



## **Scaffolding for Learners' Writing Literacy through Blended Learning in an Indonesian EFL Context**

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### **Introduction**

Scaffolding techniques in writing can be used in the learning process as a dominant component in educational planning to evolve learners' literacy. In the classroom, scaffolding provides students with a temporary learning atmosphere; hence, they are emboldened to develop their creativity, motivation, and ideas. Furthermore, scaffolding is an approach used for designing courses and assignments, therefore, segmenting the objectives into manageable steps and providing instructors with support throughout the learning process. An early study by Mirzae et al. (2017) showed the effects of collective scaffolding on morpho-syntactic and lexical skills of French learners in the classroom by elaborating students' writing literacy. Their study found that during the interaction, expert learners help the novice learners improve their morpho syntactic and lexical skills in the paragraph.

Furthermore, strategic instruction was given during the teaching and learning process. According to Kucirkova et al. (2014), as a cognate, scaffolding is a connection concept between social language and cognition creation derived from the Vygotsky Zone of Proximal Growth (ZPD). In other words, the difference between the actual level of learning identified by independent problem-solving and the future



level of growth is determined under teacher guidance, interaction, and cooperation. Miyazoe and Anderson (2010) and Walqui (2006) showed this teaching technique provided the best justification for education to foster reflective and immersive learning. Also, Kucirkova et al. (2014) explored the scaffolding instructions using non-technological (authentic) and technological media in the native context. This showed that the current preliminary study expounded the gap between scaffolding investigation for the native context, especially by using technology media, which is different from Kucirkova et al. (2014). Scaffolding learners' literacy in writing through blended learning should be consistently carried out to meet students' needs.

This study presented best practices in creating and developing English literacy through blended learning. Therefore, this study aims to explain scaffolding for learners' literacy and investigate students' and lecturers' preferences in a writing class through blended learning.

## Literature Review

### Scaffolding

Van Driel et al. (2018) and Arifani et al. (2021) affirmed that scaffolding is one of the teaching techniques that is employed to ease language learning during lessons. Kucirkova et al. (2014) also stated that it is the connection between social and cognitive process. Furthermore, Skene (2014) established several benefits of its application to language learning: allow students to start working on key assignments sooner, meet disciplinary expectations, provide more opportunities to receive formative input, promote academic integrity, and improve assignments quality.

In teaching writing, scaffolding emerges as an educational cycle that incorporates gender-based literacy approaches to providing greater reading and writing access. Therefore, it enhances curricula or field awareness and opportunities for students to participate in language and text exchanges (Derewianka & Jones, 2016). According to Derewianka and Jones (2016), the research term used four teaching cycles: Building Knowledge of the Field (BKOF), Modeling, Joint and Independent Construction.

### Literacy in Writing

In the English language learning process, literacy skills should be enjoyable and meaningful. According to Huffaker (2005), literacy is a gateway to learning. Besides language acquisition, it is a cornerstone in all academic disciplines, especially emphasizing learners' writing creativity through weblogs. Therefore, literacy involves a problem-solving approach since words are frequently used in both linguistic and situational contexts. Hyland (2003) showed that writing is a complex system mastered by learning the ability to control lexicon and grammar. In other words, it is an English literacy skill considered as an extension of grammar and vocabulary. McCarthy (2013) affirmed that writing on online platforms is less burdensome because teachers and students communicate, collaborate, and work at their own pace. Also, it is more accessible via online platforms than the media, which allows students and teachers to work together in the classroom. Therefore, writing skills can be acquired and developed through practice from paragraph to essay, such as expository and argumentative writing. In other words, some processes are required to improve these skills in students.

One of the four basic skills in English language scaffolding is writing. Muluneh (2018) and Arifani et al. (2020) showed that it is the most demanding of the other language skills. It is important for academic achievement at the university and in the workplace. Learners also need the skill to construct simple units of writing at a specific level. The ability to write well is not a skill naturally learned; hence, it needs to be regularly practiced. Muluneh (2018) showed writing is a technology-assisted ability that needs to be mastered through experience. In conclusion, the view of scaffolding literacy discussed is momentous research that emphasized language use in the social context with a further critical study of how meanings are

constructed and perceived, especially in communication behaviour to teach English writing skills through blended learning.

## **Blended Learning**

Blended learning is a crossroads between conventional education approaches and the digital world due to technical developments in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Wright, 2017). This process integrates online and face-to-face interactive co-presence between teachers and students to empower them to learn at their own pace and time (Isiaka et al., 2013). Tomlinson and Whittaker (2013) affirmed that blended learning is a combination of face-to-face teaching and computer technology. Therefore, it encompasses direct, indirect, and collaborative instruction, as well as individualized computer-assisted learning.

