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Facultad de Lenguas

**PROMOTING WRITTEN PRODUCTION BY USING A VIRTUAL FORUM
AT LAEL-I, BUAP**

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Languages for the Degree of
Licenciatura en la Enseñanza del Inglés

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**And is considered worthy of approval in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of**

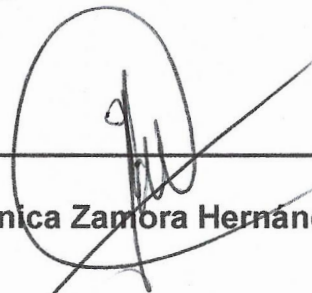
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I dedicate this project to my mother, for being one of the most important people in my life, because her love and support encouraged me to move on in difficult moments. I would never have reached this goal without you mom. To my dad, for his advice, courage, and support. Thanks to you I am a better person.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction to the problem

Nowadays we are living the zenith of the era of technology. Actually since the digital age appeared, people have had other ways to get information and facilitate their daily lives in many aspects. Technology has dramatically impacted education and it has changed with it. Now, the society has a type of education that is not only in presential but also in a distance or blended learning modality, Thus, traditional patterns of time and space are broken with this modality that is part of our present research.

Teaching languages is an extended area in which a lot of issues can be investigated and involved in; as the tools used to improve learners' skills in the language. Many tools are helping to develop education like mobile devices, computers, apps, websites, where students can find information about anything, anywhere, anytime.

In fact, there are different collaborative tools that support the teaching-learning process in a language such as Facebook, where students can create events, groups, share information, etc.; Twitter is useful to keep in touch with people, you can share information, look for interesting topics; Google Docs is very useful because it has many tools, you can create communities, blogs, share information, create presentations, spreadsheet, documents as word online and share files in google drive; virtual forums where people can discuss about different topics, interact each other, upload files, share their point of view and so on.

This study is focused on the use of a virtual forum as a tool to develop written production because the setting where this study takes place is using a platform and tools like the above mentioned. Then, the purpose of this study is to know what its usefulness is.

1.2 Rationale for the Topic Selection

This research intends to know how those tools are helping to develop the process of teaching-learning in a new modality as the blended learning one.

These students start studying the open BA to professionalize their occupation and to increase their competitiveness. Besides, there is research about platforms, digital tools, and in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), but there is not enough research about the forum used in the blended learning modality. Then, this research is important for the field.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to provide further information in learning a foreign language in order to realize how the forum helps students to develop their written production, which takes place in a Moodle platform in a blended learning modality so that it can be known both its usefulness and whether it helps students in their writing process or not.

1.4 Research Questions

- Does the forum promote the written production?
- What activities enhance the written production when working with the virtual forum?
- How does the forum impact on the students' writing production according to their perceptions?

1.5 Research Setting

The place where this study will be conducted is the open BA of teaching languages-English of Faculty of languages. Students are teachers in service; therefore, this modality offers them to study the degree in a blended learning way, attending classes on Saturdays from 8 am to 3 pm and the rest of the week, they are working in platform in an E-learning way. They use this virtual space to interact each other through which they receive feedback from their teachers to carry out independent and active learning.

1.6 Significance of the topic

It attempts to gather information by a questionnaire to know if the forum is helping to develop written production. On the one hand, this study will serve to know how the modality is working that is if indeed the forum is a tool that is helping the development of written production; if the use of the forum is beneficial or not for them.

On the other hand, the intention is that the students that use this modality can improve their written skill starting from what they already know. Therefore, taking into account the results, it is expected to answer the research questions that guide this investigation. It is important to find out if the forum promotes the written production based on the answers obtained from students.

1.7 Context of the research.

It is involved in Language development and ITCs because it is a process related to the language learning and with Information and Communication Technology because nowadays, it has a very important role in the formation of new generations and its aim is to make them competitive for the current society.

It is related to Pedagogy and Education, because many tools that ITC offers were developed for the use of the education too, currently it has an important role in education technology.

1.8 Key terms

Writing. Writing systems are both functional, providing a visual way to represent language, and also symbolic, in that they represent cultures and peoples. (Fischer, 2001: 12)

Virtual forum. It is a mediated space that gives access to organized information and resources that learners, individually or in groups, can make use of in order to improve their understanding of a given subject". Holtham and Courtney as cited in Crook and Cluley, 2009:200)

1.9 Conclusion

In this chapter the topics were presented, the rationale and purpose, the research questions, the setting where the study took place and information about it as well as the significance and the context of the research.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The current technology has effect in each aspect of our lives, in entertainment, health, culture, and also in education. The development of technology has advanced so much that it cannot be ignored. In the last decades, the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have been involved in all levels of education; it has been adopted in teaching and learning. ICT is understood as technologies that are used for accessing, gathering, manipulating and presenting or communicating information, these technologies offer many tools that are constantly changing (Toomey, 2001, cited in Fandiño Parra, 2012).

The Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in education invites teachers to leave behind traditional roles and act more as mentors (Fitzpatrick & Davies, 2003 cited in Fandiño Parra, 2012). Teachers have the commitment of being models for the students and create for them a different place to make students producers of their own knowledge. In the same way to create collaborative learning environments where they can have collaborative work and they can be helped by integrated tools in wikis, platforms, forums, etc.

All level of education, especially higher education has got a transformation process required for the integration of ICT into daily academic activities inside the classroom (García Chamorro & Rey, 2013). In language learning, the skills and subskills are trained for the improvement of those, such as the writing skill.

Ballén (2014) suggests that learning processes “are all the procedures and strategies that students use to acquire new information” (p.12). It is also the result of the decisions and actions that are made by the student who is planning and carrying out learning. As a change in behavior, learning is the outcome of performed experiences. All the skills previously mentioned having to be developed when learning a language to improve the proficiency throughout learning. Related to the writing process, Artunduaga Cuéllar (2013) argues that it is important to include grammatical teaching with interactive activities because it is essential to promote knowledge of a language and to put that knowledge into practice by using it in

different contexts and situations to achieve meaningful learning. At the same time, many competencies need to be practiced to promote the correct use of the language.

2.2 What writing is

One of the language skills that help us in our daily activities is writing, it helps us to perform some activities when we go shopping, text messages, leave messages on post sticks for someone else in the home, etc. Writing is a task that is extremely necessary when you are a student, from simple activities such as taking some notes, to write something more complicated such as academic writings. Weissberg (2006) points out that writing is a highly demanding cognitive activity requiring a high level of attention and concentration from the writer. Writing expresses the writer's thoughts, it is a personal work that involves other skills like reading, listening and speaking. It is assumed that when people refer to communication skills the first they think is being able to speak, listen, write and read (Rivera, 2011).

Writing is a way of communication between the writer and the reader; hence the writer needs to know the population of his work is addressed. There are many regimes that can be adopted depending on the public such as grammar rules, punctuation, etc. Ochoa Alpala & Medina Peña (2014) states that writing is a whole process of connecting specific elements, for example, coherence and cohesion that are important in order to build a complete text to communicate related ideas that carry the text to have sense and fluency.

A text is limited compared with a speech because the author cannot use all the stuff that is commonly used in speech to communicate, such as body language, facial expressions, the tone of voice, manners. Writing is based on construct sentences more carefully and with a wide knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, thus writing becomes more grammatically complex than speaking or the other skills. There are some styles of writing as "speech-written-down" and "differentiation". Speech-written-down consists in write exactly what you say in a speech, some writers never go beyond that; other writers that begin to move away from their oral language through a process of differentiation, which consists of joining speaking style and writing style (Kroll, 1991 cited in Weissberg, 2006).

2.3 Theories about how to teach writing

Writing effectively is one of the purposes of students, learning grammar and vocabulary is also part of the whole process to promote the written products. A written text with cohesion and coherence is easier to understand; hence these devices help the reader to comprehend better the content because the lexical and the sentences are related to each other (Harmer, 2004). Through the use of different resources, students are allowed to practice and enhance their language skills. Ochoa and Medina (2014) suggest that Technology offers a wide range of opportunities in education, as the use of web pages and virtual resources that help in any academic need. Moreover, Teachers should integrate technology in their teaching-learning process. As a matter of fact, in the history of writing instruction, taking into account Raimés as cited in Homstad and Thorson (1994) writing has followed four approaches related to second language writing instruction:

1) The focus on the form of the text itself. This means the structure of the text to the sight.

2) The focus on the writer and the cognitive processes in the act of writing. It is a cognitive process because of the author's thoughts and how all the ideas are put in order to be readable and without misunderstandings.

3) The focus on the content. It refers to what is expressed in the text that is the information provided in the structure.

4) The focus on the reader. The audience of each text is important since they are created for a specific public.

She also affirms that there are problems in ESL instructors. These problems are presented in ESL classroom and in the foreign language classroom.

