

Improving Formal Writing in Google Classroom through Collaborative Learning

¹Jorge Daniel Barrera Moncada, ²Fernando Patricio Riera Hermida, ³Carlos Lenin Alvarez Llerena

¹Cento de Estudios Espiritu Santo; English Department, Ecuador

²Escuela de Educación Básica Huellas de Conocimiento; English Department, Ecuador

³Eötvös Loránd University; Language Pedagogy Department, Hungary

ABSTRACT: *The present research was implemented in a private high school in Guayas province, Ecuador. In this study participated 22 female students from 9th grade. The age of the students ranged from 12 to 13 years old. The level of these students was A1 according to the English First proficiency test that considers reading and listening skills aligned to the CEFR. Action research was applied, and quantitative instruments were used to collect data. A pretest was taken at the beginning of this research to assess writing skills using a rubric and a post-test to compare results. A survey with fifteen items was applied to determine the problems or difficulties of participants; the results of the survey evidence that participants expressed satisfaction with the outcomes developed by this research. Participants indicated positive comments from the survey regarding their perspectives on Collaborative learning in Google Classroom. Participants also found it useful to take part in this innovation because they were aware of the importance of formal letters and business-related subjects. This research is addressed to people in education such as teachers, authorities, and researchers interested in writing, ESL, and collaborative learning.*

KEYWORDS: *Collaborative learning, Formal writing, Google Classroom, High school, Writing skills.*

I. INTRODUCTION

As English acts as a global language, one of the relevant aspects is its role in the job market or English for the workplace. Around the world, English is the language for academics and the language for business. In the era of globalization, those who master the English language can improve their career prospects after getting a degree (Clement & Murugavel, 2018). The researchers also stated that it is a fact that employees need this language to communicate with other executives and make business dealings. To achieve these activities successfully, employees need to write emails, business presentations, online chats to transfer information to all participants.

In Latin America, Cronquist and Fiszbein (2017) detailed the status of English in the region; their research pointed out the need for English proficiency for business, international communication and the connection that these aspects have with economic competitiveness in a global economy. In a report, Staton and Fiszbein (2019) remarked that in Latin America, the education systems feel pressured to guarantee that students enter the workforce well prepared with the necessary skills to succeed in a globalized world. This report was based mainly on Chile, Costa Rica, Panama, and Uruguay, which presented for the researcher the best examples in Latin America of regulations and standards.

In 2016 there were 15000 public schools in Ecuador. From that number, only 1000 schools had an English teacher. Public institutions have standards for teachers. There are teacher qualification standards, proficiency goals, and assessments for them. Ecuador has an advantage in private institutions because it is one of the few countries with national policies regarding private language institutions. This country has a vast number of English language instruction institutions. Most of these private institutions were concentrated in Quito, with more than 300 in 2014 (Cronquist & Fiszbein, 2017).

Education First (EF, 2019) is an institution known by its English Proficiency Index (EPI). It elaborates a report that investigates how and where English proficiency is developing around the world. In its report, EF showed that twelve of nineteen countries in Latin America improved their English proficiency. This is related to the progress in ensuring that all children have more access to education, the pressure of the business community, and its demand for English speakers in the region. However, Ecuador was ranked 81, with the region's lowest English language proficiency level just after Venezuela. Ecuador has declined the score from the previous year (Ministerio de Educación, 2019).

In Ecuador, the reference for assessment English language is the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), which describes what learners will be able to do during the process when advancing and the skills they will develop to communicate. Another reference for assessment is the Communicative Functional Language Approach. It provides the syllabus an organization in terms of different language functions that learners need to communicate. It also gives a set of principles and the nature of language. With these two elements, the Ecuadorian National English Curriculum was designed. Students have five hours of 45 minutes each class (Ministerio de Educación, 2019).

With this context in mind, it is demanded from students to have a level B1 at the end of high school, which means they are independent users of the language with an intermediate level of proficiency. The B1 level has a detailed description of the skills required for this level. In Table 1, the four skills are described:

TABLE 1
 Level B1 of the CEFR language skills.

Writing	Write a simple connected text on familiar topics or of personal interest.
Reading	Understand text that consists mainly have high frequency, everyday language. Understand the description of events, feelings, and wishes in personal terms.
Speaking	Deal with most situations likely to arise while traveling in an area where the language is spoken (Basic social language) Enter unprepared into familiar conversations, of personal interest, or pertinent to everyday life. Simply connect phrases to describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes, and ambitions. Give brief reasons and explanations for opinions and plans and describe their reactions to a book or film plot. Narrate a story.
Listening	Understand the main points of clear, standard speech on familiar matters regularly encounter informal situations at school, work, leisure, etc.