Also, it is often referred to as dual learning, incorporating online class experiences. Garrison and Vaughan (2008) viewed blended learning as an organic integration of carefully selected and complementary face-to-face with online approaches and technologies. Integrated learning practices are performed to provide high-quality connections between teachers and students in the classroom. Arifani et al. (2019) and Kocoglu et al. (2011) affirmed that blended learning needs good harmonization, both online learning and face-to-face. Therefore, based on that foundation, writing requires the harmonization of both online and face-to-face learning processes. Also, regarding scaffolding learners' literacy when teaching writing, there is the harmonization between online and or face-to-face. There are four cycles of scaffolding, which are building knowledge of the field (BKOF), modelling of the text (MOT), joint constructions of the text (JCOT), and independent constructions of the text (ICOT). However, there are practical challenges when harmonizing the learning process to write online and face-to-face.

This study has two questions:

- How is the scaffolding for learners' literacy in the writing genre through blended learning?
- What are the students' and lecturers' preferences in writing class through blended learning?

## **Method**

This preliminary study employed a mixed-methods approach, which included data collection using qualitative and quantitative methods (Creswell, 2014). The quantitative survey design was employed to draw participants' preferences in writing activities using a blended learning approach. Meanwhile, the qualitative analysis was used to elaborate the scaffolding implementation during the writing process using the same blended approach. This study involved thirty-five sophomore English students (6 males and 28 females, ranging in age from 19-21) who had been attending a writing course for 28 meetings and 12 EFL lecturers (5 males and 7 females, ranging in age from 31-42) who had been teaching writing for the past ten years. These research data were obtained from observations and a questionnaire. The observations were conducted fourteen times during the class and online sessions. A five-point Likert scale questionnaire modified from Mulyadi et al. (2019) and Tananuraksakul (2016) was administered via a Google Form to thirty-five students after they finished their blended writing course. The questionnaire was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The questionnaire was piloted to another thirty-nine EFL students from a different class. The reported alpha values were 0.78. Meanwhile, the qualitative data from classroom observations were thematically analyzed and interpreted.

## Findings

### Scaffolding Literacy Skill Learning Practices in Writing through Blended Learning

Since best practices are the main component in the teaching and learning process, literacy skills as a part of language learning were included among the practices. Therefore, lecturers used the learning approach to help learners enhance their literacy skills in writing. These practices applied blended learning during the educational processes. Furthermore, the lecturers selected motivational writing text of modality for the university students using this teaching technique and the appropriate design during the learning activities. Subsequently, lecturers encouraged student literacy skills in writing, where the practice has been carried out on learning activities. They also applied the modality as material to enhance the learners' literacy skills in writing, especially its manifestation. For example, students' traditional learning sources were limited from the teachers as an expert, but in online learning, they had many reading texts by browsing from online sources and watching YouTube videos to be able to enhance their literacy skills.

To promote literacy, there were four teaching cycles as the scaffolding used by the lecturers, namely Building Knowledge of the Field (BKOF), Modeling, Joint and Independent Construction. The collaboration of these cycles and the blended learning process were divided into offline sessions and online sessions consisting of BKOF and modelling, while the online sessions include Joint and Independent Construction. In offline or traditional settings, the lecturers arranged some best practices to achieve the learners' language competence on literacy skills. Furthermore, they included materials on writing skills literacy by giving examples of the text. To make the class more enjoyable, relevant photos and writing videos were used, which aimed to stimulate the students' literacy skills. Based on this, tools were prepared to help learners develop their writing skills. The scaffolding activities were started from the Building Knowledge of the Field (BKOF) cycle, where the lecturers gave apperception to stimulate and invite learners to speak up. Also, pictures and videos related to the topics were shown to stimulate critical thinking related to the learning material. Furthermore, they were instructed to examine the e-learners' skills in the literacy field. The students gave their responses by writing their apperception on small cards. Subsequently, they shared their understanding in front of the class. In Modelling of the Text (MOT), the lecturers arranged face-to-face meetings in the classroom to explain the reading text in the writing genre. Also, in the MOT cycle, the lecturers shared the example of the reading text, which is described into its social purposes, generic structures, and language features. To comprehend the students' understanding, the lecturers asked them to create the outline of the example exposition text given by modelling from the text's generic structures. In addition, the Joint Construction of the Text cycle improved the students' experiences after learning the example text given by doing some activities. Firstly, the lecturers divided them into seven groups which consisted of five members each. Furthermore, each group was asked to create the text outline by considering the generic structures and language features. They first discussed the topic sentence and then continuously assembled them into text by involving each group member. Meanwhile, each member had to contribute one sentence repeatedly until they could participate in more than three rounds of writing. Subsequently, every member had to present their writing genre products in front of the class. The last cycle in a traditional setting is Independent Construction of the Text (ICOT). In this cycle, the students had to individually create a text based on the topic given and submit it to the lecturers in two days.

