback guides this path; so does self-examination. Progress happens gradually, marked less by sudden leaps than persistent adjustments.

Learning that mixes online and classroom elements fits well with ideas about how people build knowledge through experience. When students work on writing in digital spaces, they control the timing, return to teacher comments, and draw from varied materials, moves that support independence. In contrast, meetings in person let them ask questions, talk through challenges, and receive focused help during activities. Together, these layers encourage thoughtful involvement with writing, not just quickly finishing assignments. Research by Bonk and Graham, along with Garrison and Vaughan, backs this blend to deepen understanding over time.⁹

In TVET environments, learning works better when students build understanding through doing, since their sense of identity in a trade shapes how they absorb knowledge. Because hands-on experience matters so much, teaching methods must connect classroom work to real workplace demands. When instructors use blended formats, tasks can mirror actual job-related writing, pulling learners in more deeply. This kind of alignment linking course assignments to everyday practice helps sustain attention and effort over time. Evidence supports such strategies, showing improved involvement where relevance is clear.¹⁰

Social Learning and Student Initiative

Starting from how people learn through watching others, social cognitive theory adds depth to analysis by focusing on personal drive and belief in one's abilities, because it shapes how learners act in educational settings.¹¹ Believing they can succeed affects whether students push through challenges and stay involved when faced with difficulty. When writing becomes the task, those confident in their skill tend to draft more freely, revise willingly, and reach out for input during the process.

Besides offering regular practice, blended classrooms help learners feel more capable when writing. Because digital platforms include features like comment functions or shared examples, students see how strong work looks and then start believing they can do it too. Even when schools lack materials, these setups give struggling learners a chance to catch up after past setbacks. Seeing peers succeed often sparks that shift.

How the theory affects this research

Blended learning's impact on writing abilities gains clarity when viewed through sociocultural, constructivist, and social cognitive lenses. Interaction matters deeply; so do guidance structures, student initiative, and environment-driven support in shaping written expression. One way into the study's structure emerges here: these ideas help shape how questions are framed, evidence examined, and conclusions drawn. Attention turns naturally toward how learners navigate writing tasks under hybrid conditions, with feedback loops, peer exchange, and personal oversight all unfolding inside TVET settings.

Starting from these connected theories, the work steps away from seeing blended learning only through technology. Rather than focusing on tools alone, it treats teaching methods as central to how blending modes function. Situated inside classroom cultures, organisational setups, and societal backgrounds shapes what happens. Looking at things this way allows a closer look at what helps and what holds back writing growth in South Africa's TVET institutions.

⁸ Biggs, Tang, and Kennedy, *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*.

⁹ Curtis J. Bonk and Charles R. Graham, *The Handbook of Blended Learning: Global Perspectives, Local Designs*, ed. Curtis J. Bonk and Charles R. Graham (Pfeiffer, 2005); Garrison and Vaughan, *Blended Learning in Higher Education: Framework, Principles, and Guidelines*.

¹⁰ Biggs, Tang, and Kennedy, *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*.

¹¹ Albert Bandura, "Social Foundations of Thought and Action," *Englewood Cliffs, NJ* 1986, no. 23–28 (1986): 2.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although research into blended learning and academic writing is expanding, scholars increasingly examine how mixed teaching methods influence writing skill growth in varied school settings. Because it combines in-person sessions with digital tasks intentionally, this approach has drawn attention for supporting adaptable, student-focused teaching while broadening availability of materials past typical classroom walls.¹² When applied to writing instruction, hybrid formats often allow deeper involvement over time, repeated revisions, along with stronger feedback routines, elements closely tied to advancing academic writing ability.¹³

Blended Learning and writing around the world

Research from around the world shows blended learning works well in different subjects and school stages. When students experience a mix of online and classroom teaching, they often perform better, stay more interested, and feel more motivated than in traditional classes alone, according to reviews by Dziuban and colleagues in 2018 and Graham in 2013. While much of this research looks at general results, it hints that combining formats helps build difficult abilities like academic writing. Skills such as these grow best through repeated practice, guidance over time, and chances to think back, all things hybrid models can support.

