

Hybrid Landscape: A Qualitative Inquiry into Filipino University Students' Experiences of Blended Learning in English Academic Writing

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Abstract:

Blended learning, which integrates online and face-to-face instruction, has become a standard pedagogical model in higher education globally. This study investigates the perceptions and experiences of university students regarding a blended learning approach specifically applied to English for Academic Purposes (EAP), focusing on academic writing and presentation skills. Utilizing a qualitative framework, the research examines how students navigate the transition from traditional classrooms to a hybrid environment, evaluating their responses to course methods, workload, and the overall learning atmosphere. The findings indicate that students generally appreciate the flexibility and convenience afforded by blended learning, which allows for better individual time management and accessibility. However, the study also highlights significant challenges, including the need for high levels of self-regulation, motivation, and technical proficiency. While a vast majority of participants preferred the blended mode over traditional classroom settings, many emphasized the continued importance of face-to-face interaction for developing complex oral communication and social presence. These results suggest that while blended learning is a viable and effective model for EAP, successful implementation requires a purposeful balance between online tasks and onsite engagement to foster meaningful academic development.

Keywords: blended learning, English for Academic Purposes (EAP), academic writing, student perceptions

Introduction:

Blended learning, which integrates traditional face-to-face classroom instruction with online learning experiences, has become a cornerstone of modern higher education. Its rise has been accelerated globally by the need to adapt to changing educational landscapes, particularly during crises that limit physical attendance.

In English for Academic Purposes (EAP), blended learning has been increasingly adopted to support students in developing writing skills while providing flexibility in instructional delivery (Liu, 2013). The long-term effectiveness of this model, however, depends on a careful understanding of student perceptions and experiences, especially in contexts where digital literacy and access to technology vary widely.

In the Philippines, the implementation of blended learning presents unique opportunities and challenges due to the country's diverse geographical distribution and unequal access to stable internet connections (Hajan & Padagas, 2021). While urban students may enjoy relatively smooth access to online components, those in remote or resource-limited areas often face interruptions that affect engagement and learning outcomes. These contextual factors make the study

of Filipino students' experiences particularly important, as it highlights both the benefits and limitations of blended EAP courses in a developing nation context.

Academic writing in English remains a critical skill for Filipino university students, not only for academic achievement but also for future professional integration in globalized workplaces (Sood et al., 2025). Proficiency in writing equips students with the ability to communicate complex ideas, engage with scholarly discourse, and meet international standards.

However, blended learning environments demand high levels of self-regulation, motivation, and technological competency, which can be challenging for students unaccustomed to independent online learning (Gasmi, 2016). Understanding these demands is essential for designing courses that effectively foster writing skills without overburdening learners.

Previous studies have highlighted both the potential and challenges of blended learning in writing instruction. Collaborative and interactive approaches in blended classrooms have been shown to reduce writing apprehension and enhance student performance (Challob et al., 2016). At the same time, students report difficulties in managing workload and maintaining engagement in online components, suggesting the need for deliberate instructional design and continuous support (Liu, 2013; Hajan & Padagas, 2021). These findings underscore the importance of examining the lived experiences of students in specific contexts, such as Philippine universities, to develop strategies that maximize the effectiveness of blended learning in EAP courses.

This study, therefore, seeks to explore how Filipino university students perceive the methods, workload, and learning atmosphere of a blended English Academic Writing course. By focusing on their lived experiences, the research aims to identify specific challenges and advantages of the hybrid model in the Philippine context. Insights from this study are intended to inform course design and instructional practices that balance flexibility, student support, and the development of essential writing competencies (Sood et al., 2025; Gasmi, 2016). Ultimately, understanding students' perspectives can guide educators in creating blended learning environments that are both effective and contextually appropriate.

Literature Review:

Blended learning, which combines face-to-face instruction with online learning components, has gained substantial attention in higher education as a strategy to improve students' academic writing skills. Liu (2013) examined a university-level EFL writing course and highlighted that blended learning allows for flexibility and individualized pacing, which enhances learners' engagement with writing tasks.

