الجمهوريـة الجزائـريـة الديمقراطيـة الشعبيـة
PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA
وزارة التعليـم العالـي والبحـث العلمـي
MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH
AbdElhafid Boussouf University - Mila



Institute of Letters and Languages
Department of Foreign Languages
Branch: English

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment for the Requirement of the Master Degree in Didactics of Foreign Languages

Exploring EFL Learners' Attitudes of the Use of Online Discussion Forums for the Development of their Writing Skill:A Case Study of third - Year Students of English at Abdelhafid Boussouf University Center of Mila.

Presented by:
1)Leknouche Djohaina
2) Bendali hacine Douaa

Board of Examiners: Azzioui Assia
Chairman:Hadef Rima
Supervisor:Bennane Yamina
Examiner:

2026/2025

Dedication 1

First, before any heartbeat, before any dream opened its eyes – there was Allah. He did not just open the door for me, He carried me through it when my own legs trembled. He placed success not in my hands, but in my path. This was never my achievement alone. It was His plan, His mercy, and His timing. And for that, every breath I take will say: Alhamdulillah.

To the most tender-hearted woman in the world — my Mother. My first role model, who taught me the true meaning of patience and resilience, And who eased my hardships with her prayers. Thank you for everything My words could never repay your sacrifices.

To my Father — my backbone. You never had to shout to be heard; your silence spoke louder than any words. You worked in the shadows so I could shine in the light. I will not stop until I see your eyes glow with pride. You gave me everything, now let me give you this moment.

To my Siblings — Boualam, Abdeslam, Adem, and my sister Siham. Thank you for being my constant support. This success is as much yours as it is mine.

To my Supervisor. Thank you For your invaluable guidance, patience, and the wisdom you shared so generously.

To my lovely Colleague. My kind partner douaa who shared the long hours and hard work. Thank you for making this journey easier.

To my dear Friends. Who filled my university years with joy and left beautiful moments in my memory.

To the "Bliss Touch" family. Thank you to every follower who supported me. You taught me how to rise every time I fell. For me, it's not just a business; it is a journey of growth and a home of endless support.

Finally, to the One who held my hand through every single step. To the person who shared my silence, my struggles, and my triumph. You were the calm in my storm and my unwavering strength. This success is ours.

Dedication 2

All praise is to Allah, who enlightened our path with knowledge, granted us patience to continue despite every difficulty, and turned every moment of exhaustion into a step closer to success.

To Him belongs every blessing, every achievement, and every beautiful beginning.

I dedicate this humble work...

To the ones about whom the Most Merciful said:

﴿وَقُل رَّبِّ ارْحَمْهُمَا كَمَا رَبَّيَانِي صَغِيرًا﴾

To my dear father, whose prayers were a light guiding my path, and whose support gave me strength whenever life felt heavy upon my shoulders.

Your sacrifices were silent, but your love spoke in every step I took toward this moment.

May Allah bless you with a long life filled with peace, happiness, and endless mercy.

And to my beloved mother — not only the source of tenderness and unconditional love, but also my first inspiration, my role model, and the teacher I have always looked up to with admiration and pride.

She was the meaning of kindness in teaching, sincerity in giving, and greatness in character.

She taught before she spoke, inspired before she advised, and left goodness in every heart she touched.

You were never just a teacher, Mom...

You were my teacher, my example, and the person I dream of becoming one day.

If I ever achieve something worthy in this life, it is because I was raised by a woman as remarkable as you.

May Allah protect you, reward you for every life you changed, and keep your light shining in my heart forever.

To my brothers and sisters, the companions of my journey and the most beautiful part of my life, whose presence filled my days with warmth, comfort, laughter, and love.

Thank you for being my safe place in both my strongest and weakest moments.

To my dear friends, who shared with me the difficult days before the joyful ones, the stress before the relief, and the fear before the achievement...

Thank you for every sincere word, every encouragement, and every memory that made this journey lighter and more beautiful.

To my respected teachers, who carried the message of knowledge with sincerity, patience, and dedication, and illuminated our paths with wisdom and guidance...

May Allah reward you greatly for every letter taught and every dream encouraged.

And to every person who supported me with a heartfelt prayer , a genuine smile, a kind word, or simple belief in me when I doubted myself...

I dedicate this humble achievement to you all, for it would never have been possible without Allah's grace and your endless support and love.

And in the end, I realize that some journeys are written with effort, but completed only by Allah's mercy.

Every sleepless night, every tear, every moment of patience and perseverance led me to this day by His will alone.

﴿وَكَانَ فَضْلُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكَ عَظِيمًا﴾

Acknowledgment

This work would not have been completed without the help and support of many people to whom we would like to express our deepest gratitude.

First and foremost , we are extremely grateful to our supervisor , Ms Yamina Bennane , for her patience , guidance , and valuable feedback throughout the different stages of this research . Her constructive criticism and continuous encouragement have been essential to the completion of this work . We greatly appreciate the time and effort she devoted to reading and commenting on our dissertation.

We would also like to extend our sincere thanks to the board of examiners for accepting to read and evaluate this humble work .

Our deepest gratitude goes to all the teachers of the Department of English at the University of Abdelhafid Boussouf , Mila , for their support and guidance throughout our academic journey .

We are also thankful to the third-year students who willingly participated in our study by answering the questionnaire . Their cooperation was crucial to the achievement of this research.

We wish to thank our friends for their support , encouragement , and sense of sharing

Finally , special thanks are addressed to our beloved families for their endless trust , support , and prayers . Without them , this work would have never been possible.

Table of Contents

Dedication 1	I
Dedication 2	II
Acknowledgment	III
Table of Contents	V
List of Figures	IX
Abstract	X
General Introduction	1
CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW	
1.1. Introduction	5
Section One: Online Discussion Forums in Language Education	6
1.2. Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) in EFL Contexts	6
1.2.1. Synchronous and Asynchronous Modes of CMC	7
1.2.1.1. Synchronous Communication (SCMC)	7
1.2.1.2. Asynchronous Communication (ACMC)	8
1.2.2. Beyond the Binary Classification of CMC	8
1.2.3. Complementarity of SCMC and ACMC	9
1.2.3. Pedagogical Benefits of CMC in Language Learning	10
1.2.4. Pedagogical Features of CMC (Summary)	10
1.2.4.1. Motivation	11
1.2.4.2. Active Learning	11
1.2.4.3. Reflective Learning	11
1.2.4.4. Learner Autonomy	12
1.2.4.5. Collaborative Learning	12
1.3. Online Discussion Forums as Pedagogical Tools	12
1.3.1. Definition and Characteristics	12
1.3.2. Theoretical Foundations	13
1.3.2.1. Behaviourism and Cognitivism	13
1.3.2.2. Constructivism and Social Constructivism	13
1.3.2.3. Sociocultural Theory and Mediation	14

1.3.2.4. Interaction and Collaborative Learning	14
1.3.2.5. Synthesis of Theoretical Perspectives	14
1.3.3. Advantages in EFL Contexts	15
1.3.4. Limitations and Contextual Challenges	15
1.3.5. Best Practices for Effective Implementation	15
Section Two: Writing Skill Development Through Online Interaction	16
1.4. Writing in EFL Contexts	16
1.4.1. Definition of Writing	16
1.4.2. Components of Writing	17
1.4.3. Approaches to Teaching Writing	18
1.4.3.1. Product Approach	18
1.4.3.2. Process Approach	19
1.4.3.3. Genre Approach	19
1.4.3.4. Which Approach Best Aligns with Online Discussion Forums?	20
1.5. The Role of Online Discussion Forums in Writing Development	21
1.5.1. Writing Practice and Revision	21
1.5.2. Interaction and Feedback	22
1.5.3. Development of Critical Thinking	24
1.5.4. Motivation and Anxiety Reduction	25
1.5.5. Linguistic Development	26
1.6. Empirical Studies on Online Discussion Forums and Writing	27
1.6.1 Overview of Previous Research	27
1.6.2. Identified Research Gaps	30
1.7. Conceptual Framework of the Study	31
1.7.1. Overview of the Conceptual Framework	31
1.7.2. Theoretical Foundations	31
1.7.2.1. Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978)	31
1.7.2.2. Cognitive Process Theory of Writing (Flower & Hayes, 1981)	31
1.7.2.3. Genre-Based Approach (Halliday, 1994; Martin, 1984):	31
1.7.3. Variables of the Study	32
1.7.4. Conceptual Model	32

1.7.6 Research Questions Guiding the Framework	34
1.8. Conclusion	35

CHAPTER TWO: DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS DISCUSSION	
2.1. Introduction	36
2.2. Research Aim	36
2.3. Research Questions	36
2.4. Data Collection Tool	36
2.4.1. The Students' Questionnaire	37
2.4.1.1. Aim of the Questionnaire	37
2.4.1.2. Sample and Population	37
2.4.1.3. Administration of the Students' Questionnaire	37
2.4.1.4. Description of the Students' Questionnaire	37
2.5. Data Analysis	38
2.5.1. Section one: Background Information of the Participants	38
2.5.1.1. Age of the Participants	38
2.5.1.2. Years of Studying English	39
2.5.1.3. Self-Assessed English Proficiency Level	40
2.5.1.4. Previous Academic Writing Experience	40
2.5.2. Section Two: General Information and Access	41
2.5.2.1. Frequency of Participation in Online Discussion Forums	41
2.5.2.2. Teacher Use of Online Discussion Forums	42
2.5.2.3. Self-Assessment of Digital Literacy Skills	42
2.5.2.4. Preferred Platform for Online Discussion Forums	43
2.5.3. Section Three: Perceptions of Online Discussion Forums as a Writing Tool	43
2.5.3.1. Students' Attitudes Toward Online Forums and Writing Development	43
2.5.4. Section Four: Patterns and Frequency of Participation in Online Forums	45
2.5.4.1. Engagement in Online Forum Writing Activities	45
2.5.5. Section Five: Factors Influencing Your Engagement in Online Forums	46
2.5.5.1. Perceived Influencing Factors	46

2.4.6. Section Six: Perceived Impact on Specific Writing Components	49
2.5.7. Section seven: Factors Influencing Your Engagement	50
2.5.7.1. Overall Effectiveness	50
2.5.7.2. Overall Effectiveness of Online Discussion Forums	51
2.5.8. Section Eight: Challenges and Strategies in Online Forum Participation	52
2.5.8.1. Perceived Challenges in Online Forum Participation	52
2.5.8.2. Strategies Used to Overcome Difficulties	52
2.5.8.3. Students' Personal Experiences (Open-ended Question)	53
2.5.8.4. Additional comments or suggestions about using online discussion forums to improve your writing, please write them below	54
2.6. Discussion of the results	56
2.6.1. Students' Perceptions of Online Discussion Forums	56
2.6.2. Patterns of Student Participation in Forums	56
2.6.3. Factors Influencing Student Engagement	56
2.6.4. Perceived Impact on Writing Components	57
2.6.5. Challenges and Strategies	57
2.6.6. Students' Personal Experiences and Suggestions	58
2.6.7. Summary of Key Findings	58
2.6.8. Limitations of the stady	58
2.7. Recommendations	59
2.7.1. Recommendations for EFL Teachers	59
2.7.2. Recommendations for Students	59
2.7.3. Recommendations for Curriculum Developers	60
2.7.4. Recommendations for Future Research	60
2.8. Conclusion	61
General conclusion	62
References	65
Appendices	70
Résumé	78
الملخص	79

List of Figures

CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW	
Figure 1.1. Modes of CMC	7
Figure 1.2. The Evolution and Multimodal Nature of Computer-Mediated Communication	9
Figure 1.3. Complementarity of Synchronous and Asynchronous CMC in Supporting SLA	10
Figure 1.4. Pedagogical Features of CMC within an SCT Framework	11
Figure 1.5. Pedagogical Features of Online Discussion Forums	13
Figure 1.6. Core Components of EFL Writing Based on Hartfiel et al. (1985)	17
Figure 1.7. Integrated Conceptual Framework of EFL Writing Development through Online Discussion Forums	34
CHAPTER TWO: DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS DISCUSSION	
Figure 2.1. Age Distribution of Survey Respondents	39
Figure 2.2. Distribution of Respondents by Years of Experience	39
Figure 2.3. Distribution of Respondents by Self-Assessed English Proficiency Level	40
Figure 2.4. Distribution of Respondents by Prior Enrollment in a Formal Academic Writing Course	41
Figure 2.5. Distribution of Respondents by Frequency of Participation in Online University Discussion Forums	41
Figure 2.6. Respondents' Perceptions of Teacher Use of Online Discussion Forums in University Courses	42
Figure 2.7. Respondents' Self-Assessment of Digital Literacy Skills	42
Figure 2.8. Distribution of Respondents by Preferred Platform for Online Discussion Forums	43
Figure 2.9. Respondents' Attitudes Toward Online Forums and Academic Writing Development	44
Figure 2.10. Frequency of Respondents' Engagement in Online Forum Writing Activities	45
Figure 2.11. Respondents' Perceptions of Writing-Related Factors Influencing Online Forum Participation	47
Figure 2.12. Respondents' Perceptions of the Impact of Online Forum Participation on Academic Writing Skills	48
Figure 2.13. Respondents' Perceptions of the Impact of Online Forum Participation on Writing Grades and Teacher Feedback	50
Figure 2.14. Respondents' Overall Assessment of the Effectiveness of Online Forums for Writing Improvement	51
Figure 2.15. Respondents' Perceived Challenges to Online Forum Participation and Writing Usefulness	52
Figure 2.16. Respondents' Strategies for Overcoming Difficulties in Online Forum Participation	53

Abstract

The present study investigates students' perceptions of the effectiveness of online discussion forums in developing EFL writing skills among third- year undergraduate students at the University of Abdelhafid Boussouf, Mila, Algeria. Grounded in Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky,1978) and the Cognitive Process Theory of Writing (Flower & Hayes,1981), the study also seeks to explore students' perceptions of using online forums as a writing tool, analyse their participation patterns, identify the factors influencing their engagement, and determine the challenges they encounter. The study adopts a descriptive quantitative approach. A questionnaire was administered to 56 third- year EFL students, and the collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods, including frequencies and percentages. The findings indicate that the majority of students hold positive attitudes toward online discussion forums. Most students (67.3%) reported feeling more comfortable expressing their ideas in online forums than in traditional classrooms, and 72.9% rated forums as effective or very effective for improving their writing. Students believe that forums help them most with vocabulary (77.3%), coherence (73.6%), and idea development (73.1%). However, the findings also highlight significant challenges, including lack of interest in discussion topics (40.7%), technical problems (35.2%), anxiety about sharing writing with classmates (35.2%), and lack of time (33.3%). The study also identifies that teacher involvement (86.3%) and classmates' active participation (82.0%) are the most influential factors affecting student engagement. Based on these findings, the study concludes that although online discussion forums have the potential to support writing development, their effectiveness is limited by several contextual and pedagogical challenges. Recommendations for teachers, students, curriculum developers, and future researchers are provided.

Keywords: Online discussion forums, EFL writing, writing development, student engagement, Algeria.

General Introduction

General Introduction

In recent years, rapid technological development has strongly influenced the field of education. Schools and universities increasingly use digital tools and learning platforms such as Moodle and Blackboard to support teaching and learning. Within this digital environment, the Online Discussion Forums (ODFs) have emerged as effective tools that allow students to communicate, exchange ideas, and practice writing over time (Warschauer, 1997). Their role has grown so important that they are often described as the « heart of the course » (Kelly, 2014, as cited in Jose & Abidin, 2016). However, despite their widespread adoption, these forums are often used in a limited way, functioning as simple spaces for posting comments rather than as interactive tools for developing academic writing skills in EFL contexts (Koko & Seddoud , 2021).

To address this limitation, asynchronous online discussion forums offer several teaching advantages that support writing development. They give students the freedom to participate at any time, allowing them to think carefully, organize their ideas, and revise their responses before posting them, which often leads to higher-quality writing as learners are not pressured by real-time classroom conditions (Rains et al., 2016). In addition, online forums have created their own unique style of communication. To communicate quickly and express tone participants often adapt written language by using abbreviations such as « u" instead of "you" or rebus forms like "gr" for "great" (Kadir, Maros & Hamid, 2012). From a Sociocultural Theory perspective, and within social and situated learning frameworks, these forums act as vital mediational tools that help learners negotiate meaning and knowledge co-construction, they also support social interaction and a sense of community, which are essential for encouraging continuous participation and engagement in writing activities (Al Quayeer, 2020; Kozulin, 2018; Gánem-Gutiérrez, 2018).

Recent research shows that asynchronous forums can significantly improve the writing skills of EFL students. Some studies found that students who participated in structured asynchronous discussions made significant gains in lexical and grammatical accuracy, largely because they benefited from classmates' feedback, written negotiation of meaning, and opportunities for self-assessment during revision (Mohammadi et al., 2018; Akmal, 2017; Gasmi, 2022). Similarly, Studies on engagement highlight that forums can increase participation and confidence among learners who may remain silent in traditional classrooms (Tella & Isah, 2011; Cheng et al., 2011). Although these studies confirm the potential of forums for writing development, they tend to focus on general improvement rather than specific writing components.

Despite these advantages, several challenges limit the effectiveness of ODFs in EFL writing instruction. One major challenge is related to sustaining Students' interest, as they perceive the forums as optional, especially if it not graded (Alzahrani, 2017).Furthermore, even though forums are designed for collaboration and critical thinking, many students feel too anxious to share their thoughts leading to reduced meaningful participation(Gasmi, 2022) .Moreover, technical limitations related to digital competence and internet availability continue to hinder active participation in online forums, especially in developing regions (Mashtori et al., 2015).

While previous research has extensively examined online discussion forums, relatively little attention has been paid to how these platforms support the development of specific EFL writing components such as content, organization, coherence, vocabulary use, and mechanics from the learners' perspective. Many

previous investigations concentrate on broad language improvement rather than specific writing skills and are usually limited to classroom-based settings. Consequently, the ways in which university learners interact with online forums in real academic contexts remain poorly understood. This gap indicates the need for further research examining both learners' perceived benefits and the challenges affecting writing development through asynchronous online discussion forums.

Therefore, the present study aims to investigate how online discussion forums influence EFL university students' writing performance and to examine learners' perceptions of their usefulness within academic writing courses.

Statement of the Problem

Writing is a critical skill for academic and professional success, yet it remains one of the most challenging areas for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) university learners. Students often struggle with organizing coherent arguments, developing coherence, and producing accurate written language. The traditional classroom instruction provides students with opportunities for peer interaction , giving feedback, and reflective revision- process that are essential for improving writing. Although online Discussion forums support these processes by offering space for written communication, collaborative learning, but many institutions still use them in a limited way, or students may lack digital literacy to benefit from the platform.

Previous research have shown that ODFs can enhance certain aspects of writing, such as vocabulary acquisition, grammatical accuracy, and critical thinking. However, most of them focus on general patterns of online interactions rather than the specific contributions of forums to discrete writing. Furthermore, existing studies usually focus on a specific age group, teaching designs, or cultural contexts, which leads to a limitation on the generalizability of findings across all EFL learners. Relatively few studies have looked at how learners feel about using online discussion forums for academic writing tasks or examined how individual factors like digital literacy, motivation, peer interaction, or teacher presence affect learners' participation and their writing outcomes.

Therefore, although online discussion forums have the potential to support EFL writing development, their specific contributions to improving core writing competencies, alongside the factors that shape learner engagement and perception, remain underexplored. This gap represents the central problem that the present study seeks to address by investigating how ODF participation contributes to the development of writing skills among EFL university students. It will examine learners' perceptions, their patterns of engagement, and the challenges they face when using forums as a tool for writing development.

Aim of the Study

This study aims to explore the role of online discussion forums (ODFs) in enhancing university EFL learners' writing skills by examining learners' perceptions, participation patterns, contributions to different writing components, and the challenges affecting their engagement and effectiveness in forum-based writing activities.

Research Objectives

This study aims to:

1. To examine EFL learners' perceptions of the effectiveness of online discussion forums in improving their writing skills.

2. To analyze students' participation and interaction patterns in online discussion forums.
3. To investigate the contribution of online discussion forums to the development of specific writing components, including vocabulary, grammar, coherence, organization, and idea development.
4. To identify the challenges students face when using online discussion forums for writing practice and the strategies they employ to overcome these difficulties.

Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are EFL learners' perceptions of using online discussion forums as a tool for improving their writing skills?
2. How do learners report their participation in online forum discussions?
3. What factors do learners perceive as influencing their level of engagement in forum discussions?
4. To what extent do learners believe that online discussion forums help them improve specific aspects of writing, such as vocabulary, grammar, organization, coherence, and mechanics?
5. What challenges do students face when using online discussion forums for writing practice, and what strategies do they report using to overcome these difficulties?

Significance of the study

This study aims to investigate how online discussion forums can support the development of third-year university EFL learners' writing skills by engaging cognitive, linguistic, and Sociocultural processes involved in second language learning. It is based on Vygotsky's Sociocultural theory, particularly the concepts of mediation and collaborative knowledge instruction (Kozulin, 2018; Gánem-Gutiérrez, 2018). It highlights the forum as a digital learning space where students build knowledge together, discuss language, and develop their writing through peer support. Research in Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) also shows that online writing platforms help learners organize their ideas, build arguments, and use vocabulary and grammar more effectively. Previous studies have found that students who write in forums often improve their writing performance. The study also explores how the forums increase the students' motivation and confidence helping them address anxiety, reduce language production, and other common difficulties. Many learners feel more comfortable when participating in online than writing or speaking in class. The results of this study will help EFL teachers and universities use online forums more effectively in writing courses. They can support more interactive and collaborative learning and help students become more independent writers. Ultimately, well-designed online discussions can improve writing accuracy and fluency, coherence, critical thinking, and learner autonomy.

Structure of the Study

The study is divided into two main chapters: the first is theoretical, and the second is practical. The theoretical chapter is organized into two sections. The first section explores an overview of online learning and computer-mediated communication (CMC), highlighting their key concepts, features, and relevance to educational contexts. It also introduces online discussion forums as pedagogical tools, discussing their definitions, main characteristics, roles in the learning process, advantages, and their limitations. The second section of the theoretical chapter focuses on writing skill development In EFL contexts. It presents the definition and components of writing, the main approaches to teaching writing, and explains how online discussion forums contribute to improving learners' writing performance, their challenges for

writing development, and a review of previous studies. Conversely, the practical Chapter is also divided into two sections. The first section details the research, methodology, including the population and sampling, data collection tools, and the administration and description of student's questionnaire. The second section presents the analysis and interpretation of data collection through the questionnaire.

Research Methodology

A descriptive research design will be adopted in this study, as it is appropriate for examining learners' attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors. Data will be collected through a structured questionnaire administered to third-year EFL university students. A sample of approximately 50 students will be randomly selected. The questionnaire will explore students' perceptions, levels of participation, perceived benefits, and challenges related to forum-based writing. The collected data will be analyzed using descriptive statistical methods, such as frequencies and percentages

CHAPTER ONE

LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. Introduction

Online discussion forums have become an essential tool in language education due to rapid advances in digital technology (Gasmi, 2022; Selfa-Sastre et al.,2022). They extend learning beyond the traditional classroom by enabling learners to interact, collaborate, and practice language skills through both synchronous and asynchronous communication (Mansour, 2024; Marden and Herrington, 2022).
These platforms foster meaningful interaction, critical thinking, and learner autonomy while creating supportive learning communities for sharing ideas and receiving feedback (Zamiri and Esmaeili, 2024). By allowing students to access course content in advance, online forums enhance active listening, inclusive participation, and reflective engagement during face-to-face sessions. In language learning contexts, they particularly support sustained discourse, improve written and communicative competence, and increase motivation (Fedoriv et al., 2024). Consequently, online discussion forums are increasingly recognized as an effective pedagogical approach for promoting deep learning and long-term academic success (Levin, 2024; Zamiri and Esmaeili, 2024).

Section One: Online Discussion Forums in Language Education

1.2. Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) in EFL Contexts

Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), which emerged in the 1960s and gained prominence in the 1990s, refers to human communication conducted through computers and digital devices (Herring, 2019; Thorne, 2008). With the rapid development of digital tools, CMC enables communication anytime and anywhere through platforms such as instant messaging, email, discussion forums, social media, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), Online Distance Learning (ODL) programs, blogs, wikis, and video conferencing tools (Bangun et al., 2022; Thorne, 2008).
CMC supports multidirectional interaction, including one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many communication (Gnach et al., 2022). Traditionally, it is categorized into two primary modes: synchronous CMC (SCMC) and asynchronous CMC (ACMC) (Sun, 2024). Additionally, CMC can be classified as text-based or audio/video-based, although text-based CMC remains the most widely used in educational settings despite advances in multimedia technologies (Li and Zhang, 2023). However, while CMC offers these general benefits, the extent to which it specifically supports writing development remains underexplored. This raises this question for the present study: how can CMC environments, particularly online discussion forums, be designed to enhance learners ‘written expression rather than merely facilitating general communication?

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, where learners often lack exposure to authentic English-speaking environments, CMC plays a crucial role in facilitating meaningful communication and providing access to real-world language use (Li and Zhang, 2023). Research consistently demonstrates that CMC supports second language acquisition (SLA) by promoting both input and output two essential components of language development. Compared to traditional classroom interaction, CMC environments often increase learner participation, reduce anxiety, empower shy students, and foster a more student centered learning atmosphere (Li and Zhang, 2023).

Importantly, studies indicate that integrating CMC with explicit instruction produces stronger learning outcomes than CMC interaction alone. When pedagogically guided, CMC enhances learners’ pragmatic competence, autonomy, motivation, intercultural awareness, lexical diversity, and overall communicative competence. By bridging classroom instruction with authentic communication opportunities, CMC offers

an effective, learner-centered approach to language development in EFL settings (Ajabshir, 2019; Lin, 2015).