In contrast, the scaffolding cycles of online learning are quite different. Firstly, in the BKOF cycle, the lecturers gave apperception by sending messages on *ifbba unimus* chat room or Moodle e-learning. Furthermore, the lecturers asked about the topic given as a preview of their interest in learning the text. Subsequently, the lecturers asked the students to use their smartphones and connected them to the internet link. The internet is a huge repository of learning materials where students can search for documents of their choice. The students were questioned according to their brainstorming results after seeing the pictures and videos by responding to the *Mentimeter* survey. Also, their sources were found by searching exposition reading resources to stimulate their writing based on the topic given. In the MOT cycle, the lecturers gave a model of writing exposition text in the classroom by reviewing the text on virtual meetings via the zoom

application. Subsequently, in the JCOT cycle, the students created the outlines via Padlet in the group. Meanwhile, in the Independent Construction cycle, the students were asked to write their outline of an exposition text. To increase their writing products, they searched for many sources via an online platform. After that, they checked their writing products on paperrater.com to investigate plagiarism results and mechanics error categories. From this activity, they learned and revised their drafts based on the resulting forms obtained from the paper rater. Due to these activities, the lecturers learned more individual learning experiences. Therefore, students were assigned to write and perform online activities through e-learning. However, Horton (2006) coincides with e-learning using knowledge and internet connections to construct learning experiences. Online learning supports learners to transfer literacy information to an educational environment. Regarding online learning, the lecturers applied e-learning designed by *Universitas Muhammadiyah Semarang*. Therefore, they might carry out discussions on the e-learning chat room to check their writing and get feedback from classmates as the Joint Construction cycle. After discussing and checking writing through paper rater, revision and final drafting were individually carried out. Finally, the results were uploaded to the e-learning platform.

The traditional and online teaching practices have different processes and harmonization, and every setting has its characteristics. Therefore, blended learning has a more upcoming approach that elaborates and harmonizes the teaching-learning process, especially in writing. Besides the benefits of combining traditional and online learning, some problems are faced, including honesty, punctuality in submitting assignments or quizzes, self-regulatory, and character management in the learning process. All these should be properly maintained and harmonized in the integration between online and traditional learning. This aims to produce relevant and applicable learning outcomes.

### Learners' Preferences in Writing Classes through Blended Learning

During learning practices of writing, blended learning was applied as an educational strategy to give students face-to-face and online learning experiences to help them enjoy learning activities. Therefore, responses were collected from students towards the educational process using this teaching technique. The chart below shows the responses of learners' preferences on writing class through blended learning.

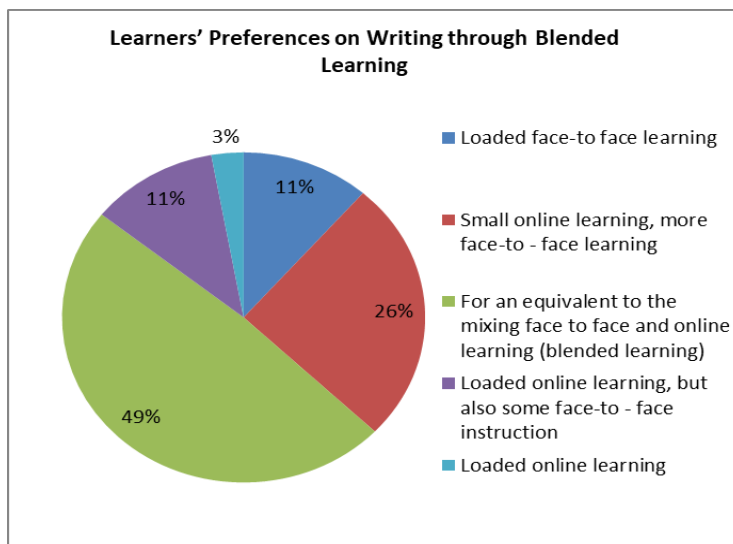


Figure 1. Learners' preferences on writing class through blended learning.

Figure 1 showed that most learners preferred to have teaching and learning activities equivalent to mixing face-to-face and online learning (blended learning) by 49%. Nevertheless, some preferred to have small online learning and more face-to-face by 26%. Furthermore, other students preferred to have loaded online

learning, but some face-to-face instruction by 11%. Several learners preferred to have loaded face-to-face learning by 11%. Meanwhile, the rest preferred to have loaded online learning.

Based on these responses, it could be concluded that scaffolding learners' literacy in writing through blended learning provided better and consequential learning activities for students. They enjoyed having both face-to-face and online learning in writing class to enhance their literacy skills.