Level B1 of the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2018)

With this comparison of the four skills, it can be observed that there is a disproportion required for the B1 level. In the first place, the speaking skill outnumbered the rest. Being writing the last one and observing the simplicity of the skills required for this level with a general skill like “write simple connected text...” and “Write personal letters...” the disproportion is enormous. The natural consequence for a difference like this would be that teachers at the secondary level may leave the writing skill behind.

Concerning writing, Fareed et al. (2016), in their research based on ESL learners, explained that writing is considered a difficult skill to develop. The most common problems were insufficient linguistic proficiency, grammar, vocabulary, lack of ideas, reliance on L1, writing anxiety, and structural organization. The factors may include untrained teachers, ineffective methods, lack of reading and writing practice, low motivation, and large classrooms. Likewise, Vurdien outlined that technology can be a helpful tool to improve writing; integrating technological tools enhances learners' critical and reflective writing skills (2012, as cited in Alvarez, 2019). For many learners, there is a lack of knowledge of the difference between formal and informal scenarios. It is taught that informal English is for friends and formal English is for essays, publications, and business communications. Based on these assumptions, Smith(2019) pointed out that speakers have strong ideas about correct and incorrect English usage.

In recent years, there has been an increase in research concerning the use of technology in classrooms to improve writing and, in this way, to develop English performance in general. This study adds the use of technology for writing. Virtual Learning Environments are "virtual spaces that teachers and students can use to present and share resources and activities. These platforms can be used to teach a completely online course or as a supporting feature for face-to-face courses." (Herrera, 2017, p. 481). One free access platform to develop this learning environment is Google Classroom which is a platform that enables teachers and learners to engage beyond the classroom (Islam, 2019). Google Classroom offers the environment required for this research because the idea is to recreate a digital reality like a business place where students must create a network of emails and communications according to their level and practice writing skills to work in authentic contexts.

There are several international studies about Google Classroom; for example, Janah and Yuniarti (2019) analyzed the use of Google Classroom on students writing learning process. The conclusion was that Google Classroom could encourage writing with a significant improvement in the post-test. Although this was carried out in a university, the subject and the results are essential to this research. In Bangladesh, Islam (2019) explained how Google Classroom helped university students and teachers to go beyond the classroom. The conclusion showed that learners needed some basic training before using this tool, so they suggested proper training before using Google Classroom. In the Latin American region, specifically in Ecuador, there are some types of research on the use of Google Classroom. Alvarez (2019) also studied Google Docs and how Collaborative work using Information and Communication Technologies helped students' writing skills. It is also essential to know how technologies have transformed educational settings and how this collaborative work can enhance students writing. The results showed that collaboration had a positive effect on students' writing skills and motivation.

It is essential to mention how the collaborative approach is closely related to writing; although not developed in a technological environment, the following research can illuminate the subject developed here. Veramuthu and Shah (2020) studied the effectiveness of collaborative writing in an ESL classroom in secondary school students. The study indicated that students showed a positive attitude using collaboration while writing. Another study that involves the collaborative approach in writing by using technologies was undertaken by Yaccob and Yunus (2019). The researchers showed that the frequent use of virtual learning in English as a Second language (ESL) positively affected language competency and collaborative skills. This study directly relates to this research because the variables collaborative writing approach and technology used in virtual environments are involved.

This context developed until now deals with collaborative learning, specifically collaborative writing and Virtual Learning Environments (VLE) like Google Classroom and Google Drive. This innovation was designed to fill the gap between the research that have been done and the need for new approaches that may include formal writing for authentic tasks in the early stages of education. In a private high school in 9th grade, it was carried out in English as a Foreign Language class. This research aimed to introduce students to basic written communication exercises like formal emails using a real business context to give a more focalized

framework. The main objective was to help them have concrete goals and meaning related to the usefulness of learning English. This research aimed to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent can help collaborative learning in a virtual environment can improve formal writing?
2. What are students' impressions about writing formal business emails using Google Classroom in collaborative learning?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section describes the main topics related to this research. It establishes the academic connection with theories, other researchers, and an overview of the topics that support this study. The topics are formal writing, the writing process, Google classroom, a letter format, collaborative learning, and the backward design model.

This study is focused on the aspect of formality in writing or formal writing. Formality is also related to register and style, e.g., Formal style and formal register. Formal registers are related to seriousness, respect, and politeness, and formal style is used when authors use formal linguistic features. Formal language is precise and independent and does not change with context. If the text has more independent linguistic features, for example, nouns, it will result in a formal text (Smith, 2019). An example of formal writing is business letters; today, most of these letters are written via email or digital format and require formality. There are five main types of formal letters, responding to someone, asking permission for a project, petitioning something, acting as a cover letter, or applying for a job (Starovoit, 2017).