Richards as cited in Homstad and Thorson (1994) argues that the nature and significance of writing have been undervalued in language teaching, whereas foreign language teaching writing is synonymous with teaching grammar and sentence structure. In the audio-lingual method writing is a tool used to reinforce grammatical and syntactic forms in speaking. The methodology allows the students to correct their own writings in the process and feel more comfortable talking about what they write

and how they do that for achieving it. In doing so, he also suggests a series of activities for writing like rehearsing/prewriting, drafting/writing, and revising.

2.4 Strategies to develop the writing process

Students use strategies to know the phases that involve writing. There are many strategies developed by many authors related to the writing process, wherefore students have the need of having a plan to get a better instruction. Then, their selection depends on the purpose while reading.

All teachers must agree with the fact that writing is a need for communication, and it provides students with opportunities to develop thinking skills because thanks to writing, students discover logic or fallacies in their text and make them feel more responsible for their own learning (Jay, 2004).

Besides, writing without a plan sometimes could bring troubles to students, for that reason, it is important to look for strategies before start writing. Levy and Ransdell (1996: 73) state that a psychological theory of written language production includes the following:

- The acquisition of knowledge

- The situation-dependent and goal-dependent retrieval of knowledge from memory

- The (inferring) construction of information

- The linearization of information that is cognitively provided

- The translation of these prelinguistic cognitive structures into topically and grammatically appropriate sentences

- The choice and inflection of words

- The graphemic and finally grapho-motoric realization of written traces of behavior.

In addition, taking into account, Brown (2010), in order to develop writing, it is necessary to go through some strategic phases like planning, pre-writing, while writing and post writing as well as editing.

Moreover, according to Davis (2002) in general, any strategy that promotes writing must target any of these aspects: feedback, motivation, instruction or practice. In the next lines, the classification is presented:

A) Strategies that emphasize feedback:

- Ask the students to improve their writing by analyzing each sentence, and then discuss the improvements as a class.

- Correct writing errors on student papers

B) Strategies that emphasize motivation:

- Encourage students to improve their writing skills by telling them that good writing skills are important in an EFL and in their future careers.

- Make students aware of the importance of writing by anecdotes about the implications of good and acceptable writing.

- Praise students' tasks anytime the teacher sees progress and then, writing becomes better.

- Help students especially when they feel discouraged because they do not see too much improvement in a genre or task. Let them know that writing is a complex progress, but once they reach a certain level of skill, writing turns into an enjoyable stage.

C) Strategies that emphasize instruction:

- When giving a task, explain to students the most common writing errors as well as grammatical rules mistakes.

- Provide students with a checklist or rubric of writing-process suggestions and ask them to do a self-evaluation based on that checklist or rubric.

- The mapping or outline strategy is always useful to organize the structure of the writing assignment as well as completing several drafts of the document, checking the writing against the requirements, and asking another classmate to proofread the document.

- Provide any written or digital handouts with important writing rules and tips about how to avoid mistakes when writing, punctuation, cohesion, and coherence.

- Encourage students to learn from their mistakes by avoiding committing them in later assignments.

-Pointing out an important topic every single class.

-Ask students to analyze grammar and punctuation they see in textbooks, articles or books or a simple paper so that they could develop simple drafts, outlines or schemas.

-Suggest students use writing tools like Grammarly in order to have correction when writing or some web writing sites.

-Explain to students that there are styles to write too, and once they are skillful in writing, they also need to develop those styles like expository, persuasive, descriptive or narrative.

D) Strategies that emphasize practice

-Ask students to elaborate a critique of a classmate's writing.

-After the class, ask students to write a summary of the content of the class.

-Give a writing assignment and in the marking criteria set aside a specific number of points for writing quality.

2.5 Tools to develop writing with ICT

According to Cochran-Smith, Paris, and Kahn (1996: 46) when students use word processing or computers laboratory situations affects both the quality and quantity of student's written products. Handwriting and typing are different, but both of them imply construct grammatical sentences, be aware of punctuation and organization, but definitely typing in the computer has another effect in the writer.

Thanks to technology, nowadays there are different tools that could be used to develop writing in a more suitable and attractive way for learners by providing them with opportunities to collaborate as thinkers, learners or writers. Indeed, technologies are being used as a way to assist in teaching basic literacy skills in a Foreign language such as listening, speaking, reading and writing since there are different applications and tools to teach a language. Then, computers are considered to enable a new and effective instructional environment designed for language teaching and learning (Davis, 2002). Some tools are the following:

A) Word processors.

According to Dudeney and Hockly (2010), a Word processor is a suitable way for a wide variety of word processing tasks, which allows multiple users to collaborate with one another on one document at the same time. In fact, this is a recommendable tool to enhance writing. This tool helps students to check spelling and grammar because it has thesaurus and dictionary options. In this way, students will be motivated and develop self-awareness of their weakness in writing.

Besides, with the use of spell-check, students could be more aware of errors and provide a chance for self-correction that is considered a crucial point in meaningful learning. At the same time, teachers can monitor in a practical way the options they want their students to use while writing a piece of composition. In this way, this word processor provides a more interactive way of teaching writing through sharing texts, produce them collaboratively and engage in peer and teacher editing. Finally, different writing activities could now be performed by word-processors in a more interactive and fun way that will motivate students to practice writing inside or outside classrooms.

B) Computer-based tools:

With technology, students develop a writing habit through the applications that force them to write and sometimes, especially in English. As a matter of fact, regarding ITU (2012) in order to enhance the effectiveness of teaching writing, teachers have to use ICT tools into their curricula and use them effectively in students' motivation and positive interaction while grasping the knowledge.

C)The internet-based tools:

The internet provides sources and facilities for educational purposes. There are a lot of useful tools and programs for innovative ways and methods to teach writing. The most common ones are emails, blogs, and virtual forums.

Email. It is one of the most common and interesting ICT tools today. Almost all students have personal emails that they use to communicate with their relatives, friends and educational life. However, teachers need to make students aware of the different kinds of language forms used in emails as well as when and how to use them.

On one hand, basic skills, especially communication and technical skills are

required before carrying on an email-based Project for example. Then, students need to know that there are different levels of formality. The use of formal or informal language is determined by the correspondent and the purpose. Besides, they also need to know basic skills such as attaching files, sending to multiple recipients and exploit the various options provided the email editing. That is why email is considered to enhance teaching writing through different activities and practices. According to Davis (2002:78) “email, as an authentic tool, helps the writer engage in a real-like conversation, in addition to the editing options it offers to the users”.

Furthermore, the email also presents the option of spelling and grammar-check, which make the writer aware of mistakes. Another advantage of this tool is that students can send their last draft to their teacher and classmates to get instant feedback and be engaged in a collaborative work ore ven to develop a story together in an asynchronous way while the teacher supervises them. Thus, the most outstanding advantage of this tool is that it helps students learn and practice writing outside the classroom in a dynamic and collaborative process.

Blogs. This is another important tool that can be set up by individuals or groups of people to provide a significant virtual space for exchanging ideas and interacting with other learners and instructors.

Taking into account Polo (2007;23) “a blog is a Web publishing tool that allows authors to quickly and easily self-publish text, artwork and links to other contents”. These blogs do not require too much technical knowledge and are quickly and easily created and stored in a repository for a long term. Since they demand a big variety of topics, they can be used to involve students with writing activities. Indeed, blogs provide a space where not only teachers but also students work collaboratively to further develop writing skills in a bidirectional form. That is, on one hand, teachers offer instructional tips and on the other hand, students practice and benefit from peer review and teacher’s guidelines. This is the way, students actively participate in blogging respecting the previous policies.

Virtual forum. This is another trendy tool due to its dynamic, interactive and attractive way to promote writing in this century. This tool will be described in the next section.

2.6 What a virtual forum is

It is a virtual space that served as a context for studying or for accomplishing a task. That is, it is a virtual environment that offers tools to enhance either written or oral communication among learners and teachers from different classrooms and schools in different countries.

According to Holtham and Courtney as cited by Crook and Cluley (2009:200), a virtual platform as “a virtual forum is a mediated space that gives access to organized information and resources that learners, individually or in groups, can make use of in order to improve their understanding of a given subject”.

Another definition regarding Davis (2002) a virtual forum is a digital space provided for participants to interact and discuss pedagogical issues raised from their experiences when reading and using different internet-based tools in their classes.

Moreover, Ardila and Bedoya (2006) stated that a virtual forum is mainly a means of authentic communication that is used as a tool to promote participation.

When the main purpose is to communicate in an oral or written form, virtual forums are essential since they allow students to interact and collaborate for educational purposes.

2.7 Strategies to promote writing with a virtual forum

Considering that there are four skills which have been divided into two categories, productive and receptive ones, each skill has its own way to be developed and practiced (Sharma and Barrett, 2007).