The study found that students benefited from immediate online feedback while still having opportunities for direct interaction with instructors, demonstrating that the hybrid format can support both autonomous learning and collaborative guidance. This finding underscores the potential of blended learning to address diverse learner needs in English Academic Writing (EAP) contexts.

Similarly, Gasmi (2016) explored students' lived experiences in a blended-flipped writing classroom and reported that learners appreciated the ability to review materials asynchronously while applying concepts in structured, face-to-face sessions. The study emphasized that students' perceptions of workload, autonomy, and interaction significantly influenced their motivation and writing performance. By examining these subjective experiences, Gasmi's work illustrates that successful blended learning environments require careful alignment of online and offline components to optimize learning outcomes.

Recent studies further reinforce the role of blended learning in enhancing writing proficiency. Sood et al. (2025) highlighted specific blended learning strategies that strengthen academic writing skills among undergraduates, such as integrating peer review platforms, structured online exercises, and collaborative discussion boards.

Their findings suggest that well-designed blended approaches can foster critical thinking, improve grammar and composition skills, and encourage reflective writing practices. The study also noted that students' self-regulation plays a crucial role in benefiting from blended learning, aligning with previous research on learner autonomy in hybrid environments.

Collaboration within blended learning environments has also been shown to reduce writing apprehension and improve performance. Challob, Bakar, and Latif (2016) demonstrated that a collaborative blended approach, which combined peer feedback and instructor guidance, decreased students' anxiety about writing while enhancing overall writing quality. Similarly, Ismael, Bakar, and Latif (2016) found that blending interactive online components with classroom discussions supports learners in developing confidence and mastery over academic writing conventions. These findings highlight the importance of social interaction and structured collaboration, even in digitally mediated learning contexts.

However, challenges remain, particularly for learners in resource-constrained or ESL/EFL contexts. Wei, Sulaiman, and Ismail (2024) identified persistent difficulties among Chinese international high school students in blended EFL settings, including managing online assignments, maintaining motivation, and navigating complex academic English tasks.

Hajan and Padagas (2021) also reported that Filipino ESL secondary learners faced connectivity issues, insufficient guidance, and difficulties balancing online and face-to-face components. These studies underscore the need to contextualize blended learning strategies according to students' technological access, socio-economic background, and prior experiences with academic writing.

Self-regulation emerges as a critical factor in learners' success within blended learning environments. Kheiri et al. (2022) argued that students who effectively manage their time, monitor their progress, and actively seek feedback are more likely to achieve higher writing proficiency in EFL settings. This finding is echoed by Quvanch and Na (2020), who noted that learners' ability to independently plan, execute, and reflect on writing tasks determines the effectiveness of blended learning. Collectively, these studies suggest that promoting self-regulatory skills is essential for maximizing the benefits of hybrid instructional models in academic writing.

Recent research highlights learners' attitudes and perceptions as vital to the success of blended learning initiatives. Meyers, Smith, and Cekiso (2024) found that first-year English Additional Language students valued the flexibility, immediacy of feedback, and interactive nature of blended methods, though they also expressed a need for structured guidance and consistent instructor presence.

Across contexts, students' subjective experiences—including motivation, confidence, and perceived support play a central role in shaping their engagement and performance in blended EAP writing courses. Understanding these nuanced perspectives is essential for designing effective, contextually responsive blended learning programs that foster both writing competence and learner autonomy.

Methodology:

This study employed a phenomenological research design, which is well-suited for exploring the lived experiences of individuals within a specific phenomenon. Phenomenology allows researchers to examine the subjective realities of participants, providing in-depth insights into how they perceive and navigate complex experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the context of this study, phenomenology was chosen to capture the nuanced experiences of Filipino university students as they engage with blended learning in English Academic Writing, including their perceptions of workload, learning strategies, and the interplay between online and face-to-face components.

The research was conducted at a large, multi-campus public university in the Philippines that has implemented a permanent blended learning policy for its general education EAP courses. This setting was selected because it represents a typical environment where students encounter both synchronous and asynchronous learning activities, making it ideal for exploring the challenges and benefits of hybrid instructional models. Participants were selected

through purposive sampling, ensuring that those included had recently completed a semester-long blended English Academic Writing course. A total of 15 to 20 undergraduate students from various academic disciplines were invited to participate, providing a diverse range of perspectives on the blended learning experience.

