



Improving Formal Writing in Google Classroom through Collaborative learning

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Abstract

The present research was implemented in a private high school in Guayas province, Ecuador. In this study, participants were 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 takes into account reading and listening skills aligned to the CEFR. An action research was applied and quantitative instruments were used to collect data. A pretest was taken at the beginning of this research to assess the level of writing skills and a posttest to compare results. A survey with fifteen items was applied to determine problems or difficulties of participants. The results of Cohen's d 0.53 demonstrated a medium effect size as an average of all aspects included in the innovation. 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 useful to take part of this innovation because they were aware of the importance of formal letters and the business-related subjects. This research is addressed to people in education such as teachers, authorities and researchers who are interested in the field of writing, EFL, and collaborative learning.

Keywords: Formal writing, writing skills, Google classroom, collaborative learning, high school.

Resumen

La presente investigación se implementó en un colegio privado en Ecuador, provincia de Guayas con 22 estudiantes femeninas de 9th grado. Las edades de las estudiantes están comprendidas entre 12 a 13 años. El nivel de inglés de las estudiantes A1 se determinó de acuerdo al Test de habilidades de English First que toma en cuenta las habilidades de lectura y escucha según el CEFR. Se implementó una investigación acción con instrumentos cuantitativos. Se aplicó un pretest al comienzo de esta investigación para evaluar el nivel de habilidades de escritura formal y al final un posttest para comparar resultados. Se aplicó una encuesta con 15 constructos para determinar los problemas o dificultades de los participantes. Los resultados del Cohen's d 0,53 demostraron un efecto del tamaño de la muestra de mediano impacto. Luego de aplicada la encuesta, los resultados evidenciaron que los participantes mostraron satisfacción con los resultados desarrollados en la investigación. Los participantes indicaron comentarios positivos en la encuesta en relación a la clase en Google y el aprendizaje colaborativo y encontraron de utilidad formar parte de esta innovación ya que estaban conscientes de la importancia de las cartas formales y los contenidos relacionados con los negocios. Esta investigación está dirigida a personas en el campo de la educación como docentes, autoridades e investigadores interesados en el área de la escritura, inglés como lengua extranjera y aprendizaje colaborativo.

Palabras clave: Escritura formal, habilidades de escritura, clase en Google, aprendizaje colaborativo, secundaria.

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One of the relevant aspects of English as a global language is its role in the job market or English for the workplace. Around the world, English is the language for academics as well as the language for business and it is necessary for career advancement. In the era of globalization those who master the English language can improve their career prospects after getting a degree (Clement & Murugavel, 2018). They also stated that it is a fact that employees need this language to communicate with other executives and do 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, this research pointed out the need of English proficiency for business, international communication, and the connection 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 the pressure 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 four countries; 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 related to private institutions because it is one of the few countries that has national policies regarding private language institutions. This country has a wide number of English language instruction institutions. Most of these private institutions were concentrated in Quito with more than 300 of them in 2014 (Cronquist & Fiszbein, 2017).

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Education First (EF, 2019) is an institution known for 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 improve 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. Ecuador is ranked 81 with the lowest English language proficiency level in the region just after Venezuela. Ecuador has declined the score from the previous year (Ministerio de Educación, 2019).

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

With this context in mind, it is required 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:

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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 of high frequency everyday or job related language 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 the plot of a book or film. Narrate a story.
Listening	Understand the main points of clear, standard speech on familiar matters regularly encounter informal situations at school, work, leisure, etc.

Source: 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. Writing is the last skill in length and has simple requirements 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.

Students after leaving 12th grade are not able to write formal emails letters in a real work environment but writing letters is a competence included in the CEFR. Taking into account this weakness this innovation helped students with this gap and design activities that would help them to overcome real difficulties in real work environments, like writing some business communications to resolve specific basic problems in the area of English; therefore, this innovation implemented formal writing and technology.