Looking closer at how writing is taught, studies show blended approaches can lift student outcomes across several areas: grammar gains, richer word choices, better structure, and clearer flow. Drafting and rewriting take on new life when digital tools enter the picture, making space for ongoing feedback cycles not always possible in standard face-to-face classrooms.¹⁴ With flexibility built in, learners often feel more in control, staying motivated as they move through assignments independently, yet never fully cut off from guidance or classmates.

However, research warns against expecting equal advantages everywhere. Although learners appreciate the adaptability of mixed-mode education, many place greater emphasis on in-person meetings when seeking quick feedback or personal guidance, especially during writing of heavy subjects. These outcomes highlight how careful teaching planning and thoughtful structure matter in hybrid writing classrooms.

Blended Learning Across TVET and Vocational Training

Despite the wide coverage of blended learning in higher education, research within TVET appears sparse by comparison. Evidence points to improved access to resources through hybrid models, where combining online tools with hands-on training strengthens understanding, provided execution is thoughtful. Still, real-world challenges tend to disrupt outcomes, especially across remote or under-resourced regions. Unequal conditions shape whether such approaches deliver their intended advantages.

Though blended learning shows promise in South African TVET colleges, real-world application often stumbles. Lecturers see value in mixing online tools with classroom work, yet many struggle without stable internet. Some students own devices; others do not, creating uneven starting points. Infrastructure gaps widen when training lags, leaving staff unprepared despite willingness to adapt. What looks good in policy can falter where electricity cuts out in the middle of a lesson. Outcomes depend less on intent than on what exists in labs and lecture rooms.

Recent South African studies provide growing evidence on the value of blended learning within TVET and higher education settings. Janse van Rensburg and Oguttu found that blended teaching approaches enhanced student engagement and improved access to learning resources, although implementation remained constrained by infrastructural and technological challenges.¹⁵ Similarly,

¹² Garrison and Vaughan, *Blended Learning in Higher Education: Framework, Principles, and Guidelines*; Graham, "Emerging Practice and Research in Blended Learning."

¹³ Hyland, *Teaching and Researching Writing*.

¹⁴ Hyland, *Teaching and Researching Writing*; Garrison and Vaughan, *Blended Learning in Higher Education: Framework, Principles, and Guidelines*.

¹⁵ E. D. Janse van Rensburg and J. W. Oguttu, "Blended Teaching and Learning: Exploring the Concept, Barriers to Implementation and Designing of Learning Resources," *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.20853/36-6-4595>.

Meyers, Smith and Cekiso reported that students perceived blended learning as beneficial for academic writing because it provided greater opportunities for interaction, independent learning, and continuous access to learning materials.¹⁶ These findings suggest that blended learning can strengthen academic literacy development when supported by appropriate pedagogical and institutional conditions.

In TVET colleges specifically, blended learning has become increasingly important as institutions seek to improve student success and graduate employability in digitally evolving workplaces. However, studies continue to highlight challenges related to digital inequality, inadequate infrastructure, and varying levels of lecturer preparedness. These contextual realities suggest that the effectiveness of blended learning within South African TVET institutions depends not only on technological availability but also on institutional capacity to support meaningful teaching and learning practices.

Evidence from other African countries presents similar findings. In Uganda, Kintu et al. found that learner characteristics, instructional design, and technological readiness significantly influenced the effectiveness of blended learning programmes.¹⁷ Studies conducted in Kenya and Nigeria similarly reported that blended learning improved learner participation and academic performance but remained vulnerable to challenges associated with internet access, affordability of devices, and digital literacy disparities. These similarities suggest that many African educational institutions face common structural and contextual barriers when implementing blended learning. Consequently, research conducted within the South African TVET sector can contribute valuable insights to broader continental discussions on technology-enhanced learning.

Blended Learning meets academic writing in South Africa

Despite years of study, student writing in South African higher education still shows recurring issues. Problems like incorrect grammar, narrow word choices, poor flow between ideas, along with struggles to follow scholarly norms, appear frequently, especially for learners from varied language settings and under-resourced schools.¹⁸ Within TVET institutions, these obstacles become more complex due to curriculum designs focused on job skills, leaving little room for strengthening academic reading and writing abilities.