1.2.1. Synchronous and Asynchronous Modes of CMC

Computer Mediated Communication (CMC)can be divided into synchronous and asynchronous modes, each providing different advantages in language learning contexts (Ajabshir,2019, 2019; Ziegler, 2016). As shown in Figure 1.1, CMC is placed at the center as a general concept that includes multiple modalities and interactional aspects. The figure shows that CMC is naturally multimodal, combining aural, textual, and visual channels of communication. These modalities come together within the CMC environment, allowing learners to communicate through written messages, audio interaction, visual elements, or a mix of these forms.

At the same time, the figure presents the time related aspect of CMC by distinguishing between synchronous and asynchronous communication. Synchronous CMC involves real time interaction, where participants communicate at the same time, while asynchronous CMC allows delayed responses, giving learners time to reflect and revise. By clearly connecting multimodality (aural, textual, visual) with time modes (synchronous and asynchronous), Figure 1.1 shows that CMC is not restricted to one format but works as a flexible and dynamic communication system (Berestok, 2021; Shahabadi and Uplane, 2015).

Thus, the figure supports the idea that CMC works through two connected dimensions) mode of delivery (aural, textual, visual) and (2) timing of interaction (synchronous vs. asynchronous). This two- part classification highlights the teaching flexibility of CMC in language learning environments, where different combinations of modalities and timing can be chosen based on instructional goals (Bao, 2024). These features are especially important for writing development. Asynchronous CMC, in particular, allows learners to plan, revise, and improve their written work key processes in academic writing. This study therefore focuses on asynchronous discussion forums as a useful tool for developing EFL writing skills.

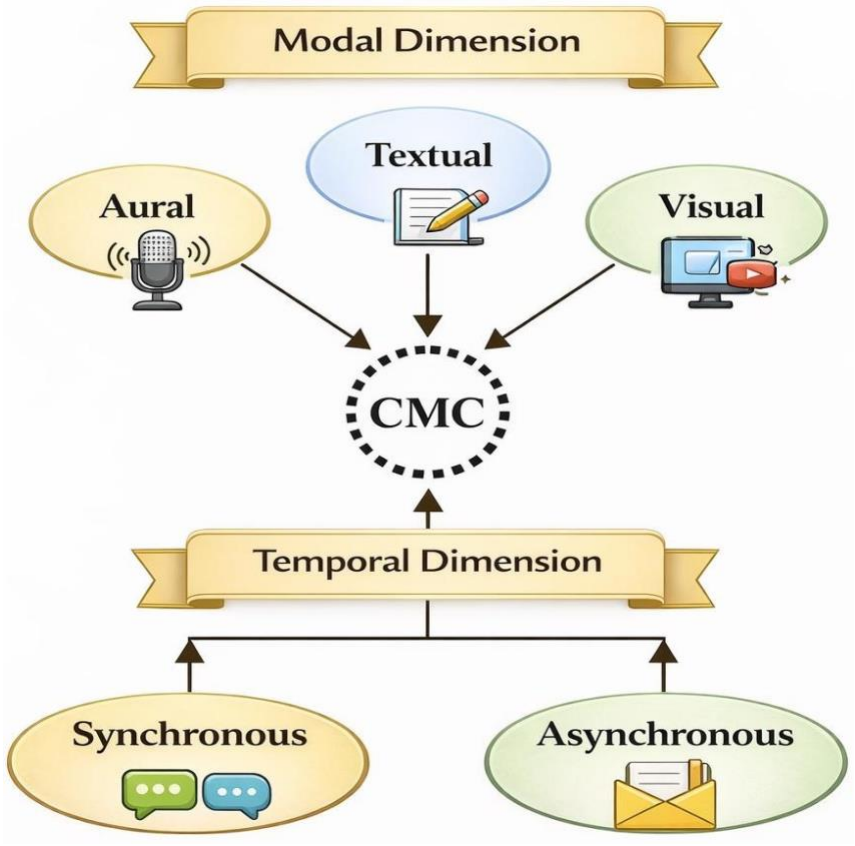

Figure 1.1. Modes of CMC

1.2.1.1. Synchronous Communication (SCMC)

Synchronous CMC refers to real-time interaction in which participants exchange messages immediately through text-based chat, instant messaging applications (e.g., WhatsApp, WeChat, Facebook Messenger), or video conferencing platforms (Chew and Ng, 2021; Namaziandost et al., 2022). This mode resembles face-to-face (F2F) communication in its spontaneity and interactional flow, fostering a strong sense of social presence (Chew and Ng, 2021).

SCMC is particularly effective for discussion-based tasks, debate, brainstorming, and collaborative meaning-making (Sameshima and Orasi, 2022).It supports discourse functions and negotiation strategies similar to those found in F2F interaction, thereby promoting engagement and fluency development (Ribeiro and Eslami, 2025).An important pedagogical advantage of text-based SCMC is that written interaction is persistent and archivable, allowing instructors to review discussions and provide corrective feedback to support language development (Mohamadi Zenouzagh, 2022; Ribeiro and Eslami, 2025).

However, synchronous communication also presents challenges, including managing message flow, maintaining coherence, coordinating participation across time zones, and ensuring adequate technological infrastructure (Gulzar et al., 2022). Furthermore, real-time chat is rarely completely synchronous due to variables such as internet speed and typing pace (Zhang et al., 2024).

While some studies report no significant differences in learning outcomes between synchronous and asynchronous modes (Hung et al., 2024;Zeng and Luo, 2024),others suggest that synchronous communication enhances collaborative understanding and content learning when supported by appropriate teaching presence (Zhong et al., 2022).This suggests that while synchronous communication

may benefit fluency and interactional competence, its contribution to written accuracy and complexity may be limited compared to asynchronous modes. Nevertheless, for writing development, the asynchronous nature of discussion forums may be more appropriate

1.2.1.2. Asynchronous Communication (ACMC)

Asynchronous CMC involves time-delayed interaction, allowing participants to respond at their convenience rather than in real time (Чекштуріна et al., 2025). Common platforms include email, discussion forums, blogs, bulletin board systems, and web-based learning environments.
ACMC provides learners with extended time to read, reflect, plan, revise, and edit their responses, which enhances accuracy, critical thinking, and written expression (Varkey et al., 2023).It has been widely used in collaborative writing and brainstorming activities, fostering deeper cognitive processing and thoughtful participation (DiPasquale and Hunter, 2022).Threaded discussions, in particular, promote extended time -on-task and allow all learners to contribute meaningfully(Liu et al., 2025).
Asynchronous learning aligns closely with constructivist approaches, where instructors act as facilitators rather than sole knowledge providers (Mansour, 2024a). Effective ACMC environments require active teaching presence to maintain cohesion and guide interaction (Rockinson-Szapkiw and Wendt, 2015). Student moderators may also share instructional responsibilities, enhancing collaboration within the learning community (Ahlf and McNeil, 2023).

Additionally, ACMC can minimize undesirable classroom behaviors and support diverse learning styles (Varkey et al., 2023). Its reflective nature makes it particularly suitable for deeper conceptual discussions and product-oriented tasks.

1.2.2. Beyond the Binary Classification of CMC

Although CMC is commonly divided into synchronous and asynchronous modes, this classification is not absolute. Many modern platforms combine features of both modes (Chew and Ng, 2021). For example, blogs and wikis can be used either synchronously or asynchronously depending on users' objectives. Similarly, messaging applications such as Skype, MSN Messenger, Yahoo Messenger, and Google Talk integrate text, audio, and video functions, rendering strict modality classifications less meaningful.

Historically, CMC has evolved from first-generation tools such as email and chat to second -generation platforms like wikis and blogs, and later to podcasting, gaming, and multimodal environments (Vandergriff, 2016). This evolution has led to increasingly hybrid forms of communication.

Another approach to categorization considers the affordances of CMC modes, including temporal, social psychological, linguistic material, and individual dimensions (Herring, 2019). Technology influences not only language choice but also message types, social relationships, psychological pressures, and tool selection. Figure 1.2 further demonstrates how these dimensions intersect, emphasizing that CMC cannot be understood through a single classification framework.

From a Sociocultural perspective, CMC is better understood as multimodal and genre-based rather than as a single uniform category (Antoniadis, 2015; Zollinger, 2021). Kern (2006) conceptualized CMC along a continuum from product-oriented to process -oriented communication. product -oriented communication involves carefully composed messages aimed at information exchange, whereas process-oriented communication features spontaneous, fragmented, and socially driven interaction (Özgür Küfi, 2022). As depicted in Figure 1.2, this continuum highlights the dynamic and flexible nature of CMC, where different communication practices coexist depending on context and learning objectives.

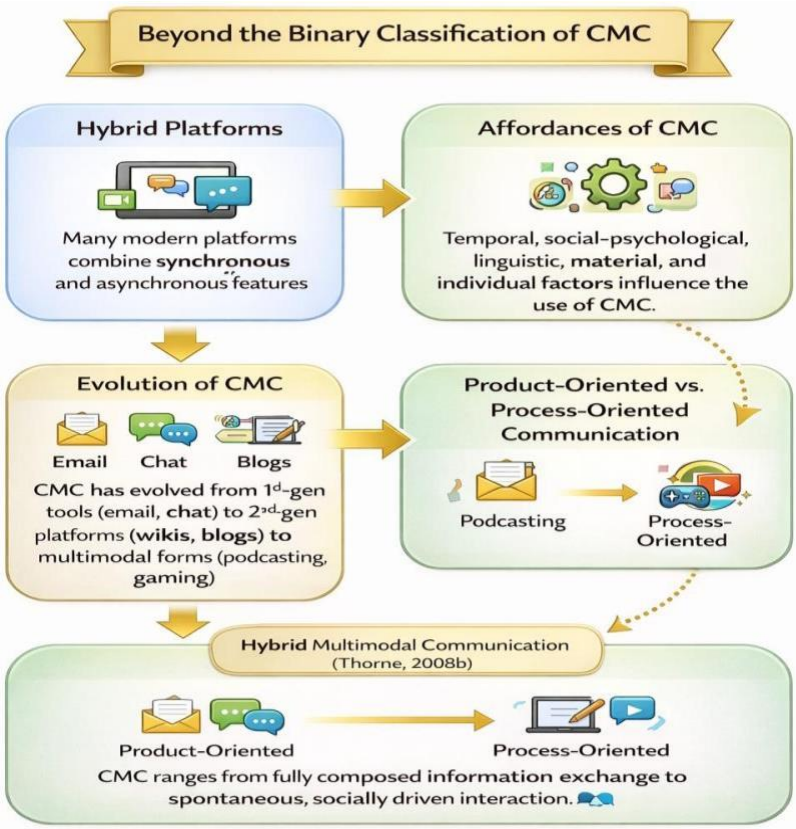

Figure 1.2. The Evolution and Multimodal Nature of Computer-Mediated Communication

1.2.3. Complementarity of SCMC and ACMC

Rather than viewing synchronous and asynchronous communication as competing modes, research suggests they are complementary (Madden et al., 2017). Synchronous discussions are particularly effective for brainstorming, rapid idea exchange, and social bonding, while asynchronous exchanges allow deeper reflection and more considered responses (Peterson et al., 2018).

A combination of synchronous (process-oriented) and asynchronous (product-oriented) CMC appears most effective for promoting collaborative learning and meaningful engagement in SLA. The selection of a particular mode depends largely on pedagogical objectives, institutional context, cultural and sociopsychological factors, temporal constraints, material conditions, and individual preferences (Ajabshir, 2019; Steinberger, 2017). Figure 1.3 further highlights how these factors influence the choice and integration of communication modes within educational settings.

Ultimately, pedagogical goals should guide decisions regarding the choice of communication medium. When strategically integrated, both SCMC and ACMC provide powerful opportunities for authentic interaction, collaborative learning, and language development in EFL contexts.

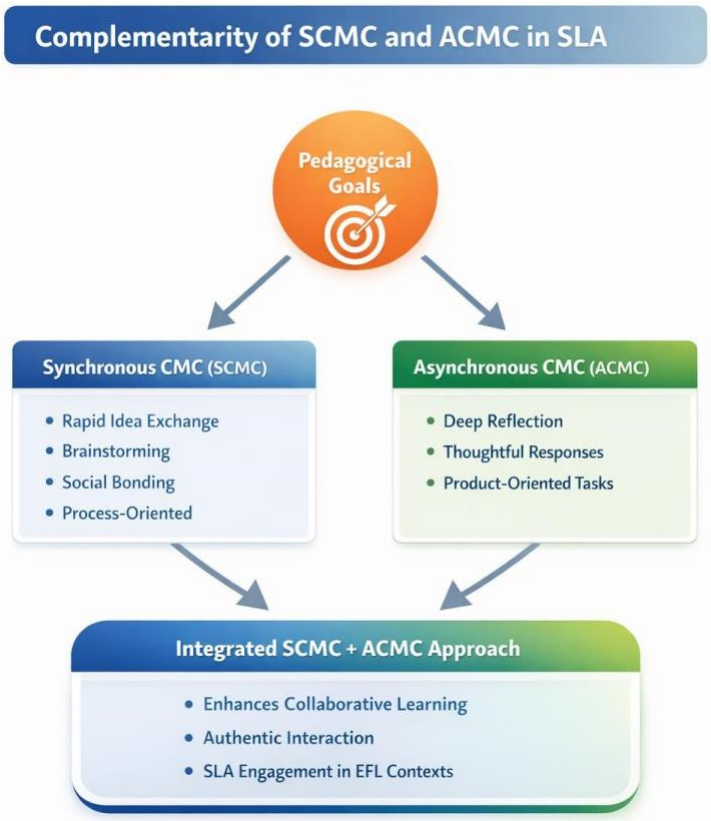

Figure 1.3. Complementarity of Synchronous and Asynchronous CMC in Supporting SLA

1.2.3. Pedagogical Benefits of CMC in Language Learning

Computer -Mediated Communication (CMC) offers significant pedagogical benefits in educational contexts. Both synchronous (SCMC)and Asynchronous (A CMC) modes support diverse learning activities such as discussions, role-play, collaborative tasks, and reflective exercises (Nguyen, 2008). Research shows that CMC enhances learners' motivation, promotes active and reflective learning, fosters learner autonomy, and supports collaborative knowledge construction across disciplines.

From a Sociocultural Theory (SCT) perspective, language learning and social interaction are inseparable (Lantolf and Xi, 2023). Drawing on Lev Vygotsky's framework, CMC functions as a mediational tool that supports the development of higher cognitive processes through interaction with others and the use of psychological tools. It enables learners to construct knowledge collaboratively, interact with more proficient speakers, and develop greater mastery through guided participation (Fadeev, 2019; Kozulin, 2003).

Studies by researchers such as Darhower and Kitade highlight CMC as part of a "tool kit" that facilitates social, cognitive, and affective development in second language learning. Additionally, CMC promotes reflective thinking, autonomy, and access to diverse perspectives in authentic learning environments. Overall, CMC is a dynamic and adaptable pedagogical tool that enhances socialization collaboration, and cognitive development in language educational (Darhower, 2002).

1.2.4. Pedagogical Features of CMC (Summary)

The pedagogical features of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) align closely with Sociocultural Theory (SCT) and are interconnected in a cause–effect relationship (Figure 1.4). The main features include motivation, active learning, reflective learning, learner autonomy, and collaborative learning.

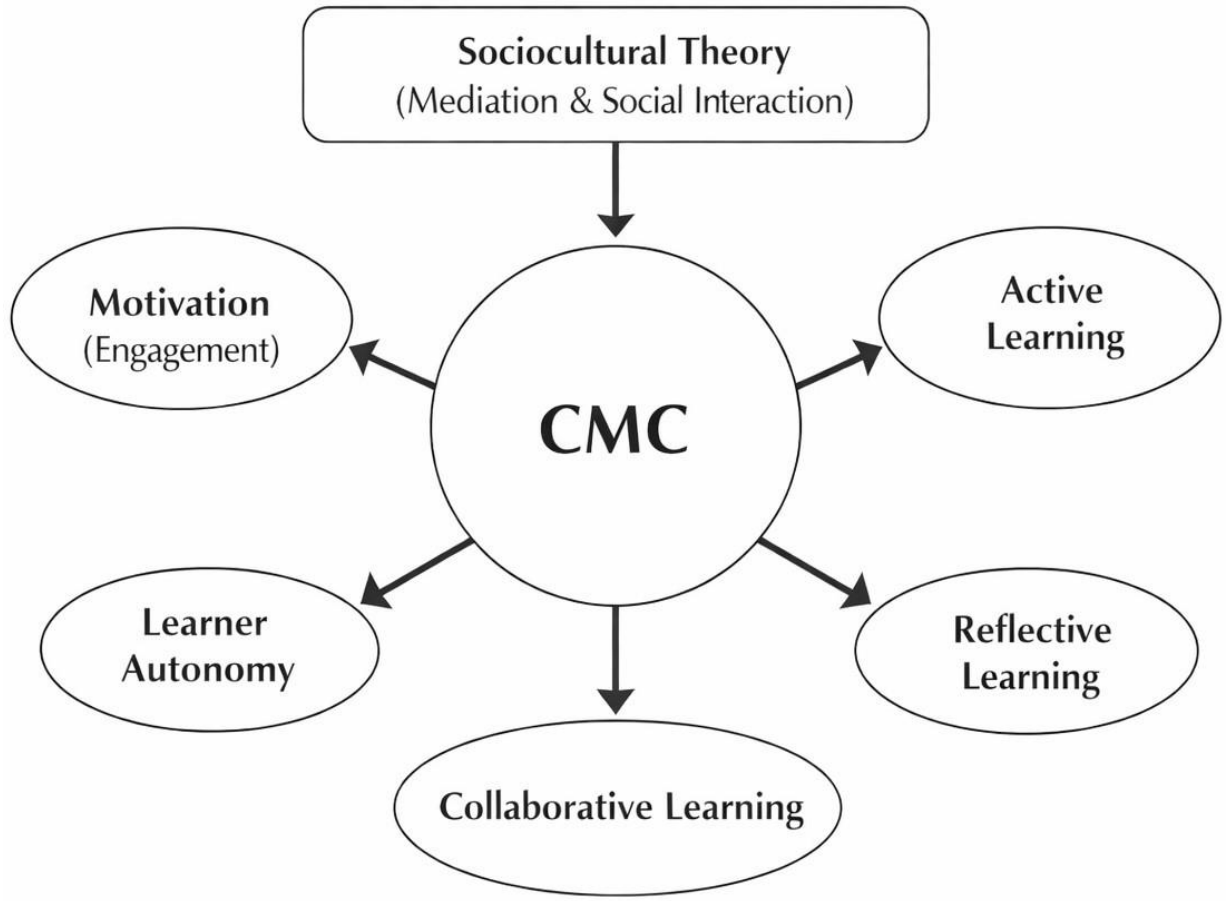

Figure 1.4. Pedagogical Features of CMC within an SCT Framework

1.2.4.1. Motivation

Research shows that learners often demonstrate higher motivation in CMC environments then in face-two-face settings (Johnson et al.,2000). Authentic interaction with real and international audience increases engagement, responsibility, and participation. The interactive and novel nature of CMC reduce anxiety and encourages greater written production and active involvement (Hussin et al , 2015).

1.2.4.2. Active Learning

CMC promotes learner-centred environments where students actively explore and manipulate information. Online platforms facilitate both linguistic and cognitive skill development (Pysarchyk, 2024). However, successful implementation depends on clear pedagogical objectives and appropriate technological tools.

1.2.4.3. Reflective Learning

Especially in Asynchronous environments, CMC allows learners more time to reflect, revise, and evaluate contributions. This supports deeper cognitive processing and metalinguistic awareness. Tools such as blogs and wikis further enhance reflective and creative learning practices (Chou, 2001).

1.2.4.4. Learner Autonomy

CMC shifts responsibility from teachers to learners by providing access to digital resources and learning tools. Students gain greater control over their learning process, while teachers adopt the role of facilitators rather than sole knowledge providers (Tolmie and Boyle, 2000).

1.2.4.5. Collaborative Learning

Motivation, reflection, participation, and autonomy collectively foster collaborative learning. CMC supports equal participation, many-to-many communication, and thoughtful interaction across time and distance, enhancing collaborative knowledge construction (Lazou and Tsinakos, 2022).

1.3. Online Discussion Forums as Pedagogical Tools

1.3.1. Definition and Characteristics

Online discussion forums are asynchronous Computer -Mediated Communication (CMC) environments that enable learners to post, read, and respond to messages within a structured digital platform (Lazou and Tsinakos, 2022). Unlike synchronous tools, forums allow delayed interaction, giving learners time to reflect, compose, and revise their contributions. They are commonly integrated into Learning Management Systems (LMS)such as Blackboard and Moodle (Almukhaylid, 2017). As illustrated in Figure 1.5, online discussion forums function as structured, asynchronous environments that support written interaction over time.

Pedagogically, discussion forums are characterized by:

- Time-and place-independence
- Threaded, text-based interaction
- Many-to-many communication
- Permanent written records of interaction
- Opportunities for reflection and revision

According To Mark Warschauer (1997), the text-based and archived nature of CMC supports more equal participation and extended discourse. Similarly, Linda Harasim (2007) highlights that online forums create a new domain of collaborative knowledge building through sustained interaction (Harasim, 2018).

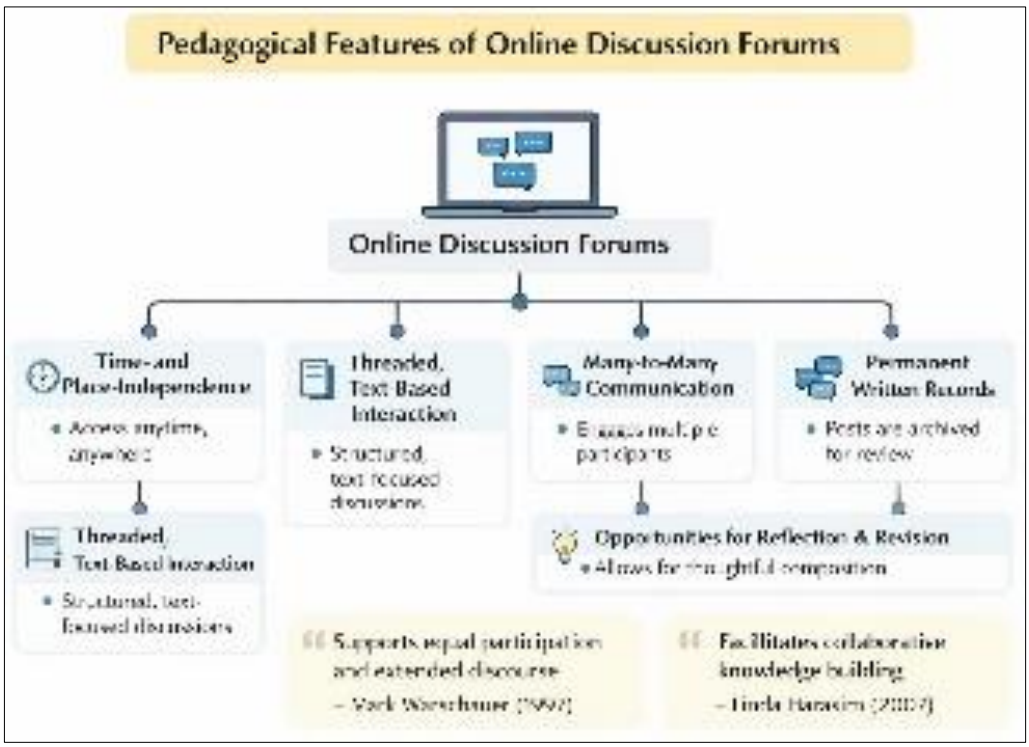

Figure 1.5. Pedagogical Features of Online Discussion Forums

2.3.2. Theoretical Foundations

1.3.2.1. Behaviourism and Cognitivism

From a behaviourist perspective, online forums can reinforce learning utilizing stimulus-reaction chains, teacher or peer feedback, and multiple rounds of practice. Participation, teacher feedback, and peer correction function as reinforcement mechanisms (Susetyarini et al., 2024). However, behaviourism on its own does not offer an explanation for the elaborate cognitive activities that characterize the evolution of writing skills such as strategizing content, organizing thoughts logically, and refining drafts.

Cognitivism, influenced by scholars such as Jean Piaget, emphasizes mental processing, schema development, and information organization (Mutharasi, 2025). Forums encourage deeper thinking by allowing students to mentally process content, verbalize their concepts, and rearrange their existing knowledge structures through interactive writing activities (Maringanti and Sahu, 2024). Nevertheless, cognitivism has been criticised for underestimating the social and contextual dimensions of writing (Prior, 2006). This limitation naturally transitions us to the subsequent perspective within learning theory.

1.3.2.2. Constructivism and Social Constructivism

Constructivist theory views learning as an active process of meaning-making. Social constructivism broadens this view by underscoring the importance of communicative exchange, as central to knowledge construction. Online platforms are well suited to this approach since students co-create knowledge through written conversation with one another (Najjemba, 2021). The social constructivist view, rooted in the work of Lev Vygotsky (1978), stresses that learning occurs through social interaction and through forms of communication that are facilitated by tools or intermediaries. Online platforms create a virtual setting that supports both the mediation of communication and the collaborative negotiation of meaning (Tilak and Glassman, 2022; Woo and Reeves, 2007). For writing development, the constructivist perspective suggests that learners develop written expression not by memorising rules but by involving

themselves in authentic written interactions where their audience consists of real individuals, not just an impersonal evaluator .When students write forum posts that peers will read and respond to, they become aware of audience expectations a crucial component of proficient written expression.