Writing belongs to the productive skills; thus, the output of the students can be moderated by the teacher. There are many resources about strategies for writing any kind of writings, but each author adopts his/her own way to do it. According to Hyland’s proposal as cited in Diaz (2014), the most recognized model for implementing the writing process in the classroom is to see writing as a process more than a product. It consists of:

“A topic selection, (by teachers or students); prewriting (through brainstorming, collecting data, note taking, outlining, etc.); composing (by getting the ideas on the paper); responding to drafts (by teacher or peer assessment of ideas,

organization, and style); revising (reorganizing, refining ideas, adjusting to the audience, etc.); responding to revisions (by teacher or peer who check ideas, organization, and style); proofreading and editing (checking and correcting the form, the layout, etc.); evaluation (teacher evaluates the process); publishing (by class presentation, websites, etc.); and follow-up tasks (to address weaknesses, metacognitive awareness, etc.)” (Hyland, 2003: 11).

As mentioned before in this chapter, writing is more complex than speech. Many strategies and steps are designed to help people plan a way to write. Hashimoto, Kroll, and Schafer (1982) argue that there is an advantage of using steps in what you do because you are able to group ideas and show relationships between the issues instead of studying a long list of individual or unrelated activities.

Another writing process is based on pedagogical techniques which include brainstorming, planning, pre-writing, drafting, revising, and editing, (Diaz, 2014). It offers the opportunity to give the students meaningful assessment in the written production. Consequently, the development of writing skill has a way to be organized better.

However, when writing in a virtual forum, there are certain phases that must be followed:

A) Setting clear expectations. It deals with clear instructions. That is to clarify how often students should be in the forum, read the messages posted, write and respond to messages. Another important part is to define their role before starting participating in the forums, especially if it is a collaborative assignment.

B) Interacting online. Before interacting, it is recommendable to have a set of commitments and rules for general interaction like respect among them, free expression regarding their thoughts and participation.

C) Managing with anxiety. It is always advisable to know how they feel about their computer skills for writing in order to minimize some of the confusion and anxiety in the beginning. One way to overcome this is by uploading tutorials about how to use the virtual forum for writing.

D) Assessing and reusing resources. Evaluate if the resources need to be adapted, adopted or taken out according to the writing purposes (Crook and Cluley, 2009).

Finally, some advantages of using a virtual forum in the educational process regarding Sharma & Barrett (2007) are:

- Students can continue working full-time and simultaneously take a training course
- Do not need to take time out of work to attend a seminar; they can work on their course in their own time, at their own convenience, and at their own pace.
- It is commonly applied to a course where all the learners meet with the teacher in a face-to-face class, but in which the course includes a parallel self-study component.
- The learner can be set pre-lesson tasks or specific homework tasks between the face-to-face classes.

2.8 How to develop writing with virtual forums

Enhancing writing skill is the highest commitment of a forum designed to measure the level of writing production of second or foreign language learners. Technology in education also allows a way to show performance; this is how a forum works. The ICT in a blended learning modality has required to achieve the purposes of this modality and make it work. This is a kind of a social network because this technology has facilitated communication outside the classroom (Stanley, 2013). Similarly, Bloch (2008: 75) holds that “Like websites, forums can be designed to foster connectivity. The social nature of virtual forums is one of the latest manifestations of the collaborative nature of writing on the internet.”

In the following lines, it is described how to develop writing with virtual forums.

1. Set the ground rules beforehand. This means to set expectations and guidelines in advance so that learners know their role and how they should behave when interacting with their peers.

2. Establish rules and observe the activity. Forums give the audience a place to share their ideas and explore the topic in the eLearning environment. Then,

the facilitator should only guide the activity and encourage peer-based collaboration by guiding the online writing by posting a question or idea.

3. Choose the ideal platform. Before choosing the instructional strategy in order to include forums in e-Learning, it is necessary to define which online forum and platform will be used. For instance, if post articles are included, the virtual-blog forum is a perfect choice. In contrast, if short responses and online discussions are the main ideas, then a message board could be the suitable solution. Therefore, when choosing an online platform, think about the learning objectives of the eLearning course and the needs of your audience.

4. Link to interactive resources. Attractive online forums are characterized by including links to videos, tutorials and extra material that help students to develop writing and monitoring their progress through rubrics or checklist.

6. Encourage students to write and share thoughts. Although nowadays learners use applications and tools daily, there are still some who are not willing to write and share their thoughts and experiences in a public forum. Then, the facilitator must encourage and motivate them to do it.

7. Set a schedule for posting and answering. Establishing a schedule to work in the forum gives students the opportunity to work freely as well as brainstorm their ideas for the specific determined purpose.

8. Feedback. Virtual forums let learners connect with their peers and facilitator to receive invaluable and instant feedback (Ardila and Beyoda, 2006)

2.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, the different authors that support the research topic were analyzed as well as the latest theories related to the topic so that a complete view of the research phenomenon could be done.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter intends to show how the data was obtained in the Licenciatura Abierta en la Enseñanza de Lenguas Inglés (LAEL-I) at the Faculty of Languages of the Benemerita Universidad Autonoma de Puebla (BUAP). It is worthy to mention that the platform in which this study is focused has a virtual forum to develop writing skills. It also intends to describe the type of the method, subjects, instrument, data collection, data analysis procedures and all the processes performed in the investigation.

3.2 Type of method

In order to get enough data to interpret the phenomenon, it is necessary to choose the suitable one that provides information to represent the research in an easy and apprehensible way to both readers and researchers.

3.2.1 Quantitative method

The method that was used in this research was quantitative which primarily focuses on numerical evaluation. Then, the statements were specific to gather numeric data from the participants. The present research tries to show up if the forum is helping to develop the students' writing process.

It was decided to use a quantitative method because according to Bowling (2005: 45) "quantitative research aims to answer a specific research question and the designs are predetermined and structured, remaining consistent throughout the study making them potentially reproducible".

Other reasons that support the election of this method are the following:

1. The quantitative study provides data that can be measurable.
2. The instrument guides data collection providing accuracy, validity, and reliability of the results.

3. This method allows researchers to organize results using tables, graphs, or figures that show trends, relationships, or differences among variables of the study, which really help to understand the investigation.

4. This method also allows researchers to verify or confirm the findings by repeating the study.

5. The results are presented using percentages and scales to have an accurate measure of the findings. As in this case, the instrument followed a Likert scale (University of Southern California, 2015).

6. Moreover, according to Creswell (2009) in a quantitative research, the obtained data are measurable and observable. It was decided to use quantitative approach due to the variables and how this would be analyzed.

3.2.2 Research Design

Taking into account that this research tries to look for the strategies, characteristics, processes, and ways to develop writing with a virtual forum, a cross-sectional design was selected since according to Bowling (2005: 50) this type of design “has a similar structure to cohort studies except that the measurements are taken at one time point, with no follow-up”. Thus, measurements of variables are taken on a single occasion or within a short period of time like, in this case, the measures were taken during spring 2017. Furthermore, a cross-sectional study is useful because it is a feasible design for there is no need to wait for an outcome to occur, making them fast and inexpensive.

Last but not least, it can be used as a preliminary step for a cohort study.

3.3 Subjects

The population of this study was 14 students of the open BA degree of the Faculty of Languages; they started the major in August 2016. They are already teachers in service working in public and private sector such as preschool, elementary and secondary schools. The participants were 7 male and 7 female from 21 to 71 years old.

The major lasts three years and the areas of professional competence in which students can develop are teaching, educational research, and translators. They have on-site sessions 7 hours per week, once a week every Saturday from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

In order to fulfill their learning process and taking into account their activities as teachers in service, they work on a platform which is available 24 hours a day. In this way, they have the opportunity to interact with their teacher and classmates the rest of the week and complete their tasks.

The sample of the study share some characteristics like the following:

- a. The majority of students have strategies or techniques to develop writing.
- b. They organize their ideas when they have to write and consider that their paper has cohesion and coherence.
- c. Many of the students consider that writing is a skill in which they can improve; as a matter of fact, they are working on it and they consider they can enhance their production.

3.4 Instrument

The instrument used to collect the data was a multiple choice questionnaire. It is important to mention that it was piloted and validated by SPSS, getting a 0.01 of validity.

A questionnaire is a set of systematically structured questions used by a research to get needed information from respondents or subjects. According to Brown (2001: 4) a questionnaire is “a written instrument that presents respondents with a series of questions or statements to which they are to react either by writing out their answers or selecting from among existing answers”.

For the present study, the questionnaire consists of 20 items and four options for each item that were: strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree (See appendix 1).

The questionnaire is structured with items about the use of the forum, the participation, interaction and feedback from the students, the writing performance in a virtual space, and the association with technology since the data was collected to know if the virtual forum promotes the students' writing production.