Some recent research indicates blended learning could help tackle these issues by increasing chances to write and receive responses outside face-to-face sessions. Through online tools, instructors can deliver feedback more often and in greater depth, support student-led evaluation, and offer samples of strong written work. However, success hinges less on technology itself and more on how well teachers apply teaching strategies, together with whether learners have reliable internet access and know how to navigate digital environments.

Student experiences reported in previous studies indicate that blended learning can create more supportive environments for writing development. Learners frequently describe appreciating the flexibility to revisit learning materials, revise drafts multiple times, and receive feedback beyond traditional classroom hours. Lecturers similarly report that digital platforms allow them to monitor student progress more effectively and provide targeted support for specific writing challenges. Such experiences suggest that blended learning extends the learning process beyond scheduled contact sessions and encourages more sustained engagement with writing activities.

Teachers who help students write better in mixed learning settings

The success of blended learning in advancing writing skills hinges on multiple factors highlighted by research. Instructional design quality plays a central role, shaping how well students engage with material. When online elements connect clearly with classroom sessions, outcomes improve noticeably. Integration of blended activities into assessments also makes a difference, ensuring

¹⁶ Fabian A.W. Meyers, Cornelia Smith, and Madoda Cekiso, "First-Year English Additional Language Students' Insight and Attitudes on Blended Learning Methods in Academic Writing," *Literator* 45, no. 1 (March 11, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.4102/LIT.v45i1.2016>.

¹⁷ Mugenyi Justice Kintu, Chang Zhu, and Edmond Kagambe, "Blended Learning Effectiveness: The Relationship between Student Characteristics, Design Features and Outcomes," *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education* 14, no. 1 (December 6, 2017): 7, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-017-0043-4>.

¹⁸ Hyland, *Teaching and Researching Writing*.

continuity across modes. Evidence suggests stronger results emerge if writing assignments build progressively in difficulty. Feedback matters too, especially when it arrives quickly and invites conversation. Collaborative tasks contribute meaningfully, provided they follow a clear plan. Such conditions appear to be consistently related to better performance.¹⁹

Engagement often depends on more than just course design. Although blended settings offer independence and adjustable schedules, how involved learners become is closely related to drive, belief in their own ability, skill level, and what tools they can access. If support stays weak, these formats might deepen already existing gaps. For this reason, help from colleges and direction from instructors shape whether students connect meaningfully with mixed-mode writing tasks.

The process through which blended learning improves writing skills is multifaceted. First, online learning environments provide opportunities for repeated writing practice, allowing students to draft, revise, and refine their work over time. Second, digital platforms facilitate both synchronous and asynchronous feedback, allowing students to identify and correct errors more efficiently. Third, discussion forums and collaborative writing activities expose students to diverse perspectives and language use, thereby supporting vocabulary development and critical thinking. Finally, the flexibility of blended learning promotes learner autonomy, encouraging students to take greater responsibility for their own writing development. These interconnected processes improve grammar, sentence construction, coherence, vocabulary usage, and overall writing fluency.

Gaps and tensions in the current research

Even though more studies highlight blended learning's teaching benefits, key missing pieces remain, especially when it comes to writing growth within TVET environments. Most current work looks at universities or measures student opinions instead of digging into actual writing methods and results. On top of that, few qualitative efforts centre on what teachers and learners themselves say about using blended models in real college situations.

Within South Africa, particularly in rural TVET contexts such as the Vhembe District, limited empirical research has examined how blended learning specifically contributes to students' writing development. Existing studies tend to focus on student perceptions of technology use rather than exploring the pedagogical processes through which writing skills improve. Furthermore, relatively little qualitative research has documented the lived experiences of both lecturers and students engaged in blended writing instruction. Therefore, context-specific investigations are needed to examine how blended learning influences grammar development, vocabulary acquisition, coherence, learner engagement, and academic writing confidence within under-resourced vocational education settings. By addressing these gaps, the present study contributes empirical evidence that advances understanding of blended learning and writing pedagogy within the South African TVET sector.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative approach, guided by interpretivism, a stance focused on how people make sense of their experiences in education.²⁰ Given the aim to examine closely how blended learning affects writing development, the choice of inquiry fits well. Insights were drawn directly from real-world settings, highlighting what teachers and learners notice, feel, or value in daily practice.