1.3.2.3. Sociocultural Theory and Mediation

Within Sociocultural Theory (SCT), language is both a tool for communication and as a cognitive mediator that connects social interaction to individual understanding. Forums function as mediational resources that assist in the development of sophisticated mental activities through interaction. Learners move from reliance on assistance from others toward autonomous self-direction through scaffolded exchanges (Alkhudiry, 2022). As argued by James P. Lantolf, mediation through language and tools is essential for progress in learning and cognitive grow. Within these digital environments, mediation manifests through peer review, teacher-led scaffolding and collaborative problem-solving (Lantolf, 2000).The Zone of Proximal Development, which describes the gap separating what a learner does without aid from what they do with assistance is particularly relevant .As students engage in forum discussions, they can receive guided support from classmates who possess stronger writing abilities or directly from the teacher, enabling them to produce written language beyond their current independent ability.

The present research adopts sociocultural theory as its primary theoretical framework because it explains how social interaction (forum discussions) leads to cognitive development (improved writing skills). However, SCT does not provide detailed guidance on measuring writing improvement. Therefore, this study also draws on cognitive perspectives (Flower & Hayes) to analyse writing processes and on genre theory to analyse written products.

1.3.2.4. Interaction and Collaborative Learning

Interactionist perspectives in Second Language Acquisition emphasize negotiation of meaning as essential for language development. Michael Long's Interaction Hypothesis suggests that modified interaction promotes acquisition (Long, 1980).

Online discussion forums foster collaborative learning by:

- Encouraging equal participation
- Supporting thoughtful, composed responses
- Enabling extended negotiation of meaning
- Allowing exposure to diverse perspectives

Research indicates that many-to-many interaction enhances collective knowledge construction and critical thinking (Beckmann and Weber, 2016). However, not all interaction is equally beneficial. This raises a question: what types of forum interaction most effectively promote writing development? Research suggests that task type matters–open–ended questions that require extended written responses produce more negotiation of meaning than simple agreement posts (Jose & Abidin, 2016).

1.3.2.5. Synthesis of Theoretical Perspectives

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives suggest that online discussion forums are best understood through a sociocultural and constructivist lens. While behaviourism explains basic reinforcement through feedback, and cognitivism accounts for mental processing and schema development, neither fully captures the collaborative and interactive nature of forum-based learning. The sociocultural framework, with its

emphasis on mediation, scaffolding, and the ZPD, provides the most comprehensive explanation for how learners develop writing skills through sustained online interaction.

This study therefore adopts sociocultural theory as its primary theoretical framework, while drawing on:

- Cognitivism to understand the mental processes of planning, translating, and reviewing
- Constructivism to understand how learners actively co-construct knowledge
- Genre theory to understand how learners adapt writing to different communicative purposes

This integrated framework acknowledges that writing development through forums is simultaneously a cognitive, social, and linguistic process.

1.3.3. Advantages in EFL Contexts

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings, online forums provide several advantages (Ibrahim et al., 2018; Saeed, 2013)

a. Increased participation: Shy or anxious learners feel more comfortable contributing in writing
b. Reduced anxiety: The absence of immediate face -to -face pressure lowers effective barriers.
c. Improved writing skills: Regular posting enhances fluency, accuracy, and complexity.
d. Reflective learning: Asynchronous communication allows time for planning and revision.
e. Learners autonomy: Students take responsibility for research, drafting, and responding.

Studies by D. M. Chun (1994) and Mark Warschauer (1996) demonstrate that CMC environments increase language production and interactional equality (Chun, 2017).

1.3.4. Limitations and Contextual Challenges

Despite their advantages, online discussion forums present some challenges (Lampe et al, 2014; pendry and Salvatore, 2015):

- Unequal participation
- Superficial or minimal responses
- Lack of immediacy
- Technical problems
- Need for strong moderation

Without clear instructional design and scaffolding, forums may become passive spaces rather than interactive learning environment. As Gilly Salmon suggests, structured facilitation is very essential for meaningful online engagement.

1.3.5. Best Practices for Effective Implementation

To maximize pedagogical effectiveness, instructors should (Little et al, 2009)

1. Provide clear objectives and assessment criteria
2. Design open-ended, critical -thinking prompts
3. Encourage peer interaction rather than teacher-dominated discussion
4. Provide timely and constructive feedback
5. Scaffold participation gradually
6. Integrate forums with broader course goals

Effective implementation combines sound pedagogy with technological affordances, ensuring that forums function as collaborative, reflective, and autonomy -supportive environments.

Section Two: Writing Skill Development Through Online Interaction

1.4. Writing in EFL Contexts

1.4.1. Definition of Writing

According to the Cognitive Process theory developed by Flower and Hayes (1981), writing is a complex thinking process with clear goals, not only a final product. This theory explains that writing includes different mental processes that writer's control and organize while they are writing (Flower & Hayes, 1981, p. 366).

The writing process has an organized structure where one process can happen inside another. It is also recursive, which means writers move back between steps. These steps include planning ideas, translating ideas into words, and reviewing or improving the text (Flower & Hayes, 1981, pp. 375 –376).

However, while this cognitive model has been highly influential, it has faced criticism for failing to give enough weight to the social and situational aspects of composing text (Prior, 2006).This leads to a crucial question that this study seeks to answer : given that writing is built on recursive cognitive steps, can online discussion forums with their asynchronous, text-based nature provide the necessary conditions for learners to engage in these cognitive operations ?The present research proposes that the built-in lag between messages on forums could in fact reinforce the cyclical character of composing by allowing learners the mental breathing room to prepare, refine, and reassess their written input before posting.

Drawing on the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), Nagao (2019) describes writing as an activity where people create meaning in a social context. From this view, writing is not only about producing correct sentences. It also requires understanding how language works in different situations (Nagao, 2019, p. 2). Two main ideas explain this view: language as functional, which means people use language in context and organize it for communication, and language as meaning making, where writers choose language forms depending on the situation (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, as cited in Nagao, 2019, p. 2).

This SFL perspective is particularly relevant to online discussion forums because when learners write posts and replies, they are not simply practicing grammar-they are engaged in generating meaning for a real audience who will read their words, offering reactions to others' contributions, and adjusting their word choices to fit the forum's social setting. Thus, SFL provides a useful lens for understanding how forum-based writing develops learners' ability to use language functionally across a range of varied communication situations.

In the same way, Bui (2021) explains that among the four language skills, " writing seems to be the most difficult because it requires a writer to master specific vocabulary knowledge, grammar, and schematic structures" (p. 1). From a functional view, language is used to achieve goals. Depending on the purpose of the text, writers choose the appropriate vocabulary and grammar to express what they want readers to do (Derewianka, 1992, as cited in Bui, 2021, p. 2). Widiati and Cahyono (2006) also explain that writing is a useful learning activity for language learners. It helps them record, understand, and reformulate knowledge... and also develop and organize their own ideas (Miller, 1998, p. 341, as cited in Widiati & Cahyono, 2006, p. 140).

1.4.2. Components of Writing

EFL writing usually includes several parts that help make writing clear and effective. Widiati and Cahyono (2006) refer to the framework of Hartfiel et al. (1985) to assess writing ability. This framework evaluates writing based on five main components (Figure 1.6):

• **Content**: the ideas and information in the text, including how clear, relevant, and detailed the ideas are (Hartfiel et al., 1985, as cited in Widiati & Cahyono, 2006, p. 145).

• **Organization**: the structure of the text and the logical order of ideas including coherence and cohesion (Hartfiel et al., 1985, as cited in Widiati & Cahyono, 2006, p. 145).

• **Vocabulary**: the variety of words and how appropriate the word choice is (Hartfiel et al., 1985, as cited in Widiati & Cahyono, 2006, p. 145).

• **Language Use**: correct grammar including sentence structure and word forms (Hartfiel et al., 1985, as cited in Widiati & Cahyono, 2006, p. 145).

• **Mechanics**: correct spelling, punctuation, and capitalization (Hartfiel et al., 1985, as cited in Widiati & Cahyono, 2006, p. 145).



Figure 1.6. Core Components of EFL Writing Based on Hartfiel et al. (1985)

However, what remains underexplored in the literature is how online discussion forums contribute to the development of each component.
For the purposes of this study, it is proposed that:

- Content may develop as learners build arguments across multiple forum posts and respond to peers' questions.
- Organisation may improve through the structured nature of threaded discussions, which require logical sequencing of ideas.

- Vocabulary may expand through exposure to peers' lexical choices and teacher feedback.
- Language use may be enhanced through noticing and error correction in forum interactions.
- Mechanics may develop through repeated practice in typing and formatting written text.

This suggests that online discussion forums have the potential to support integrated development across all five components simultaneously an area that merits empirical investigation in the Algerian EFL context.

Using Systemic Functional Linguistics, Nagao (2019) explains writing components through the concept of register which has three features connected to different language functions (p. 3). Field refers to ideational meaning or what the text talks about, and it appears through vocabulary, grammar, and tense. Tenor refers to interpersonal meaning, which shows the relationship between the writer and the reader, and it appears through mood and modality. Mode refers to textual meaning, or how the text is organized, and it appears through theme choices and cohesive devices (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, as cited in Nagao, 2019, p. 3).

Bui (2021) also explains writing components using genre theory. This theory separates two main elements which are: schematic structure, which is the organization of the text such as introduction, body, and conclusion, and lexico grammatical features, which are the language forms used in writing (p. 2). Important language elements include transitional expressions to improve cohesion and coherence, formal academic language that avoids contractions and first person pronouns, correct tense use, and an appropriate range of vocabulary (Bui, 2021, pp. 8 - 9).

For forum-based writing, both SFL and genre theory are relevant. Learners writing forum posts must consider the field (topic), tenor (relationship with readers), and mode (written, asynchronous, semi-formal). They must also recognize the genre conventions of forum posts typically shorter than academic essays but more structured than chat messages

1.4.3. Approaches to Teaching Writing

The main approaches to teaching writing are the product approach, the process approach, and the genre approach. Bui (2021) explains these three approaches and states that the genre based approach has been "implemented into teaching writing nationwide in Australia and worldwide" (p. 1).

1.4.3.1. Product Approach

According to Widiati and Cahyono (2006), the product approach sees writing as the final result of the writing activity, which is « a written text » or « a composition « This result can appear as printed texts, handwritten papers , or digital documents (p. 141).This approach focuses on grammar and discourse forms , as supported by the Audio Lingual Method (ALM) .It aims to help students produce correct sentences and texts that show their control of language structures (Miller, 1998, as cited in Widiati & Cahyono, 2006, p. 140).

Research in this approach studies the quality of writing by looking at different components of a text. It may also compare texts written in different languages, which is called contrastive thetoric, to study

« thought patterns « and discourse features such as cohesive markers and stylistic features (Kaplan, 1966, as cited in Widiati & Cahyono, 2006, p.141).

However, the product approach has been criticised for neglecting the cognitive processes involved in writing and for viewing writing as a single, one-off act instead of as an ongoing, evolving process of growth.

1.4.3.2. Process Approach

The process approach appeared as a reaction to the strong focus on the final result of writing. Flower and Hayes (1981) introduced a cognitive process theory of writing which was very different from the traditional stage model (p. 367). In this model, writing is studied through basic mental processes, such as generating ideas which are organized in a hierarchical structure.

These mental processes include planning, translating (putting ideas into the language), and reviewing, and they can happen at any moment during the writing process (Flower & Hayes, 1981, pp. 367 _ 368). The process approach sees writing as a recursive activity not a single action. Writers may repeat different stages many times from the beginning until the final text is produced (Caudery, 1995, as cited in Widiati & Cahyono, 2006, p. 141).

White and Arndt's (1991) model, as cited in Widiati and Cahyono (2006, p. 141), shows writing as a process that goes through several steps: generating ideas, focusing, structuring (prewriting), drafting, evaluating, and reviewing. Murray's (1980) diagram explains that the writing process finishes when drafting leads to a final draft which shows that the ideas have become clear (Widiati & Cahyono, 2006, p. 142).

1.4.3.3. Genre Approach

The genre based approach comes from Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), and focuses on "the rapport between text genres and their contexts"(Hyon, 1996, as cited in Bui, 2021, p. 3). Hyland (2007) explains that "the genre based approach to writing in L2 emphasizes communicative methods which is different from process pedagogies" (Bui, 2021, p. 1). This approach focuses on the communicative purpose of writing and on understanding how language is used for real purposes in specific situations.

Nagao (2019) defines genre as "types of written text that help us understand the relationship between the text's social purpose and structure which influence writers' linguistic actions" (p. 4). Martin (1984) also explains that genre is "goal oriented" and connected to social purposes (Bui, 2021, p. 2). Because of this, writing teachers should clearly explain the purpose of each genre so that EFL learners can understand the differences between different types of writing.

The genre based approach usually follows the Teaching Learning Cycle which has three stages: studying a model or "sample expert" text, writing a text together with the teacher and then writing a text independently (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993, Bui, 2021, p. 3). Hyland (2007) suggested five stages: setting the context, modeling, joint construction, independent construction, and comparing (Bui, 2021, p. 3).

1.4.3.4. Which Approach Best Aligns with Online Discussion Forums?

Now, a critical question must be addressed: which approach best aligns with online discussion forums?

The present study argues that online discussion forums appear to align most closely with the process approach because:

- Forums emphasise drafting, revision, and feedback over time
- Learners can plan, write, review, and revise their posts before posting
- The asynchronous nature supports recursive movement between stages

Nevertheless, forums also incorporate elements of genre theory because:

- Learners must adapt their writing to the conventions of the « forum post » genre
- Audience awareness (tenor) and purpose (field) shape how learners write
- Different forums may have different genre expectations

Importantly, forums are not purely product-oriented. In contrast to the product model, which prizes nothing but the completed written texts, forums emphasize the importance of written exchange over multiple posts and replies. The focus is directed towards dialogue and development, not a single final draft.

This study therefore adopts an integrated process-genre approach when examining writing development through forum participation. This choice is justified because:

- Process: Accounts for recursive nature (planning, drafting, revising, responding to feedback)
- Genre: Accounts for social and contextual dimensions (audience awareness, communicative purpose, forum conventions)
- Product: Less relevant (forums prioritize ongoing dialogue over final products)

> As Widiati and Cahyono (2006) explain that in modern teaching, especially in literacy based curricula, it is better to combine the process approach and the genre approach because the genre based approach is connected to both product and process models (p.142)

1.5. The Role of Online Discussion Forums in Writing Development

Online discussion forums are a type of asynchronous Computer Mediated Communication (CMC). They create a special environment that can help develop writing skills. Research shows that these platforms offer many benefits for the writing development of EFL learners through different ways.

However, a critical observation is necessary, much of the existing research reports positive effects of forums on writing. Nevertheless, these findings should be interpreted cautiously for several reasons. First many studies are conducted over short period of time (4_8 weeks), raising questions about long -term development. Second, most studies use small samples, limiting generalisability. Third, few studies compare forum-based writing to equivalent face-to-face writing activities, making it difficult to isolate the unique contribution of the forum medium. The present study will attempt to address these limitations

1.5.1. Writing Practice and Revision

Online discussion forums give learners many chances to practice writing and revise their work. According to Beleulmi (2023), teachers said that during the pandemic they used platforms like Google Classroom and Facebook learning groups to teach writing, share assignments, and let students send their work online. This regular use of digital platforms for writing tasks helps students improve their fluency and feel more confident when writing.

In the Algerian context a study by JERIBIAI and BAHLOUL (2020) showed that limited time for teaching writing and overcrowded classes make it difficult for teachers to evaluate students' work and give proper feedback. However, while the study suggests using the Learning Management System Google Classroom as a solution, it does not empirically demonstrate whether this platform actually improves writing quality or simply makes feedback delivery more efficient. This raises an important question: does asynchronous feedback save teacher time at the expense of depth?. This idea is similar to Beleulmi's (2023) findings, where teachers said that Google Classroom is « simpler and more convenient » than other platforms. They also described it as « very interactive for students » and « an effective social networking tool to support online teaching » (p.5). Nevertheless, one teacher reported scanning student essays and writing feedback on separate paper a process that seems neither simple nor efficient. This contradiction indicates that the effectiveness of digital feedback platforms may influenced by teachers' digital literacy and institutional support, not merely on platform features.

The asynchronous nature of discussion forums is also helpful for revision. Amirouche and Kehal (2022) explain that asynchronous feedback happens after students finish their texts. Students get comments on their submitted work and then take time to revise their drafts (p.19). This asynchronous communication allows learners to think carefully about the feedback before writing their final submission. In their experimental study, students who received asynchronous feedback improved some structural elements in their writing. For example, the use of prepositional phrases increased from 95 to 135 phrases, and the use of relative pronouns increased from 30 to 45 after teacher feedback (Amirouche & Kehal, 2022, pp. 39–40). However, this study did not report whether these gains were maintained over time or transferred to

other writing tasks. This suggests that while short-term gains are observable, long-term writing development remains unconfirmed.

Synchronous feedback during the writing process also helps revision because students receive feedback immediately. Amirouche and Kehal (2022) found that students who received synchronous feedback while writing produced eight more complex sentences after receiving feedback and the number of gerund phrases almost doubled, from 16 to 31 (pp. 31–35). This shows that both types of online feedback support writing practice and revision but in different ways. Nevertheless, the study did not compare the two conditions directly, making it difficult to determine which is more effective for writing development.

The study by Jose and Abidin (2016) also shows the importance of regular writing practice through forums. Their quasi experimental study found that the experimental group that participated in synchronous forum discussions improved their writing complexity. The mean syntactic complexity increased from 0.66 to 0.70 (Jose & Abidin, 2016, p.99). However, the effect size was small, and the study did not include a delayed post-test to measure retention. This raises questions about whether forum-based writing practice produces durable improvements in writing complexity.

For the present study, these findings imply that while forums offer theoretical advantages for writing practice and revision, their actual impact may vary according to several factors such as class size, teacher training, and technological infrastructure. This study will examine how Algerian EFL learners engage with revision in forum environments.

1.5.2. Interaction and Feedback

Online discussion for Online discussion forums help create different types of interaction and feedback that are important for developing writing skills.

Amirouche and Kehal (2022) explain two main types of online feedback which are: synchronous and asynchronous. Synchronous feedback happens "while students are in the process of composing their texts", which allows direct and immediate interaction between the teacher and the learner (Shintani & Aubrey, 2016, as cited in Amirouche & Kehal, 2022, p.20). Asynchronous feedback happens after students finish writing their texts. In this case, teachers review the work and send feedback through email or other online platforms (p.19). This idea is similar to Jose and Abidin's (2016) explanation of synchronous learning (real time forum discussions) and asynchronous learning (blog writing) (p.84). **Teacher Feedback:** Both studies show that teacher feedback is very important in online learning environments. Amirouche and Kehal (2022) found that students in both synchronous and asynchronous situations improved their writing after receiving teacher feedback, especially in using more complex structures. Their teacher questionnaire showed that 87% of teachers had experience with online teaching. They used

different platforms such as Google Classroom, Facebook learning groups, Messenger, email, and Zoom. However, this finding is descriptive rather than analytical it does not explain whether certain platforms were more effective than others for writing feedback. This raises a question for future research: does the choice of platform influence the quality or uptake of feedback?

The study by Hyland and Hyland (2019) explains more about how teachers give feedback. Their analysis of almost 500 feedback comments showed that 44% were praise, 31% were criticism, and 25% were suggestions. Teachers also used different strategies to make criticism softer. These included paired comments (praise with criticism) at 43.8%, hedged comments at 37.9%, personal attribution at 11.8%, and questions at 6.5% (Hyland & Hyland, 2019, pp. 4–6). This shows that teachers understand the social side of feedback and try to keep a positive relationship with students while giving useful criticism. However, Hyland and Hyland's study did not examine how students actually used or ignored different types of feedback. This suggests that our understanding of feedback effectiveness remains incomplete without investigating the learner's role in receiving, interpreting, and applying comments. In the context of the present study, these limitations indicate that simply measuring the quantity or type of feedback is insufficient. What matters is whether learners engage with feedback and whether that engagement translates into improved writing.

Beleulmi (2023) also explains that teacher feedback in online learning helps students improve both their writing and their digital skills. Teachers reported that ICT tools helped them "provide useful and interesting input materials" and share "a big number of texts and activities" during the pandemic (p.6). However, giving detailed feedback online was sometimes difficult. One teacher explained: "I had to scan students sent pictures of their essays and write my feedback and all the comments on a separate paper and send them back on their emails or google classroom" (Beleulmi, 2023, p.7). This practical constraint has remained adequately addressed in the literature and suggests that the expected effectiveness of digital feedback may not materialize in under-resourced contexts. Similarly, JERIBIAI and BAHLOUL (2020) reported that teachers said overcrowded classes and limited time for teaching writing (only one and a half hours per week) were the main problems that prevented them from giving effective feedback (p.395).

Peer Interaction: Online forums also support peer interaction and collaborative learning. Beleulmi (2023) explains that teachers who used Facebook learning groups saw students interacting with their classmates and waiting for feedback and comments from both teachers and peers (p.5). This interaction between students helps create a supportive learning community where learners can learn from each other's writing.

The qualitative analysis in Jose and Abidin's (2016) interviews showed that learner to learner interaction was the main feature of discussion forums. This interaction helped students share ideas with respect. Students said things like: "ask my friends about.…", "when we discuss about…", and "we exchange ideas, information; take and we give at the same time" (Jose & Abidin, 2016, pp.94–95). This is similar to what Bouzerabi et al. (2019) explained about discussions helping learners "negotiate meaning among their peers" and allowing them to "develop your point of view and having new information"(pp.41–42). In writing forums, the same process happens when students read and reply to each other's posts, which helps them discuss meaning and develop their ideas. However, a critical observation is needed here. While these qualitative comments are positive, they do not demonstrate that peer interaction leads to measurable writing improvement. This raises a question: does peer interaction in forums produce better writing outcomes than individual writing practice? The present study will attempt to answer this question empirically.

1.5.3. Development of Critical Thinking

Online discussion forums help students develop critical thinking skills which are important for academic writing. Bouzerabi et al. (2019) found that students who took part in discussions noticed improvement in their « critical thinking skills » and also in their oral proficiency (p.40). The participants explained that discussion is important for « improving student's critical thinking » and helps « ease the process of understanding » by removing unclear ideas and giving new information (pp.41–42).

In writing forums, critical thinking grows when students examine their classmates' arguments, look at different points of view, and prepare their own answers. Jose and Abidin (2016) found that students in forum discussions studied their peers' ideas and compared them with their own ideas. One student said: « I compare my point with another people; that's good for me and good for them » (p.95). Amirouche and Kehal (2022) explain that when students receive feedback and use it in their writing, they need to think carefully about their own work and make good decisions about revision. The improvement in complex sentence structures and different clause types in their study (pp.31–41) shows deeper thinking and stronger critical engagement with writing. Nevertheless, the relationship between forum participation and critical thinking development has not been directly measured in most studies. This raises a methodological concern: is the claimed improvement in critical thinking an actual outcome, or do learners simply perceive improvement because they enjoy forum activities? The present study will include measures of critical thinking in writing to address this question.

1.5.4. Motivation and Anxiety Reduction

Online discussion forums can increase motivation and reduce writing anxiety among EFL learners. Bouzerabi et al. (2019) found that students first felt "fears, excitement and hesitation" when they took part in discussions, but later they became “more confident, excited, and motivated” (p.39). The participants said that discussion helped them “overcome their fears” and "reinforced her esteem of her answers and opinions"(p.40). One student described discussion as "a developmental step", and explained that although she felt anxious at first, she later became "motivated and proud of herself" (p.39).

The qualitative analysis by Jose and Abidin (2016) showed seven main themes about students’ experience with forums. The most important one was Feeling which included happiness, gratefulness, comfort, and pleasure. For example, one student said: "I feel very happy…" Another said: "I am grateful to the persons who gave us the chance to use these types of writing", and a third student said: "when you ask me one question ‘what’s your favorite days in a week?’ I said Wednesday because I have online discussion" (Jose & Abidin, 2016, p.94). This shows the strong motivational effect of online discussions.

These results are similar to Beleulmi’s (2023) observation that ICTs increased students’ participation and enthusiasm. Teachers in their study said that online platforms helped "students write on Microsoft Word and type their essays; by this they acquired a skill", and that "students started to write formal correct emails" (p.6). Learning these digital literacy skills helps students feel more confident in their writing abilities.

The asynchronous nature of discussion forums is especially useful for anxious learners. As explained in the theoretical framework, asynchronous communication gives students time to think, write, and revise their responses without the pressure of answering immediately. Bouzerabi et al. (2019) found that students who were first "scared", "anxious", “nervous", and “shy” slowly became more confident through regular participation in discussions (p.39). However, a cautionary note is warranted. While these motivational effects are well-documented in qualitative research, limited scholarly attention has been given to whether motivational rises bring about measurable advances in writing proficiency. It is possible that learners enjoy forums and feel less anxious, but their writing quality remains unchanged despite these positive feelings. This study will examine the relationship between motivational changes and observable advances in writing performance.

1.5.5. Linguistic Development

Online discussion forums help develop different parts of language in writing. Amirouche and Kehal (2022) give clear evidence that online feedback improved structural complexity in students’ writing.

Syntactic Complexity:

Students who received synchronous feedback wrote eight more complex sentences after getting feedback, while students who received asynchronous feedback kept almost the same level of complex sentence use (pp.31, 36). The number of dependent clauses also increased in both groups. Students with synchronous feedback added seven more dependent clauses, and students with asynchronous feedback added four more (pp.32, 37). The study by Jose and Abidin (2016) also found a small improvement in the mean syntactic complexity of the group using synchronous forums compared with the asynchronous blog group (0.70 vs. 0.66) (Jose & Abidin, 2016, p.97).

Grammatical Structures:

Both groups in Amirouche and Kehal's (2022) study improved in some grammatical structures:

- Prepositional phrases increased a lot in both conditions (synchronous: from 63 to 157; asynchronous: from 95 to 135) (pp.35, 40).
- Relative pronouns increased by fifteen in each group (pp.34, 39).
- Gerund phrases almost doubled in the synchronous feedback group (from 16 to 31) (p.34).
- Relative conjunctions also increased clearly in both groups (pp.36, 41).

