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**The Use of Technology to Promote Self-Learning in an on-line English 1 MEIF Group**

Línea de Generación y Aplicación del Conocimiento al que se adscribe el presente proyecto: *Modalidades de enseñanza-aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras en la UV.*

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**Abstract**

The present study is related to the importance of self-learning strategies for online courses. It is based on the Constructivist theory which implies the learner creates his own knowledge.

The Veracruzana University has been immersing in the new teaching tendencies due to globalization. As a result, a new philosophy emerged to face the overcrowding Higher Education Institutions are suffering.

Those learning options are self-learning and online learning. These modes are grown under the Constructivist theory since they promote autonomy.

Autonomy is related to the fact of transferring more control to the students, generally in order to have a greater coverage and reduced costs.

However, students are not fond of them, because seem to feel isolated. So, this study was carried out in order to observe to what extent the online mode is achieving the purpose of turning students autonomous.

In order to obtain data, some questionnaires were handed in to the involved people in the process. Also field notes were taken by the researcher and finally, the data was triangulated to obtain the results.

As a result, it was obtained that the online course promotes self-learning strategies as long as the learner is open-minded to them.

So after having analyzed the pros and cons from this learning mode what I suggest is to implement self-learning strategies no matter the level we are teaching. It would improve our students' learning and at the same time increase their strategies. It would be advisable to work collaboratively to ensure we are all going to the same objective.

**Key words:** online learning, self-learning, autonomy

## Introduction

As a result from the changes in the Higher Education Institutions (HEI) worldwide, the Veracruzana University faced the need to implement new learning processes which were more adequate to the global requirements.

To begin with, as the globalization advance impacted all the HEI processes and one of the main problems to overcome was coverage, a transformation from the learning paradigm was compulsory at the Veracruzana University.

The first action taken was to change the prevalent rigid learning paradigm to the so-called *Integral and Flexible Educational Model* (MEIF in Spanish).

This new model was aimed to change from a teaching centered model to a learner-centered one; this model fosters a holistic learning which includes three important dimensions: the human, the intellectual, and the professional.

This study is based on the Constructivist and Autonomy theories. It is important to mention that the Constructivist theory has recently made an influence on the Autonomy. In Raz words, (Benson 2001) Autonomy is a “theory of the good...is socially defined in that the goals , preferences and values of individual activities, are derived from the shared social matrix” (44).

As part of this new learning mode, in 1999 a Self-Access Center per region was implemented throughout the five University Regions in the State to support students’ education since one of the learning modalities was self-learning.

Some teachers were hired by the UV and trained by the British Council to perform as advisors which implied an important University investment in favor of education.

Another improvement was made in 2000 by modernizing the different technological platforms to support either the academic and administrative activities, taking advantage of the ICT.

As a result, the Veracruzana University implemented the EMINUS virtual learning environment to face the coverage problem. This platform offers support to face to face (FTF) groups, totally online sessions, or a blended learning: combining FTF and virtual sessions.

By 2009, the *Plan Estratégico de Tecnologías de Información y Comunicaciones UV 2009-2013*, included, in the 2<sup>nd</sup>. axis, objectives to achieve such as: Reforming

educational programs based on the evaluation of the MEIF; design and operate a multimodal system education; promote the development and use of ICT's to support students' learning; among other aims.

All these new global paradigms, implies an adjustment in the teaching role; as said by Seng Chee (2011), the school goals have changed, consequently, our functions have too; and now we should be more concern about how to prepare students to a globalize and diverse knowledge society; fostering their confidence for learning on their own, and helping them to develop their learning competencies.

Along with Area in Bautista (2004) we need to have a more formative roll than an information provider and promote learning to learn strategies; guide them to look for and select the adequate information from the internet; in other words, we turn into knowledge mediators concerned in planning a more flexible and open learning process.

As a self-access counselor, I carried out some surveys to know about students believes about self-learning. Most of them coincided they were in this learning mode because they had not had any other chance to take a classroom lesson because overcrowding. They also agreed expressing they preferred having a class with a teacher in a classroom. Some of them argued they did not even know they were enrolled in a self-learning mode; and many of them did not even appear once during the course.