Research Design

One college in South Africa's Vhembe region was chosen purposefully for its unique position within technical education. Because it zooms in closely, the case method works well when unpacking layered realities inside actual classrooms and training spaces.²¹ Instead of broad trends, this work looked at how online tools mix with face-to-face teaching, how learners stay involved, and how their writing grows

¹⁹ Biggs, Tang, and Kennedy, *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*; Hyland, *Teaching and Researching Writing*.

²⁰ J. W Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 3rd ed (Thousand Oaks: CA: Sage Publications, 2013); Sharan B. Merriam and Elizabeth J. Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 4th ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2016).

²¹ Robert K Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications*, vol. 6 (Sage Thousand Oaks, CA, 2018).

over time. Through that lens, deeper patterns emerged not generalizable facts, but textured observations rooted in place. Context shaped everything: routines, responses, even the way ideas were put into words.

Though focused on blended learning and writing growth, the design leaned toward depth rather than breadth. A case study format shaped the inquiry, allowing close attention to real-world settings. The selection of participants followed intent, not chance, fitting the need for meaningful engagement with the subject. Interviews unfolded loosely, guided by themes but open to shift. Documents added layers, offering traces of practice beyond spoken accounts. Together, these elements built a picture grounded in experience. Ethical care ran throughout, woven into each step without emphasis yet present at every turn. Ideas drawn from sociocultural, constructivist, and social cognitive views found space here, not as labels but as quiet undercurrents shaping interpretation.

Population and Sampling

Among those involved in the research were instructors handling writing-focused subjects and learners attending these classes at a chosen TVET institution. To identify contributors, purposeful selection guided the process, aiming for detailed insights, meaningful, and varied.²² A group of three teachers and eight pupils participated, covering sex differences, years spent instructing, and stages of study. Key factors for inclusion: engagement in mixed-mode instruction methods, readiness to join, and time access for discussion sessions.

Although the sample consisted of three lecturers and eight students, qualitative case study research prioritises depth, contextual richness, and detailed understanding rather than statistical representativeness. The selected participants had direct experience with blended learning and were therefore well placed to provide information-rich accounts relevant to the study objectives. Furthermore, data saturation was achieved during data collection, suggesting that the sample size was adequate to generate meaningful and credible insights within the specific institutional context.

Data Collection Methods

A range of qualitative techniques shaped the data collection, aiming to strengthen credibility through cross-verification. Built around open-ended questions, the core approach involved semi-structured interviews where individuals shared personal views, situations faced, and difficulties encountered, giving space for follow-up when meanings needed refining.²³ These discussions emerged directly from study goals, zeroing in on how people engaged with mixed-mode instruction, what shifts they noticed in written expression abilities, along with surrounding limitations shaping those outcomes.

Looking deeper, researchers examined student writing alongside course resources and school policies about teaching composition. These materials helped show how instruction unfolded while reflecting learner involvement. Patterns in skill growth such as use of grammar, word choice, flow, and organization emerged through careful review. Evidence supporting these trends came directly from assignments, hybrid lesson content, and official directives. Insights followed established methods for qualitative document study.²⁴

Semi-structured interviews were conducted over a period of four weeks. Individual interviews with lecturers lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, while student interviews ranged from 30 to 45 minutes. All interviews were conducted in quiet venues within the college premises and were audio-recorded with participants' consent. The interviews explored participants' experiences of blended learning, perceptions of writing development, challenges encountered, and recommendations for improving blended learning practices.

Data collection continued until data saturation was achieved. Saturation was reached when no substantially new information, categories, or insights emerged from successive interviews and document reviews. The final interviews largely confirmed patterns that had already emerged from earlier participants, indicating sufficient depth and redundancy within the dataset.

²² Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2015).

²³ S Brinkmann and S Kvale, *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research (3rd Ed.)* (Los Angeles CA: SAGE, 2015).

²⁴ Glenn A Bowen, "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method," *Qualitative Research Journal* 9, no. 2 (2009): 27–40.