The formal format is essential when writing a business letter. Business letters are written to make a request, file a complaint, order materials, or apply for a job. A formal letter should contain a heading, an inside address, salutation, a body, a complimentary closing, a signature, initials, and an enclosure if the letter is sent elsewhere. The short format of business letters is the Memo; it creates a flow of information within the organization, asking questions, reminding of a meeting, or describing procedures. There are three main parts of a memo: The subject line, additional details, and desired response (Sebranek et al., 1997). Starovoit also explained that "The formal letter is a standard genre in professional and academic settings. The main purpose of writing letters is to persuade and request something, apply for a job or course, to complain, among others." (2017, as cited in Pineda, 2019, p.7).

Moreover, Zhang (2017) presented arguments to emphasize the role of English business letters. A business letter conveys information among companies or departments within a company; in a business letter, there are two main parts; format and rules. The format can be formal and informal, and the rules will lead to a good understanding and help judge if letters are qualified. The old writing approaches considered only the product where the final work should meet some standards like accurate grammar and organization according to the audience. This approach changed because learners were considered creators, and the focus shifted to content and message. The writing process is framed in three main stages; prewriting, drafting, and revising. *Prewriting* is based on generating ideas by reading, research, brainstorming, or free writing, among others. *Drafting* is a complex set of strategies and implies instruction and time, and *Revising* includes feedback, editing for grammatical errors, and proofreading (Brown, 2001).

With a similar approach, Seow also defined the writing process as a private activity that includes four main stages; planning, drafting, revising, and editing (2002, as cited in Abas, 2016). William (2003, as cited in Abas, 2016) extended the stages and included four more, for a total of eight; prewriting, planning, drafting, pausing, reading, revising, editing, and publishing. Williams called this classification of the writing process the *phase model*. The process-oriented approach is also explained by Abas and Abd (2016), and they defined it as a "variety of classroom activities in order to encourage the use of language proficiently" (p. 367). To

summarize, there are three main classifications: Brown only considered three stages of the writing process, Seow four and William eight. For this innovation, the classification of Seow will be considered with four stages; Planning, drafting, revising, and editing because editing formal writing is an unavoidable stage of the writing process.

Another element that is included in writing is vocabulary. Vocabulary, as the Cambridge Online Dictionary (2020) defined it is “(the stock of) words known and used by one person, or within a particular trade or profession.” Farhan and Zaki (2019) claimed that vocabulary is the most effective way to improve a language for second or foreign language learners. In this research, there fourteen studies were selected over ten years, from 2009 to 2018. The results indicated that vocabulary learning strategies varied from different countries to the same country, which showed some inconsistencies in strategies. The strategies that worked for some learners in one country did not work for learners in another country. A better system and standardized tasks should be developed to assess learners over extended periods. The usefulness of this study for this innovation is that vocabulary learning is still an essential element of learning ESL or EFL and that the context definition and analysis are vital to achieving better results.

In this innovation, punctuation and capitalization is considered relevant factor. Punctuation is defined by the Cambridge Dictionary (2020) as “the use of marks in writing so that people can see when a sentence begins and ends, that something is questioned, etc.” On the other hand, capitalization “is the writing of a word with its first letter in uppercase and the remaining letters in lowercase.” (GrammarBook, 2020). These features of language can be improved by practicing and creating the habit of writing daily. To improve writing and the ability to use punctuation and capitalization, Nurhayati (2019) demonstrated that by performing the habit of writing regularly, students could improve punctuation and capitalization and show more interest in writing. There was a significant difference in student achievement between students who were taught with this writing mechanism and those who were not.

This study involves a virtual environment, in this case, Google Classroom. Sharpe (2019) defined Google Classroom as assistive technology; these technologies combine devices and services to improve skills in students like reading, writing, listening, and communicating. Google Classroom was launched in 2014 to bring together students and teachers. In this platform, resources, assignments, announcements, and due dates can be posted. Students can access and connect with other students. The coursework can be divided into folders, and in these folders, resources can be accessed at convenience. Teachers can post new information, and via mail, students will receive the announcement.

Kumar and Bervell (2019) mentioned that Google Classroom, as a Learning Management System (LMS). It is a free web-based learning management platform that is part of the G Suite for education. It can allow parallel applications that belong to Google like Google Hangout, Google Calendar, Gmail, Google Drive for collaborative and mobile learning. There are other resources on these platforms like Google Docs and Google Slides where students can share and work simultaneously in pairs or groups to share ideas.