Lexical Diversity and Density:

Jose and Abidin (2016) found no statistically significant difference between the two groups in lexical diversity and lexical density in the post-test. The mean lexical diversity was 4.17 for the forum group and 4.26 for the blog group, while lexical density was 0.20 for both groups (Jose & Abidin, 2016, pp.96–97). This suggests that both types of online written interaction, synchronous and asynchronous, help in a similar way to develop these parts of vocabulary.

Vocabulary Development:

Beleulmi (2023) explains that ICTs helped teachers provide "useful and interesting input materials" and share "a big number of texts and activities" (p. 6). This contact with different texts helps students learn more vocabulary. Bouzerabi et al. (2019) found that students saw « lack of vocabulary « as a major problem in speaking (p. 46). This suggests that written forums give students useful chances to improve vocabulary by reading their classmates' posts and teacher feedback.

Academic Writing Conventions:

Students in Amirouche and Kehal's (2022) study also showed better understanding of academic writing rules. They reduced the use of fragments and run-on sentences, and this appeared in the higher number of

T-units (pp.32, 37). Beleulmi (2023) also notes that students learned to write "formal correct emails" through online practice (p. 6).

So, the combination of writing practice, feedback, and contact with different language input in online discussion forums helps support full linguistic development in many parts of writing ability.

1.6. Empirical Studies on Online Discussion Forums and EFL Writing Development

1.6.1. Overview of Previous Research

A number of empirical studies have examined how online discussion forums and related technologies help improve writing skills. This section presents the main findings of this research.

Studies on Feedback effectiveness

In the Algerian context, Amirouche and Kehal (2022) used a quasi experimental design with fourteen third year English students from the University of Jijel to study how synchronous and asynchronous online teacher feedback can improve structural complexity in academic writing. The study divided the students into two groups. One group received synchronous feedback while writing, and the other group received asynchronous feedback after submitting their essays. When the researchers compared the texts written before feedback and after feedback, they found that both groups improved in several areas of structural complexity. These improvements included more use of complex sentences, dependent clauses, prepositional phrases, relative pronouns, gerund phrases, and relative conjunctions (pp.31–41). However, the study had a very small sample size (N=14), which raises questions about the generalisability of its findings. Furthermore, the study did not include a delayed post-test to measure whether improvements were maintained over time. This suggests that while short-term gains are observable, long-term writing development through online feedback remains unconfirmed. The study also included a questionnaire for eight teachers of Written Expression. The results showed that although teachers believed synchronous feedback could lead to better improvement because it is more interactive, they preferred asynchronous feedback because it required less time and effort (pp.53–54). This contradiction is important: what teachers prefer (efficiency) may differ from what is pedagogically optimal (interactivity).

In Oman, Jose and Abidin (2016) carried out a quasi experimental study with 56 post foundation learners. The aim was to examine how synchronous forum discussions could affect EFL writing performance, especially linguistic complexity. The quantitative analysis did not find statistically significant differences between the students in the synchronous forum group and those in the asynchronous blog group in the three measures: lexical diversity, lexical density, and syntactic complexity. However, the qualitative analysis of interviews showed very positive views about forum participation. Students said that they felt happy and comfortable, and that they improved in interaction skills, writing ability, and self-directed learning (Jose & Abidin, 2016, pp.94–98).

Comparing Amirouche and Kehal (2022) with Jose and Abidin (2016): Both studies examined online feedback, but they reached different conclusions about effectiveness. The study by Amirouche and Kehal revealed improvements in structural sophistication, while Jose and Abidin reported no statistically significant variations. This contradiction could be understood by looking at variations in the measurement methods, the periods of implementation or the specific feedback types examined. This raises a question: under what conditions do online discussion boards lead to measurable improvements in composing skills?.

In New Zealand, Hyland and Hyland (2019) carried out a qualitative study with six ESL learners. The aim of the research was to examine how interpersonal factors influence both the way teachers give written feedback and the way students receive it. The study analyzed nearly 500 feedback points and found that teachers often used mitigation strategies. They softened 76% of their criticisms and 64% of their suggestions, which reduced the harsh effect of comments and helped create positive interaction with learners. The study also showed that teachers adapted their feedback to the individual needs, personality, and learning situation of each student (Hyland & Hyland, 2019, pp.4_6).

This finding complements the quantitative studies by showing how teachers deliver feedback, not just whether it is effective. However, Hyland and Hyland's study did not examine how students actually used or ignored different types of feedback. This suggests that our understanding of feedback effectiveness remains incomplete without investigating the learner's role in receiving, interpreting, and applying comments

At El Oued University in Algeria, JERIBIAI and BAHLOUL (2020) conducted a qualitative study using semi structured interviews with six teachers of English writing. The aim was to identify the difficulties of teaching writing and to explore possible solutions. The results showed that the main problems were not enough time for teaching writing and very large classes. These problems made it difficult for teachers to provide suitable feedback. To solve these problems the study suggested using Google Classroom as an additional tool for giving electronic feedback and saving time and effort (JERIBIAI & BAHLOUL, 2020, pp.395–396). However, this study does not empirically demonstrate whether Google Classroom actually improves writing quality or simply makes feedback delivery more efficient. This raises a methodological concern: is the suggested solution based on evidence or on teacher perception of convenience?

At Frères Mentouri University, Constantine 1, Beleulmi (2023) used a focus group interview with six Written Expression teachers to study their views on using ICT tools for online writing teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study showed that teachers used many online tools, such as Google Classroom, Facebook learning groups, Messenger, email, and Zoom, to teach writing and provide feedback. Teachers said that ICTs increased student engagement and collaborative work, made it easier to share materials, and encouraged feedback between teachers and peers. However, teachers' satisfaction was only moderate because they faced some problems, such as weak internet connection, lack of student training, and difficulties in giving effective feedback and assessment (pp.5–7). The study stressed the importance of both technological knowledge and pedagogical knowledge for successful online writing teaching, and it suggested using Koehler and Mishra's (2009) TPACK framework to design the written expression curriculum (p.8).

Comparing Jeribia and Bahloul (2020) with Beleulmi (2023): Both Algerian studies identified similar challenges (overcrowded classes, limited time, weak infrastructure) and each advocated for the use of digital tools to address these problems. Nevertheless, Beleulmi took an additional step by recording the shortcomings of such solutions namely, only moderate levels of user satisfaction and ongoing technical difficulties, suggesting that digital feedback is not a panacea for Algerian EFL contexts.

Additional Studies Cited

Shintani (2015), cited in Amirouche and Kehal (2022), studied the effect of synchronous and asynchronous computer based corrective feedback on the writing of 15 Japanese university students. The results showed that synchronous feedback created an interactive environment similar to traditional

feedback. It helped students notice and correct their mistakes while writing. Both synchronous and asynchronous feedback also helped students understand metalinguistic features, including semantic and syntactic aspects (Amirouche & Kehal, 2022, p.15).

Ene and Upton (2018), cited in Amirouche and Kehal (2022), examined the effect of electronic teacher feedback on how learners used feedback in ESL writing. The researchers analyzed essay drafts, chat sessions, students' survey answers, and teacher interview transcripts. The study found that both synchronous and asynchronous feedback were viewed positively by teachers and students. The findings also suggested that combining both types of feedback may lead to better improvement in students' writing performance (Amirouche & Kehal, 2022, p. 15).

Shang (2017), cited in Amirouche and Kehal (2022), compared EFL university students' experiences with asynchronous peer feedback and synchronous feedback, with a focus on syntactic complexity. The study involved 44 students from a private university in Taiwan. The results showed that students generally accepted this form of e-learning and achieved satisfying results. Although both types of feedback helped students write more, asynchronous feedback was more useful for sentence level writing and was preferred by more students (Amirouche & Kehal, 2022, p.15).

Cabantac Lumabi and Tabajen (2021), cited in Amirouche and Kehal (2022), explored college students 'experiences with online asynchronous peer feedback in writing. Using questionnaire responses and focus group discussions with 100 students, the study showed that learners had positive experiences with this type of feedback and considered it valuable for improving their writing (Amirouche & Kehal, 2022, p.15).

Studies on Interaction in Online Discussion Forums

At the University of Jijel, Bouzerabi, Boureghda, and Melit (2019) used an online focus group discussion with six Master one students to study their opinions about the effect of classroom discussion on improving speaking skills. Although the study mainly focused on speaking, its findings are also useful for writing forums. Students said that taking part in discussions helped them improve critical thinking, overcome fear, increase self confidence, and improve general understanding. The study also found that participation depended on several factors, such as the lesson goals, students' interest, and the differences between classmates. Students explained that discussion not only made the learning environment more comfortable, but also helped build meaningful relationships among classmates and between students and teachers (pp.39–47). These findings support the value of discussion-based teaching for developing language skills. However, as the authors acknowledge, the study focused on speaking, not writing. This raises a question: do the same interactional benefits transfer to written forum discussions? The present study will examine written interaction directly.

1.6.2. Identified Research Gaps

Despite the growing number of studies about online discussion forums and writing development, there are still some research gaps.

First, there is limited research in the Algerian context. Amirouche and Kehal (2022) state that « no studies have been carried out in Algeria to investigate the role of synchronous and asynchronous online feedback in enhancing students' writing in terms of complexity of structure » (p.16). Although Beleulmi (2023) and JERIBIAI and BAHLOUL (2020) later added useful work in this field, more studies are still needed in different Algerian universities and learning contexts.

Second, more comparative studies on feedback modes are needed. Amirouche and Kehal (2022) found that teachers believed synchronous feedback could lead to better improvement, but they still preferred asynchronous feedback because it is easier to use (p.54). This shows that more research is needed to find the best way to combine both types of feedback. In the same way, Jose and Abidin (2016) found no statistically significant difference in the quantitative results, but the qualitative data showed that students strongly preferred synchronous forums.

Third, student perceptions and experiences need more attention. Many studies focused more on teachers' views, while fewer studies explored students' experiences with online writing forums in detail. Bouzerabi et al. (2019) showed that qualitative research is useful for understanding learner experiences, and this can also be applied to writing forums.

Fourth, the longitudinal effects are still underexplored. Most studies were cross sectional or based on short term interventions. Amirouche and Kehal (2022) explain that « one session was not enough for the students to grasp all the instructions related to complexity of structure » and they suggested using several sessions in future experiments (p.57). Long term studies could show how students' writing develops over time through forum participation.

Fifth, more research is needed on the integration of online learning with traditional instruction. Beleulmi (2023) explains that teachers stressed « the crucial and central role of traditional classroom feedback, which remains more important than online feedback » (p.54). This means researchers should study how online forum activities can be combined effectively with classroom writing instruction.

Sixth, technological infrastructure and access remain important challenges. Beleulmi (2023), Amirouche and Kehal (2022), and Jose and Abidin (2016) all reported that technology related problems were major barriers. Beleulmi (2023) mentions « poor and unstable internet connection », lack of ICT tools, and limited student training as factors that make online writing instruction difficult (pp.6–7). Jose and Abidin (2016) also reported technical problems such as slow internet, system failure, and lack of enough computers or labs (p.96). More research should look for solutions to these problems.

Seventh, some specific writing components are still underexplored. Amirouche and Kehal (2022) focused on structural complexity, but other important aspects of writing, such as coherence, cohesion, audience awareness, and rhetorical effectiveness, still need more attention in online forum research.

Eighth, the quality of peer feedback also needs more study. Although peer interaction is seen as useful, there is still limited research on how good and effective peer feedback is in online forums. Future studies can examine how students can be trained to give better peer feedback.

Ninth, cultural and contextual factors should also be studied more. Bouzerabi et al. (2019) found that factors like student diversity and cultural background affected participation in discussion (pp.42–44). Jose and Abidin (2016) also reported that one student wanted « topics different for the boys and girls" (p.96). These factors may also affect participation in online writing forums and should be explored further.

Tenth, teacher training and professional development are also important. Beleulmi (2023) stresses the need for teacher training in ICTs and suggests that « professional learning for teachers to provide a flexible use of the different technological tools » is necessary (p.9). Future research can study effective ways to develop teachers 'technological pedagogical content knowledge for writing instruction.

1.7. Conceptual Framework of the Study

1.7.1. Overview of the Conceptual Framework

Drawing on the theoretical and empirical literature reviewed in this chapter, this study proposes a conceptual framework that explains how online discussion forums contribute to the development of EFL learners' writing skills. The framework integrates sociocultural, cognitive, and genre-based perspectives to provide a comprehensive understanding of writing development as a social, cognitive, and contextual process.

1.7.2. Theoretical Foundations

This study is primarily grounded in Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978), which views learning as socially mediated through interaction and collaboration. To complement this perspective, Cognitive Process Theory explains the recursive mental processes involved in writing, while the Genre-Based Approach accounts for the social and rhetorical dimensions of written communication.

1.7.2.1. Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978)

Grounded in Vygotsky (1978), this perspective views learning as a socially mediated process. Online discussion forums act as interactive environments where learners co-construct knowledge through dialogue, feedback, and collaboration. The concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is particularly relevant, as learners benefit from guidance provided by teachers and more capable peers. Feedback, therefore, plays a crucial mediating role in supporting writing development.

1.7.2.2. Cognitive Process Theory of Writing (Flower & Hayes, 1981)

According to Flower and Hayes (1981), writing is a recursive cognitive activity involving planning, translating, and reviewing. Online forums especially asynchronous ones support these processes by allowing learners time to reflect, revise, and refine their ideas. The iterative nature of forum participation reinforces these cognitive operations and contributes to improved writing performance.

1.7.2.3. Genre-Based Approach (Halliday, 1994; Martin, 1984):

Informed by Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), this approach views writing as a socially situated activity shaped by communicative purpose and context. Participation in online forums exposes learners to specific discourse conventions, helping them understand how language, structure, and purpose interact in real communication settings.

1.7.3. Variables of the Study

Independent Variable

Engagement in online discussion forums (synchronous and asynchronous).

Dependent Variable

Development of EFL writing proficiency, reflected in:

- Writing practice and revision behaviors
- Interaction patterns
- Feedback utilization
- Critical thinking development

- Linguistic improvement (grammar, vocabulary, structural complexity)

Mediating Variables

- Learner motivation and writing anxiety
- Feedback quality and effectiveness
- Frequency and depth of participation
- Digital literacy and access to technology

Moderating Variables

- Learner proficiency level
- Teacher guidance
- Task design and forum structure
- Cultural and contextual factors

1.7.4. Conceptual Model

Figure 1.7 illustrates a multi-stage model explaining how engagement in online discussion forums leads to the development of EFL writing proficiency.

The framework begins with the input stage, where online discussion forums provide a digital learning environment that supports both synchronous and asynchronous interaction. This environment creates opportunities for meaningful written communication.

In the process stage, learners engage in recursive writing activities, including planning, translating ideas into text, and reviewing their contributions. The asynchronous nature of forums allows learners to reflect and revise, reinforcing cognitive writing processes.

The interaction stage highlights the central role of social engagement. Through peer feedback, teacher feedback, and collaborative learning, learners are exposed to diverse perspectives and receive guidance that supports language development. These interactions function as mediational tools that facilitate learning within the sociocultural framework.

In the development stage, learners demonstrate improvement across key writing components, including content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. Additionally, structural complexity such as the use of clauses and phrases develops as learners engage in sustained writing practice and interaction.

Finally, the outcome stage represents the overall improvement in EFL writing proficiency. This improvement is reflected in higher-quality written production, greater linguistic accuracy, and increased complexity of expression.

Overall, the framework demonstrates that writing development in online forums is not linear but dynamic, resulting from the interaction between cognitive processes, social collaboration, and contextual language use.

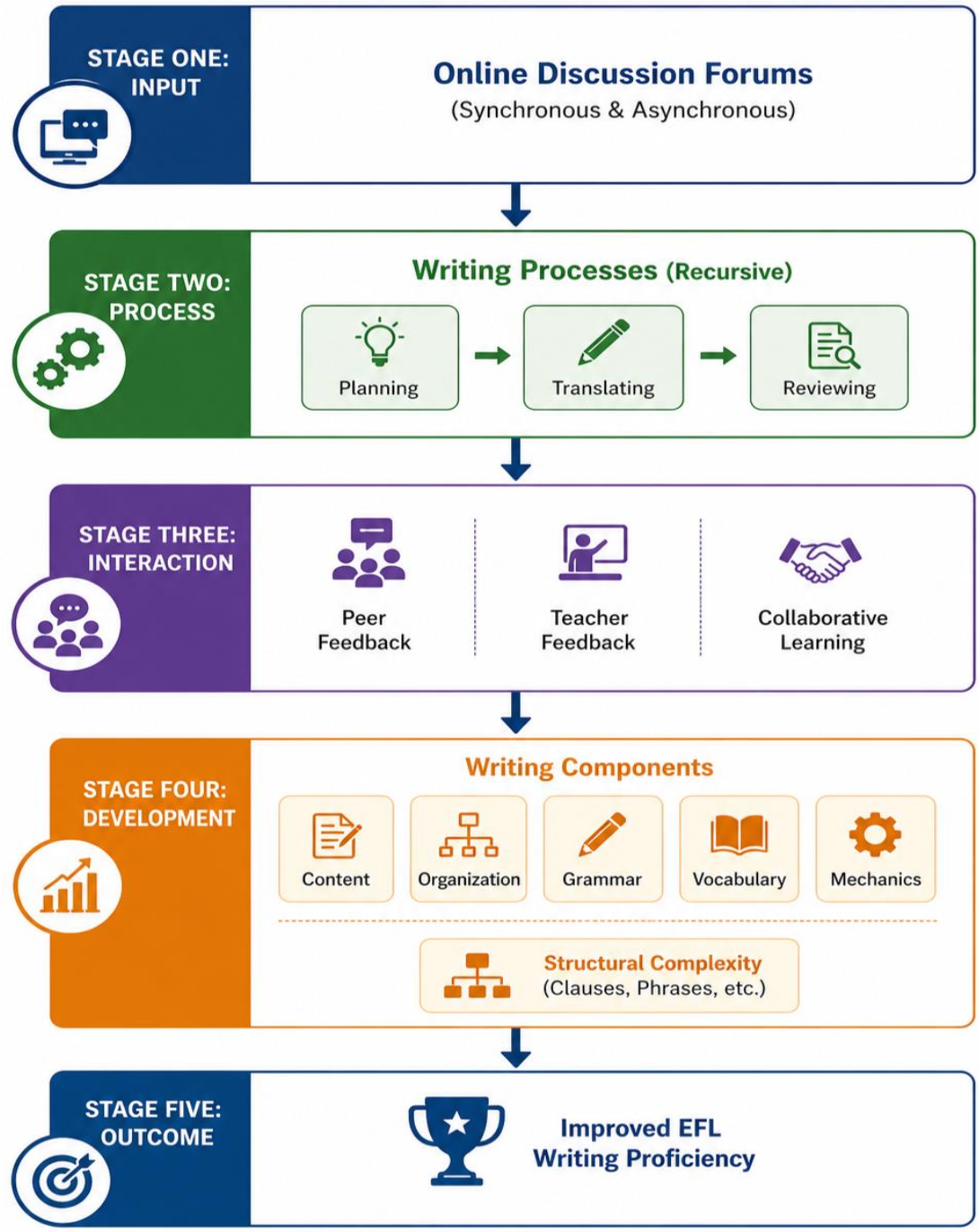

Figure 1.7. Integrated Conceptual Framework of EFL Writing Development through Online Discussion Forums

1.7.6. Research Questions Guiding the Framework

1. How does participation in online discussion forums influence EFL learners' writing practices and revision behaviors?
2. What role do peer and teacher feedback play in developing writing skills in online forums?
3. How do online discussion forums contribute to the development of critical thinking in writing?
4. How do online forums affect learner motivation and writing anxiety?

5. What linguistic developments (e.g., structural complexity, vocabulary growth) emerge through forum participation?
6. What challenges do learners face when using online forums, and how can they be addressed?

1.8. Conclusion

This chapter gives a clear theoretical background for understanding how online discussion forums help EFL learners improve their writing skills. It began by explaining Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) in EFL, showing the difference between synchronous and asynchronous communication and their teaching benefits. Then, it focused on online discussion forums as teaching tools, discussing their definition, main features, theories behind them, advantages, challenges, and tips for effective use.

The theory section included many perspectives such as behaviourism, cognitivism, constructivism, social constructivism, sociocultural theory, and interactionist approaches. Together, these theories show that learning is social, interactive, and guided, making online forums effective for developing writing through teamwork and scaffolded help.

The second part looked at how writing develops in EFL. Writing was described as a complex, repeated process that involves thinking, language, and communication. Key writing components content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics were discussed, with special focus on structural complexity as important for writing quality. Different teaching approaches were reviewed: product, process, and genre based approaches, noting that modern teaching often combines process and genre methods.

The chapter then explained how online forums support writing growth. Through forums, students practice writing more, exchange meaningful feedback, improve critical thinking, feel less anxious and more motivated, and gain exposure to language that helps them improve in grammar, vocabulary, and structure. Research in Algeria and other countries shows that forums are useful but also highlights challenges and areas needing more study.

Finally, the chapter presented a conceptual framework combining sociocultural theory, cognitive process theory, and genre based approaches. This framework suggests that online discussion forums help writing development through repeated writing practice, different kinds of interaction, and steady improvement in writing components, leading to better EFL writing skills.

CHAPTER TWO

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS DISCUSSION

2.1. Introduction

The integration of digital technologies into higher education has changed the way students learn and communicate. Among the many digital tools used in education, online discussion forums have become important platforms for supporting interaction and developing language skills. These forums provide students with opportunities to express their ideas in writing, exchange opinions with peers, and participate in academic discussions in an online environment.

In the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), writing is considered one of the most important but challenging skills for university students. Many learners face difficulties in organizing ideas, using appropriate vocabulary, and producing coherent written texts. For this reason, teachers and researchers have become increasingly interested in using online discussion forums to support the development of students' writing skills.

The present study investigates EFL university students' attitudes and perceptions toward the use of online discussion forums for improving writing skills. It also explores how students interact with these platforms and the possible challenges they face while using them in academic contexts.

This chapter presents the practical part of the study. It describes the research methodology, the participants, and the questionnaire used for data collection. In addition, it provides the analysis and discussion of the collected data, followed by the main findings and recommendations.

2.2. Research Aim

This study aims to:
1.Investigate university EFL learners' perceptions of using online discussion forums as a tool for developing their writing skills.
2.Examine how participation in ODFs contributes to the development of specific writing components such as vocabulary, grammar, coherence, and organization.
3.Identify the challenges that influence student engagement and effectiveness when using online discussion forums for writing practice

2.3. Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are EFL learners' perceptions of using online discussion forums as a tool for improving their writing skills?
2. How do university EFL learners report their participation in online forum discussions?
3. What factors do learners perceive as influencing their level of engagement in forum discussions?
4. To what extent do learners believe that online discussion forums help them improve specific aspects of writing, such as vocabulary, grammar, organization, coherence, and mechanics?
5. What challenges do students face when using online discussion forums for writing practice, and what strategies do they report using to overcome these difficulties?

2.4. Data Collection Tool

This study employs a questionnaire administered to third-year EFL students at the University of Abdelhafid Boussouf, Mila. By means of this tool, the necessary data were collected in order to achieve the research aims.

2.4.1. The Students' Questionnaire

2.4.1.1. Aim of the Questionnaire

The primary aim of the questionnaire at hand is to gain insights into how third-year EFL students at the University of Abdelhafid Boussouf, Mila, perceive the use of online discussion forums for developing their writing skills. Collecting data directly from the target sample is valuable as it contributes to answering the research questions and consequently to achieving the overall research aims.

2.4.1.2. Sample and Population

The selected population of the current study is third-year EFL students at the University of Abdelhafid Boussouf, Mila. The questionnaire was administered to a sample of 56 students. The reasons for selecting this population in particular are that third-year students, compared to first and second years, are generally expected to have more experience concerning learning the English language and developing the writing skill specifically. Moreover, as they have been developing the writing skill for three years at university, it is likely that third-year students have been exposed to various online learning platforms and discussion forums throughout their studies. Most importantly, third-year students are assessed primarily through essay writing, which makes writing a skill of paramount importance to them.

2.4.1.3. Administration of the Students' Questionnaire

The students' questionnaire was distributed to 56 third-year students at the University of Abdelhafid Boussouf, Mila. The administration of the questionnaire was conducted online due to the university holiday. Students received the questionnaire via Google Forms, and their responses were collected over a period of several days.

2.4.1.4. Description of the Students' Questionnaire

The students' questionnaire is composed of 18 questions and divided into eight main sections.

- **Section One:** Background Information consists of 4 questions. This section collects data related to the students' backgrounds, including their age, years of studying English, self-rated English level, and whether they have taken a formal academic writing course before.
- **Section Two**: General Information and Access consists of 4 questions. This section examines students' frequency of participation in online forums, teachers' use of forums, students' digital literacy skills, and the platforms they mainly use for forums.
- **Section Three**: Perceptions of Online Discussion Forums as a Writing Tool consists of 6 statements (a–f) using a Likert scale. This section explores students' attitudes towards using forums for writing, including their comfort level, confidence, and overall perception of usefulness.
- **Section Four:** Patterns and Frequency of Participation consists of 5 items (a–e). This section focuses on how often students engage in specific activities when participating in forums, such as reading instructions, planning ideas, drafting, responding to peers, and giving feedback.
- **Section Five**: Factors Influencing Engagement consists of 5 statements (a–e). This section investigates the factors that affect students' level of participation, including grading, teacher involvement, peer participation, digital competence, and topic relevance.
- **Section Six**: Perceived Impact on Writing Components consists of 6 items (a–f). This section measures the extent to which students believe forums have helped them improve specific aspects of

writing, including vocabulary, grammar, organization, coherence, idea development, and writing mechanics.