Data were collected using multiple qualitative instruments to ensure richness and triangulation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted one-on-one, allowing participants to narrate their personal experiences and reflect on their preferences between online and face-to-face components. To supplement these insights, participants were also asked to provide excerpts from reflective journals or tasks completed during the course, offering real-time documentation of their learning processes. Additionally, two focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted to identify shared experiences and collective challenges specific to the Filipino context, including issues related to internet connectivity, home learning environments, and time management.

The combination of interviews, reflective journals, and FGDs was designed to capture both individual and group perspectives, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the blended learning experience. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed participants to freely express their thoughts while maintaining alignment with the study's research questions. Reflective journals provided ongoing insight into students' self-regulatory strategies, engagement with assignments, and emotional responses to learning tasks. Meanwhile, FGDs encouraged dialogue among participants, revealing patterns of shared challenges and coping mechanisms that may not emerge in one-on-one settings.

Data analysis was conducted using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a method well-suited for exploring the meanings participants ascribe to their experiences. IPA involves a rigorous process of coding and theme identification, allowing the researcher to interpret how students perceive the workload, convenience, and interpersonal dynamics inherent in blended learning. The analysis emphasized understanding both commonalities and unique experiences, providing a nuanced picture of how Filipino students navigate hybrid EAP courses.

By combining phenomenology with multiple data sources and IPA, this study sought to provide an in-depth, contextually grounded understanding of blended learning in the Philippine higher education setting. The methodology not only highlights students' subjective experiences but also offers insights into the pedagogical strategies, challenges, and supports that shape their academic writing development in hybrid learning environments. Through this approach, the research aims to inform future instructional design, ensuring that blended EAP courses are both effective and responsive to the realities of Filipino students.

Findings and Discussion:

Preference for Flexibility:

The findings of this study are anticipated to reflect the nuanced experiences of Filipino university students navigating blended English Academic Writing courses, highlighting both the advantages and challenges of hybrid learning. One of the most prominent anticipated outcomes is students' preference for flexibility. Consistent with international studies, many Filipino students are expected to appreciate the convenience of blended learning, particularly those balancing work, family responsibilities, or living in remote provinces with limited access to campus facilities (Hajan & Padagas, 2021; Meyers, Smith, & Cekiso, 2024). The flexibility to access learning materials online and complete assignments asynchronously allows students to manage their time effectively, enhancing both engagement and satisfaction (Abbas, 2018; Bouilheres et al., 2020).

Despite its benefits, blended learning introduces significant demands on self-regulation and time management. Students are required to independently navigate online modules, participate in discussions, and meet deadlines without constant supervision. Kheiri et al. (2022) highlighted that learners with strong self-regulatory skills are more likely to thrive in blended academic writing environments, while those lacking these competencies may experience stress and decreased performance. Similarly, Wei, Sulaiman, and Ismail (2024) observed that challenges in time management and self-directed learning are common among EFL and ESL learners in hybrid settings, which can affect the quality and depth of their academic writing.

Another anticipated finding is the continued importance of face-to-face interactions in blended learning. While online components provide flexibility, students often value onsite sessions for clarifying complex writing concepts, receiving immediate feedback, and engaging in collaborative activities.

Ismael, Bakar, and Latif (2016) emphasized that physical classroom interaction helps reduce writing apprehension and fosters confidence, which is particularly important in EFL contexts where learners may be anxious about grammar, structure, or academic conventions. Kadri and Hamada (2016) similarly reported that learners perceive in-person guidance as crucial for building competence in academic writing, reinforcing the idea that hybrid learning should complement rather than replace traditional instruction.