3.4.1 Type of scale

To carry out the research an additive scale was used. In the questionnaire the Likert scale measures the level of agreement to obtain a quantitative measure by using 4 options, each option increase by one for each level:

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly disagree

There were only four options to have a better measurement of the attitude and avoid bias in the study; otherwise the neutral position like: neither agree nor disagree, is an option that can cause a disadvantage in order to know if the virtual forum help to develop written production or not.

The scale of Likert is a psychometric response scale with a non-comparative technique and its aim is to obtain the preference or level of agreement of an attitude like in this case, the 20 statements are followed by an agreement scale on which respondents are requested to indicate the degree to which they agree or disagree with each statement. According to Terry (2008:33) this scale is suggested because “it is easy to construct, to produce to read and complete by the participants since it facilitates the analysis of the data gathered”.

Finally, it is crucial to mention that on one hand, for positively worded statements the scoring categories are the following:

Table 1. Scoring categories

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
4	3	2	1

On the other hand, for negatively worded statements the scoring is reversed so that strongly agree would be scored as 1, and so on, with strongly disagree being scored as 4.

3.5 Data collection procedures

To obtain the required information, first of all, the teacher and students permission was asked in order to hand in the questionnaire and collect the data. After, the purpose of the research was explained to the participants. It is crucial to mention that they were cooperative and willing to participate. After that, the data was collected and analyzed in order to be presented in figures as final findings which will be shown and described further on.

3.6 Data analysis procedures

To answer the research questions, the collected data was represented in percentages and other responses of the students were analyzed using figures and tables. The figures for the first variable show the items that support it, and also the percentage of the level of agreement about this variable. The table and figures in the second variable show the activities the students carry out when they write in the platform and also which of those activities are more used by them. Finally, the table for the first variable shows the impact that the forum has had in each section according to the instrument.

3.7 Conclusions

In this chapter, the methodology followed for this investigation was described. Moreover, the important issues that concern the research design were addressed such as the setting where the study was developed, the characteristics of the participants and the instrument as well as the procedures of data collection and data analysis. Based on all these important issues, the results will be shown in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

4.1 General introduction

In this chapter, the results obtained in the instrument will be shown. Three research questions guided our investigation and the findings will be presented in the same order as those questions.

4.2 Research questions

This investigation was guided by the following research questions:

- Does the forum promote the written production?
- What activities enhance the written production when working with the virtual forum?
- How does the forum impact on the students writing production according to their perceptions?

4.3 Answers to research questions

The results will be analyzed and explained with the use of figures and tables that show the level of agreement in percentages in order to create a visual organizer for each research questions.

4.3.1 Does the forum promote the written production?

To answer this research question, the following statements were taken into account to address the main results.

Table 2. Promoting written production

Research question 1.	
Question:	Content:
3	The participation in the forum helps me to improve my writing
8	The forum fosters effective writing
9	The topics and information provided in the forum are useful for writing effectively

10	When I write, I look for strategies for writing in a blended learning modality
11	I consider that my writing production gets better through the time spent working with the platform 16. My writing proficiency level has improved through the use of the forum in the moodle platform
17	The forum enhances my development for writing in a virtual modality
18	The virtual modality also helps to enhance coherence regarding writing
19	I find in the forum another space to write interactively
20	The writing skill is easier to be developed with technology

Now, each of the above questions will be analyzed.

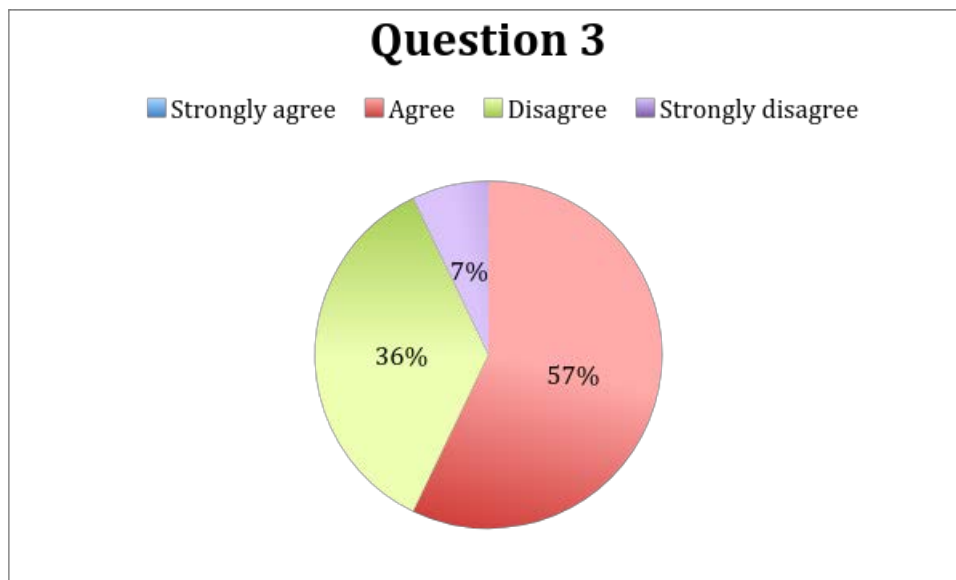


Figure 1. The participation in the forum helps me to improve my writing

This figure shows that 57% of the students agree what means that due to the nature of the modality, their participation forces them to write when they have to do

homework or collaborative tasks since one way to communicate via platform are in a written form. The following figure shows how the forum fosters effective writing.

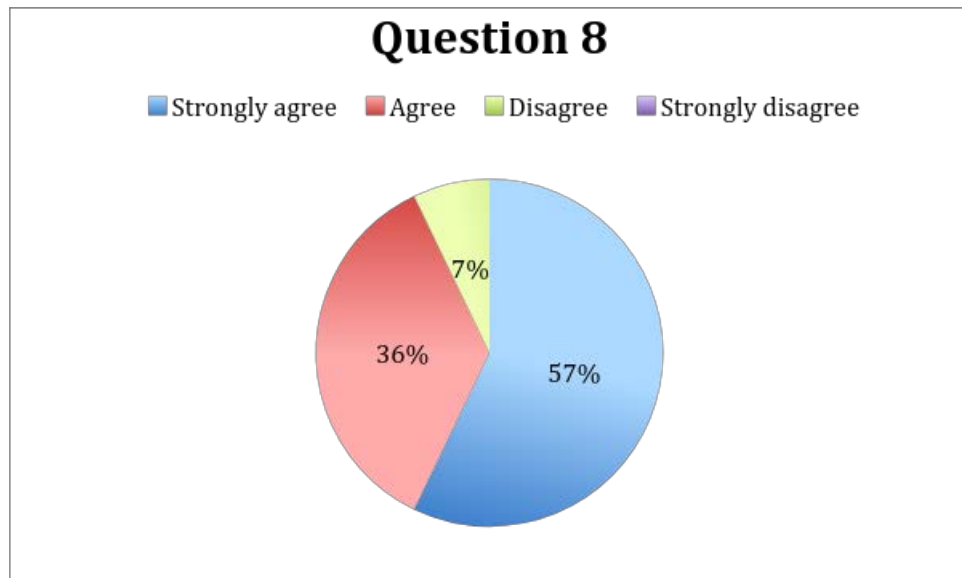


Figure 2. The forum fosters effective writing

As it is appreciated in the figure, 97% of the participants agree that they develop effective writing when writing in virtual forums. This confirms what Prensky (2001) states early experiences in working with virtual forum do suggest that students become more selective and skillful in their use of strategies and techniques to write because they know that others will be reading and linking to their contributions.

Figure 3 describes how the topics and information provided in the forum are useful for writing effectively.

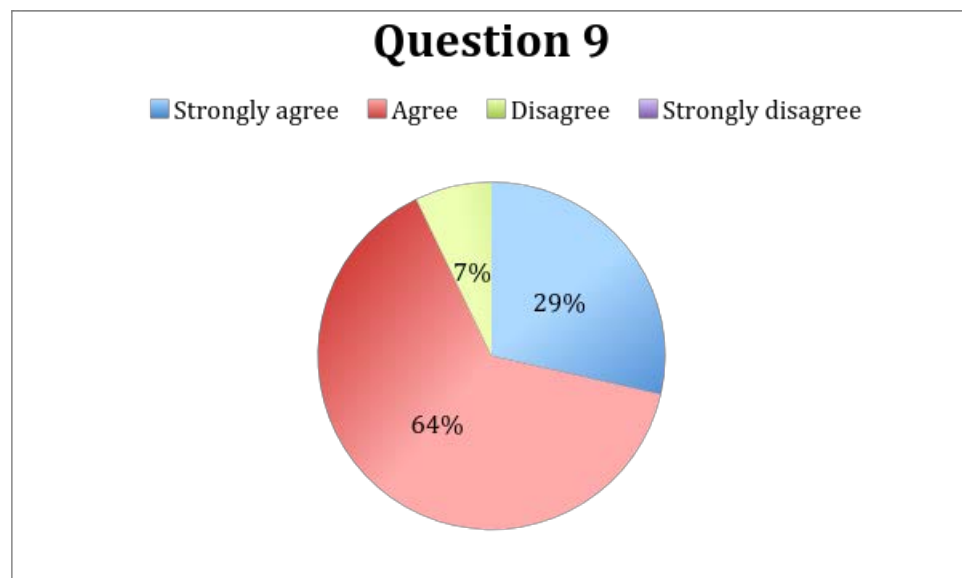


Figure 3. The topics and information provided in the forum are useful for writing effectively

This figure illustrates that 93% of the participants agree that the topics and information in the platform are designed specifically for the students of the blended learning modality, for that reason the information provided in the forum is a tool for building a meaningful learning and writing not only for them but also for their readers or e-peers. In fact, students have different resources on the platform like videos, graphic organizers, learning objects, and so on that provide specific information that helps them to write about a given topic.