- **Section Seven**: Effectiveness consists of 3 questions. This section analyses students' perceptions of the effectiveness of forums, including whether their writing grades have improved, whether their teacher has noticed improvement, and an overall rating of forum effectiveness.
- **Section Eight:** Challenges and Strategies consists of 4 questions. This section identifies the main challenges students face when using forums and the strategies they use to overcome these difficulties, including open-ended questions for personal experiences and additional comments.

2.5. Data Analysis

The data collected in this study were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods. Following the completion of data collection, the responses were organized and run through Google Forms' internal processing functions, which automatically calculated both the raw counts and the relative percentages for each individual item. The results were subsequently presented in the form of bar charts enabling researchers to view, clearly and simply, the breakdown of participant answers across the entire range of variables.

For closed-ended questions featuring Likert-scale items, the frequency and percentage of responses for each category ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, or from always to never were calculated and interpreted to uncover the main inclinations and structural regularities that characterized the collected data. For multiple-choice and single-response items, the proportion of respondents selecting each option was computed and examined in light of the full sample, which contained 55 respondents.

Given the predominantly descriptive nature of the analysis, no inferential statistical procedures were applied The findings are therefore interpreted in terms of frequencies, percentages, and general tendencies with particular attention paid to dominant response patterns and notable distributions It should be noted that, due to the limited and homogeneous nature of the sample, the results are not intended to be generalized beyond the specific population under investigation and should be regarded as exploratory and context-specific in scope

2.5.1. Section one: Background Information of the Participants

This section presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents. It aims to provide a general overview of the participants' profiles, which is important for contextualizing the findings of the study.

2.5.1.1. Age of the Participants

Figure 2.1 presents the distribution of participants according to their age.

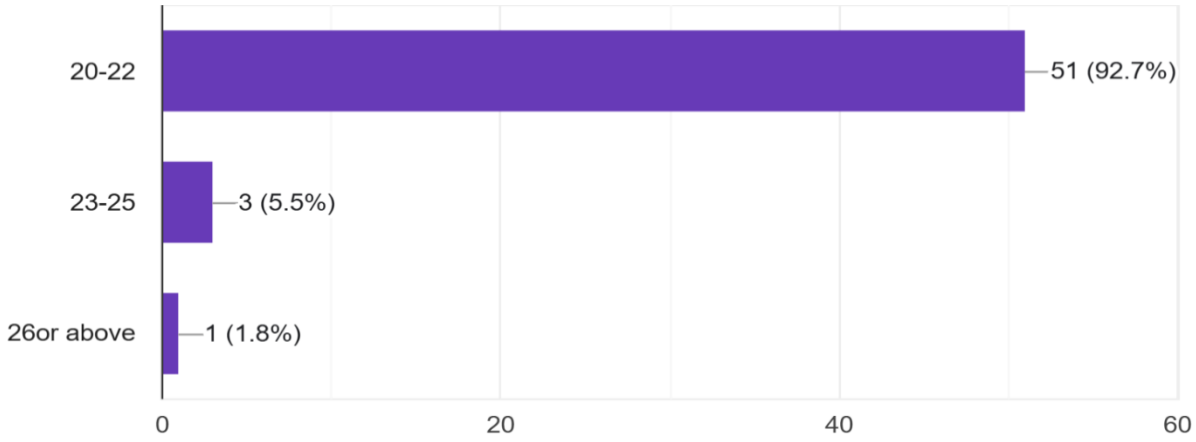

Figure 2.1. Age Distribution of Survey Respondents

The findings indicate that most participants (92.7%) are between 20 and 22 years old. This is consistent with the typical age range of third year university students in Algeria. A small number (5.5%) are between 23 and 25 years old, and only one student (1.8%) is 26 or older. This may be explained by the fact that some students repeat academic years or begin university later than usual. Although age is not the main focus of this study, it is helpful for describing the group and suggests that most students share similar age characteristics, which may influence their familiarity with digital tools.

2.5.1.2. Years of Studying English

Figure 2.2 presents the distribution of respondents according to their years of studying English.

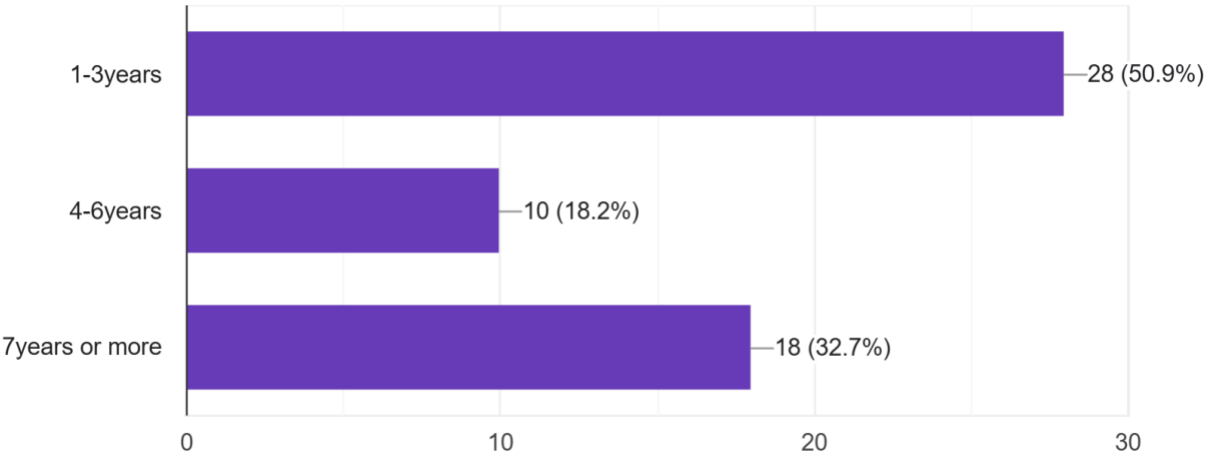

Figure 2.2. Distribution of Respondents by Years of Experience

The data reveal that approximately half of the students (50.9%) have studied English for 1 to 3 years. This indicates that many students started learning English at university not before. About 32.7% have studied English for 7 years or more suggesting that they started in middle school or earlier. Also 18.2% have studied English for 4 to 6 years. These findings show that students have different levels of experience with English. It can be inferred that students who studied for more years may have stronger

language skills, which can help them feel more confident in writing and participate better in online forums. However, students with fewer years of study may find it more difficult to express their ideas in writing.

2.5.1.3. Self-Assessed English Proficiency Level

Figure 2.3 illustrates the distribution of respondents based on their self-assessed English proficiency level.

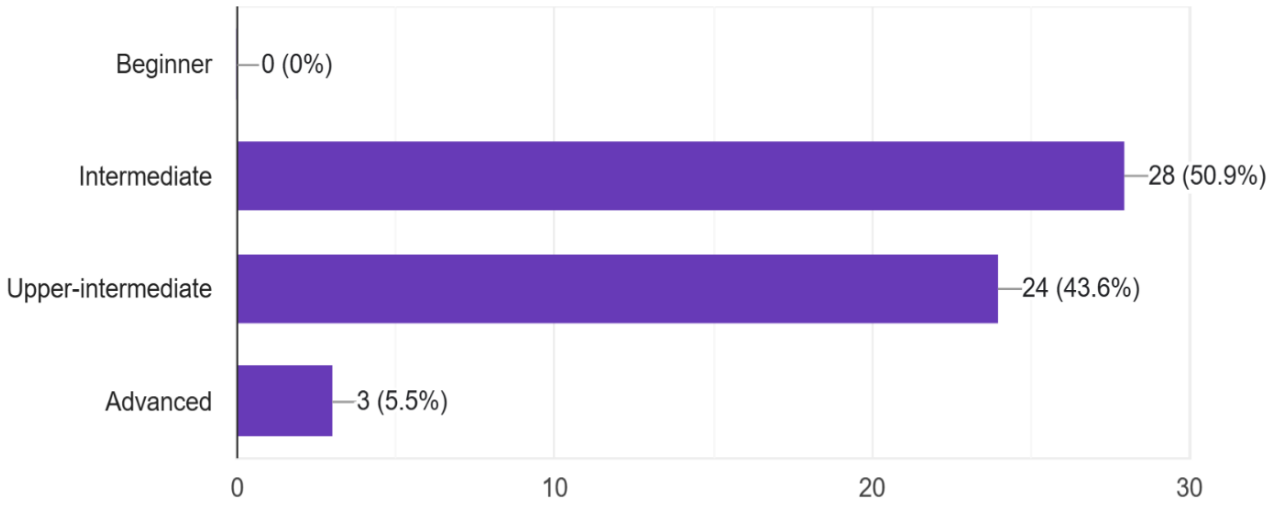

Figure 2.3. Distribution of Respondents by Self-Assessed English Proficiency Level

The results indicate that about half of the students (50.9%) say their English level is intermediate, and 43.6% say they are upper intermediate. Only 5.5% say they are advanced, and no student said they are beginners. This finding is significant because the majority of students (94.5%) have a good level of English, between intermediate and upper intermediate. This is particularly important for the present study because using online forums and writing in English needs a certain level of language ability. It can be inferred that Students with higher levels may feel more confident when writing, while intermediate students may still have some difficulties but can still participate. The fact that no one chose beginner shows that third year students have enough language skills for academic writing. However, self rating is not always accurate, and students may judge their level higher or lower than it really is.

2.5.1.4. Previous Academic Writing Experience

Figure 2.4 presents the distribution of participants according to their previous experience with formal academic writing courses.

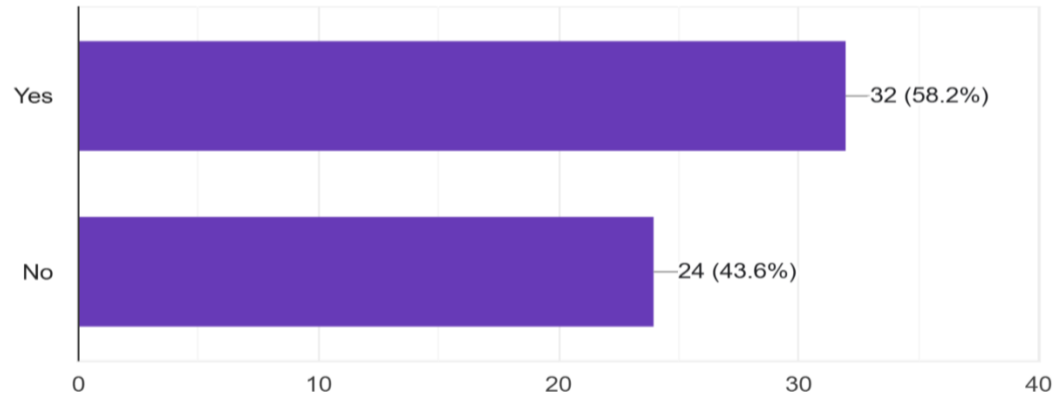

Figure 2.4. Distribution of Respondents by Prior Enrollment in a Formal Academic Writing Course

The data show that more than half of the students (58.2%) have taken a formal academic writing course, while 43.6%have not. This indicates that most students have some formal training in academic writing. They may have learned basic skills like organizing paragraphs, choosing vocabulary, and following academic rules. This knowledge can help them write better in online discussion forums. However, a large number of students (43.6%) have never taken such a course. This suggests that they may depend on informal practice or other ways of learning. Consequently, they may face more difficulties in academic writing, such as organizing ideas or using correct grammar and punctuation.

2.5.2. Section Two: General Information and Access

This section examines students' access to and use of online discussion forums, including their frequency of participation, the extent to which teachers integrate forums into their courses, and students' level of digital literacy.

2.5.2.1. Frequency of Participation in Online Discussion Forums

Figure 2.5 presents the distribution of respondents according to their frequency of participation in online discussion forums for university courses.

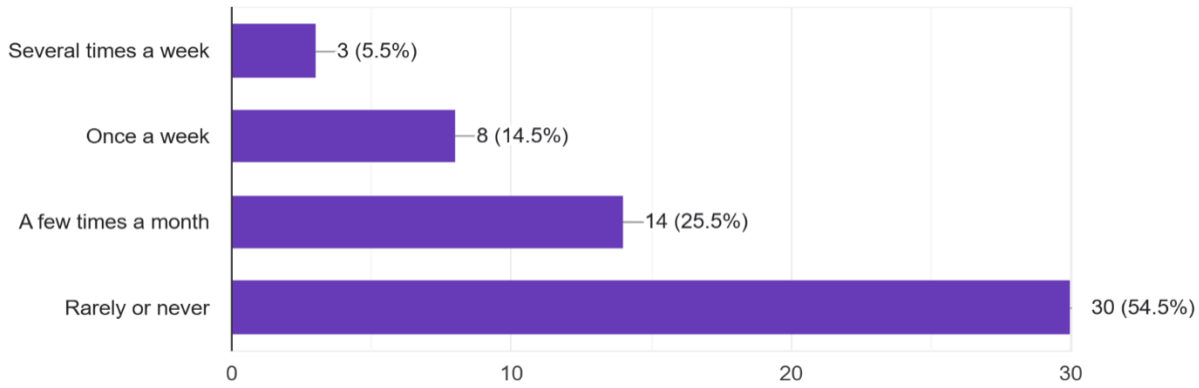

Figure 2.5. Distribution of Respondents by Frequency of Participation in Online University Discussion Forums

The findings reveal that more than half of the students (54.5%) rarely or never use the online discussion forums. Only 5.5% use them several times a week, and 14.5% use them once a week. About 25.5% use them a few times each month. This means that most students do not actively use online forums in their university courses. This may be because they don't know the benefits of forums, teachers don't use

them often, or students prefer other ways of communication. This low participation is a problem because forums are meant to support interaction, writing practice, and collaborative learning. The results of this study may help explain why students don't use forums much, and this will be discussed in later sections.

2.5.2.2. Teacher Use of Online Discussion Forums

Figure 6 illustrates respondents' perceptions of the extent to which their teachers use online discussion forums in university courses.

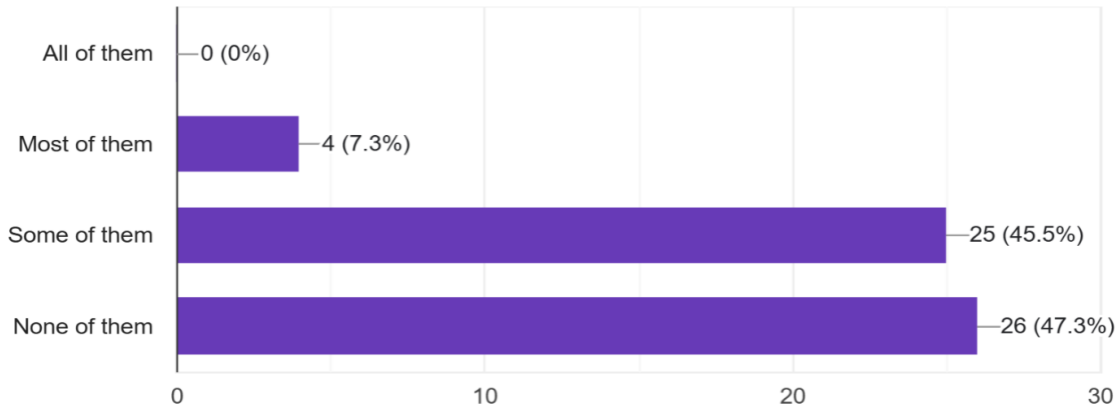

Figure 2.6. Respondents' Perceptions of Teacher Use of Online Discussion Forums in University Courses

As shown in the figure 6, almost half of the students (47.3%) said that none of their teachers use online discussion forums. About 45.5% said that only some teachers use them. Only 7.3% said that most teachers use forums and no student said that all teachers use them. This means that online discussion forums are not widely used in university courses. Most students either don't use forums at all or use them only in a few subjects. This can explain why many students rarely or never participate in forums as seen before. The low use of forums by teachers may be because of the lack of training, limited time, or preference for traditional teaching methods.

2.5.2.3. Self-Assessment of Digital Literacy Skills

Figure 2.7 presents the distribution of respondents based on their self-assessment of digital literacy skills.

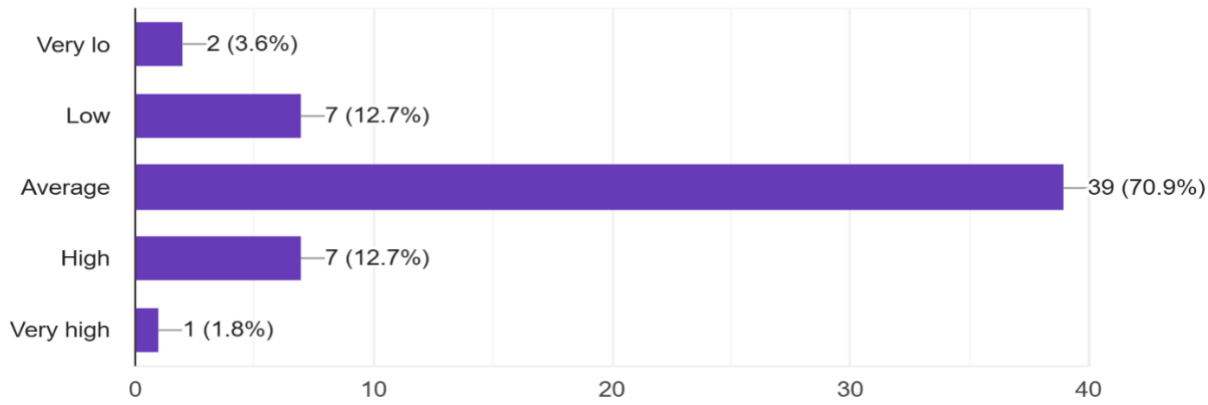

Figure 2.7. Respondents' Self-Assessment of Digital Literacy Skills

This finding suggests that most students (70.9%) say their digital literacy is average. About 16.3% say their level is low or very low, while14.5% say it is high or very high. This means that most students perceive themselves as possessing basic digital literacy skills. This finding is particularly significant because using online discussion forums needs simple digital skills like using the platform, posting messages, and replying to others. Students with average skills can usually use forums without big problems, but students with low skills may find it difficult. The small number of students with high digital skills shows that some students are very comfortable with technology which may help them participate more in forums.

2.5.2.4. Preferred Platform for Online Discussion Forums

Figure 2.8 presents the distribution of respondents according to the platforms they mainly use for participating in online discussion forums.

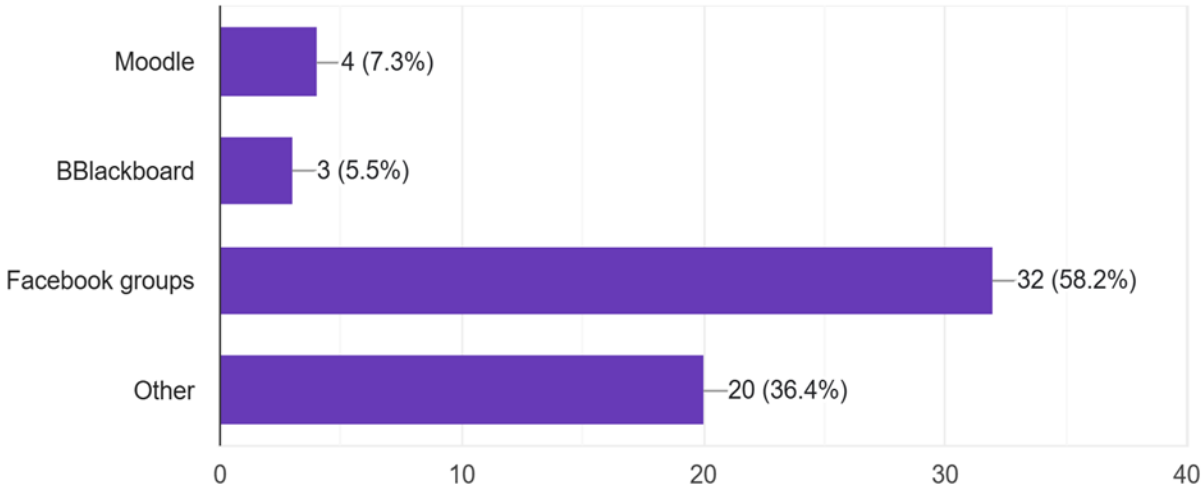

Figure 2.8. Distribution of Respondents by Preferred Platform for Online Discussion Forums

As shown in the table, more than half of the students (58.2%) mainly use Facebook groups for online discussions. About 36.4% use other platforms like WhatsApp or Messenger. Only 7.3% use Moodle, and 5.5% use Blackboard. This shows that students prefer informal social media platforms like Facebook instead of formal Learning Management Systems such as Moodle or Blackboard. This may be because they already know how to use Facebook and find it easy. However, using informal platforms for academic discussions has both advantages and disadvantages. Students may feel more comfortable and active but the discussions may not be well organized or properly controlled like in formal LMS platforms.

2.5.3. Section Three: Perceptions of Online Discussion Forums as a Writing Tool

This section examines students' attitudes toward the use of online discussion forums (ODFs) as a tool for developing their writing skills. The analysis is based on a series of Likert-scale statements designed to assess learners' comfort, confidence, perceived usefulness, and overall evaluation of forum-based writing activities.

2.5.3.1. Students' Attitudes Toward Online Forums and Writing Development

Figure 2.9 presents respondents' attitudes toward the role of online discussion forums in supporting academic writing development.

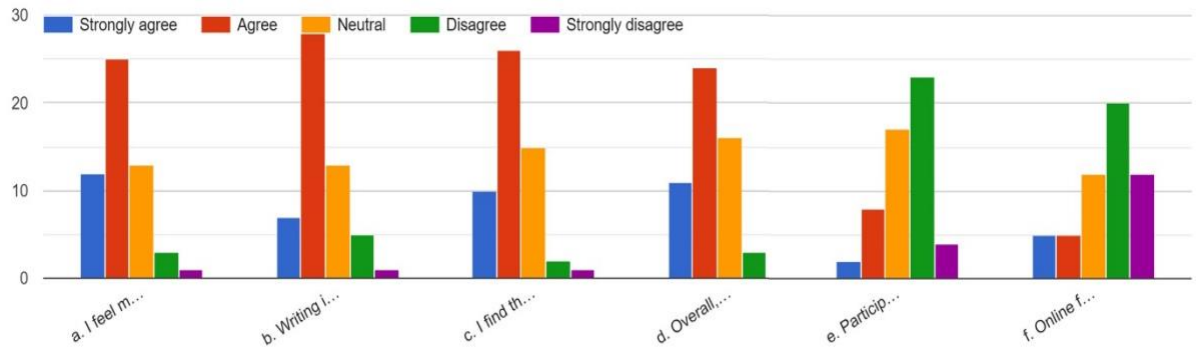

Figure 2.9. Respondents' Attitudes Toward Online Forums and Academic Writing Development

9a. I feel more comfortable expressing my ideas in an online forum than in a traditional classroom.

The data indicate that most students (67.3%) agree or strongly agree that they feel more comfortable expressing their ideas in online forums than in traditional classrooms. Only 7.3% disagree or strongly disagree while 23.6% are neutral. This means that online forums create a more comfortable environment for most students. In the traditional classrooms, students may feel nervous when speaking in front of others or afraid of making mistakes. In online forums, students have more time to think, organize their ideas, and write their answers without pressure. This supports the idea that asynchronous communication reduces anxiety and helps students participate more.

9b. Writing in online forums has helped me become more confident in my ability to write in English.

As shown above, the majority of students (64.9%) agree or strongly agree that writing in online forums has helped them feel more confident in their writing, and only 11.2% disagree or strongly disagree, while 24.1% are neutral. This finding indicates that writing regularly in forums can improve students' confidence. When students write in forums, they get feedback, read other students' posts, and slowly improve their writing. This repeated practice helps them feel more able to express their ideas in English.

9c. I find the writing style used in online forums (e.g., less formal, more interactive) helpful for my writing development

The data show that the majority of students agree or strongly agree that the writing style in online forums which is less formal and more interactive, helps their writing development. Only 5.6% disagree or strongly disagree, while 27.8%are neutral. This means that students see informal writing as useful. In online forums, they can try new language, use short forms, and write in a more natural way. This helps them become more fluent and confident before they move to the formal academic writing**.**

9d. Overall, I have a positive attitude towards using online forums as part of my writing courses.

As shown above most students (64.8%) have a positive opinion about using online forums in writing courses, as they agree or strongly agree. Only 5.6% have a negative opinion, while 29.6% are neutral. This is a good result because a positive attitude helps students participate more. Students who think forums are useful are more likely to use them often and improve their writing through practice.

9e. Participating in online forums does not significantly improve my writing.

The results indicate that most students (50%) disagree or strongly disagree with the idea that forums don't improve their writing. This finding suggests that students believe forums help improve their writing. Only 18.5% agree or strongly agree, while 31.5% are neutral.
This result is important because it supports the positive opinions in the previous questions. This negative statement was used to check the accuracy of students 'answers, and the results are consistent which makes the findings more reliable.

9f. Online forums are a waste of time for writing practice

The finding reveal that most students (59.2%) disagree or strongly disagree that online forums are a waste of time for writing practice. Only 18.6% agree or strongly agree, and 22.2% are neutral.
This finding supports the previous results. Most students think that forums are useful for practicing writing, not a waste of time. This positive view is very important because it encourages students to participate and helps teachers decide to use forums in writing courses.

Overall, the findings reveal a generally positive but nuanced set of attitudes toward online forums as a tool for writing development. Students tend to appreciate the comfort, interactivity, and confidence-building potential of these platforms, yet considerable ambivalence persists, particularly regarding their overall value and effectiveness for academic writing improvement.

2.5.4. Section Four: Patterns and Frequency of Participation in Online Forums

This section examines how students engage in specific writing-related activities when participating in online discussion forums. It focuses on key processes such as reading, planning, drafting, revising, and interacting with peers.