The strategy to improve students` writing is collaboration. In this respect, Alvarez (2019) highlighted the importance of collaborative activities for improving writing. The author explained that collaborative working is now a requisite for business, science, and education people. Moreover, there is a need to change student-centered learning by using hands-on assignments, technology, and collaboration. Hiew and Hoon (2014) mentioned that online collaborative learning is critical for the teamwork process. It also involves sharing of knowledge among students and many social factors. Therefore, collaborative learning does not apply to any educational environment. Chisholm stated that collaborative writing students would make writing assessment challenging to accomplish due to interpersonal problems and inexperience in the process. Nevertheless, with all these limitations, team members need the collaborative approach when working on an assignment to share knowledge (1990. as cited in Hiew & Hoon, 2014).

The lesson design used in this innovation observed backward design principles. As Reynolds and Kearns indicated, the backward design can inspire the lesson planner with the objective to include more learner-centered activities and improve students' frequent feedback (2017, as cited in Ontaneda & Sánchez, 2018). The backward design, also known as Understanding by Design (UbD), has two main ideas. First, the focus is on teaching and assessment for understanding and learning, and second, the curriculum is designed backward to achieve those aims. There are six steps in order for students to understand: capacity to explain, to interpret, to apply, to shift perspective, to empathize, and to self-assess. The curriculum is planned backward for long-term results on a three-stage process; desired results, evidence, and learning plan. Teachers focus on learning to happen by checking the transfer and meaning of students (McTighe & Wiggins, 2012).

III. Innovation

The innovation consisted in improving formal writing by collaboration through Google Classroom. This innovation lasted six weeks. Students learned how to write formal letters with appropriate messages by using the required format of formal letters. Students were given written assignments simulating formal emails like those written by employers, for example, a manager in a department in a company and the employees of this company. Students used these tasks collaborative writing and Google Classroom because they worked in small groups to solve the assignments given in a virtual company. In order to write formal emails, it was necessary to recreate the roles in a company. With this in mind, students recreated an imaginary company in which they assumed different roles working in groups; in this way, students needed to communicate with each other.

During the innovation, one-half of the group played the role of managers or executives in the company and the other half employees; in this way, two main kinds of formal letters were assessed by using one rubric that measured the format of formal letters. These activities were included in a lesson plan (Appendix A) with contents and instruments. The first letters were sent and considered as a pretest (Appendix B). After these assessments, students learned the main theory and how to work within Google Classroom, vocabulary related to business, including a short introduction to the formal structure of a private company, and the main principles or rules in order to write formal emails using the appropriate register according to the audiences. Besides, this innovation included explaining to students the information or messages contained in a formal letter and the main parts that conform to a formal letter.

In this innovation, the researcher interacted and exchanged with all students by reading, providing feedback, answering doubts and questions about different topics, and coordinating activities. The feedback process was designed to develop mainly inside the groups at the time students wrote letters, and at the end of each assignment, a general feedback process was opened with the aim of students to concentrate first on the task of the group they belonged and then to pay attention to the other groups work.

IV. Methodology

This research was carried out using action research with quantitative instruments. As David (2020) stated, action research starts with planning and involves a cycle of events. Although action research is considered qualitative design research, the evidence can be collected in the form of quantitative elements, and it can be incorporated to obtain numerical data. At the beginning of the innovation, the participants took a pretest, and at the end, a post-test was applied to compare results. A survey (Appendix D) was applied to determine the problems or difficulties of participants.

4.1 Participants

According to the demographic survey results, participants of this study consisted of 22 female students of a private high school in Guayas province, Ecuador, where they were coursing the 9th grade. The age of the students ranged from 12 to 13 years old, Ecuadorian nationality, most of them had middle income, with Spanish

as their L1 language. According to the results, 91% of students considered that they had an intermediate English level, which was learned from regular school instruction. Half of the participants had access to technology with laptops and smartphones. Internet access was available at home for 20 students (90.1%) and the rest of the participants at the municipality. The institution coordinator chose them among the best students in the subject, and the group is called 9th A/D Language Arts; the objective of this group was to participate in cultural activities. According to the Education First proficiency test, the level that considers reading and listening skills aligned to the CEFR, the level of students are A1 or beginners with 1-60% of the correct answers. After the test, students were informed they were beginners, not intermediate. The study was conducted during the 2020-2021 school year.