In the next figure, there is another reason that complements the idea of considering the virtual forum as a successful strategy to write in a foreign language.

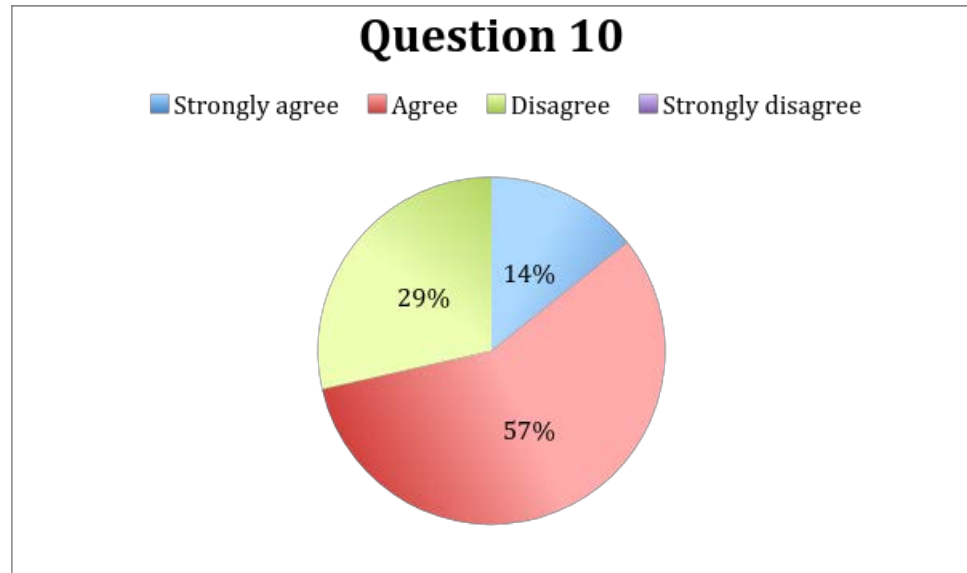


Figure 4. When I write, I look for strategies for writing in a blended learning modality

71% of the participants accepted and agree that following some strategies like working collaboratively to write, using previous data to write, and getting immediate feedback from e-classmates really help them improve in writing. In contrast, only 29% of the participants disagree with the idea of using strategies.

Besides according to Bude (2005) when connecting with online classmates and building a learning community, it is easier if strategies are used along with the social tools and applications available today like virtual forums.

In the next figure, it can be seen that the subjects perceived the use of the forum in the virtual platform as a way of meaningful investment because it does help in their writing production.

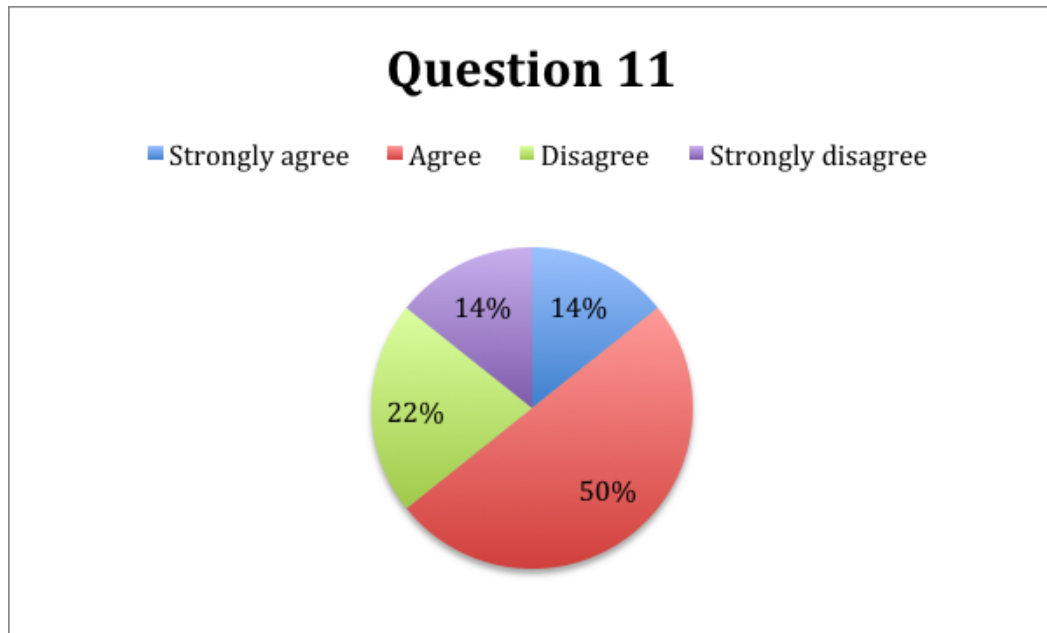


Figure 5. I consider that my writing production gets better through the time spent working with the platform.

64% of the subjects confirm that their writing has improved with the use of the forum while only 36% disagree with the idea. This means that the different tools from the forum like editing, writing and critiquing in a positive sense have increased their suitable writing of the participants from common grammatical errors until coherence and cohesion.

The following figure displays how the writing proficiency level has increased.

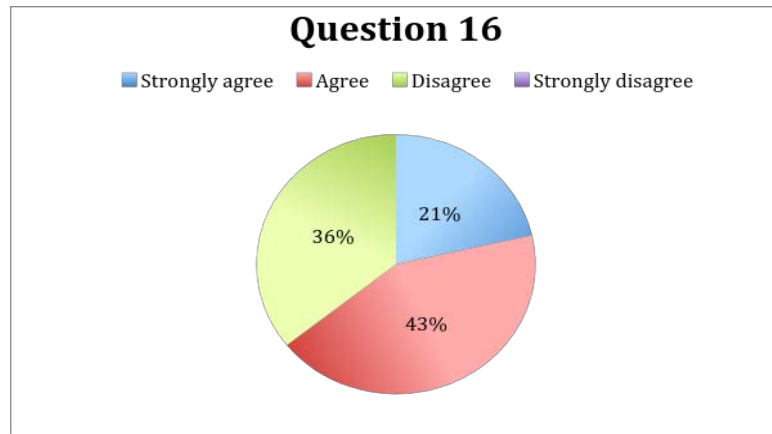


Figure 6. My writing proficiency level has improved through the use of the forum in the Moodle platform

As it can be seen, 43% of the students agree and 21% strongly agree with their writing proficiency level improvement through the use of the forum in the Moodle platform. Besides, the use of the forum is not only focused in their writing skills but also encourages their independent and active learning. Indeed, in each writing made in the forum, the students improve little by little so they can also improve their proficiency level in general.

Moreover, the virtual forum helps students in writing because every time they have to write about a specific topic, students have to send a draft before publishing their final version (Prensky, 2001).

Figure 7 describes the writing process in a virtual modality.