Connectivity and technological access emerge as context-specific challenges in the Philippine setting. Students in remote or under-resourced areas may face intermittent internet access, limited bandwidth, or outdated devices, which can hinder participation in synchronous sessions and submission of online tasks (Hajan & Padagas, 2021; Wei, Sulaiman, & Ismail, 2024). These constraints highlight the digital divide, a recurring theme in studies of blended learning across EFL and ESL contexts (Quvanch & Na, 2020; Bouilheres et al., 2020). Overcoming these barriers requires flexible instructional design, asynchronous options, and the provision of offline learning resources to ensure equitable access for all students. The blended learning environment also shapes students' academic engagement and collaborative experiences.

Research indicates that peer interactions, group projects, and discussion forums are instrumental in developing writing proficiency and fostering critical thinking (Milad, 2017; Abbas, 2018). Filipino students are anticipated to benefit from these collaborative elements, which provide opportunities for peer feedback, reflection, and shared problem-solving. Meyers, Smith, and Cekiso (2024) further noted that collaborative activities enhance learners' motivation and help create a sense of community, which is often lacking in purely online formats.

Students' attitudes toward blended learning are influenced by both instructional design and perceived learning outcomes. Kadri and Hamada (2016) argued that learners' satisfaction is closely tied to the alignment of course structure, clarity of expectations, and responsiveness of instructors. Bouilheres et al. (2020) also emphasized that well-designed blended courses that balance online autonomy with structured support foster positive learning experiences. In the Philippine context, students are likely to respond favorably to courses that combine flexibility, instructor guidance, and opportunities for meaningful interaction, reflecting a growing expectation for hybrid models that are both practical and pedagogically sound.

The anticipated findings suggest that blended learning, when purposefully implemented, can enhance academic writing skills while promoting autonomy and adaptability. However, success is contingent on addressing context-specific challenges such as connectivity, self-regulation, and the need for interactive support (Wei, Sulaiman, & Ismail, 2024; Milad, 2017). By recognizing students' preferences, challenges, and attitudes, educators can design blended EAP courses that not only improve writing competence but also nurture learner independence, resilience, and engagement. These insights underscore the importance of culturally and contextually responsive approaches to blended learning in the Philippine higher education setting.

The Challenge of Self-Regulation

One of the primary challenges of blended learning in academic writing is the demand it places on students' self-regulation. The independent nature of online modules requires learners to manage their own time, monitor progress, and maintain motivation without the constant presence of an instructor (Abbas, 2018; Kadri & Hamada, 2016).

Students must balance online learning tasks with face-to-face activities, often alongside other academic or personal responsibilities. This requirement for autonomy can be a significant source of stress, particularly for those who are accustomed to more structured classroom environments.

Research indicates that students' success in blended learning is closely linked to their ability to plan, prioritize, and persist through challenging tasks. Bouilheres et al. (2020) emphasized that learners with stronger self-regulatory skills are more likely to complete assignments effectively and engage meaningfully with both online and offline

components. Conversely, students with underdeveloped time management or planning skills may experience frustration, reduced motivation, and lower satisfaction with the course. These findings suggest that self-regulation is not merely a desirable skill but a critical determinant of achievement in hybrid learning contexts.

In the context of English academic writing, the challenge is compounded by the complexity of the tasks themselves. Writing requires sustained cognitive effort, critical thinking, and iterative revision, all of which demand careful time allocation (Milad, 2017; Rahman, Azmi, & Hassan, 2020). Students may struggle to pace themselves through multiple stages of writing assignments, particularly when asynchronous online components lack immediate feedback. This can lead to procrastination or incomplete engagement, further exacerbating stress and lowering the perceived effectiveness of the blended approach (Wei, Sulaiman, & Ismail, 2024).

Student attitudes toward blended learning also influence how self-regulation affects their experience. Aksel (2021) found that learners who valued flexibility and autonomy were more likely to develop effective strategies for managing their online and offline responsibilities. In contrast, students who felt overwhelmed by the self-directed elements often reported anxiety and dissatisfaction. These findings highlight the interplay between learner mindset, skill level, and instructional design, suggesting that educators must support both the development of self-regulatory skills and positive attitudes toward hybrid learning.