4.2 Instruments

To answer the research questions, the following instruments to collect the data were: pretest, post-test, a rubric, and a survey. For the first question: *To what extent can collaborative learning in a virtual environment can improve formal writing?* A pretest was applied in the first two innovation sessions to assess students' level and background knowledge of formal writing letters. At the end of the innovation, a post-test was applied to evidence improvement. During the pretest and post-test, one group of students was asked to write a formal letter to the company's manager for a basic procedure or request, and the other group wrote a letter to answer a request previously written by the instructor.

To assess students' letters, a rubric was applied. With this instrument, the researcher graded five components: Google Classroom, business vocabulary, formal letters, formal registers, and punctuation and capitalization, from 0 to 4 points per component; there were 20 points as the maximum grade. This instrument covered topics, such as the use of main elements of Google classroom, vocabulary related to a company or business, formal and informal differences, essential elements of a letter, use of short sentences and expressions in formal letters, and message of letters depending on the kind of letter; request, complaint. Another expert in the area validated this instrument.

The second question: *What are students' impressions about writing formal business emails using Google Classroom in collaborative learning?* A survey was employed to establish students' viewpoints about working in groups in the virtual environment Google Classroom. This instrument used a Likert scale. The statements were written in the learners' mother tongue and in English to avoid misunderstanding and errors considering the participant's level of proficiency. The survey consisted of fifteen items; the first five items are related to Google Classroom and its advantages, allowing interaction among students and instructors. Items from six to eleven deal with collaborative learning and how this approach helps students with writing and solving problems. Finally, items from twelve to fifteen deal with formal writing and the differences with informal writing. The level of reliability was established by running Cronbach's alpha.

4.3 Data Analysis

This innovation based on action research used quantitative instruments; therefore, descriptive statistical data analysis was implemented to measure the impact of the innovation. The data was tabulated and encoded in an Excel spreadsheet and was transferred to the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to get descriptive statistical information (Maximum, minimum, mean, and standard deviation). Cronbach's alpha was run to calculate the reliability of the survey.

4.4 Ethical Considerations

The authorities of the institution were asked permission to conduct the research and the participants' parents for the private use of data collected during the study. The participants were students of a high school, and their participation was voluntary and strictly confidential. These students were informed about the researcher's innovation and content's purpose and details.

V. Results

The data in this innovation were obtained to answer two main questions. The results are explained statistically according to each question.

5.1 Question 1: To what extent does collaborative learning in a virtual environment can improve formal writing?

TABLE 2

The pretest and post-test results

Instruments	N	Minimum Statistic	Maximum Statistic	Mean Statistic	Standard deviation
Pretest	22	4	11	6.27	1.66
Posttest	22	12	17	14.50	1.40

Table 1 shows participants' improvement on formal writing through the use of collaborative writing. The results of Cohen's $d=0.533554$ demonstrate a medium effect size as an average of all aspects included in the innovation. In general, this study has a medium impact on improving formal writing.

TABLE 3

Formal writing improvement based on the rubric

Components	N	Pretest mean	Std. deviation	Posttest mean	Std. deviation	Effect size
Google Classroom	22	0.73	0.456	3.05	0.844	16.823
Business Vocabulary	22	0.36	0.581	2.59	0.796	17.072
Basic elements of formal letters	22	1.55	0.510	2.64	0.581	8.386
Formal registers	22	1.68	0.646	3.05	0.575	7.545
Punctuation and capitalization	22	1.95	0.653	5.88	0.588	9.407

In this rubric, the significant effect size was represented by Google Classroom and business vocabulary probably because students started these two aspects with almost none previous knowledge and acquired the necessary skills to handle these aspects during the innovation. The other elements showed a medium-size effect but were still according to the aims of this research. In conclusion, pretest and post-test showed an essential improvement in writing skills, particularly formal writing.

5.2 Question 2: What are the students' impressions about writing formal business emails using Google Classroom in collaborative learning?

TABLE 4

Students' impressions about writing formal business emails using Google Classroom in collaborative learning

Nº	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Google Classroom allows me to interact with my partners effectively.	3.27	.93
2	Google Classroom allows me to interact with my teachers effectively.	3 (Agree)	.81
3	Google Classroom is an accessible virtual environment to simulate a company or business.	2.5	.51
4	Google Classroom helps me to find my assignments and documents	3.45	.73

	easily.		
5	Google Classroom helps me to find my documents easily.	3.45	.73
6	Collaborative writing helps me to understand the process of formal writing.	3.04	.84
7	Collaborative writing allows me to improve my writing.	3.18	.85
8	Collaborative writing is a mean to better understand my partners` needs and ideas in class.	3.27	.82
9	Collaborative writing made me aware of grammar mistakes.	3.31	.83
10	Collaborative writing made me aware of sentences order.	3.31	.77
11	The collaboration helped you to understand the differences between formal and informal writing?	3.27	.76
12	Writing Formal letters gave me an idea of an authentic work environment	3.54	.59
13	Formal letters are different from informal letters.	3.95	.21
14	Formal emails are different from informal emails.	3.90	.29
15	Writing Formal letters will help me at university in the future.	3.72	.45