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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 found were insufficient linguistic proficiency, grammar, vocabulary, lack of ideas, reliance on L1, writing anxiety, and structure organization. The factors may include untrained teachers, ineffective methods, lack of reading and writing practice, low motivation, and large classrooms, among others. Likewise, Vurdien outlined that technology can be a useful tool to improve writing, integrating technological tools is a way of enhancing 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 what is formal and what is informal. Students often consider 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 what is correct and incorrect English usage. For example, “An instance of *implying* when *infer* is intended...” This correction of the language incites the critics of the called “grammar Nazis” which enjoy pointing out grammatical mistakes. This tendency to preserve the language by some people is called the prescriptive tradition of English. This defines that language contains many ways of expressing meaning, but one alternative is correct while the others are not. The idea of prescription is important in this innovation because for writing this idea is frequently used by experts. In this case the idea is that students get to know the differences between being aware of the limits and having some flexibility at the same time “the prescriptive tradition in English is based on the idea that speakers and writers require language experts ...to identify and define rules” (Smith, 2019, p. 3) and experts will consider what is good English or bad English.

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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, added 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 in this way practicing writing skills to work in a real environment.

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 posttest. Although this was carried out in a university, the subject and the results are of importance 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 by using Information and Communication Technologies helped students improve writing skills. It is also important to know how technologies have transformed educational settings and how

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this collaborative work can enhance students writing. The results showed that collaboration had a positive effect on students` writing skills and motivation.

It is important to mention how the collaborative approach is closely related to writing, although not developed in a technological environment the following research can bring light to 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) had a positive effect on language competency and collaborative skills. This study has a direct relation to this research because the variables collaborative writing approach and technology using in virtual environments are involved.

In Ecuador, there are some research studies available in the technological field and collaborative writing. One important example is the research carried out by León and Rosero (2018). The researchers established the incidence of collaborative work in developing writing skills in Ecuadorian university students. Pineda (2019) carried out a study in an International Baccalaureate (IB) which aimed to improve format and message of formal letters using peer feedback facilitated by using blogs. This research had a positive impact on students` formal letters writing and demonstrated the importance of peer feedback in a collaborative environment.

This innovation was designed to fill the gap between the research that has been done and the need for new approaches that may include formal writing for real tasks in the early stages of education. This context developed until now deals with collaborative learning,

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specifically collaborative writing and Virtual Learning Environments (VLE) like Google Classroom and Google Drive.

This research was carried out in a private high school in 9th grade, subject “English Language”. One aim of this research was to introduce students to real basic written exercises of communication like formal emails using a “real” business environment to give a more focalized framework, the objective was to help them to 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 collaborative learning in a virtual environment improve formal writing?
2. What are students’ impressions about writing formal business emails using Google Classroom in collaborative learning?

Literature Review

This section describes the main topics related to this research. This 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, format of a letter, collaborative learning, and backward design.

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). One example of formal writing is business letters, today

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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, to file a complaint, to order materials or to apply for a job. A formal letter should contain a heading, an inside address, salutation, a body, a complimentary closing, a signature, initials, an enclosure, in case 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 is used to convey information among companies or departments within a company, in a business letter there are two main parts; format and rules. Format can be formal and informal and the rules will lead to good understanding and help to judge if letters are qualified.

The old approaches of writing 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 the generation of ideas by reading, research, brainstorming or free writing among others. *Drafting* is a complex set of strategies

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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 includes 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 “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 in formal writing is an unavoidable stage of the writing process.

Another element which is included in writing is vocabulary. Vocabulary as the Cambridge Online Dictionary (2020) defined it is “(the stock of) words known and used e.g. by one person, or within a particular trade or profession.” Related to vocabulary, Farhan and Zaki (2019) defined it as the most effective way to improve a language for second or foreign language learners. In this research, there were selected fourteen studies over a period of ten years, from 2009 to 2018. The results indicated that vocabulary learning strategies varied from different countries and even in the same country, which showed some inconsistencies on 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 of time. The usefulness of this study for this innovation

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is that vocabulary learning is still a basic element of learning ESL or EFL, and that the context definition and analysis is vital to achieve better results.

In this innovation punctuation and capitalization is considered a 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 question, 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 practice and creating the habit of writing on a daily basis. To improve writing and the ability of using punctuation and capitalization, Nurhayati (2019) demonstrated that by performing the habit of writing on a regular basis students can improve punctuation and capitalization and show more interest on writing. There was a significant difference in student achievement in students who were taught with this mechanism of writing daily and those who were not.

This study involves a virtual environment, in this case Google Classroom. Thus, its features are introduced in this paragraph. Sharpe (2019) defined Google Classroom as assistive technology, these kinds of 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.