Participant Profile

The study involved three lecturers and eight students from a selected TVET college in the Vhembe District of Limpopo Province. The lecturer participants had teaching experience ranging from five to fifteen years and were directly involved in implementing blended learning approaches within their courses. The student participants represented different levels of study and possessed varying degrees of familiarity with digital learning technologies. The diversity of participants enabled the study to capture multiple perspectives regarding the implementation of blended learning and its influence on students' writing development.

Analysis of the interview transcripts and supporting documents generated four major themes: (1) improvement in grammar and sentence construction, (2) development of vocabulary and coherence, (3) flexibility and access to learning resources, and (4) challenges affecting blended learning implementation. These themes emerged through a systematic coding and thematic analysis process and are presented below with supporting participant quotations and discussion in relation to existing literature.

Data Analysis

The data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's six-step thematic analysis framework. First, all interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and repeatedly read to facilitate familiarisation with the data.²⁵ Second, initial codes were generated by identifying meaningful segments related to blended learning experiences, writing development, learner engagement, technological challenges, and instructional practices. Third, similar codes were grouped into preliminary categories. Fourth, categories were reviewed and refined into broader themes. Fifth, themes were defined and named according to their conceptual significance and relationship to the research questions. Finally, thematic interpretations were developed and integrated with evidence from document analysis and existing literature.

Throughout the analysis process, constant comparison was employed to identify similarities and differences across participant responses. Data obtained from document analysis were used to corroborate emerging themes and strengthen the credibility of the findings. The final themes presented in the study emerged from recurring patterns observed across both lecturer and student data sets.

Trust and Ethics

To support reliability, the work followed recognized standards for qualitative research credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.²⁶ Spending extended time with participants helped shape credible findings. Interview records were reviewed by those who took part, adding another layer of accuracy. Multiple data sources were used together to strengthen confidence in results. Detailed background on both the institution and individuals allowed others to assess relevance beyond the immediate setting. A clear record of choices made during analysis supported consistency across stages. Every step taken throughout the process was carefully written down, helping ensure traceability and neutrality. What remained fixed was the link between the raw material and the interpretations drawn.

The approval was obtained through the Turfloop Research Ethics Committee. Participants gave their consent after learning what the study involved, knowing their identity would stay hidden throughout. They could leave whenever they wanted, without need for reason, and no penalty applied. Information collected was kept under lock and key, accessible only to researchers. What was shared stayed within the project, never repurposed beyond its original intent.

Several strategies were used to improve trustworthiness. Member checking was conducted by sharing interview summaries with participants for verification and clarification. Data triangulation was achieved through the integration of interview data and document analysis. An audit trail was maintained throughout the research process to document analytical decisions, coding procedures, and theme development. Peer debriefing with experienced qualitative researchers further strengthened the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the findings.

²⁵ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101.

²⁶ Yvonna S Lincoln and Egon G Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (sage, 1985).

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Blended learning, as seen through interview responses and document review, supports student writing in varied ways at the chosen TVET institution. Themes forming naturally from the information shape how results are shared; personal perspectives appear in italics, drawing attention to real moments behind the words.

Improved grammar and clearer sentences

Although some found it challenging at first, working through digital tasks alongside classroom discussion helped sharpen basic writing skills. Over time, chances to revise drafts with peer input made structural choices clearer. One student noted that returning to lessons repeatedly built confidence gradually. Through guided practice and responses from instructors, small errors became easier to spot. Exposure to model examples, followed by structured revision, formed a more precise expression. Written work grew stronger not simply from volume but from thoughtful interaction with content.

"I used to struggle with sentence structure, but the online exercises allowed me to practice repeatedly and get feedback immediately. I can see my sentences improving every week". (Student 3)

Frequent feedback emerged as a key benefit, with instructors observing how digital tools helped clarify mistakes soon after they occurred. Grammar instruction gained consistency through organized online modules that supported rule application step by step.