In this survey, there was evidence that participants showed satisfaction with the outcomes developed by this research. Participants answered fifteen statements in the survey and three open questions. Participants indicated positive comments from the survey regarding their perspectives on Google Classroom and collaborative learning. Participants also found it helpful to take part in this innovation because they were aware of the importance of formal letters and business-related subjects. The Cronbach`s alpha result was 0.770 after calculus using SPSS. Interpretation indicates acceptable reliability or internal consistency for this survey.

TABLE 5
Open questions were included in the survey.

Questions	Answer
What did you like the most about this innovation (Improving formal writing in Google Classroom through collaborative learning?)	The more repeated criteria was vocabulary related to business.
What were the challenges of writing? Did you overcome them?	The more repeated aspect was grammar.
Do you still have weaknesses? Which?	The more repeated criteria was grammar.

In the open questions of the survey in Table 4, it can be observed that participants were motivated by the inclusion of new vocabulary related to a new subject for them, which is the business-related vocabulary. Moreover, the challenge of writing to be overcome was grammar. It is also interesting to notice that this aspect is considered the weakest aspect for participants.

VI. Discussions

The following discussions are based on the results obtained in this study regarding improving formal writing in Google Classroom.

6.1 Question 1: To what extend does collaborative learning in a virtual environment can improve formal writing?

Real work environments demand group work. Therefore, collaborative activities are a requisite for people in business and education. In the field of education, the student-centered approach with the combination of technology and collaboration can assist in achieving better results (Alvarez, 2019). Formal letters in real environments are used to convey information among companies and within the company (Zhang, 2017). To achieve the objective to improve formal letters, the combination of collaborative learning and the improvement of formal writing was the main goal of this innovation.

According to Sharpe (2019), Google Classroom is an assistive technology that combines devices and services to improve skills in students like writing, listening, and communicating. A relevant difference could be noticed from the results in the main aspects that this innovation looked for improvement. Formal writing was improved by the student's knowledge of the measured skills; Basic elements of formal letters and formal registers. These two aspects were increased significantly from 1.68 to 2.64 and 1.68 to 3.05 respectively. It means that students improved in general in their capacity to write and use the format of a formal or business letter. Business vocabulary, capitalization, and punctuation also increased significantly and represented two relevant topics related to formal writing. Another factor that positively influenced formal writing was the virtual environment.

6.2 Question 2: What are students' impressions about writing formal business emails using Google Classroom in collaborative learning?

Google Classroom includes devices and services that can improve the writing skills of students. Besides, students can connect with each other and also with instructors (Sharpe, 2019). Besides, Kumar and Bervell (2019) mentioned that Google Classroom allows parallel applications for collaborative and mobile learning. Also, Hiew and Hoon (2014) stated that collaborative learning is vital for the teamwork process, which is relevant because collaboration among students was a means to better understand formal writing, especially in a formal environment like business. In item 11 of the survey, they recognized that collaboration allowed them to distinguish between informal and formal writing and its usefulness in natural work environments.

VII. Conclusions

This research demonstrated that students improved their writing skills with the help of collaboration and the use of a virtual environment like Google Classroom. Improving these skills was not an easy task; generally, at this level in high school, students can barely achieve a basic notion of informal writing to be used among peers. With the implementation of this innovation, a step forward was made. It can be observed that with the help of teamwork, the speed of learning can be increased.

With the use of technology, the interaction and communication improved among participants and with instructors. The sharing and storage of documents created an order and a fixed place of interaction; participants knew that there was a place where documents and communication were available. The two main items in the survey helped to understand students' impressions concerning the technology used in this innovation. This aspect of technology was the one that increased the most, considering the media results. At the beginning of the implementation of this innovation, students knew just some vague elements of a virtual environment like Google Classroom. Students improved the use of this tool by using it with a clear objective in mind.

The format and content of formal letters were improved, as shown by the pretest and post-test results. Students were able to write formal letters in a better format, with the new business vocabulary and formal registers (formality and politeness) that are proper of real work environments.

The survey provided information related to students' perspectives and the technologies used in the innovation like Google Classroom, which was used as a platform for students and instructors to facilitate communication and the finding of information. There was a positive reaction to this tool. It was clear that students agreed that Google Classroom facilitated communication, allowing them to interact more

accessible with their partners, although participants did not consider this tool good enough to simulate a business environment.