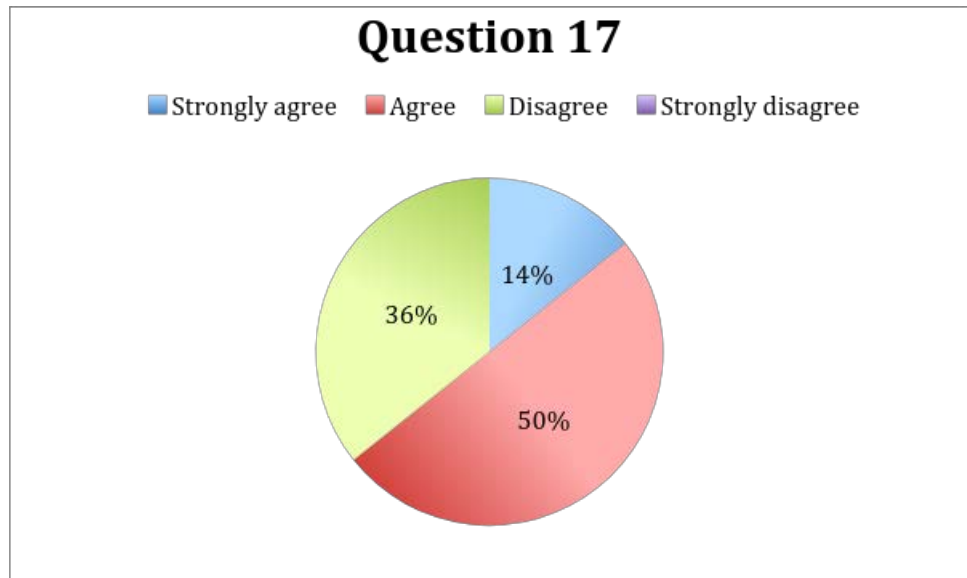


Figure 7. The forum enhances my development for writing in a virtual modality

According to Richardson (2006), the use of virtual forums enrich students' learning writing process and engage them to communicate and interact with their classmates through their written creations. As a matter of fact, it can be confirmed with the data from this study where 14% of the participants strongly agree and 50% agree that the forum enhances writing.

Figure 8 displays how the forum in a virtual modality provides coherence in writing

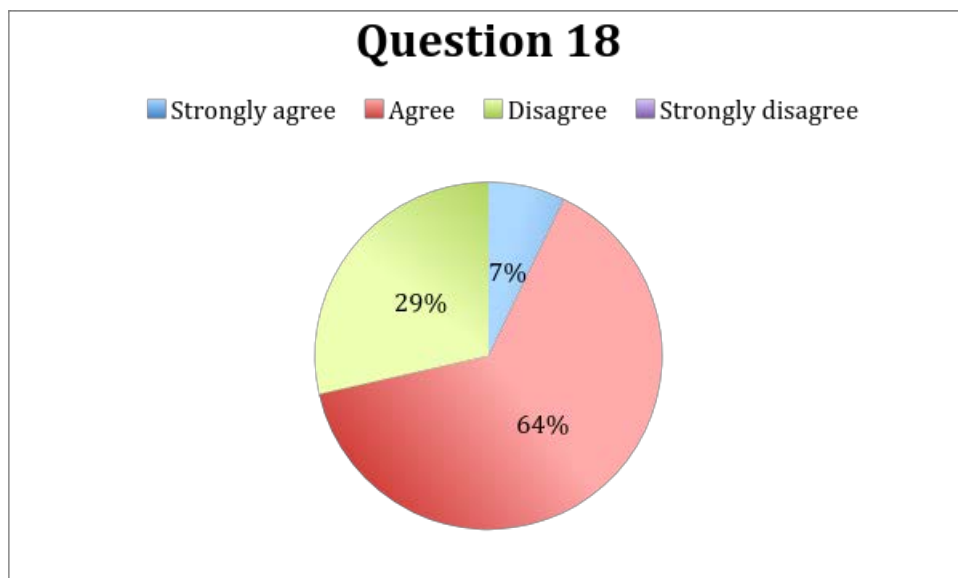


Figure 8. The virtual modality also helps to enhance coherence regarding writing

Learning a Foreign language is a complex process because a language is a system which is composed of a variety of elements like grammar rules, vocabulary, phrases, and so on., which is structured in coherent and cohesive ways. In fact, coherence is a necessary and important factor in order for learners to be able to express ideas, opinions, feelings, and thoughts meaningfully. Then, taking into account the percentages, it is observed that activities in a virtual modality allowed students to have the opportunity to develop paragraphs in order to communicate, registering a 71% of agreement.

Figure 9 indicates that the virtual forum provides an interactive writing.

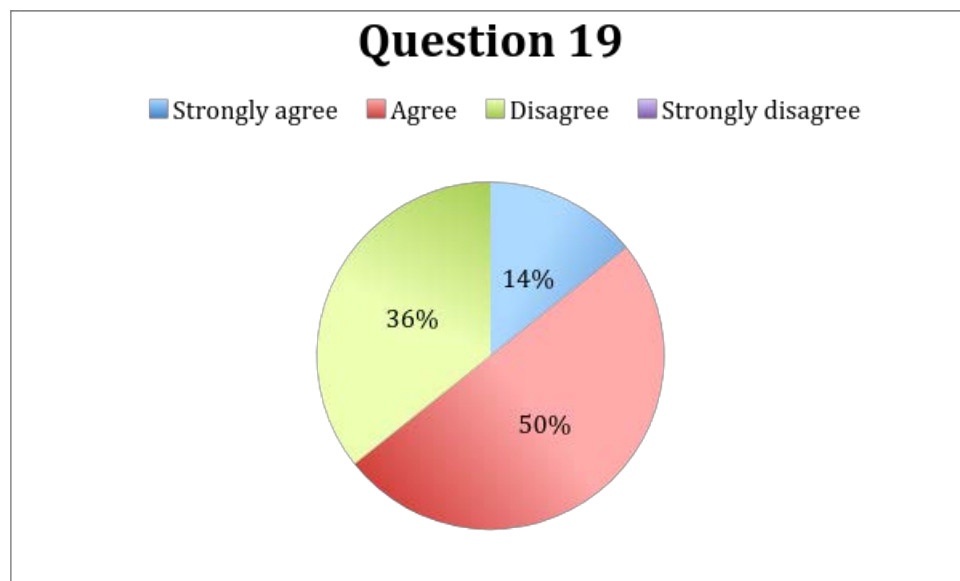


Figure 9. I find in the forum another space to write interactively

Writing is a process that requires time, responsibility, and commitment due to its requirements. Indeed, it requires writers to reflect on what they want to write, how to do it and to have knowledge about the topic they will talk about in order to create interesting and comprehensible writing tasks. Moreover, as it can be appreciated, 64% of the subjects agree that the use of the forum permitted the subjects to write opinions about their classmates' creations by having an interactive writing since each student had the opportunity to read the others e-classmates' comments and

reflections about their texts. In this way, students found another space to write interactively, which means, they had to create coherent answers about what was said before and learn new written conversational clues in a virtual interaction with other participants.

Besides, 64% of the participants said that the forum helped them to practice and foster their writing skills in a cooperative and interactive way. Participants used the language to write about a specific topic and interact with their e-classmates by answering questions, giving opinions, and writing comments about the different writings they produced.

In addition, Mandal (2010:189) stated: "Being independent and working in a team, gives a person an opportunity to share himself deeply, meaningfully with others and have access to the vast resources and potential of other human beings". Then, this percentage confirm this assertion since cooperative writing becomes a common task where subjects know and teach the others useful items when creating a paragraph or text cooperatively.

Figure 10 shows how the use of technology can develop the writing skill in an easy way.

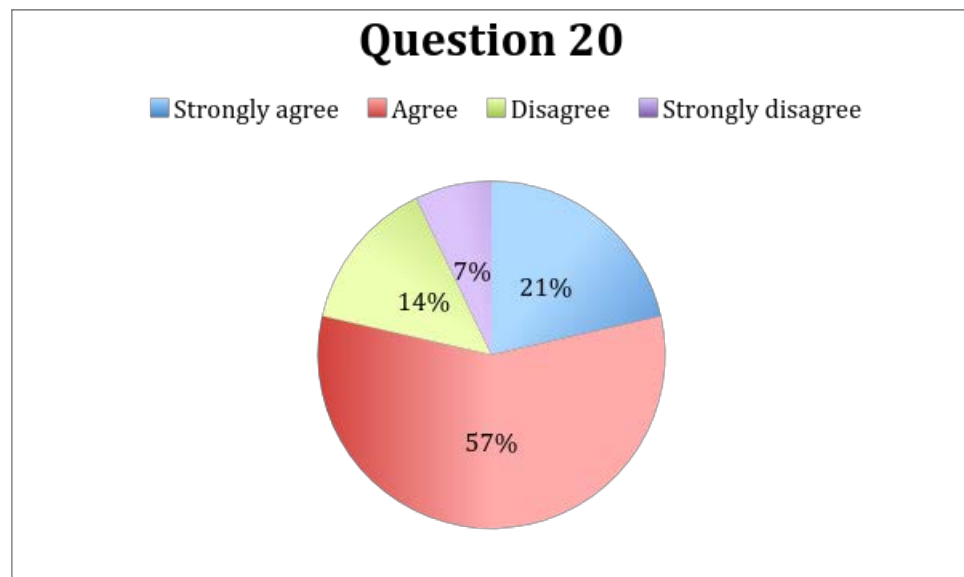


Figure 10. The writing skill is easier to be developed with technology

Taking into account that the subjects create texts or paragraphs in a collaborative way with a virtual forum which is considered an ICT tool, it is easy for them to write because they supported each other. Additionally, 79% of the participants affirm that the written production allows them to develop their English writing skill more easily because cooperation also helps them exchange ideas, feelings, and thoughts at the moment of creating their writings. Moreover, it can be deduced that the subjects found a fun and creative space to learn English and complement the on-site sessions they received in their classroom.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that regarding Richardson (2006) working in the virtual forum is productive and gets users motivated towards learning and developing their skills, especially, those concerning writing.