"The blended approach allows me to track common errors and give targeted feedback. Students are more aware of their mistakes and can correct them before submitting final drafts". (Lecturer 1)

This finding supports Hyland's argument that continuous feedback is central to writing development.²⁷ Similarly, Dziuban et al. found that blended learning environments facilitate more frequent interactions between lecturers and students, thereby improving academic writing performance.²⁸ The findings further align with Meyers et al., who reported that blended learning improved students' confidence and writing competence within South African higher education contexts.²⁹

Building Word Knowledge and Clear Connections

Despite mixed formats, learners gained stronger word choices along with clearer structure in their written work. Access to digital tools mattered, especially curated vocab lists and shared spaces where academic terms were used naturally through conversation. Some found that these supports made a difference when shaping ideas on paper.

"I can look up words and learn how to use them in my assignments. The forum discussions also help me structure my thoughts more logically". (Student 6)

Starting with blended learning, lecturers pointed out how it helped students connect concepts between paragraphs. This approach made arguments clearer, since ideas moved more smoothly from one section to another. Rather than staying isolated, thoughts were tied together through deliberate transitions. As a result, written work gained structure without losing flexibility.

"Students are beginning to connect ideas across paragraphs better because the online activities prompt them to plan and reflect on their work". (Lecturer 2)

²⁷ Hyland, *Teaching and Researching Writing*.

²⁸ Dziuban et al., "Blended Learning: The New Normal and Emerging Technologies."

²⁹ Meyers, Smith, and Cekiso, "First-Year English Additional Language Students' Insight and Attitudes on Blended Learning Methods in Academic Writing."

The findings suggest that blended learning contributes significantly to the development of vocabulary and textual coherence. Through repeated exposure to digital learning resources, discussion forums, and online writing activities, students were able to expand their academic vocabulary and improve the organisation of ideas within their written work. These findings support Hyland's assertion that academic writing development requires continuous interaction with language-rich environments that encourage reflection and revision.³⁰ Similarly, Li found that blended writing instruction enabled students to strengthen coherence and argument development through iterative drafting and feedback processes.³¹ The findings are also in agreement with Meyers et al., whose study among South African university students revealed that blended learning environments promoted greater confidence in academic writing and facilitated improved organisation of written texts.³² Within the TVET context, these improvements are particularly significant because students often enter post-school education with limited exposure to academic literacy practices. The findings therefore demonstrate that blended learning can serve as an important mechanism for strengthening foundational writing competencies and improving students' ability to communicate ideas effectively.

Flexibility and Access to Learning Materials

Flexibility stood out clearly when both learners and instructors spoke about blended approaches. Access unfolded beyond classroom walls through digital elements, letting study happen at any hour. This mattered most when campuses lacked books, tools, or space, common traits across remote vocational schools.

“Even when I am at home, I can continue working on my writing. I don’t have to wait for class; the materials are always available online”. (Student 2)

Some teachers noted this adaptability helped support writing activities better.

“Blended learning enables me to upload additional exercises, examples, and guidelines that students can access at their own pace, which reinforces classroom learning”. (Lecturer 3)

An important finding emerging from this study is the flexibility afforded by blended learning. Participants reported that the ability to access learning materials beyond normal classroom hours increased opportunities for practice, revision, and independent learning. These findings align with those of Garrison and Vaughan, who argue that blended learning extends learning opportunities beyond physical classrooms and encourages greater learner autonomy.³³ Similarly, Graham found that flexibility and accessibility are among the most significant advantages associated with blended learning environments.³⁴ The present findings also support those of Hashim and Hamidon, who reported that blended learning increased access to instructional resources within vocational education settings and enhanced learner engagement with course content.³⁵ In rural and historically disadvantaged contexts such as Vhembe District, the availability of online learning materials appears particularly valuable because students often face limitations related to physical learning resources. Consequently, blended learning creates opportunities for continuous engagement with writing activities and promotes self-directed learning practices that contribute to academic success.

³⁰ Hyland, *Teaching and Researching Writing*.

³¹ Haitao Li, “Blended Assessment in University Academic English Writing Course,” *Journal of Education and Educational Research* 12, no. 1 (January 28, 2025): 161–64, <https://doi.org/10.54097/2wkab381>.

³² Meyers, Smith, and Cekiso, “First-Year English Additional Language Students’ Insight and Attitudes on Blended Learning Methods in Academic Writing.”

³³ Garrison and Vaughan, *Blended Learning in Higher Education: Framework, Principles, and Guidelines*.