The overall impression of participants was positive towards the application of this innovation and helped them improve many more aspects like the use of grammar and punctuation capitalization. The survey also helped to understand the vital role of collaborative learning in this innovation. Students agreed that the collaborative approach helped them to be aware of grammar mistakes and sentence order. Students also found it helpful to improve writing because of the interaction and constant information they received from partners and instructors. Finally, in the survey, they expressed the importance of formal letters in the future when working in real situations, and they were conscious of the nature of formal writing and the aspects related.

VIII. Limitations

During the implementation of this innovation, some limitations must be analyzed for future research. The main problems occurred in the technological field; some participants did not have access to the internet at home on their PCs or laptops, making it more difficult to access the virtual learning environment. Although the minority did not have an internet connection at home, they had internet on their smartphones. This problem was partially overcome by using the internet connection provided by the municipality. Although the limitations of schedules to get this service, all participants could have access and used Google Classroom to interact with partners and instructors.

The second major limitation was time. Participants were learning or implementing several new concepts, techniques and skills at the same time that for some of them, it was difficult to assimilate them in a short period of time. They were learning to write in a new manner but not how they used to do it regularly. They were learning to write with a new format in a formal environment, besides they were using a new technological tool, and they were using the collaborative learning approach, which has to be carried out consciously by participants. These limitations were not absolute barriers to participants and researchers but can be assimilated with better resources and more time available.

IX. Recommendations

During the experience with this innovation, the researcher considered that participants and instructors should be provided with more time to manage appropriately the skills given in this innovation, especially the writing skills, which take so much time to handle. In this context, with at least twelve weeks, participants will be in better conditions to improve the writing process.

Another aspect to be taken into account in the communication spectrum; during this innovation, among communication tools, the mail was the most frequently used. It would be possible to include a second tool outside Google Classroom: the phone with SMS, chats, and calls. These could be considered informal ways of communication, but in future research, those channels can be included as relevant factors and a measure to help interpret results because students frequently use this tool.

REFERENCES

Journal Papers:

- [1.] Clement, A., & Murugavel, T. (2018). English for the workplace: The importance of English language skills for effective performance. *Journal the English Classroom*, 20(1), 1-15. Retrieved from

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328353901_English_for_the_Workplace_The_Importance_of_English_Language_Skills_for_Effective_Performance

- [2.] Cronquist, K., & Fiszbein, A. (2017). *English language learning in Latin America*. Retrieved from <https://www.thedialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/English-Language-Learning-in-Latin-America-Final-1.pdf>
- [3.] Staton, S., & Fiszbein, A. (2019). *Work in Progress: English Teaching and Teachers in Latin America*. Retrieved from <https://www.thedialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/white-paper-2019-completo-final.pdf>
- [4.] Ministerio de Educación. (2019). *Currículo de los niveles de educación obligatoria*.
- [5.] *Subnivel Medio* [Mandatory educational levels. Sub-level Middle]. Retrieved from <https://educacion.gob.ec/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2016/03/Curriculo1.pdf>
- [6.] Fareed, M., Ashraf, A., & Bilal, M. (2016). ESL Learners writing skills. Problems, factors, and suggestions. *Journal of Education and Social Sciences*, 4(2), 81-92. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311669829_ESL_Learners'_Writing_Skills_Problems_Factors_and_Suggestions
- [7.] Islam, S. (2019). Bangladeshi university students` perception on using Google Classroom for teaching English. *International Journal of Psycho-Educational Sciences*, 8(2), 57-65 Retrieved from <https://www.journals.lapub.co.uk/index.php/IJPES/article/view/1165>
- [9.] Janah, M., & Yuniarti, F. (2019). Google classroom on students writing learning process. *Journal Smart*, 5(2), 128-138. Retrieved from <https://ejournal.stkipmpringsewu-lpg.ac.id/index.php/smart/article/view/951>
- [10.] Veramuthu, P., & Shah, P. (2020). Effectiveness of collaborative writing among secondary school students in an ESL classroom. *Creative Education*, 11, 54-67. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338553539_Effectiveness_of_Collaborative_Writing_among_Secondary_School_Students_in_an_ESL_Classroom
- [11.] Yaccob, N. & Yunus, M. (2019). A review on teaching writing to ESL learners through collaborative online writing activity (Google Docs). *Journal Penyelidikan Sains Sosial (JOSSR)*, 2(3), 35-42. Retrieved from <http://scholar.google.com/citations?user=HTxioXYAAAAJ&hl=en>
- [12.] León, A. & Rosero, A. (2018). Collaborative work through Google Drive tool, to develop the writing skill in A1 level. *Kronos*, 1, 39-41 Retrieved from <http://revistadigital.uce.edu.ec/index.php/KronosJournal/article/view/852>
- [13.] Starovoit, V. (2017). *The Purpose of Writing a Business Letter*. Retrieved from bizfluent.com: <https://bizfluent.com/about-6602798-purpose-writing-business-letter.html>
- [14.] Sebranek, P., Meyer, V., & Kemper, D. (1997). *Write for College. A Student Handbook*. Write Source. Massachusetts, USA
- [15.] Zhang, C. (2017). *A Study on the Application of the Cooperative Principle in Business English Letters*. Retrieved from <https://dx.doi.org/10.2991/emcm-16.2017.219>.
- [16.] Batema, Cara. (n.d.). How to Write an APA Style Letter. Retrieved from <https://penandthepad.com/write-apa-style-letter-5018977.html>
- [17.] Abas, I., Abd, Noor. (2016). Classification of the L2 writing process and writing strategies. *ICECRS*, 1, 67-380. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.21070/picercs.v1i1.505>
- [18.] Farhan, L., & Zaki, S. (2019). Exploring vocabulary strategies across ESL/EFL contexts: Juggling between experimental and traditional modes of learning. *Journal of Education and Educational Development*, 6(2) 201-218 Retrieved from <https://journals.iobmresearch.com/index.php/JoEED/article/view/2756/Lubna>