There are other resources on these platforms like Google Docs, Google Slides where students can share and work simultaneously in pairs or groups to share ideas. Kumar and

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Bervell (2019) mentioned that Google Classroom is 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.

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 people in business, science, and education. 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 key for team work process. This also involves sharing of knowledge among students and a number of social factors. Therefore, collaborative learning is not applicable to any educational environment. Chisholm stated that in the case of collaborative writing students due to interpersonal problems and inexperience in the process would make writing assessment difficult to accomplish. Nevertheless, and 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 backwards design principles. As Reynolds and Kearns indicated backwards 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). 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 backwards 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

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curriculum is planned backwards for long terms results on a three-stage process; desired results, evidence and learning plan. Teachers are focused on learning to happen by checking transfer and meaning of students (McTighe & Wiggins, 2012).

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 the ones written by employers, for example a manager in a department in a company and the employees of this company. Students used for these tasks collaborative writing and Google Classroom because they worked in small groups to solve the assignments given in the context of a virtual company. In order to write formal e-mails it was necessary to recreate the roles in a real company, with this in mind, students recreated an imaginary company in which each of them 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 there were two main kinds of formal letters that were assessed by using one rubric that measured 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 mails using the appropriate register according to the audiences. Besides, this innovation included the explanation to students

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about the information or kinds of messages contained in a formal letter, and the main parts that conform a formal letter.

In this innovation the researcher interacted and exchanged with all different groups of students by reading, providing feedback and answering doubts and questions about different topics and the coordination of 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 in the task of the group they belong and then to pay attention to the other groups.

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 a 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 a pretest was taken by the participants and at the end a posttest was applied to compare results. A survey (Appendix D) was applied to determine problems or difficulties of participants.

Participants

According to the results of the demographic survey that was applied, participants of this study consisted of 22 female students of a private high school Guayas province, Ecuador where they were in 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 level of English and this was learnt from regular school instruction. Half of participants had access to

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technology with laptops and smartphones. Internet access was available at home for 20 students (90.1%) and for the rest of the participants at the municipality. They were chosen by the institution coordinator 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 takes into account reading and listening skills aligned to the CEFR, the level of students is 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.

Instruments

To answer the research questions, the following instruments to collect the data were: pretest, posttest, a rubric, and a survey. For the first question *To what extent can collaborative learning in a virtual environment improve formal writing?* was answered by using a pretest (Appendix B). This test was applied in the first two sessions of the innovation to assess the level and background knowledge students had related to formal writing letters. At the end of the innovation a posttest (Appendix B) was applied to evidence improvement. During the pretest and posttest, one group of students was asked to write a formal letter to the manager of the company 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 writing and format of letters, a rubric was applied (Appendix C). With this instrument, the researcher graded five components such as Google Classroom, business vocabulary, elements of formal letters, formal registers, and punctuation and capitalization, from 0 to 4 points per component in total were 20 points as maximum grade. This instrument covered topics, such as the use of main elements of Google classroom,

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vocabulary related to a company or business, formal and informal differences, basic elements of a letter, use of short sentences and expressions in formal letters, and message of letters depending of the kind of letter; request, complaint. This instrument was validated by another expert in the area.

For the second question, *What are students' impressions about writing formal business emails using Google Classroom in collaborative learning?* A survey was employed to establish the viewpoints of students 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 in fifteen items, the first five items are related to Google Classroom and the advantages it has allowing interaction among students and with instructors as well. Items from six to eleven deal with collaborative learning and how this approach helps students with writing and to solve 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.

Data Analysis

This innovation which is 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 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.

Ethical Considerations

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The authorities of the institution were asked permission to conduct the research, as well as the parents of the participants 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 purpose, benefits and the details of the way the researcher conducted the innovation and content.

Results

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

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

Table 2.

The pretest and posttest 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 2 shows participants' improvement on formal writing through the use of collaborative writing. The results of Cohen's d 0.533554 demonstrates a medium effect size as an average of all aspects included in the innovation. In general, this study has a medium impact in improving formal writing.

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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 most considerable effect size was represented by Google Classroom and business vocabulary probably because students started these two aspects with a lack of knowledge and during the innovation acquired the necessary skills to handle these aspects. The other elements showed a medium size effect but were still according to the aims of this research. In conclusion, pretest and posttest showed that there was an important improvement in writing skills.