In conclusion, taking into account all the questions to describe this research question, the following figure is shown:

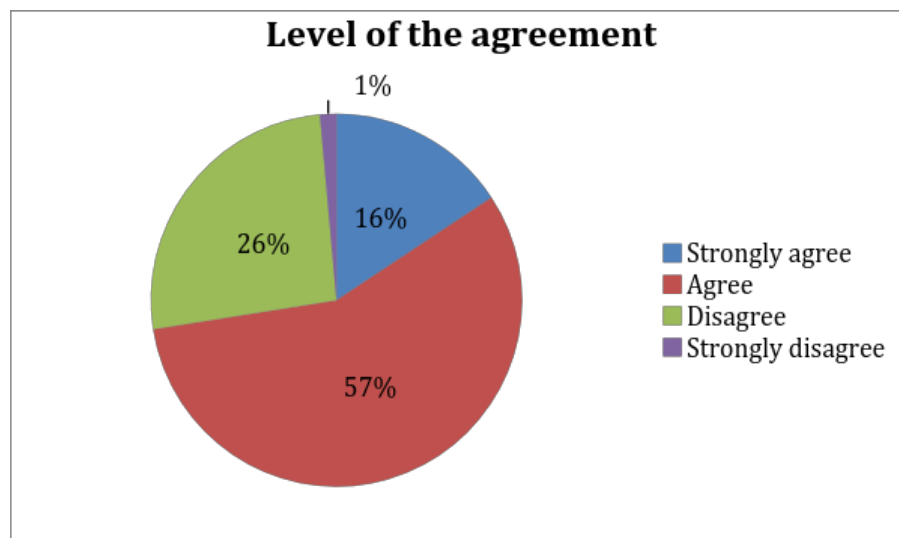


Figure 11. Level of the agreement.

As it can be observed 57% of the participants chose "agree" as the best description of their preferences or level of agreement, and the 16% chose "strongly agree". Then, there is a total of 73% of agreement. While in contrast, 26% of the participants chose "disagree" and just 1% chose "strongly disagree". Thus, the total of disagreement is 27%.

With these general percentages, it is concluded that the forum helps to enhance the students' written production in a suitable way.

4.3.2 What activities enhanced the written production when working with the forum?

In order to answer this research question, it was necessary to revise the activities and their results from the Moodle platform where they were working. It is worth mentioning that this was not mentioned as an instrument because the researcher did not design it.

In fact, the Moodle platform is programmed to do a trace of the results and the improvement of the writing production as part of the course and it was decided to analyze it in order to have more information about the phenomenon.

The next table shows the main activities that enhance the students' written production when working with the forum in the Moodle platform.

Table 3. Activities done in a virtual forum in Moodle platform

Activities	Total of students	Percentage of improvement
Write ideas	8	96%
Brainstorm	5	94%
Select a topic	7	91%
Look for information/ Research	6	89%
Make a draft	7	87%
Organize ideas	6	85%
Identify ideas	3	84%
Read	2	82%
Check/ Correct the writing	3	80%
Follow an outline	3	80%

This table is represented in the next figure.

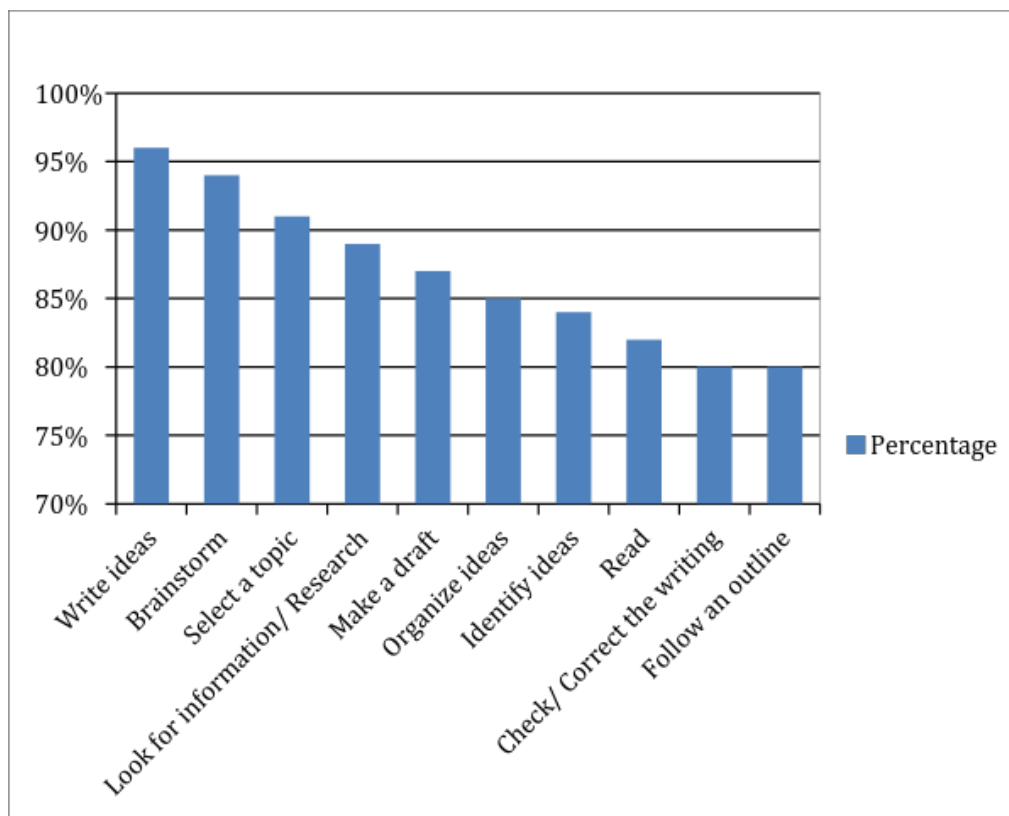


Figure 12. Activities that enhance written production

This figure indicates that the main activities performed by the students that enhance their writing are: writing ideas 96%, brainstorm 94%, select a topic 91%, look for information/ research 89%, make a draft 87%, and organize ideas 85%.

Even though the other activities have a lower percentage in comparison with the already mentioned, it can be seen that the numbers are also higher to describe a process that is really difficult to develop in real contexts since the percentages are the following: identify ideas 84%, read 82%, check/ correct the writing 80%, and follow an outline 80%. Indeed, there are slight differences between the ones that are considered to be high. With these results, it is corroborated what Sharma and Barret state “activities done with a virtual tool always potentialize the results and improve the learning process no matter what ability or skill is being developed” (2007:46).

4.3.3 How does the forum impact on the students’ writing production according to their perceptions?

In order to answer the last research question, the following results are presented.

Table 4. Impact of the forum on students' written production

Questions	Sections	Positive	Negative
Question 1	Independent learning	93%	7%
Question 2	Active learning	86%	14%
Question 4	Easier interaction	71%	29%
Question 5	Feedback from classmates	79%	21%
Question 6	Issues related to their work or studies	86%	14%
Question 7	Opportunities to improve and changes in their work and professional development.	64%	36%
Question 12	Strategies for writing	71%	29%
Question 13	Attitudes towards technology	86%	14%
Question 14	Autonomous learning	93%	7%
Question 15	Contribute to the learning process	86%	14%

As it can be seen, the virtual forum has a more positive impact than a negative according to the students' perceptions. As a matter of fact, the forum impacted in a positive way on the following areas: independent learning 93% what means that the forum promotes learning by their own when a performance is required. At this point, it is worthy to point out that this characteristic is something that any model of learning looks for although it is difficult to develop in students. Another characteristic is the active learning (86%) that most of students claim in a class. Then, it was also found higher percentages in some other aspects like: easier interaction (71%), feedback from classmates (79%), issues related to their work or studies (86%), opportunities to improve and changes in their work and professional development (64%), strategies for writing (71%), attitudes towards technology (86%), autonomous learning (93%), and activities that contribute to the learning process (86%).

In the next figure, the difference between the perceptions is displayed.