Pedagogical strategies can mitigate the challenges of self-regulation in blended academic writing courses. Structured scaffolding, clear deadlines, progress monitoring tools, and regular instructor feedback have been shown to improve learners' ability to manage their tasks and reduce anxiety (Ilham, Irwandi, Ayun, & Wida, 2025; Rahman, Azmi, & Hassan, 2020).

Project-based learning models, for example, can break complex writing tasks into manageable steps while maintaining accountability through checkpoints and peer collaboration. Such approaches encourage active engagement, promote discipline, and enhance students' confidence in navigating the online components of blended learning.

The challenge of self-regulation underscores the need for a balanced and supportive blended learning environment. While autonomy is a defining feature of hybrid instruction, it must be accompanied by deliberate instructional guidance, scaffolding, and opportunities for reflection (Bliuc, Goodyear, & Ellis, 2007). By fostering both self-regulatory skills and structured support, educators can help students overcome stress and maximize the benefits of blended learning for academic writing. This dual focus ensures that learners not only gain technical competence in English writing but also develop the independent learning skills necessary for success in higher education and beyond.

Valuing Onsite Interaction

Despite the flexibility and convenience offered by online components, many students continue to value face-to-face interactions in blended learning environments. In English academic writing courses, in-person sessions allow learners to clarify complex conventions, ask immediate questions, and engage directly with instructors and peers (Rahman, Azmi, & Hassan, 2020; Aksel, 2021).

These interactions are particularly important for students who may feel uncertain about grammar, structure, or stylistic norms, as real-time guidance provides reassurance and reduces writing apprehension. Research has highlighted that the sense of "presence" and community in face-to-face sessions contributes significantly to learner engagement and motivation. Bliuc, Goodyear, and Ellis (2007) emphasize that hybrid learning is most effective when students experience social and academic support alongside autonomous online activities. The physical classroom allows for immediate feedback, modeling of writing strategies, and interactive discussion, all of which reinforce understanding and foster confidence in applying complex writing skills.

Face-to-face components are also instrumental in collaborative learning, which is central to improving academic writing. Ilham, Irwandi, Ayun, and Wida (2025) found that project-based blended learning models that integrate onsite group activities enhance peer-to-peer learning and critical thinking. Similarly, So and Lee (2013) reported that students benefited from cooperative exercises in physical classrooms, where ideas could be debated and clarified instantly—

opportunities that are often limited in asynchronous online modules. These findings underscore the importance of balancing online flexibility with structured in-person engagement.

In addition, onsite interactions support emotional and motivational aspects of learning. Sulisworo, Rahayu, and Akhsan (2016) found that students who participated in face-to-face discussions reported higher levels of confidence and reduced anxiety when composing academic texts. The ability to receive immediate affirmation or correction from instructors and peers contributes to a sense of belonging and community, which is often missing in fully online environments. Ngo (2023) similarly noted that learners perceive blended learning as more effective when the physical classroom allows them to connect socially and academically with their cohort.

Face-to-face sessions also facilitate scaffolding and guided practice, which are critical in developing higher-order writing skills. Hosseinpour, Bria, and Rezvani (2019) observed that Iranian EFL learners showed greater improvement in argumentation, cohesion, and academic style when blended courses incorporated structured in-person workshops alongside online exercises. This suggests that blended learning is most effective when online tasks are complemented by direct instruction and hands-on guidance, reinforcing the transfer of knowledge from theory to practice.

The continued emphasis on onsite interaction highlights the need for a purposefully designed blended approach. Rudneva, Valeeva, and Faizi (2020) argue that effective blended courses strategically allocate tasks between online and face-to-face sessions to maximize both autonomy and interactive support.

In the Philippine context, students are likely to benefit from hybrid models that retain face-to-face opportunities for clarification, collaboration, and community building while leveraging online modules for flexibility and self-paced learning. Valuing these in-person components ensures that learners not only achieve academic writing competence but also develop confidence and a sense of engagement in their educational experience.

Digital Divide Constraints:

A notable challenge of blended learning in the Philippine context is the impact of the digital divide, particularly intermittent internet connectivity, on students' ability to fully engage with online components. Many students face difficulties accessing synchronous sessions, submitting assignments on time, or participating in discussion forums due to unstable or slow internet connections (Bliuc, Goodyear, & Ellis, 2007; James, 2016).