2.5.4.1. Engagement in Online Forum Writing Activities

Figure 2.10 presents the frequency with which respondents engage in various writing-related activities during their participation in online discussion forums.

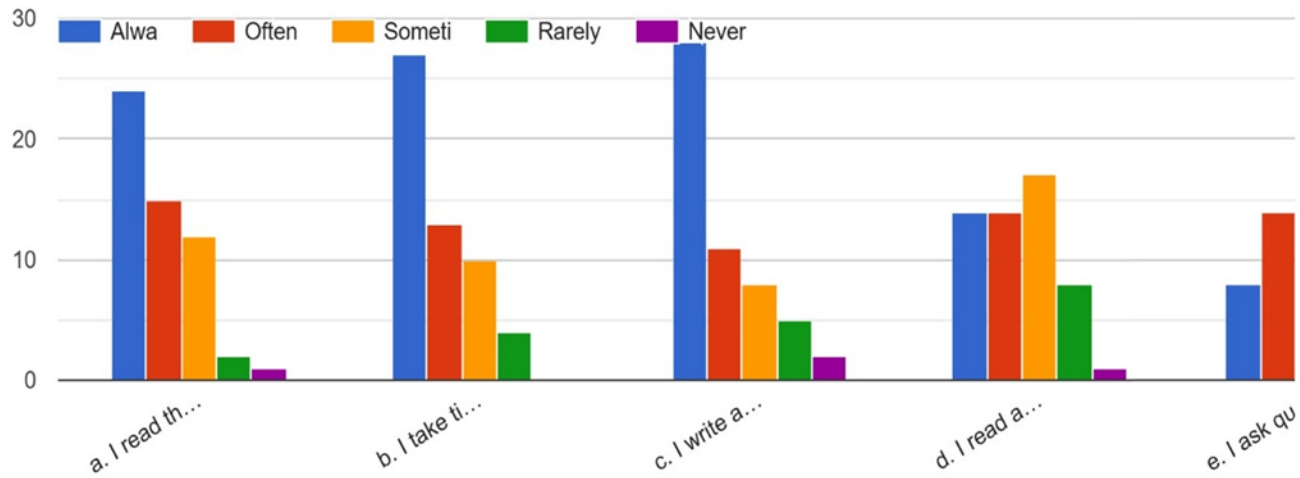

Figure 2.10. Frequency of Respondents' Engagement in Online Forum Writing Activities

10a. I read the posts and instructions carefully before I write my own response.

The finding demonstrate that most students (72.2%) always or often read posts and instructions carefully before writing their answers. Only 5.6% rarely or never do this, while 22.2% sometimes do.
The data demonstrate that most students are careful when they use forums. Reading instructions and other posts helps them understand the topic better and write more relevant and thoughtful answers. This behavior is very important for good online discussion and improving writing skills.

10b. I take time to plan and organize my ideas before I write my post.

The results show that most students (74.1%) always or often plan and organize their ideas before writing their posts. Only 7.4% rarely do this and no student said they never do it. This finding indicates that students think carefully before writing. Planning and organizing ideas helps them write clear and well structured posts. This is a good writing habit that can also help them in other academic writing tasks.

10c. I write a first draft and then revise it before finally posting it.

The finding indicate that most students (72.3%) always or often write a first draft and revise it before posting. Only 13% rarely or never do this, while 14.8% sometimes do. This finding is significant because revision is a main part of writing. Students who revise their work can write more correct, clear, and organized texts. This habit helps them improve their writing skills in general.

10d. I read and respond to my classmates' posts

The results reveal that about half of the students (51.8%) always or often read and respond to their classmates' posts. About 31.5% sometimes do this, while 16.7% rarely or never do. It can be inferred that interaction between students in forums is at a medium level. Reading and replying to others is important for learning together and improving critical thinking. Students who interact with their classmates can learn new ideas and get useful feedback.

10e. I ask questions or provide feedback on my classmates' writing.

The results indicate that only 40.7% of students always or often ask questions or give feedback to their classmates. About 35.2% sometimes do this, while 24.1% rarely or never do. This finding suggests that students do not give feedback as much as they do other activities. This may be because they lack confidence, are afraid of giving wrong advice, or do not know how to give good feedback. Encouraging peer feedback can help improve this and support collaborative learning.

2.5.5. Section Five: Factors Influencing Your Engagement in Online Forums

This section explores the key factors that influence students' level of participation in online discussion forums, including assessment, teacher involvement, peer interaction, and other contextual variables.

2.5.5.1. Perceived Influencing Factors

Figure 2.11 presents respondents' perceptions of the main factors that affect their participation in online discussion forums.

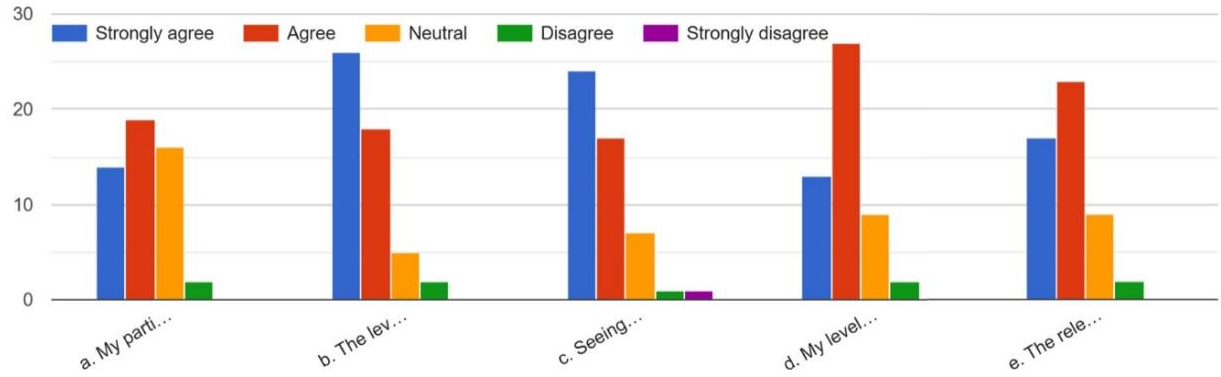

Figure 2.11. Respondents' Perceptions of Writing-Related Factors Influencing Online Forum Participation

11a. My participation is higher when the forum activity is graded or counts towards my final mark.

The findings indicate that the majority of students (61.1%) agree or strongly agree that they participate more when forum activities are graded or counted in their final mark. About 29.6% are neutral, and only 3.7% disagree.

This finding suggests that grades are important for motivating students to participate in online forums. When students know their work will be evaluated, they take it more seriously and participate more. This supports previous research which shows that graded tasks increase participation. Students who are neutral may participate even without grades, or they may not have tried graded forum activities before.

11b. The level of teacher involvement (e.g., asking questions, giving feedback) motivates me to participate more.

The results reveal that most students (86.3%) agree or strongly agree that teacher involvement helps them participate more in online forums. Only 9.8% are neutral, and 3.9% disagree. This finding demonstrates that the teacher plays an important role in encouraging students to participate. When teachers ask questions, give feedback, and show interest, students feel supported and join the discussion more. This finding is consistent with Sociocultural Theory which indicate that learners improve with help from a more knowledgeable person like the teacher. The very small number of neutral and negative answers shows that most students value teacher involvement.

11c. Seeing my classmates actively participating encourages me to join the discussion.

The data indicate that the vast majority of students agree or strongly agree that when their classmates participate actively, it encourages them to join the discussion. About 14.0% are neutral, and 4.0% disagree or strongly disagree. This means that classmates have a strong influence on participation. When students see others active in the forum, hey feel motivated to participate too. This creates a positive cycle where active students encourage others. This supports the idea that learning together and peer interaction can increase student engagement.

11d. My level of digital competence (how comfortable I am using the online platform) affects my participation.

The results show that most students (78.8%) agree or strongly agree that their digital skills affect how much they participate in online forums. About 17.3% are neutral and only 3.8% disagree.

This finding suggests that students who feel comfortable using technology are more likely to participate. Digital skills include using the forum, posting messages, replying to others, and sharing files. Students with low digital skills may feel confused or not confident to participate. This shows that giving training or clear instructions on how to use the forum can help increase participation.

11e. The relevance and interest of the discussion topic strongly influences my decision to participate.

The results indicate that most students (78.8%) agree or strongly agree that the topic's relevance and interest affect their participation. About 17.3% are neutral and only 3.8% disagree.

The finding indicates that students participate more actively when the topic is interesting or related to their studies. When the topic connects to their experiences, goals or interests, they feel more motivated to share ideas and interact with others. This suggests that teachers should choose topics carefully. Topics should be meaningful and interesting, because boring or difficult topics may reduce participation.

2.4.6. Section Six: Perceived Impact on Specific Writing Components

This section examines students' perceptions of the extent to which participation in online discussion forums contributes to the development of specific components of academic writing, namely vocabulary, grammar, organization, coherence, idea development, and writing mechanics.

Figure 2.12 presents respondents' perceptions regarding the impact of online forum participation on different aspects of academic writing.

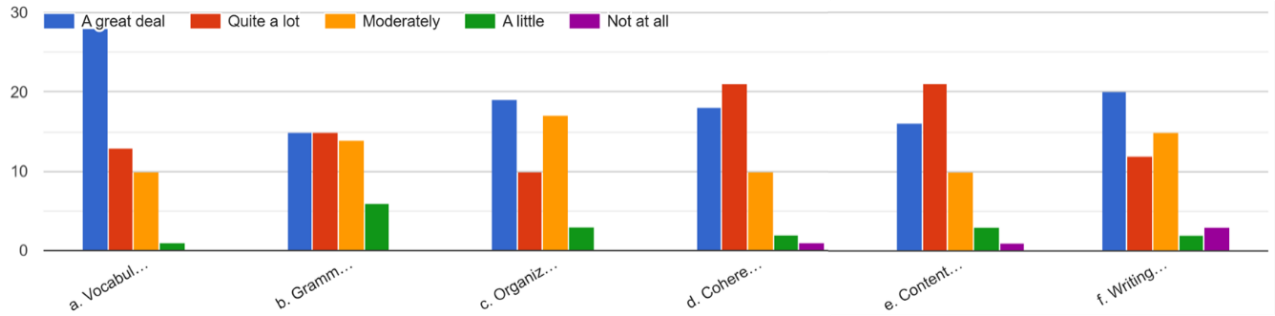

Figure 2.12. Respondents' Perceptions of the Impact of Online Forum Participation on Academic Writing Skills

12a. Vocabulary: Learning and using new words and expressions.

The finding indicates that most students think that taking part in online forums has helped them improve their vocabulary a lot or quite a lot. Around one fifth of the students (20.8%) believe that forums have helped them in a medium way, while only 1.9% say it helped a little. No students said it did not help at all.

This finding suggests that online forums are a useful tool for improving vocabulary. When students read their classmates' posts and write their own answers, they see new words and expressions. They can also learn new vocabulary by reading teacher feedback or by looking for words to explain their ideas. This supports the fourth research question about how forums help improve specific parts of writing.

12b. Grammar: Improving the grammatical accuracy of my sentences.

The results show that more than half of the students (58.8%) think that taking part in online forums has helped them improve their grammar a lot or quite a lot. About one quarter of the students (27.5%) believe that forums have helped them in a medium way, while 13.7% say it helped a little. No students said it did not help at all.

The data indicates that online forums can help improve grammar but a little less than vocabulary. When students write in forums they focus on sentence structure and the order of words. However, improving grammar may need more clear feedback from teachers or classmates. The number of students who said "a little" (13.7%) is higher than for vocabulary (1.9%) which shows that grammar may be harder to improve only through forum participation.

12c. Organization: Structuring my ideas more logically in a paragraph or essay.

The results show that more than half of the students (58.0%) think that taking part in online forums has helped them improve the organization of their ideas a lot or quite a lot. About one third of the students (36.0%) believe that forums have helped them in a medium way, while 6.0% say it helped a little. No students said it did not help at all.

This finding suggests that online forums can help students to organize their ideas in a more logical way. When students write posts in forums they must present their thoughts in a clear and organized form so that others can understand them. This practice may also help in other writing tasks like paragraphs and essays. However, the number of students who said "moderately" (36.0%) is higher than for vocabulary and grammar which suggests that organizing ideas may be a more difficult skill to improve only through forums.

12d. Coherence: Making my ideas flow smoothly and connect well with each other.

The results indicate that most students (73.6%) think that taking part in online forums has helped them improve their coherence a lot or quite a lot. About one fifth of the students (20.8%) believe that forums have helped them in a medium way, while 5.7% say it helped a little or not at all.

The data reveal that online forums are useful for helping students make their ideas flow in a smooth way and connect them well together. When students write posts in forums, they need to write in a way that is easy for others to understand. This needs the use of linking words, referring to earlier ideas, and keeping a clear order of ideas. The high percentage of positive answers (73.6%) shows that regular participation in forums can strongly improve coherence in writing.

12e. Content / Idea Development: Generating and elaborating on ideas for a topic.

The results show that most students (73.1%) think that taking part in online forums has helped them improve their content and idea development a lot or quite a lot. About one fifth of the students (19.2%) believe that forums have helped them in a medium way, while 7.7%say it helped a little or not at all.

This finding indicates that online forums are effective in helping students produce and develop ideas. When students read the posts of their classmates, they are exposed to different views and new information. This can encourage them to think more deeply about a topic and build their own ideas. Also, when writing replies, students need to explain their ideas clearly and add supporting details which helps them improve their ability to develop ideas.

12f. Writing Mechanics: Improving my punctuation and spelling.

The results show that the majority of students think that taking part in online forums has helped them improve their writing mechanics a lot or quite a lot. About one quarter of the students (28.3%) believe that forums have helped them in a medium way, while 11.4% say it helped a little or not at all.

The data suggests that online forums can help students improve punctuation and spelling but less than other parts of writing. When students write in forums, they may try to use correct spelling and punctuation, especially because they know that others will read their posts. However, the number of students who said "a little" or "not at all" (11.4%) is higher than in other areas. This suggests that writing mechanics may need more direct teaching or focused feedback to show strong improvement.

2.5.7. Section seven: Factors Influencing Your Engagement

This section examines students' perceptions of the effectiveness of online discussion forums in improving their writing performance, with a particular focus on perceived changes in writing grades and teacher feedback.

2.5.7.1. Overall Effectiveness

Figure 2.13 presents respondents' perceptions of the impact of online forum participation on writing grades and teacher feedback.

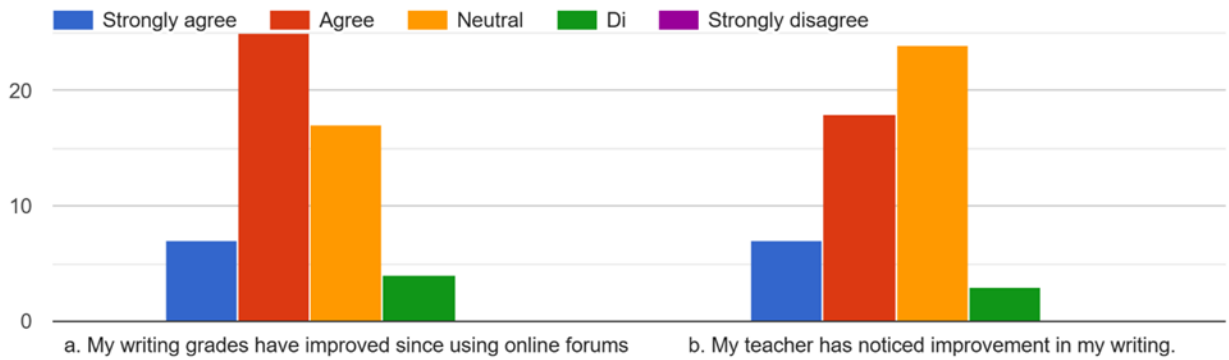

Figure 2.13. Respondents' Perceptions of the Impact of Online Forum Participation on Writing Grades and Teacher Feedback

13a. My writing grades have improved since using online forums.

The data reveal that most students (59.3%) agree or strongly agree that their writing grades have improved since using online forums. About one third of the students (33.3%) are neutral, while 7.4% disagree.

This result shows that more than half of the students see a positive connection between taking part in forums and their writing grades. This supports the idea that regular writing practice in forums can help improve academic writing performance in a measurable way. The students who are neutral may not have clearly seen a direct link between forum activities and their grades, or they may not have received specific grades for forum work.

13b. My teacher has noticed improvement in my writing.

The results show that less than half of the students (47.2%) agree or strongly agree that their teacher has noticed improvement in their writing. The largest group of students (45.3%) are neutral, while 7.5% disagree.

This result indicates that students are less sure about whether their teachers have noticed improvement in their writing compared to their own view about grade improvement. This may be because teachers do not always give direct feedback about writing progress or because students have not received clear comments about their improvement. The high percentage of neutral answers (45.3%) shows that many students are not sure or have not received clear feedback from their teachers about their writing development.

2.5.7.2. Overall Effectiveness of Online Discussion Forums

Figure 2.14 presents respondents' overall assessment of the effectiveness of online discussion forums in improving their writing skills.

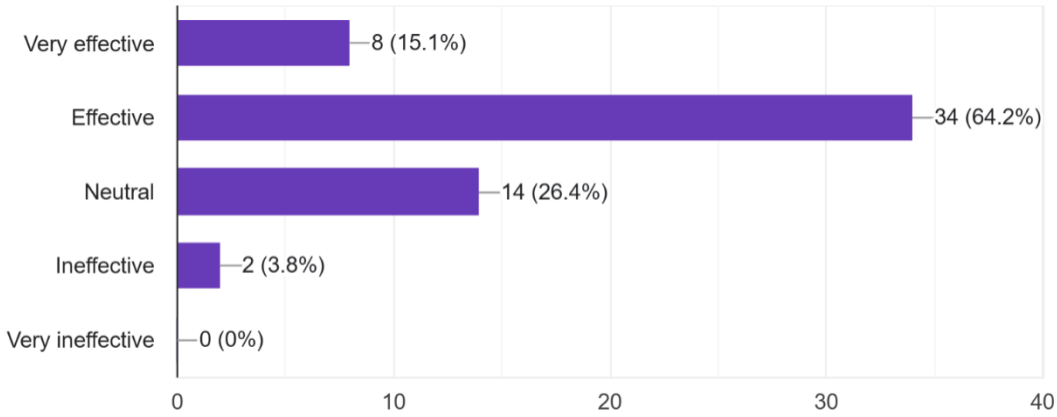

Figure 2.14. Respondents' Overall Assessment of the Effectiveness of Online Forums for Writing Improvement

The data reveal that most students (72.9%) think that online forums are effective or very effective for improving their writing. About one quarter of the students (23.7%) are neutral, while only 3.4% think that forums are not effective.

These findings are highly significant and confirms the findings from the previous sections. Most students see online forums as a useful tool for improving writing skills. This supports the main aim of the study which is to explore how online discussion forums affect EFL university students' writing performance and to study learners' opinions about their usefulness. The low percentage of negative answers (3.4%) shows that students generally have a positive opinion about forums, even if some are not sure about their effectiveness.

2.5.8. Section Eight: Challenges and Strategies in Online Forum Participation

This section explores the main challenges that hinder students' participation in online discussion forums, as well as the strategies they use to overcome these difficulties. It also includes qualitative insights from open-ended responses.

2.5.8.1. Perceived Challenges in Online Forum Participation

Figure 15 presents respondents' perceived challenges that limit their participation in online discussion forums and reduce their effectiveness for writing development.

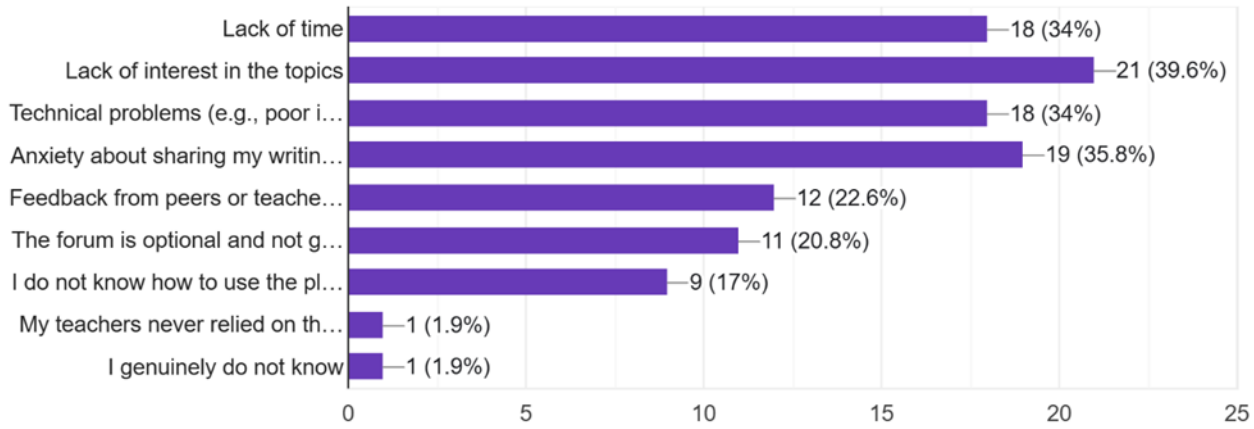

Figure 2.15. Respondents' Perceived Challenges to Online Forum Participation and Writing Usefulness

The findings reveal that the most common challenge reported by students is the lack of interest in the topics (40.7%). This is followed by technical problems (35.2%) and feeling anxious about sharing their writing with classmates (35.2%). Lack of time is also an important challenge (33.3%). Other less common problems include unhelpful feedback (22.2%), forums being optional or not graded (20.4%) and lack of knowledge about how to use the platform (16.7%).

These findings are significantly important because they reveal the main difficulties that stop students from taking part in online forums. Lack of interest in topics means that teachers should choose topics that are more interesting and relevant. Technical problems show that there is a need for better internet access and support for using the platform. Anxiety about sharing writing with classmates shows that some students feel uncomfortable when others read their work, so there should be a more supportive and safe environment. These results answer the fifth research question about the challenges students face when using online forums for writing practice.

2.5.8.2. Strategies Used to Overcome Difficulties

Figure 2.16 presents the strategies employed by students to overcome difficulties encountered during online forum participation.

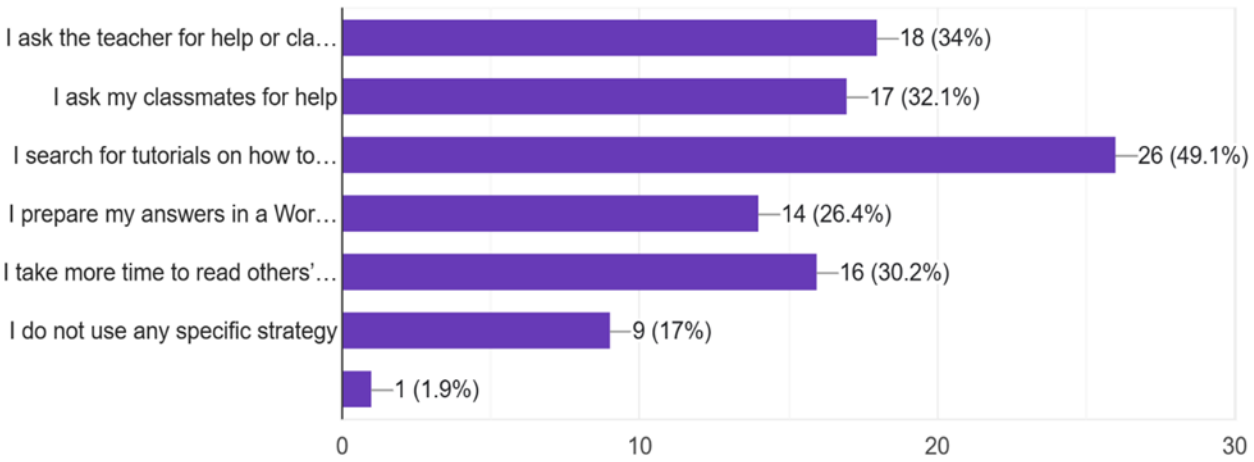

Figure 2.16. Respondents' Strategies for Overcoming Difficulties in Online Forum Participation

The data reveal that the most common strategy used by students is searching for tutorials to learn how to use the platform (48.1%). This is followed by asking the teacher for help(33.3%)and asking classmates for help (33.3%). About one third of the students (31.5%) spend more time reading others 'posts before writing their own, while 25.9% prepare their answers in a Word document before posting. A small number of students (16.7%) don't use any specific strategy, and only 1.9% use other strategies.

These findings indicate that most students try to find solutions to the problems they face. Searching for tutorials shows that students are ready to learn by themselves which reflects a good level of digital independence. Asking teachers and classmates for help shows that students depend on social support. Spending more time reading others 'posts and preparing answers in Word documents are useful strategies to improve the quality of writing before posting. The fact that 16.7% do not use any strategy shows that some students may need guidance on how to deal with difficulties.

2.5.8.3. Students' Personal Experiences (Open-ended Question)

This was an open-ended question. It was answered by 33 students out of 56(58.9% of all participants). The answers were studied and grouped into the following themes:

1. Positive experiences (60.6%)

Most students shared positive experiences. Many said that writing in online forums helped them feel more confident and less shy over time. Several students liked the feedback they received from others which helped them correct their mistakes and learn new words. Some students said that preparing their posts first in Word documents improved the quality of their writing. A few students said they made friends and found supportive communities through forums. Others liked that forums allowed them to write without pressure when the activities were not graded.

2. Negative experiences (27.3%)

Some students shared negative experiences. Some said they were afraid of criticism or strong negative feedback on their writing.

A few mentioned that others sometimes did not understand their ideas correctly. One student said they received negative comments when asking for study advice which taught them to ignore unkind replies. Another student talked about an embarrassing situation when posting emotional content without thinking first. Some students simply said that forums are "difficult "or "different from writing".