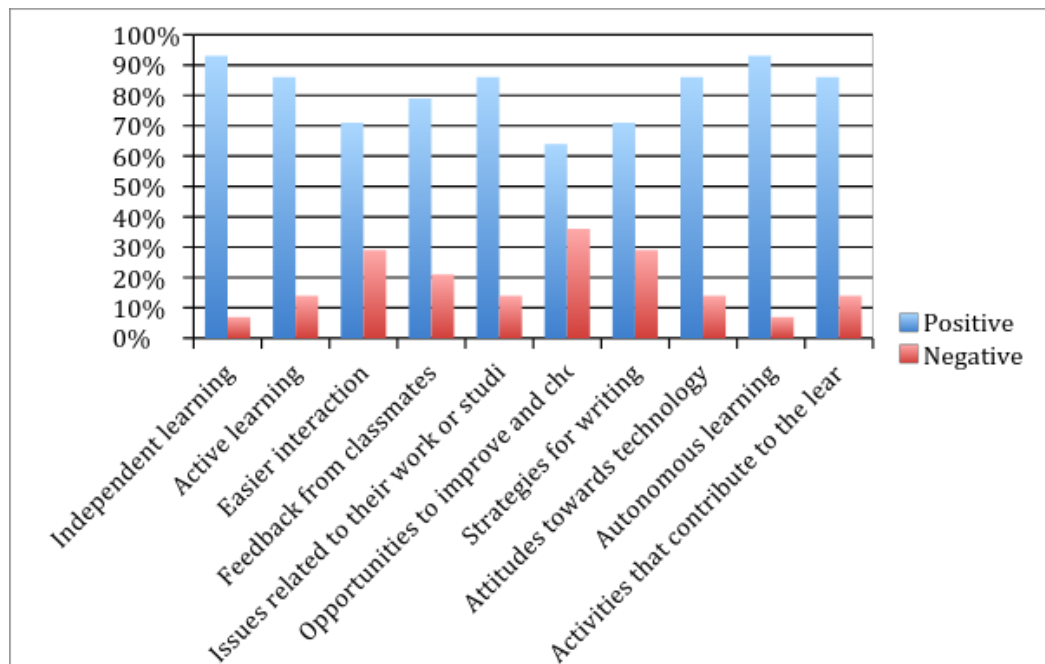


Figure 13. Students' perceptions towards

Besides, according to Bloch (2008), working with technologies is usually perceived by users as something easier since the communication through the use of a platform is instantaneous as well as the feedback from their classmates that makes changes in their performance and proficiency.

Furthermore, it can be seen that the forum also shows a positive impact on the development of strategies and attitudes for the writing process because taking into account Ochoa and Medina (2014), the virtual forum and blended learning modality allow students to be aware of their autonomous learning, learning style and strategies to grasp knowledge.

4.4 Conclusion

The results gathered in each research question were explained in this chapter. Here and now, it is known that the forum truly promotes the written production of the students from LAEL-I. Currently, it is known which are the activities that students most frequently do before starting to write or when they are writing and also that the forum impacts in a positive way in the program of these students.

It is concluded that the virtual forum of the Moodle platform helps the students to improve their written production and be skillful in it. Due to the type of study each figure and table shows the number or percentage obtained and analyzed with Likert-scale based on their answers.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, a summary of the findings will be described as well as the accomplishment of the aims, limitations, suggestions for further research and a personal reflection.

This is a conclusion about the usefulness of the forum used in the blended learning modality of the Open BA of the Faculty of Languages.

5.2 Summary of the findings

This research has found out that the students of LAEL-I, for its acronym in Spanish (Licenciatura Abierta en la Enseñanza de Lenguas-Inglés); consider that the virtual forum truly helps their writing skills. Due to the research questions, the researcher has concluded that the forum enhances the students' written production by adding features such as participation, useful topics, and information, etc. It means that the forum has improved the writing proficiency of the students as a result of each feature it takes into account.

The research also addresses the activities that the students carry out when they work with the forum; most of the students plan their steps before start writing. Now it is known that the main activities are: write ideas, brainstorm, select a topic, look for information/ research, make a draft, and organize ideas; therefore these activities are performed as the plan and strategy to accomplish their task when they write in the virtual forum.

Concurrently, it was found that the forum has a positive impact on the development of the writing production of the students. Most of the students agree that the forum has a significant impact, thus the forum is considered as an important tool provided by the Moodle platform to improve the written production.

5.3 Accomplishments of the aims

The present study gathered information in the process of teaching-learning in the blended learning modality about the development of the writing skill. The purpose

of the investigation was to realize the usefulness of the forum; it allowed us to know that the forum really helps to the process of improvement of the students in the written production.

5.4 Limitations of the study

The limitations of this research are that it cannot address to a population without the characteristics of the present participants. It means that this study can only be applied to a population where the people are teachers in service, the modality is BL, and they work with platforms. This group of people has distinctive characteristics so that it cannot be applied to a setting where a platform is used but the subjects do not have the same specific details.

The students work with learning objects such as forums, computer graphics, videos, and different resources within this pedagogy called flipped classroom.

5.5 Suggestions for further research

The study allows researchers to know enough information to continue researching about what happens in the BL modality. From this research about the written production, it can be investigated other aspects as the acquisition of vocabulary, grammar, conjunctions, cohesion and coherence, the advantages of knowing about morphology and syntax just to mention some of the possible topics.

It guides the way forward to know what happens in the development of oral production and the effects in reading comprehension. In the same way, it can address what happens in other skills, such as listening, reading and speaking skill regarding the use of the virtual forum.

5.6 Personal reflection

In a particular way, this investigation has expanded my knowledge about technology, about ICT and all the tools available there to achieve learning. It is a new system of pedagogy and a new way of applying didactic; these current resources supply a new vision in education, consequently, teachers must be competitive for a globalized world.

Throughout this research I learned so much about approaches, the methodology of investigation and instruments to gather information; I was involved in research and it was a wonderful experience. At the end of this investigation, I realized that it has impacted my personal knowledge, culture and everything learned will be reflected in my professional development.

5.7 Final comments

The use of the virtual forum promotes effective writing in the students of generation 2016 of LAEL-I; this forum addresses important issues to achieve a meaningful learning focused in written production. It was a tool specially created and adapted for this population to interact and communicate with them. As a result of this investigation, it is comforting to know that the forum attains in students good impact related to the process of writing that students develop in this major. Teachers can develop better strategies in writing for their particular group while students innovate activities to be carried out.

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APPENDIX 1
QUESTIONNAIRE

I would really appreciate that you answer this questionnaire. The information gathered will be used only for research purposes.

Age: _____ **Gender: F:** ____ **M:** ____ **Sector:** _____

Choose the answer that best addresses your experience:

1. The use of the forum encourages my independent learning

a) Strongly agree b) Agree c) Disagree d) Strongly disagree

2. The use of the forum encourages my active learning

a) Strongly agree b) Agree c) Disagree d) Strongly disagree

3. The participation in the forum helps me to improve my writing

a) Strongly agree b) Agree c) Disagree d) Strongly disagree

Why?

4. The interaction is easier among my classmates with the use of the forum in the moodle platform?

a) Strongly agree b) Agree c) Disagree d) Strongly disagree

Why?

5. The feedback from your classmates makes changes in your performance

a) Strongly agree b) Agree c) Disagree d) Strongly disagree

6. The Forum addresses important issues related to my work or studies.

a) Strongly agree b) Agree c) Disagree d) Strongly disagree

7. The Forum provides me opportunities to improve; it will make changes in my work and professional development.

a) Strongly agree b) Agree c) Disagree d) Strongly disagree

8. The forum fosters effective writing

a) Strongly agree b) Agree c) Disagree d) Strongly disagree

For example:

9. The topics and information provided in the forum are useful for writing effectively
a) Strongly agree b) Agree c) Disagree d) Strongly disagree

10. When I write, I look for strategies for writing in a blended learning modality
a) Strongly agree b) Agree c) Disagree d) Strongly disagree

11. I consider that my writing production gets better through the time spent working with the platform
a) Strongly agree b) Agree c) Disagree d) Strongly disagree

12. Handwriting and typing have different effects and products
a) Strongly agree b) Agree c) Disagree d) Strongly disagree

13. My attitudes towards the use of technology have changed
a) Strongly agree b) Agree c) Disagree d) Strongly disagree

How _____

14. The modality has made me aware of my autonomous learning
a) Strongly agree b) Agree c) Disagree d) Strongly disagree

15. The activities developed in the forum have contributed to my learning
a) Strongly agree b) Agree c) Disagree d) Strongly disagree

16. My writing proficiency level has improved through the use of the forum in the moodle platform
a) Strongly agree b) Agree c) Disagree d) Strongly disagree

17. The forum enhances my development for writing in a virtual modality
a) Strongly agree b) Agree d) Disagree e) Strongly disagree

18. The virtual modality also helps to enhance coherence regarding writing
a) Strongly agree b) Agree c) Disagree d) Strongly disagree

19. I find in the forum another space to write interactively
a) Strongly agree b) Agree c) Disagree d) Strongly disagree

20. The writing skill is easier to be developed with technology
a) Strongly agree b) Agree c) Disagree d) Strongly disagree

Thanks for your cooperation.