- [19.] Nurhayati, S. (2019). The Student's Ability in Using Punctuation and Capitalization through FARRPerforming Habit of Writing Diary. *INTERACTION: Journal Pendidikan Bahasa*, 6(2), 11-20. <https://doi.org/10.36232/jurnalpendidikanbahasa.v6i2.326>
- [20.] Sharpe, S. (2019). *Examining Google Classroom capabilities to help to provide principles of universal design for learning*. (Master's thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St John, Canada) Retrieved from <https://research.library.mun.ca/13935/>
- [21.] Kumar, J., & Bervell, B. (2019). Google classroom for mobile learning in higher education: Modelling the initial perceptions of students. *Education and Information Technologies* 24, 1793-1817. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330298788_Google_Classroom_for_mobile_learning_in_higher_education_Modelling_the_initial_perceptions_of_students
- [22.] Hiew, Y., & Hoon, T. (2014). Factors affecting knowledge sharing among ESL undergraduates in completing collaborative writing tasks using wiki and skype. *The English Teacher*, 43(2), 46-62. Retrieved from https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/d71b/87a6a8fb39a5d95e08ac0600bc7ced19e47a.pdf?_ga=2.5308275.1757856444.1590257048-95824037.1590257048.
- [23.] Ontaneda, M., & Sánchez, J. (2018). Implementing backward design to improve students' academic performance in EFL classes. *Centro Sur*, 2(2), 1-8. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330091070_Implementing_backward_design_to_improve_students'_academic_performance_in_EFL_classes
- [24.] David, C. (2020). *A Quick guide to quantitative research in social sciences*. Retrieved from <https://repository.uwtsd.ac.uk/1218/18/A%20quick%20guide%20to%20quantitative%20research%20in%20the%20social%20sciences.pdf>
- [25.] Capitalization. (2020). In *GrammarBook*. Retrieved from <https://www.grammarbook.com/punctuation/capital.asp>
- Books:**
- [26.] Brown, D. (2001). *Teaching by principles. An interactive approach to language pedagogy*. Longman.
- [27.] McTighe, J., & Wiggins, G. (2012). *Understanding by design framework*. Retrieved from https://www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/siteASCD/publications/UbD_WhitePaper0312.pdf
- Theses:**
- [28.] Alvarez, C. (2019). *Improving writing through collaboration facilitated by Google Docs*. (Master's thesis, Universidad Casa Grande, Guayaquil, Ecuador). Retrieved from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/4a0c/74e599d72c8c6fb21d570947e4a6d3f6a2f3.pdf>
- [29.] Pineda, T. (2019). *Peer feedback to improve message and format of writing formal letters in International Baccalaureate (IB) students*. (Master's thesis, Universidad Casa Grande, Guayaquil, Ecuador). Retrieved From: <http://dspace.casagrande.edu.ec:8080/bitstream/ucasagrande/1819/1/Tesis1995PINu.pdf>
- [30.] Smith, T. (2019). *A comparison of prescriptive usage problems in formal and informal written English*. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Iowa, Iowa city, United States). Retrieved from https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/etd/17566https://www.researchgate.net/publication/320604290_Impact_of_Implementing_a_Virtual_Learning_Environment_VLE_in_the_EFL_Classroom