### Lecturers' Preferences of Writing Class through Blended Learning

In this language acquisition, blended learning was used as the teaching method to help students learn literacy skills in writing class. This method helps to combine face-to-face and online learning in the educational process. The result showed that the learners were able to enhance their literacy skills in writing. In addition, the responses were also collected from other lecturers when implementing blended learning in their classes. The result of lecturers' preferences is as follows.

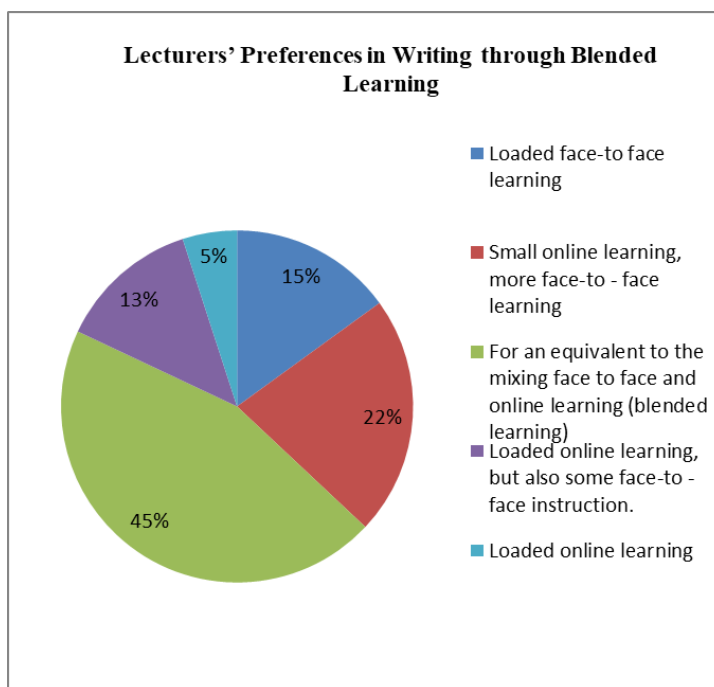


Figure 2. Lecturers' preferences on writing class through blended learning.

Figure 2 showed that the highest response came from the category of mixing face-to-face and online learning (blended learning) by 45%. This showed that most lecturers preferred to mix both face-to-face and online learning in their teaching processes. Meanwhile, in the category of small online learning, there was more face-to-face learning by 22%. This showed that some lecturers still gave online learning to their students. Furthermore, the full face-to-face learning category was 15%, which showed that lecturers did not want to carry out online learning. In the category of loaded online learning, face-to-face instruction was by 13%. This showed the lecturers preferred blended learning. The last category, which was loaded online learning by 5%, showed the lecturers were not interested in doing face-to-face learning in writing class.

### Discussion

The scaffolding in learners' literacy in writing through blended learning, especially applying teaching-learning cycles, showed there were potential teaching practices that foster the students' writing and literacy

skills. Firstly, the lecturers provided the platform or devices for blended learning through e-learning, Mentimeter.com, and paper rater. They also designed the material related to modality in writing literacy. This result expounded the gap on the investigation of scaffolding learners' literacy in writing through blended learning, which is new and different from Kucirkova et al. (2014) that scaffolding was found on the non-technology and technology-based media. Secondly, the questionnaire results on the learners' and lecturers' preferences in writing showed both agreed to mixed face-to-face and online learning in the teaching processes. It was also shown that students enjoyed blended learning (Mabuan & Ebron, 2017; Purnawarman et al., 2016), and the lecturers were interested in mixing face-to-face and online to foster students' writing positive responses (Anggeraini et al., 2018; Arifin & As, 2019; Budiman & Ngadiso, 2018; Muhaemin, 2019; Tarasova, 2018). Thirdly, this study showed new exposure to the differences of teaching writing through online and traditional methods that require good harmonization to achieve the learning objectives, which is in line with Arifani et al. (2019) and Kocoglu et al. (2011). Therefore, this study added to the existing research of learners' and lecturers' responses to teaching-writing through blended learning. Previously, very few studies have investigated the consequential scaffolding of learner writing through this teaching technique in the context of Indonesian higher education. Hence, the results showed the gap between previous and current studies, especially in scaffolding learners' literacy in writing class between online and traditional learning. Further studies should be conducted on the impact of blended learning on students' writing literacy and their self-regulated skills.

## Conclusion

The preliminary research has shown that the realization of best practices in promoting English writing literacy skills of learners gave new insight that is very consequential for other research teams and allowed students to learn writing skills. In addition, blended learning provided a more individualized learning experience, helped learners develop their writing language skills, and gave targeted practices beyond face-to-face and online learning. Therefore, both learners and lecturers have responded to their class preferences through this teaching technique. Several lecturers also agreed to mix face-to-face and online learning in their writing classrooms.

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