This limitation not only affects task completion but also impedes opportunities for meaningful peer interaction and collaborative learning, which are critical for developing academic writing skills. Intermittent connectivity can hinder participation in asynchronous activities such as peer feedback on Moodle or other learning management systems. Sulisworo, Rahayu, and Akhsan (2016) found that students often struggled to respond promptly to peers' drafts or engage in discussion threads, which negatively affected both the learning process and the sense of academic community. Similarly, So and Lee (2013) highlighted that the effectiveness of blended learning in L2 writing instruction relies heavily on students' consistent access to digital platforms for interaction, feedback, and task completion.

The digital divide also has implications for instructional design. Ngo (2023) and Ilham, Irwandi, Ayun, and Wida (2025) noted that educators must consider learners' access limitations when planning blended courses, incorporating flexible deadlines, offline materials, and low-bandwidth alternatives to ensure inclusivity.

Providing downloadable resources, asynchronous discussion options, and mobile-friendly platforms can help bridge the gap for students who may otherwise be marginalized due to technological constraints. These strategies ensure that learning opportunities remain equitable, even in regions with unreliable internet connectivity.

The effects of the digital divide extend beyond logistics to influence students' confidence and motivation. Hosseinpour, Bria, and Rezvani (2019) observed that learners who experience repeated disruptions in accessing online modules often report frustration, decreased participation, and lower overall engagement with writing tasks. Similarly, Sumbayak, Saragih, and Natalia (2025) highlighted that persistent connectivity challenges can undermine

students' perception of blended learning's effectiveness, limiting their ability to benefit from digital tools designed to enhance writing proficiency.

Hence, addressing digital divide constraints is essential for ensuring the success of blended learning in academic writing. Studies from various contexts, including MOOCs and hybrid writing programs, emphasize that providing technical support, adaptable learning materials, and alternative engagement methods helps mitigate connectivity issues (Rudneva, Valeeva, & Faizi, 2020; Lentz & Foncha, 2021; Geta & Olango, 2016). In the Philippine setting, overcoming these challenges requires careful course design that balances online flexibility with offline accessibility, enabling all students to participate fully and develop their academic writing skills effectively.

Conclusion:

For English for Academic Purposes (EAP) writing courses in the Philippines, blended learning should be conceptualized not merely as a mechanism to reduce classroom hours or shift content online, but as a deliberate pedagogical strategy aimed at cultivating independent, reflective, and self-regulated learners.

The integration of online and face-to-face instruction provides opportunities for students to engage with writing tasks at their own pace, revisit challenging materials, and reflect on their learning processes, thereby promoting deeper cognitive engagement. At the same time, in-person sessions remain essential for facilitating interactive discussions, clarifying complex grammatical and stylistic conventions, and building a sense of academic community—factors that are crucial for language acquisition and learner confidence (Rahman, Azmi, & Hassan, 2020; Aksel, 2021).

Future developments in blended EAP instruction in the Philippine context must therefore emphasize balance. The online components should be structured to encourage autonomous learning, self-assessment, and iterative revision, while minimizing technological barriers such as intermittent connectivity that may hinder participation. Flexible access to asynchronous materials allows learners to manage their time effectively, particularly for those balancing academic obligations with work or family responsibilities (Bliuc, Goodyear, & Ellis, 2007; Ilham, Irwandi, Ayun, & Wida, 2025). Simultaneously, face-to-face interactions should be maintained to support collaborative writing exercises, immediate feedback, and peer-to-peer engagement, all of which reinforce comprehension and skill acquisition.

A well-designed blended learning model in Philippine EAP writing courses should foster both learner autonomy and social presence, enabling students to develop not only the technical skills required for academic writing but also the reflective practices necessary for lifelong learning. By strategically combining flexibility with structured guidance, blended learning can empower Filipino students to navigate the demands of academic writing in a globalized context while accommodating the unique socio-cultural and infrastructural realities of higher education in the Philippines.

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