3. No experience or unclear responses (12.1%)

Some students said they had no experience with online forums or gave very short and unclear answers such as "Never "or" I have no experience".

2.5.8.4. Additional comments or suggestions about using online discussion forums to improve your writing, please write them below

This question was open-ended. It was answered by 22 students out of 56 (39.3% of all participants).
The answers were examined and organized into the following themes:

1. Positive comments about the usefulness of forums (36.4% - 8 students)

Some students stated that online forums are helpful for improving writing skills. They explained that forums give students the chance to exchange ideas, read different viewpoints, practice writing, and receive feedback from others.

Examples from responses:" Online forums are useful for improving writing", "Online discussion forums are helpful for improving writing because they allow us to share ideas, read different opinions, and receive feedback from others", "Online forums are very helpful for improving writing".

2. Suggestions for nervous or hesitant students (13.6% - 3 students)

Some students gave useful advice for learners who feel shy or unsure about participating in forums. They suggested beginning by reacting to others 'posts before sharing personal writing, posting small parts like paragraphs or outlines instead of full texts, and using offline tools first to prepare their writing.

Examples from responses: "If you are nervous, begin by commenting on others' posts","Instead of dropping a finished piece, share excerpts, outlines, or even a single paragraph", "I recommend that students use offline tools to draft their posts first, as it reduces the pressure of instant replying and allows for better self correction".

3. Suggestions for improving forum effectiveness (13.6% - 3 students)

Some students shared ideas to make forums more effective for writing development. They suggested choosing clear and engaging topics, giving helpful and respectful feedback, joining supportive communities, and paying attention to useful comments while ignoring negative ones.

Examples from responses: "Clear topics and constructive feedback make them more effective", "I suggest using simple topics and giving feedback in a kind way to help everyone improve", "Focus on helpful comments, ignore negativity, and choose supportive communities".

4. General positive remarks about the research topic (9.1% - 2 students)

Two students mentioned that they found the research topic interesting.
Examples from responses: "The topic is interesting I like it", "This is a quite interesting topic tbh"

5. Negative or dismissive comments (9.1% - 2 students)

A small number of students expressed negative opinions about the research topic or about forums in general.
Examples from responses: "Not a relevant research topic to our university students","None","I don't have"

6. No specific suggestion or unclear responses (18.2% - 4 students)

Some students wrote answers like "Nothing", "I don't have", or gave unclear responses.
Examples from responses: "Nothing", "I don't have", "No I don't".

2.6. Discussion of the results

The aim of the students' questionnaire is to examine third year EFL students' views about using online discussion forums (ODFs)as a tool to improve their writing skills. The data analysis shows several results. The most important results from this survey are presented in the following discussion.

2.6.1 Students' Perceptions of Online Discussion Forums

The results show that most students have positive opinions about using online discussion forums to improve their writing. More than two thirds of the students (67.3%) said they feel more comfortable sharing their ideas in online forums than in traditional classrooms. Also, 64.9% of the students agreed that writing in forums has made them more confident in their writing skills. These results are similar to earlier studies which showed that asynchronous communication reduces anxiety and increases participation (Bouzerabi et al., 2019; Gasmi, 2022). However, unlike these previous studies which focused on speaking and general participation, the present study extends these findings to writing development. This is significant because writing anxiety is a well-documented barrier to EFL writing development, and online forums may offer a practical solution to this challenge.

In addition, 66.6% of the students said that the informal and interactive style of writing in forums helps their writing development, and 64.8% showed a positive attitude towards using forums in their writing courses. When asked about the general effectiveness of forums, 72.9% of the students said they are effective or very effective in improving writing. This shows that third year EFL students generally understand the importance of online discussion forums as a teaching tool for writing practice. However, a critical question remains: why do students perceive forums as effective, yet their actual participation rates remain low? This paradox suggests that positive perceptions alone are insufficient to guarantee active engagement.

2.6.2 Patterns of Student Participation in Forums

The findings reveal that students take part in different activities when using forums. Most students (72.2%) said they always or often read posts and instructions carefully before writing their answers. In the same way, 74.1% said they take time to plan and organize their ideas and 72.3% said they write drafts and revise their work before posting. These findings indicates that students are careful and serious when writing in forums which reflects good writing behavior. This finding indicate that students adopt cognitively engaged writing practices, which aligns with Flower and Hayes' (1981) cognitive process theory of writing, particularly the recursive stages of planning, translating, and reviewing.

However, students were less active in interactive tasks. Only 51.8% said they always or often read and reply to their classmates 'posts, and only 40.7% ask questions or give feedback on others' writing. This shows that students focus more on their own writing and may need more support to interact with peers. This result is consistent with previous studies which showed that interaction between students in forums is often limited (Jose & Abidin, 2016). This pattern raises an important question: why do students focus more on their own writing than on interacting with peers? One possible explanation is that students may lack confidence in providing feedback to classmates. Another possibility is that the course design may not sufficiently incentivise or require interaction. From a sociocultural perspective, this pattern is problematic because collaborative learning is essential for knowledge co-construction (Vygotsky, 1978).

2.6.3 Factors Influencing Student Engagement

The findings identify several factors that affect how much students participate in online forums. Teacher support was the strongest factor, with 86.3% of students saying it encourages them to participate more. This finding aligns with Sociocultural Theory which explains that help from a more experienced person (the teacher) supports learning (Vygotsky, 1978). What is significant here is that teacher involvement was rated higher than any other factor, including grading. This suggests that students view the teacher as the primary source of guidance and motivation in forum-based writing activities.

Participation of classmates was also an important factor, as 82.0% of students said that seeing others participate encourages them to join. Digital skills and the importance of the topic both affected 78.8% of students. Grading was the least important factor with only 61.1% saying it affects their participation.

These findings demonstrate that social and motivational factors (teacher and classmates) are more important than external factors like grades in encouraging students to participate in forums. This answers the third research question about what affects student engagement. This finding contradicts some previous research suggesting that assessment is a primary motivator for student participation (Alzahrani, 2017). A possible explanation for this discrepancy is that students in the present study may be intrinsically motivated to write, or they may not have experienced graded forum activities that were meaningful to them.

2.6.4 Perceived Impact on Writing Components

Students believe that online forums help them most with vocabulary (77.3%), coherence (73.6%), and content and idea development (73.1%). Forums were seen as less helpful for grammar (58.8%), organization (58.0%), and writing mechanics (60.3%).

These findings suggest that forums are very useful for improving vocabulary and organizing ideas, while grammar accuracy and writing mechanics may need more direct teaching or feedback. This answers the fourth research question about how forums help improve different parts of writing. This finding is consistent with the distinction between implicit learning (through exposure and use) and explicit learning (through direct instruction). Forums may promote implicit learning of vocabulary and coherence, but grammar may require more explicit instruction.

2.6.5 Challenges and Strategies

The most common problems reported by students were lack of interest in topics (40.7%), technical problems (35.2%), fear of sharing their writing (35.2%), and the lack of time (33.3%). These results show the main difficulties that stop students from using forums and are similar to previous studies about problems in online learning (Alzahrani, 2017; Gasmi, 2022). What is particularly noteworthy is that lack of interest in topics was the most frequently reported challenge, even surpassing technical problems. This suggests that topic selection is a critical factor that has received insufficient attention in previous research.

To deal with these problems, students used different strategies. The most common strategy was searching for tutorials (48.1%), followed by asking the teacher for help (33.3%) and asking classmates for help (33.3%). Some students (31.5%) said they spend more time reading others' posts before writing, and 25.9% prepare their answers in Word documents first. These results answer the fifth research question about the challenges students face and the strategies they use to overcome them. However, the fact that 16.7% of students do not use any strategy to overcome difficulties suggests that some learners may need

guidance on how to deal with technical or motivational challenges. Teachers should explicitly teach strategies for overcoming common challenges.

2.6.6 Students' Personal Experiences and Suggestions

The analysis of students' experiences shows that most students (60.6%) had positive experiences when writing in online forums, such as increased confidence, useful feedback, better writing quality, and making social connections. However, some students (27.3%) had negative experiences, mainly because of fear of criticism, strong negative feedback, or misunderstanding by others. Why do some students have negative experiences while others have positive ones? Possible factors include differences in digital literacy, the quality of feedback received, and individual sensitivity to criticism. Teachers can help by modelling constructive feedback and establishing clear guidelines for respectful interaction.

Students suggested improving forums by choosing clear and interesting topics, giving helpful and kind feedback and encouraging shy students to start by commenting on others' posts before sharing their own work.

These suggestions give useful ideas for teachers who want to use forums in their writing classes. What is particularly valuable is that students recognised the importance of scaffolding for anxious learners (starting with comments before posting original content). This aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, where learners progress from simple to complex tasks with appropriate support.

2.6.7 Summary of Key Findings

Research Question
Key Finding
RQ1: Perceptions of ODFs
72.9% said forums are effective for improving writing
RQ2: Patterns of participation
Students are active in individual tasks but less active in interactive tasks
RQ3: Factors influencing engagement
Teacher support (86.3%) and classmates' participation (82.0%) are the strongest factors
RQ4: Impact on writing components
Forums help most with vocabulary (77.3%), coherence (73.6%), and idea development (73.1%)
RQ5: Challenges and strategies
Main problems: lack of interest, technical issues, anxiety; Main strategy: searching for tutorials.

2.6.8 Limitations of the Study

Like any research, this study has some limitations that need to be kept in mind when looking at the results. **First**, only 56 third-year students from one Algerian university took part in the study. This means the findings may not apply to other students or different university settings.

Second, the study only used a questionnaire and depended on what students reported about themselves. We did not look at actual forum posts or writing samples. So, what we have are students' opinions and perceptions, not a direct measure of how much their writing actually improved.

Third, the study was cross-sectional, which means we collected data at one point in time only. We cannot say how students' views or writing skills might change over a longer period. A longitudinal study would be needed for that.

Fourth, there was no control group in this study. Because of this, it is hard to say for sure whether the students' perceived improvement in writing came directly from using the forums or from other factors.

Fifth, the study focused only on students' views. We did not include teachers' perspectives, even though their input could have given us a better understanding of how forums are used in teaching and how they could be improved.

2.7. Recommendations:

Based on the results and the limits of this study, several recommendations can be given for EFL teachers students, curriculum developers, and future research.

2.7.1. Recommendations for EFL Teachers

The following recommendations are suggested for teachers:

1.Since most students have positive views about online discussion forums for improving writing, teachers are advised to include forums in their writing courses. Many students said that forums help them feel more confident and improve their vocabulary and coherence.

2. Teachers are strongly encouraged to select topics that are interesting and related to students' needs. The results showed that lack of interest in topics was one of the main problems that stopped students from participating (40.7%). Choosing engaging topics can increase motivation and participation.

3.Teachers are strongly encouraged to adopt an active facilitative role in forum discussions. The results showed that teacher involvement was the strongest factor affecting student participation (86.3%). Teachers should ask questions, give feedback, and guide discussions to help students learn.

4.Teachers are advised to create a safe and supportive environment in forums. The results showed that fear of sharing writing (35.2%) and fear of criticism were major challenges. Teachers can help by encouraging positive feedback and showing how to give constructive comments.

5.Teachers should give clear instructions and training on how to use forum platforms. Although 48.1%of students said they search for tutorials themselves, giving direct training can help reduce the number of students (16.7%) who do not know how to use the platform well.

2.7.2. Recommendations for Students

The following recommendations are suggested for students:

1. Students should take part actively in online forums because regular practice helps improve writing skills. The results showed that students who participated more often reported better improvement in vocabulary, coherence, and idea development.
2. Students are advised to read and reply to their classmates' posts. The results showed that students were active in individual tasks (planning, drafting, revising) but less active in interactive tasks like

replying to others (only 40.7% always or often give feedback). Interacting with others can improve learning by seeing different ideas.

3. Students should prepare their posts before sharing them by using offline tools. Many students said that writing drafts in Word documents first helped them organize their ideas and improve writing quality.
4. Students should not let fear of criticism stop them from participating. The results showed that many students who passed their fear had positive experiences and became more confident. Starting by replying to others can be a good first step.
5. Students should pay attention to helpful feedback and ignore negative or unhelpful comments, as some students said this helped them continue participating even after bad experiences.

2.7.3. Recommendations for Curriculum Developers

Curriculum developers are advised to:

1. Include online discussion forums in the official writing curriculum. The results showed that 47.3% of students said none of their teachers use forums, and 46.4%said only some teachers use them. More use of forums will give students more chances to practice writing.
2. Offer training programs for teachers on how to use forums effectively in teaching, including choosing good topics, managing discussions, and giving helpful feedback.
3. Make sure that forum platforms are easy to use and accessible. Technical problems were reported by 35.2%of students which shows the need for better platforms and technical support.
4. Think about making forum activities graded, because61.1% of students said that grades increase their participation. However, teachers should also keep a supportive environment.

2.7.4. Recommendations for Future Research

For future studies, it is suggested to:

1. Study how online forums can improve other language skills (reading, speaking, listening), not only writing.
2. Expand research to include different types of learners and different learning contexts (different universities and levels) to better understand the effect of forums on writing.
3. Carry out experimental or experimental studies that compare students who use forums with those who do not, to measure real improvement and not only students ‘opinions.
4. Study the role of peer feedback in forums and how it can be improved to help student writing.
5. Explore the connection between digital skills and successful participation in forums since 78.8%of students said digital competence affects their participation.
6. Use mixed methods (questionnaires, interviews, and analysis of real forum posts)to make the results more reliable and complete.

2.8. Conclusion

This chapter discussed and analyzed the data gathered from third-year EFL students at the University of Abdelhafid Boussouf, Mila, regarding their views on the use of online discussion forums (ODFs) in improving writing skills. The questionnaire analysis examined students' attitudes toward these forums, their level of participation, the factors affecting their engagement, the influence of forums on writing development, and the difficulties they face while using such platforms.

The results Indicated that most students have favorable attitudes toward online discussion forums and regard them as useful tools for enhancing writing abilities. Participants stated that these forums help them express their ideas more freely, strengthen their confidence in writing, and improve different writing aspects, including vocabulary, coherence, and idea organization. The findings also showed that students actively engage in writing practices such as planning, editing, and arranging ideas before publishing their posts. However, peer interaction through feedback and responses to classmates remained relatively limited.

Furthermore, the study revealed that several factors affect students' participation in online forums, mainly teacher support, classmates' involvement, digital skills, and the suitability of discussion topics. On the other hand, students experienced certain obstacles, such as technical problems, limited interest in some topics, fear of negative evaluation, and time constraints. Despite these challenges, many students adopted different solutions, including seeking guidance, watching tutorials and preparing their writing carefully before posting.

In general, the findings confirm that online discussion forums can effectively support the development of EFL students' writing skills when they are properly incorporated into the learning process. The study also emphasizes the need to create encouraging online learning environments, choose engaging discussion topics, and promote positive interaction between teachers and students.

Although the study was limited by the sample size and research context, it offers valuable insights into the educational importance of online discussion forums in EFL writing instruction. It is expected that this research will help improve the integration of digital learning tools in higher education and inspire further studies on the role of online communication in language learning and writing enhancement.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

GENERAL CONCLUSION

Developing writing skills in English as a foreign language is a significant challenge for university students, especially in contexts where there is little exposure to real language use. Online discussion forums have become a possible teaching tool to help address this issue because they give learners opportunities for sustained written interaction, peer feedback, and collaborative learning. The present study set out to explore students' perceptions of the effectiveness of online discussion forums for developing EFL writing skills among third year undergraduate students at the University of Abdelhafid Boussouf, Mila. It also aimed to investigate students' perceptions of using online forums as a writing tool, examine their patterns of participation, identify the factors influencing their engagement, and determine the challenges they face when using forums for writing practice.

This dissertation is made up of two main chapters. The first chapter reviewed the theoretical literature on Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) and online discussion forums as teaching tools. It explained the definitions and features of CMC, the difference between synchronous and asynchronous communication, the teaching benefits of CMC, and the theoretical bases of forum based learning, including behaviourism, cognitivism, constructivism, sociocultural theory, and interactionist perspectives. The chapter also studied writing in EFL contexts, including the definition of writing, its components, and the main approaches to teaching writing (product, process, and genre). Finally, it reviewed previous studies on online discussion forums and writing development and identified the research gaps that the present study aimed to address.

The second chapter focused on the methodology and data analysis. It described the research aims and questions, the data collection tool (a questionnaire), the target population and sample (56 third year EFL students), how the questionnaire was given, and the method of data analysis (descriptive statistics). The chapter then presented and discussed the results, organized according to the sections of the questionnaire. It ended with recommendations for teachers, students, curriculum developers, and future researchers.

The findings of the study reveal a detailed and complex picture. On the one hand, most students have positive attitudes toward online discussion forums. Most students (67.3%) said they feel more comfortable expressing their ideas in online forums than in traditional classrooms, and 64.9% agreed that writing in forums has facilitated greater confident in their writing abilities. Furthermore, 72.9% of the students rated forums as effective or very effective for improving their writing. Students perceived forums as helpful for improving vocabulary (77.3%), coherence (73.6%), and idea development (73.1%).

On the other hand, the findings also indicate significant challenges that limit effective use of forums. The most common problems reported by students were lack of interest in discussion topics (40.7%), technical problems (35.2%), anxiety about sharing writing with classmates (35.2%), and lack of time (33.3%). Moreover, the results demonstrate that while students are active in individual writing tasks such as planning, drafting, and revising, they are less active in interactive tasks such as replying to peers 'posts (only 51.8% always or often do so) and giving feedback to classmates (only 40.7% always or often do so). This low level of interaction raises concerns about fully achieving the socio-constructivist benefits of online forums.

The study also identified main factors that influence student engagement. Teacher involvement was the strongest motivating factor, with 86.3% of students agreeing that it encourages them to participate more. Classmates 'active participation was also important, with 82.0% of students saying that seeing others participate motivates them to join discussions. Digital skills and topic relevance each affected 78.8%of students. Interestingly, grading was the least important factor, with only 61.1%of students indicating that it affects their participation.

In response to the research questions formulated at the beginning of this study, the following conclusions can be drawn: (1) EFL learners have generally positive perceptions of using online discussion forums for writing development(2) students are hardworking in individual writing activities but less involved in interactive activities;(3) teacher involvement and classmates' participation are the strongest factors influencing engagement;(4) forums contribute to vocabulary, coherence, and idea development, and (5) the main challenges are lack of interest in topics, technical problems, anxiety, and time limits.

The findings of this study have several teaching implications. Teachers are encouraged to use forums in their writing courses, choose interesting topics, stay active in forum discussions, create a supportive environment, provide training on how to use the platform, and design activities that encourage peer interaction.

This study recognises several limitations. First, the sample was limited to 56 third year students from one Algerian university which limits the generalisation of the results. Second, the study depended only on a questionnaire and self reported data; no analysis of real forum posts or writing samples was done. Third, the study was cross sectional and showed students' perceptions at one moment in time. Fourth, the study did not include a control group. Fifth, the study focused only on students' perceptions and did not include teachers' views.

Finally, it is hoped that the findings of this modest work will contribute to improving the use of online discussion forums as a teaching tool for developing writing skills at the University of Abdelhafid Boussouf, Mila, and in other Algerian EFL contexts. It is also hoped that this research opens the way for future researchers to carry out more studies, including experimental studies, analysis of real forum posts, inclusion of teachers' views, and long term research on the effects of forum based writing practice.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

References

Ahlf, M., McNeil, S.G., 2023. An exploratory review of literature on moderation in asynchronous discussions. Distance Educ. 44, 137–161. https://doi.org/10.1080/01587919.2022.2150146

Ajabshir, Z.F., 2019a. The effect of synchronous and asynchronous computer-mediated communication (CMC) on EFL learners' pragmatic competence, Computers in Human Behavior. Elsevier.

Ajabshir, Z.F., 2019b. The effect of synchronous and asynchronous computer-mediated communication (CMC) on EFL learners' pragmatic competence, Computers in Human Behavior. Elsevier.

Akmal, S. (2017). Impact of web based learning on EFL : Using on-line discussion forum (ODF) to enhance students' writing skill. Universal Journal of Educational Research, 5(8), 1345–1348. https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2017.050807

Al Qunayeer, H. S. (2020). Exploring EFL Learners' Online Participation in Online Peer Writing Discussions Through a Facebook Group. Journal of Information Technology Education: Research, 19, 671–692. https://doi.org/10.28945/4621

Alkhudiry, R., 2022. The Contribution of Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory in Mediating L2 Knowledge Co-Construction., Theory & Practice in Language Studies (TPLS).

Almukhaylid, M., 2017. A comparison of socially-motivated discussion forum models for learning management systems.

Alzahrani, M. G. (2017). The effect of using online discussion forums on students' learning. Journal of Educational Technology & Online Learning, 2(1), 15–23.

Amirouche, R., & Kehal, M. (2022). The role of synchronous and asynchronous online teacher feedback in enhancing the complexity of structure in academic writing [Unpublished master's thesis]. University of Mohamed Seddik BenYahia, Jijel.

Antoniadis, G., 2015. COMPUTER-MEDIATED DISCOURSE: Issues and Challenges at the Interface of Corpus.

Bangun, C.S., Purnama, S., Panjaitan, A.S., 2022. Analysis of new business opportunities from online informal education mediamorphosis through digital platforms. Int. Trans. Educ. Technol. 1, 42– 52.

Bao, Y., 2024. A pedagogical classification framework for language learning and teaching tools based on Information and Communication Technologies.

Beckmann, J., Weber, P., 2016. Cognitive presence in virtual collaborative learning: Assessing and improving critical thinking in online discussion forums, Interactive Technology and Smart Education. Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Beleulmi, S. (2023). EFL teachers' perspectives on online teaching of the writing skill using ICT tools. ALTRALANG Journal, 5(3), 288–298.

Berestok, O.V., 2021. Synchronous and asynchronous e-learning modes: strategies, methods, objectives. Eng. Educ. Technol. 9, 19–27.

Bou-Franch, P., Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, P. (Eds.), Analyzing Digital Discourse. Springer International Publishing, Cham, pp. 25–67. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3319-92663-6_2

Bouzerabi, I., Boureghda, N., & Melit, I. (2019). The students' attitudes towards the influence of classroom discussion on improving students' speaking skill [Unpublished master's thesis]. University of Mohamed Seddik BenYahia, Jijel.

Bui, T. K. L. (2021). The genre-based approach to teaching writing : An analysis of move-step structure and lexico-grammatical errors in EFL students' expository essays. World Journal of English Language, 11(2), 95–110. https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v11n2p95

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Cabantac-Lumabi, A., & Tabajen, N. (2021). College students' experience in online asynchronous peer feedback in writing. International Journal of English Language Teaching, 9(3), 1–15.

Caudery, T. (1995a). Process writing: A brief introduction [Paper presentation]. British Council Summer School, University of Surrey, Guildford, United Kingdom.

Cheng, C. K., Paré, D. E., Collimore, L., & Joordens, S. (2011). Assessing the effectiveness of a voluntary online discussion forum on improving students' course performance. Computers & Education, 56(1), 253-261. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2010.07.023

Chew, S.Y., Ng, L.L., 2021. Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), in: Interpersonal Interactions and Language Learning. Springer International Publishing, Cham, pp. 27–52. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-67425-0_3

Chou, C.C., 2001. Formative evaluation of synchronous CMC systems for a learner-centered online course, Journal of interactive learning research. Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education (AACE).

CHUN, D.M., 2017. for Investigating Technology for Language and Culture. Handb. Technol. Second Lang. Teach. Learn. 393.

Cope, B., & Kalantzis, M. (1993). Introduction: How a genre approach to literacy can transform the way writing is taught. In B. Cope & M. Kalantzis (Eds.), The power of literacy: A genre approach to teaching writing (pp. 1–21). Falmer Press.

Darhower, M., 2002. Interactional Features of Synchronous Computer-Mediated Communication in the Intermediate L2 Class. CALICO J. 19, 249–277. https://doi.org/10.1558/cj.v19i2.249-277

Derewianka, B. (1992). A functional model of language. Board of Studies.

DiPasquale, J., Hunter, W.J., 2022. Fostering productive social interactions using asynchronous activities. Thriving Online Guide Busy Educ.

Ene, E., & Upton, T. A. (2018). Synchronous and asynchronous teacher electronic feedback and learner uptake in ESL composition. Journal of Second Language Writing, 41, 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2018.05.005

Experiences. Sage Open 12, 21582440221079907. https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440221079907

Fadeev, A., 2019. Vygotsky's theory of mediation in digital learning environment: Actuality and practice. Punctum 5, 24–44.

Fedoriv, Y., Pirozhenko, I., Shuhai, A., 2024. Sustainable linguistic strategies for enhancing learner resilience and motivation in crisis contexts. J. Innov. Sustain. 8, 04–04.

Flower, L., & Hayes, J. R. (1981). A cognitive process theory of writing. College Composition and Communication, 32(4), 365–387. http://www.jstor.org/stable/356600

Gánem-Gutiérrez, G. A. (2018). Sociocultural theory and second language learning in virtual environments. In P. Swain, M. Poehner, & J. Lantolf (Eds.), The Routledge handbook of sociocultural theory and second language development (pp. 327–342). Routledge.

Gasmi, A. A. (2022). Through the lens of students: How online discussion forums affect Students' learning. International Journal of Technology in Education (IJTE), 5(4), 669–684. https://doi.org/10.46328/ijte.291

Gnach, A., Weber, W., Engebretsen, M., Perrin, D., 2022. Digital communication and media linguistics. Cambridge University Press.

Gulzar, R., Ali, N., Bagram, M.M.M., 2022. Pedagogical Challenges of Synchronous Communication Technologies for Business English Language Learning. Tech. J. Univ. Eng. Technol. Taxila 27.

Halliday, M. A. K. (1994). An introduction to functional grammar (2nd ed.). Edward Arnold.