³⁴ Graham, “Emerging Practice and Research in Blended Learning.”

³⁵ Norliza Hashim and Zahari Hamidon, “Blended Learning in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Training Institute,” *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development* 11, no. 1 (January 30, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v11-i1/12343>.

Problems with Using Blended Learning

Even though it helps, some problems made blended learning less effective, according to those involved. A lack of stable internet or enough devices stood out as a key barrier. When students could not reliably reach digital tools, irritation followed closely behind.

“Sometimes the internet is slow or unavailable, and I cannot complete the exercises on time. It makes learning stressful”. (Student 5)

Few lecturers felt well prepared to handle mixed learning formats effectively. Their experience pointed to gaps in professional development tailored to digital integration.

“Not all lecturers are confident in using online tools effectively. Some only upload materials without engaging students, which limits the potential of blended learning”. (Lecturer 1)

Few learners took part consistently during sessions, while others leaned toward in-person contact rather than digital formats, suggesting motivation may depend on how involvement is framed. Though online elements were available, interest faded without clear support structures to keep attention alive.

“Some students do not participate in forums or complete online tasks unless reminded; they still rely heavily on face-to-face sessions”. (Lecturer 2)

Despite the positive outcomes associated with blended learning, participants identified several challenges that constrained its effectiveness. The most frequently cited barriers included unreliable internet connectivity, inadequate access to technological devices, limited digital literacy, and insufficient professional development opportunities for lecturers. These findings are consistent with Janse van Rensburg and Oguttu, who found that infrastructural limitations and unequal access to digital technologies remain major obstacles to blended learning implementation in South African higher education institutions.³⁶ Similarly, Teane reported that teachers' technological literacy significantly influences their willingness and ability to adopt blended learning approaches effectively.³⁷ Research conducted in other African contexts has also highlighted similar challenges. For example, Kintu et al. found that learner characteristics, technological readiness, and instructional design significantly influence the success of blended learning initiatives.³⁸ Therefore, the findings of the present study suggest that the effectiveness of blended learning is not determined solely by the availability of technology but also by institutional support systems, lecturer preparedness, and student engagement levels. Addressing these challenges is essential if the full pedagogical benefits of blended learning are to be realised within TVET education.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings demonstrate that blended learning can serve as a powerful pedagogical approach to improve writing development within TVET education. Consistent improvements in grammar, sentence construction, vocabulary development, coherence, and writing fluency indicate that blended learning provides students with multiple opportunities for practice, reflection, and feedback. These findings support socio-cultural perspectives which emphasise learning through interaction and scaffolding,³⁹ constructivist views that position learners as active participants in knowledge construction,⁴⁰ and social cognitive perspectives that highlight the importance of self-efficacy in learning.⁴¹

The study further demonstrates that the effectiveness of blended learning depends on the quality of instructional design rather than the mere integration of technology. Students benefited most when

³⁶ Janse van Rensburg and Oguttu, “Blended Teaching and Learning: Exploring the Concept, Barriers to Implementation and Designing of Learning Resources.”

³⁷ Florah M. Teane, “Technological Literacy and Its Influence on Teachers’ Adoption of a Blended Learning Approach,” *Reading & Writing* 15, no. 1 (January 30, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.4102/RW.v15i1.426>.

³⁸ Kintu, Zhu, and Kagambe, “Blended Learning Effectiveness: The Relationship between Student Characteristics, Design Features and Outcomes.”

³⁹ Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*.

⁴⁰ Biggs, Tang, and Kennedy, *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*.

⁴¹ Bandura, “Social Foundations of Thought and Action.”

online activities were purposefully linked to classroom instruction and when lecturers provided timely and constructive feedback. These findings are consistent with Garrison and Vaughan and Dziuban et al., who argue that successful blended learning requires the deliberate integration of pedagogical, technological, and social dimensions of learning.⁴² The findings therefore suggest that institutions seeking to improve students' writing abilities should prioritise lecturer training, technological infrastructure development, and the design of structured writing activities that encourage continuous engagement and feedback.