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

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Table 4.

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

N°	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 easy virtual environment to simulate a company or business.	2.5	.51
4	Google Classroom helps me to find my assignments and documents easily.	3.45	.73
5	Google Classroom helps me to find my documents easily.	3.45	.73
6	Collaborative writing helps me to understand the process or 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	Collaboration helped you to understand the differences between formal and informal writing?	3.27	.76
12	Writing Formal letters gave me an idea of a real work environment	3.54	.59
13	Formal letters are different from informal letters.	3.95	.21

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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 useful to take part of this innovation because they were aware of the importance of formal letters and the business-related subjects. The Cronbach`s alpha result was 0.770 after proper calculus using SPSS. Interpretation indicates an acceptable reliability or internal consistency for this survey.

Table 5.

Open questions included in the survey.

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

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In the open questions of the survey in Table 5, according to results, participants were motivated by the inclusion of new vocabulary related to a new subject for them, which is the business-related vocabulary. And the challenge of writing to be overcome was grammar. It is also interesting to notice that this aspect is considered the most important weakness for participants.

Discussions

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

Question 1: To what extent can collaborative learning in a virtual environment 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 to achieve 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.

Another factor that influenced positively formal writing was the virtual environment. According to Sharpe (2019) Google Classroom is an assistive technology that combines devices and services to improve skills on students like writing, listening, and communicating. From the results, there was a relevant difference that could be noticed in the main aspects that this innovation looked for improvement. Formal writing was improved by the students' knowledge of the skills that were measured; Basic elements of formal letters and formal

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registers. These two aspects were increased significantly from a mean of 1.68 to 2.64 and 1.68 to 3.05 respectively, which means that students improved in general in their capacity to write and use the format of a formal or business letter. Business vocabulary and capitalization and punctuation also increased significantly and represent two relevant topics related to formal writing.

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 writing skills in 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 key for team work process, which is relevant because collaboration among students was a mean to achieve a better understanding of formal writing, especially in a formal environment like the one of business. In item 11 of the survey, they were able to recognize that collaboration allowed them to establish the difference of informal and formal writing and the usefulness of this kind of writing on real work environments.

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 team work the speed of learning can be increased.

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With the use of technology, the interaction and therefore communication among participants improved, as well as 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 the impressions of students in relation to the technology used in this innovation. This aspect of technology was the one that increased the most taking into account 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 was improved as shown by the pretest and posttest results. Students were able to write formal letters in a better format, with the new vocabulary of business and using formal registers (formality and politeness) that are proper of real work environments.

The survey provided information related to the perspective of students 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 with respect of this tool. It was clear that students agreed that Google Classroom facilitated communication allowing them to interact easier with their partners, although participants, did not considered this tool good enough to simulate a business environment.

The survey also helped to understand the important 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 considered working in this way to improve writing because of the interaction and constant information they received from partners and

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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. The overall impression of participants was positive towards the application of this innovation and helped them to improve many more aspects like the use use of grammar and punctuation-capitalization.

Limitations

During the implementation of this innovation there were some limitations that must be analyzed for future research. The main problems occurred in the technological field, some participants did not have access to internet at home in their PCs or laptops which made more difficult to them to access the virtual learning environment. Although, the minority did not have internet connection at home, they had internet in 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 mayor 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 in the way they used to do it on a regular basis. 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 have to be carried out in a conscious way by participants. All these limitations did not act as an absolute barrier to participants and researchers but can be assimilated with better resources and more time available.

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 a period of at least twelve weeks participants will be in better conditions to improve the process of writing.

Another aspect to be taken into account is the communication spectrum, during this innovation among the tools of communication, the mail was the most frequently used. It would be possible to include a second tool outside Google Classroom, that is 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 in the interpretation of results because this is a tool frequently used in general by students.

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Appendix A

Lesson Plan for the innovation.

Available upon request.

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Appendix B

Pretest/Posttest

Student`s name: _____ Date: _____ Code: _____

Available upon request.

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Appendix C

Rubric

Available upon request.

Appendix D

Survey

Student`s viewpoints about collaborative writing and Google Classroom.

Available upon request.