Halliday, M. A. K., & Matthiessen, C. M. I. M. (2014). An introduction to functional grammar (4th ed.). Routledge.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Harasim, L., 2018. Learning about Learning Online: The Methodology of Discourse Analytics, in: Responsible Analytics and Data Mining in Education. Routledge, pp. 119–137.

Hartfiel, V. F., Hughey, J. B., Wormuth, D. R., & Jacobs, H. L. (1985). Learning ESL composition. Newbury House.

Herring, S.C., 2019a. The Coevolution of Computer-Mediated Communication and Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis,

Hung, C.-T., Wu, S.-E., Chen, Y.-H., Soong, C.-Y., Chiang, C., Wang, W., 2024. The evaluation of synchronous and asynchronous online learning: student experience, learning outcomes, and cognitive load. BMC Med. Educ. 24, 326. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-024-05311-7

Hussin, S., Abdullah, M.Y., Ismail, N., Yoke, S.K., 2015. The Effects of CMC Applications on ESL Writing Anxiety among Postgraduate Students. Engl. Lang. Teach. 8, 167–172

Hyland, K. (2007). Genre pedagogy : Language, literacy and L2 writing instruction. Journal of Second Language Writing, 16(3), 148–164. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2007.07.005

Hyland, K., & Hyland, F. (2019). Interpersonality and teacher written feedback. In K. Hyland & F. Hyland (Eds.), Feedback in second language writing (2nd ed., pp. 165–183). Cambridge University Press.

Hyon, S. (1996). Genre in three traditions : Implications for ESL. TESOL Quarterly, 30(4), 693–722. https://doi.org/10.2307/3587930

Ibrahim, S., Saad, S., Md Tahir, N., Primsuwan, P., 2018. Promoting learners' autonomy by using Facebook to enhance students' writing skills. J. Creat. Pract. Lang. Learn. Teach. CPLT 6, 56– 68.

JERIBIAI, A., & BAHLOUL, A. (2020). The role of Google Classroom in enhancing writing capacities through electronic feedback. Journal of Arabic Language Sciences and Literature, 12(1), 394–408.

Johnson, D.M., Sutton, P., Poon, J., 2000. Face-to-Face vs. CMC: Student communication in a technologically rich learning environment, in: 17th Annual Conference of the Australian Society for Computers in Learning in Tertiary Education: ASCILITE 2000,.

Jose, J., & Abidin, M. J. Z. (2016). A pedagogical perspective on promoting English as a foreign language writing through online forum discussions. English Language Teaching, 9(2), 84–101. https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v9n2p84

Kadir,Z. A., Maros, M., & Hamid, B. A. (2012). Linguistic features in the online discussion forums. International Journal of Social Science and Humanity, 2(3), 276-281.

Kaplan, R. B. (1966). Cultural thought patterns in intercultural education. Language Learning, 16(1), 1–20

Koehler, M. J., & Mishra, P. (2009). What is technological pedagogical content knowledge ? Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education, 9(1), 60–70.

Koko, D. A., & Seddoud, M. (2021). Students' interactivity in online discussion forums: The case of Language and Communication Master II students at MMUTO [Unpublished master's dissertation]. Mouloud Mammeri University of Tizi-Ouzou, Faculty of Letters and Languages.

Kozulin, A. (2018). Sociocultural theory and mediated learning : The role of cultural tools in cognitive development. Cambridge University Press.

Kozulin, A., 2003. Psychological tools and mediated learning. Vygotsky's Educ. Theory Cult. Context 4, 15–38.

Lampe, C., Zube, P., Lee, J., Park, C.H., Johnston, E., 2014. Crowdsourcing civility: A natural experiment examining the effects of distributed moderation in online forums, Government Information Quarterly. Elsevier.

Lantolf, J.P., 2000. Second language learning as a mediated process, Language teaching. Cambridge University Press.

Lantolf, J.P., Xi, J., 2023. Digital Language Learning: A Sociocultural Theory Perspective. TESOL Q. 57, 702–715. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.3218

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Lazou, C., Tsinakos, A., 2022. Computer-Mediated Communication for Collaborative Learning in Distance Education Environments, in: Zaphiris, P., Ioannou, A. (Eds.), Learning and Collaboration Technologies. Designing the Learner and Teacher Experience, Lecture Notes in Computer Science. Springer International Publishing, Cham, pp. 265–274. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-05657-4_19

Levin, S.M., 2024. Review on the influence of student engagement and interaction in online learning communities on academic achievement. Векторы Благополучия Экономика И Социум 72–85.

Li, M., Zhang, M., 2023. Collaborative writing in L2 classrooms: A research agenda, Language Teaching. Cambridge University Press.

Lin, H., 2015. Computer-mediated communication (CMC) in L2 oral proficiency development: A metaanalysis, ReCALL. Cambridge University Press.

Little, O., Goe, L., Bell, C., 2009. A Practical Guide to Evaluating Teacher Effectiveness. Natl. Compr. Cent. Teach. Qual.

Liu, A.L., Winne, P.H., Nesbit, J.C., 2025. Temporal structuring in asynchronous discussions: Designing for collaborative learning in online university courses, The Internet and Higher Education. Elsevier.

Long, M.H., 1980. Input, interaction, and second language acquisition. University of California, Los Angeles.

Madden, L., Jones, G., Childers, G., 2017. Teacher education: Modes of communication within asynchronous and synchronous communication platforms, The Journal of Classroom Interaction. JSTOR.

Mansour, N., 2024a. Students' and facilitators' experiences with synchronous and asynchronous online dialogic discussions and e-facilitation in understanding the Nature of Science. Educ. Inf. Technol. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-024-12473-w

Mansour, N., 2024b. Students' and facilitators' experiences with synchronous and asynchronous online dialogic discussions and e-facilitation in understanding the Nature of Science. Educ. Inf. Technol. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-024-12473-w

Marden, M.P., Herrington, J., 2022. Asynchronous text-based communication in online communities of foreign language learners: Design principles for practice, Australasian Journal of Educational Technology.

Maringanti, H.B., Sahu, M., 2024. Cognitive Learning, in: Digital Skill Development for Industry 4.0. Auerbach Publications, pp. 15–32.

Martin, J. R. (1984). Language, register and genre. In F. Christie (Ed.), Children writing: Reader (pp. 21–29). Deakin University Press.

Miller, K. S. (1998). Teaching writing. In K. Johnson & H. Johnson (Eds.), Encyclopedic dictionary of applied linguistics (pp. 341–348). Blackwell.

Mohamadi Zenouzagh, Z., 2022. Language-related episodes and feedback in synchronous voiced-based and asynchronous text-based computer-mediated communications. J. Comput. Educ. 9, 515–547. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40692-021-00212-w

Mohammadi, M. O., Jabbari, A. A., & Fazilatfar, A. M. (2018). The impact of the asynchronous online discussion forum on the Iranian EFL students' writing ability and attitudes. Applied Research on English Language, 7(4), 367–396.SID. https://sid.ir/paper/723938/en

Murray, D. M. (1980). Writing as process : How writing finds its own meaning. In T. R. Donovan & B. W. McClelland (Eds.), Eight approaches to teaching composition (pp. 1–13). National Council of Teachers of English.

Mutharasi, A., 2025. From Synapses to Schemas: Understanding Brain Development and Cognitive Growth through Piaget and Vygotsky's Theories. Crit. Cartogr. 42.

Nagao, A. (2019). The SFL genre-based approach to writing in EFL contexts. Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education, 4(6), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40862-019-0069-3

Najjemba, J.L., 2021. A social constructivist approach to enhance the literacy skills of English as Second Language pre-service students (PhD Thesis). University of the Free State.

Namaziandost, E., Razmi, M.H., Hernández, R.M., Ocaña-Fernández, Y., Khabir, M., 2022. Synchronous CMC text chat versus synchronous CMC voice chat: impacts on EFL learners' oral proficiency and anxiety. J. Res. Technol. Educ. 54, 599–616. https://doi.org/10.1080/15391523.2021.1906362

Nguyen, L.V., 2008. Computer mediated communication and foreign language education: Pedagogical features. Int. J. Instr. Technol. Distance Learn. 5, 23–44.

Özgür Küfi, E., 2022. A Retrospective Evaluation of Pre-Pandemic Online Teacher Learning

Pendry, L.F., Salvatore, J., 2015. Individual and social benefits of online discussion forums, Computers in human behavior. Elsevier.

Peterson, A.T., Beymer, P.N., Putnam, R.T., 2018. Synchronous and asynchronous discussions: Effects on cooperation, belonging, and affect., Online Learning. ERIC.

Pysarchyk, O., 2024. Creating effective learning environment: learner-centred pedagogy, assessment and feedback practices and web-based tools in ESP education. Eur. Sci. 163–192.

Rains, S., Brunner, M., Pavlich, C., & Goktas, S. (2016). Asynchronous communication and cognitive processing in online learning. Computers & Education, 98, 14–25. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2015.11.015

Ribeiro, A., Eslami, Z.R., 2025. Second language development in face-to-face versus synchronous computer-mediated interactions: Dyadic type and language proficiency. Lang. Teach. Res. 29, 1780–1806. https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688221098379

Rockinson-Szapkiw, A., Wendt, J., 2015. Technologies that assist in online group work: A comparison of synchronous and asynchronous computer mediated communication technologies on students' learning and community, Journal of Educational Multimedia and Hypermedia. Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education (AACE).

Saeed, M., 2013. Adopting social networking sites (SNSs) as interactive communities among English foreign language (EFL) learners in writing: Opportunities and challenges. Engl. Lang. Teach.

Sameshima, P., Orasi, T., 2022. What's better than the asynchronous discussion post?, Journal of Applied Learning & Teaching. Kaplan Business School Australia Sydney, NSW.

Selfa-Sastre, M., Pifarré, M., Cujba, A., Cutillas, L., Falguera, E., 2022. The role of digital technologies to promote collaborative creativity in language education, Frontiers in psychology. Frontiers Media SA.

Shahabadi, M.M., Uplane, M., 2015. Synchronous and asynchronous e-learning styles and academic performance of e-learners. Procedia-Soc. Behav. Sci. 176, 129–138.

Shang, H. F. (2017). An exploration of asynchronous and synchronous feedback modes in EFL writing. Journal of Computing in Higher Education, 29(3), 496–513. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12528-017-9154-0

Shintani, N. (2015). The effects of computer-mediated synchronous and asynchronous direct corrective feedback on writing: A case study. Computer Assisted Language Learning, 29(3), 517–538. https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2014.993400

Shintani, N., & Aubrey, S. (2016). The effectiveness of synchronous and asynchronous written corrective feedback on grammatical accuracy in a computer-mediated environment. The Modern Language Journal, 100(1), 296–319. https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12317

Steinberger, F., 2017. Synchronous collaborative L2 writing with technology (PhD Thesis). lmu.

Sun, L., 2024. Dialogue in enhancing EFL writing proficiency through collaborative synchronous and asynchronous computer-mediated communication (PhD Thesis).

Susetyarini, R.E., Baiduri, B., Darmayanti, R., Nuryami, N., Siregar, Y.S., Sahara, N., Suprayitno, K., 2024. Learning Reform: Why does Behavioral Theory prevent interactive teaching? AMCA J. Community Dev. 4, 43–50.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Tella, A., & Isah, A. (2011). Pattern of undergraduate's participation in the online discussion forum at the University of Ilorin, Nigeria. Journal of Information Technology Management, 22(3), 59–76.

Thorne, S.L., 2008. Computer-mediated communication. Encycl. Lang. Educ. 4, C336.

Tilak, S., Glassman, M., 2022. Gordon Pask's second-order cybernetics and Lev Vygotsky's cultural historical theory: Understanding the role of the internet in developing human thinking. Theory Psychol. 32, 888–914. https://doi.org/10.1177/09593543221123281

Tolmie, A., Boyle, J., 2000. Factors influencing the success of computer mediated communication (CMC) environments in university teaching: a review and case study, Computers & education. Elsevier.

Vandergriff, I., 2016. Second-language discourse in the digital world.

Varkey, T.C., Varkey, J.A., Ding, J.B., Varkey, P.K., Zeitler, C., Nguyen, A.M., Merhavy, Z.I., Thomas, C.R., 2023. Asynchronous learning: a general review of best practices for the 21st century, Journal of Research in Innovative Teaching & Learning. Emerald Publishing Limited.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). Mind in society : The development of higher psychological processes. Harvard University Press

Warschauer, M. (1997). A sociocultural approach to literacy and its significance for CALL. In K. Murphy-Judy & R. Sanders (Eds.), Nexus: The convergence of research & teaching through new information Technologies (pp. 88-97). Durham: University of North Carolina.

WARSCHAUER, M. (1997). Computer-mediated collaborative learning : Theory and practice. The Modern Language Journal, 81(4), 470–481.

White, R., & Arndt, V. (1991). Process writing. Longman.

Widiati, U., & Cahyono, B. Y. (2006). The teaching of EFL writing in the Indonesian context : The state of the art. Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan, 13(3), 139–150.

Woo, Y., Reeves, T.C., 2007. Meaningful interaction in web-based learning: A social constructivist interpretation, The Internet and higher education. Elsevier.

Zamiri, M., Esmaeili, A., 2024. Methods and technologies for supporting knowledge sharing within learning communities: A systematic literature review, Administrative Sciences. MDPI.

Zeng, H., Luo, J., 2024. Effectiveness of synchronous and asynchronous online learning: a metaanalysis. Interact. Learn. Environ. 32, 4297–4313. https://doi.org/10.1080/10494820.2023.2197953

Zhang, Y., Zheng, B., Tian, Y., 2024. An exploratory study of English-language learners' text chat interaction in synchronous computer-mediated communication: functions and change over time. Comput. Assist. Lang. Learn. 37, 1975–2006. https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2022.2136202

Zhong, Q., Wang, Y., Lv, W., Xu, J., Zhang, Y., 2022. Self-regulation, teaching presence, and social presence: Predictors of students' learning engagement and persistence in blended synchronous learning, Sustainability. MDPI.

Ziegler, N., 2016. Synchronous computer-mediated communication and interaction: A meta-analysis, Studies in Second Language Acquisition. Cambridge University Press.

Zollinger, A., 2021. Multimodality on the Internet: Recent Meme Genres as Tools for Online Communication.

Чекштуріна, В., Гомотюк, О., Патряк, О., 2025. Features of Asynchronous Digital Communications in Educational and Professional Clusters. Науковий Журнал «Бібліотекознавство Документознавство Інформологія».

APPENDICES

Questionnaire for Third-Year EFL Students

Dear student,

This questionnaire aims to gather information about your experiences and opinions regarding the use of Online Discussion Forums (ODFs) – like discussion boards on Moodle, Blackboard, or other platforms – as a tool to help you develop your academic writing skills in English. Your honest and thoughtful responses will be very valuable for this research. All information provided will be kept strictly confidential and used only for academic research purposes. Thank you for your participation.

Please, tick (√) in the appropriate box and write full answers when necessary.

Section One: Background Information

1.How old are you?

□ 20–22 □ 23–25 □ 26 or above

2.How many years have you been studying English?

□ 1–3 years □ 4–6 years □ 7 years or more

3.How do you rate your overall level of English?

□ Beginner □ Intermediate □ Upper-intermediate □ Advanced

4.Have you ever taken a formal academic writing course before?

□ Yes □ No

Section Two: General Information and Access

5.how often do you participate in online discussion forums for your university courses?

- Several times a week □
- Once a week □
- A few times a month □
- Rarely or never □

6.How many of your teachers use online discussion forums as part of their courses?

- All of them □
- Most of them □
- Some of them □
- None of them □

7.How do you evaluate your digital literacy skills?

- Very low □

- Low □
- Average □
- High □
- Very high □

8. Which platform do you mainly use for forums?

- Moodle □
- Blackboard □
- Facebook groups □
- Other □

Section Three: Perceptions of Online Discussion Forums as a Writing Tool

9.To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

I feel more comfortable expressing my ideas in an online forum than in a traditional classroom.

- Strongly Agree □
- Agree □
- Neutral □
- disagree □
- Strongly disagree □

Writing in online forums has helped me become more confident in my ability to write in English.

- Strongly Agree □
- Agree □
- Neutral □
- disagree □
- Strongly disagree □

I find the writing style used in online forums (e.g., less formal, more interactive) helpful for my writing development.

- Strongly Agree □
- Agree □
- Neutral □
- disagree □

- Strongly disagree □

Overall, I have a positive attitude towards using online forums as part of my writing courses.

- Strongly Agree □
- Agree □
- Neutral □
- disagree □
- Strongly disagree □

Participating in online forums does not significantly improve my writing.

. Strongly Agree □
. Agree □
. Neutral □
. disagree □
. Strongly disagree □

Online forums are a waste of time for writing practice

- Strongly Agree □
- Agree □
- Neutral □
- disagree □
- Strongly disagree □

Section Four : Patterns and Frequency of Participation

10.How often do you engage in the following activities when participating in an online forum?
a. I read the posts and instructions carefully before I write my own response.

- Always □
- Often □
- Sometimes □
- Rarely □
- Never □

b. I take time to plan and organize my ideas before I write my post.

- Always □
- Often □
- Sometimes □
- Rarely □
- Never □

c. I write a first draft and then revise it before finally posting it.

- Always □
- Often □
- Sometimes □
- Rarely □
- Never □

d. I read and respond to my classmates' posts.

- Always □
- Often □
- Sometimes □
- Rarely □
- Never □

e. I ask questions or provide feedback on my classmates' writing.

- Always □
- Often □
- Sometimes □
- Rarely □
- Never □

Section Five: Factors Influencing Your Engagement

11.To what extent do you agree that the following factors influence your level of participation in online forums?

My participation is higher when the forum activity is graded or counts towards my final mark.

- Strongly agree □
- Agree □
- Neutral □

- Disagree □
- Strongly disagree □

The level of teacher involvement (e.g., asking questions, giving feedback) motivates me to participate more.

- Strongly agree □
- Agree □
- Neutral □
- Disagree □
- Strongly disagree □

Seeing my classmates actively participating encourages me to join the discussion.

- Strongly agree □
- Agree □
- Neutral □
- Disagree □
- Strongly disagree □

My level of digital competence (how comfortable I am using the online platform) affects my participation.

- Strongly agree □
- Agree □
- Neutral □
- Disagree □
- Strongly disagree □

The relevance and interest of the discussion topic strongly influences my decision to participate.

- Strongly agree □
- Agree □
- Neutral □
- disagree □
- Strongly disagree □

Section Six: Perceived Impact on Specific Writing Components

12. To what extent do you believe that participating in online forums has helped you improve the following aspects of your academic writing?

a. Vocabulary: Learning and using new words and expressions.

- A great deal □

- Quite a lot □
- Moderately □
- A little □
- Not at all □

b. Grammar: Improving the grammatical accuracy of my sentences.

- A great deal □
- Quite a lot □
- Moderately □
- A little □
- Not at all □

c. Organization: Structuring my ideas more logically in a paragraph or essay.

- A great deal □
- Quite a lot □
- Moderately □
- A little □
- Not at all □

d. Coherence: Making my ideas flow smoothly and connect well with each other.

- A great deal □
- Quite a lot □
- Moderately □
- A little □
- Not at all □

e. Content / Idea Development: Generating and elaborating on ideas for a topic.

- A great deal □
- Quite a lot □
- Moderately □
- A little □
- Not at all □

f. Writing Mechanics: Improving my punctuation and spelling.

- A great deal □

- Quite a lot □
- Moderately □
- A little □
- Not at all □

Section Seven: Effectiveness

13. To what extent do you agree with the following?

a. My writing grades have improved since using online forums

- Strongly agree □
- Agree □
- Neutral □
- Disagree □
- Strongly disagree □

b. My teacher has noticed improvement in my writing.

- Strongly agree □
- Agree □
- Neutral □
- Disagree □
- Strongly disagree □

14. Overall, how effective do you think online forums are for improving your writing?

- Very effective □
- Effective □
- Neutral □
- Ineffective □
- Very ineffective □

Section Eight: Challenges and Strategies

15.In your opinion, what are the main challenges that prevent you from participating more in online discussion forums or make them less useful for your writing? (You can tick more than one)

- Lack of time □
- Lack of interest in the topics □

- Technical problems (e.g., poor internet connection) □
- Anxiety about sharing my writing with peers □
- Feedback from peers or teachers is not helpful or unclear □
- The forum is optional and not graded □
- I do not know how to use the platform properly □
- Other:

16.What strategies do you use to overcome the difficulties you face when participating in online forums? (You can tick more than one)

- I ask the teacher for help or clarification □
- I ask my classmates for help □
- I search for tutorials on how to use the platform □
- I prepare my answers in a Word document before posting them online □
- I take more time to read others' posts before I write my own □
- I do not use any specific strategy □
- Other:

17.Please describe one personal experience (positive or negative) related to writing in online forums.

18.If you have any additional comments or suggestions about using online discussion forums to improve your writing, please write them below.

Thank you very much for your cooperation

Résumé

La présente étude examine les perceptions des étudiants quant à l'efficacité des forums de discussion en ligne dans le développement des compétences en expression écrite en anglais langue étrangère (EFL) chez les étudiants de troisième année de licence à l'University of Abdelhafid Boussouf Mila, Algérie. Fondée sur la Sociocultural Theory de Lev Vygotsky (1978) et la théorie cognitive du processus d'écriture de Linda Flower et John R. Hayes (1981), l'étude vise également à explorer les perceptions des étudiants concernant l'utilisation des forums en ligne comme outil d'écriture, à analyser leurs modes de participation, à identifier les facteurs influençant leur engagement et à déterminer les défis qu'ils rencontrent. L'étude adopte une approche quantitative descriptive. Un questionnaire a été administré à 56 étudiants de troisième année d'anglais, et les données recueillies ont été analysées à l'aide de méthodes statistiques descriptives, notamment les fréquences et les pourcentages. Les résultats indiquent que la majorité des étudiants ont des attitudes positives envers les forums de discussion en ligne. La plupart des étudiants (67,3 %) ont déclaré se sentir plus à l'aise pour exprimer leurs idées dans les forums en ligne que dans les salles de classe traditionnelles, et 72,9 % considèrent les forums comme efficaces ou très efficaces pour améliorer leurs compétences rédactionnelles. Les étudiants estiment que les forums les aident principalement à améliorer le vocabulaire (77,3 %), la cohérence (73,6 %) et le développement des idées (73,1 %). Cependant, les résultats mettent également en évidence des défis importants, notamment le manque d'intérêt pour les sujets de discussion (40,7 %), les problèmes techniques (35,2 %), l'anxiété liée au partage des écrits avec les camarades de classe (35,2 %) et le manque de temps (33,3 %). L'étude identifie également que l'implication des enseignants (86,3 %) et la participation active des camarades (82,0 %) sont les facteurs les plus influents sur l'engagement des étudiants. Sur la base de ces résultats, l'étude conclut que, bien que les forums de discussion en ligne aient le potentiel de soutenir le développement des compétences rédactionnelles, leur efficacité reste limitée par plusieurs défis contextuels et pédagogiques. Des recommandations destinées aux enseignants, aux étudiants, aux concepteurs de programmes et aux futurs chercheurs sont proposées.

Mots-clés : forums de discussion en ligne, écriture en EFL, développement de l'écriture, engagement des étudiants, Algérie.

الملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى معرفة آراء الطلاب حول فعالية المنتديات النقاشية عبر الإنترنت في تطوير مهارات الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية عند طلبة السنة الثالثة ليسانس بجامعة عبد الحفيظ بوصوف ، ميلة ، الجزائر . تعتمد الدراسة على النظرية الاجتماعية الثقافية لفيغوتسكي (1978) والنظرية المعرفية للكتابة لفلور وهايز (1981) . كما تهدف الدراسة إلى معرفة آراء الطلاب حول استخدام المنتديات عبر الإنترنت كوسيلة للكتابة ، وتحليل طريقة مشاركتهم فيها ، ومعرفة العوامل التي تؤثر على تفاعلهم، وتحديد الصعوبات التي يواجهونها. اعتمدت الدراسة على المنهج الوصفي الكمي . وتم توزيع استبيان على 56 طالباً من طلبة السنة الثالثة ، ثم تم تحليل البيانات باستعمال التكرارات والنسب المئوية.

أظهرت النتائج أن أغلب الطلاب لديهم مواقف إيجابية تجاه المنتديات النقاشية عبر الإنترنت. حيث قال معظم الطلاب (67.3%) إنهم يشعرون براحة أكبر عند التعبير عن أفكارهم في المنتديات عبر الإنترنت مقارنة بالقسم العادي ، كما رأى 72.9% من الطلاب أن المنتديات فعالة أو فعالة جداً في تحسين كتاباتهم . واعتقد الطلاب أن المنتديات تساعدهم أكثر في تحسين المفردات (77.3%)، والترابط بين الأفكار (73.6%)، وتطوير الأفكار (73.1%). ومع ذلك، أظهرت النتائج أيضاً وجود بعض الصعوبات، مثل عدم الاهتمام بمواضيع النقاش (40.7%) ، والمشكلات التقنية (35.2%) ، والخوف من مشاركة الكتابة مع الزملاء (35.2%)، وضيق الوقت (33.3%) . كما بينت الدراسة أن مشاركة الأستاذ (86.3%) ومشاركة الزملاء بشكل نشط (82.0%) هما أكثر العوامل التي تؤثر على تفاعل الطلاب.

بناءً على هذه النتائج ، توصلت الدراسة إلى أن المنتديات النقاشية عبر الإنترنت يمكن أن تساعد في تطوير مهارات الكتابة ، لكن فعاليتها تتأثر ببعض الصعوبات التعليمية والظروف المحيطة . وفي النهاية، قدمت الدراسة مجموعة من التوصيات للأساتذة والطلاب ومطوري المناهج والباحثين في المستقبل.

الكلمات المفتاحية: منتديات النقاش عبر الإنترنت، الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، تطوير مهارات الكتابة، انخراط الطلبة، الجزائر.