Connecting ideas and existing knowledge

The findings of this study can be understood through the integrated theoretical lens that guided the research. From a socio-cultural perspective, improvements in students' writing skills emerged through interaction with lecturers, peers, and digital learning resources, reflecting the importance of scaffolding and the Zone of Proximal Development.⁴³ Students benefited from ongoing support provided both through face-to-face and online environments, allowing them to gradually develop more advanced writing competencies.

From a constructivist perspective, blended learning provided opportunities for students to actively construct knowledge by drafting, revising, reflecting, and engaging with feedback. The findings support Biggs and Tang's argument that meaningful learning occurs when students actively engage with learning tasks rather than passively receiving information.⁴⁴ Furthermore, the increased confidence reported by participants aligns with Bandura's social cognitive theory, which emphasises the role of self-efficacy in influencing learning outcomes.⁴⁵ Students who experienced repeated success through blended learning activities appeared to be more willing to participate in writing tasks and engage in revision processes.

The findings are also consistent with previous studies conducted internationally and within South Africa,⁴⁶ which similarly report that blended learning enhances learner engagement and academic performance while simultaneously presenting challenges related to technological access and digital readiness. The study therefore contributes to the growing body of evidence suggesting that blended learning can improve writing development within vocational education when implemented through well-designed pedagogical strategies and supported by appropriate institutional resources.

CONCLUSION

This research shows blended learning can strengthen student writing in TVET environments, especially where support is limited, such as schools across the Vhembe District. Because it combines classroom teaching with web-based activities, learners revisit writing exercises multiple times while receiving structured guidance, working with peers, and drawing from varied materials. Such conditions nurture growth in grammar use, word choice, how ideas connect, and general ease when composing texts. What makes this approach work depends heavily on thoughtful lesson planning, instructors who are confident using technology, and consistent effort and interest shown by those studying. From another angle, blending methods fits well with cultural, hands-on, and mental process theories, meaning skill in writing grows through interaction, personal thinking efforts, and belief in one's own ability to improve. Even though it shows promise, the research points to ongoing issues such as outdated tools, uneven availability of online materials, and differing levels of instructor skill in mixed teaching methods that limit how well blended learning works. Overall, findings show improved writing outcomes in TVET institutions happen only when programs are carefully rolled out, shaped by local needs, and

⁴² Garrison and Vaughan, *Blended Learning in Higher Education: Framework, Principles, and Guidelines*; Dziuban et al., "Blended Learning: The New Normal and Emerging Technologies."

⁴³ Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*.

⁴⁴ Biggs, Tang, and Kennedy, *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*.

⁴⁵ Bandura, "Social Foundations of Thought and Action."

⁴⁶ Dziuban et al., "Blended Learning: The New Normal and Emerging Technologies"; Meyers, Smith, and Cekiso, "First-Year English Additional Language Students' Insight and Attitudes on Blended Learning Methods in Academic Writing"; Janse van Rensburg and Oguttu, "Blended Teaching and Learning: Exploring the Concept, Barriers to Implementation and Designing of Learning Resources."

backed by leadership, presenting a path toward stronger reading and writing skills in job-focused education while reducing gaps faced by students outside urban areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the findings, TVET colleges would benefit from blending classroom-based and online writing instruction in a way that ties directly to course goals and how students are assessed. Instead of treating these methods separately, combining them through consistent planning helps create smoother learning paths. Professional growth for instructors matters just as much; training ought to centre on designing blended experiences, using tech thoughtfully, and supporting writing development step by step. This kind of preparation allows teachers to give feedback that matches where each student is, responding meaningfully rather than applying fixed rules. Without strong internet, working devices, or platforms everyone can reach, some learners will fall behind; institutions must act here first. When tools work reliably, educators can shift focus toward interactive tasks pairing students, building group projects that encourage ownership and mutual help during writing practice. Frequent low-stakes checks along the way offer insight into progress, shaping next steps without relying solely on final grades. Oversight bodies and school administrators play a role too: setting practical standards, tracking results over time, raising digital confidence across campus. These efforts only succeed if they reflect who the students really are their languages, past schooling, daily realities so adjustments feel grounded, not imposed. Thoughtful adaptation like this opens real change, especially when writing becomes more than an assignment but part of becoming capable within technical fields.

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