I realized not many students were convinced with the self-learning modality; even though the facilities are adequate and the counselors are trained, probably students do not feel prepared to learn on their own guided by a counselor, or may not be interested in this learning modality; desertion can be example of resistance to autonomy.

Concerning online learning, the panorama does not seem to be different. Students express they thought it would be easier to take this lesson at home or at work, but then they exceed time and finally quit.

I also conducted online English groups made up students who had freely chosen this subjected but not many succeeded.

Willing in Gardener & Miller (1999) commented a study where only a 3% of the surveyed "... responded positively to the statement 'I like to study English by myself'..." (p. 47).

Farmer in Gardener & Miller (1999) also reported that in a study, a tertiary part of self-access learners expected teacher contact.

Hence, when I was given the opening for being responsible for the first time to a MEIF online English group I ponder the opportunity to use Technology to Promote Self-Learning.

Since I also have a FTF class, taking advantage of my previous experience as counselor, I decided to implement a blended learning support, giving the online students the occasion to attend my classroom lessons, as a backing to the emotional aspect.

I also had in mind that it is necessary to prepare students to take advantage of the facilities and the counselors to develop and/or learn lifelong self-learning abilities.

### **Context and Focus**

English as a Second Language in Mexico

As a result of globalization, English language has turned into a "must" subject in Mexico. This situation is recognized by the Public Educational Department (SEP by its Spanish acronym) which has implemented English learning as compulsory according to the Educational Reform which will be totally established by 2018.

As stated by the Reforma de la Educación Secundaria. Fundamentación Curricular. Lengua Extranjera. Inglés (2006), English a Second Language in Mexico has been part of the curriculum since 1925 when Junior High School was implemented in our country. The main teaching methods practiced since the first time English was established as compulsory were Grammar and Direct Methods. It was in 1993 when the existing teaching methods were changed in response to the Educational Program corresponding to 1993 period.

This new paradigm emphasized the communicative aspects rather than the grammar or translation aspects. Nevertheless, an exploratory research carried out during 2001-2002 demonstrated that this new paradigm failed since students who finished junior high school were neither able to communicate, nor had developed metacognitive or linguistic abilities.

Moreover, teachers got confused with the new methodology and continued to promote activities such as translation, repetition and memory learning which were not adequate to foster the new paradigm.

Additionally, the program did not state the English level teachers needed to manage, nor mention the level students needed to accomplish, which made impossible the measurement of the program achievement.

During this 2001-2002 research the basis for the 2006 Junior High School English Programs were established. The core characteristic for these programs is the social practices of language which are aimed for students to achieve the A2 level according to the Common European Framework (CEF).

Furthermore, teachers are required to accomplish a B1 English level according to the CEF as a minimum, however, a B2 would be desirable so as they are able to work more efficiently.

The 2006 programs were piloted in the 2004-2005 period where the importance of English language as an instrument for accessing to technology and different cultures was stated.

It is important to mention that these 2006 programs are still used in 2013 junior high schools all over the Mexican Country.

Regarding to Senior high school, in line with the Common Curriculum Framework for the Senior High School at the SEP, signed in 2008, English learning is part of the Communication subjects and is part of the whole Senior High School program.

The students from this level are expected to communicate in a second language, in different contexts, with different instruments, at a Basic level. Nonetheless, specific levels are stated neither for the students nor for the teachers.

On the other hand, consistent with the SEP Curriculum, from the 2011 Basic Education Reform, English language is inserted from the very early school years, that is to say, kinder garden, where students are expected to achieved a vocabulary recognition level, especially greetings, animals, and names.

Consistent with the elementary and Junior high school achievements, in this new Reform, students are expected to consolidate their previous knowledge, communicate their everyday activities and events related to their past experiences.

In relation to the standardization expected from this Reform, the CEF is mentioned so as the National Language Level Certification (CENNI Spanish acronym) but no level is referenced.

All these curriculum adaptations to the basic education emerged as a response to the globalization impact, which has definitely influenced all the teaching levels and HEIs are not the exception. As a result, the Veracruzana University since 1999 implemented a new Educational Model where English was obligatory to all the Programs. Students have to take two English levels in order to achieve a A1 level from the CEF.

Even though all the English lessons new university students are supposed to have taken, most of them still lack basic knowledge need to take the lessons in their first bachelor semesters.

Students have the opportunity to either take the lessons or validate those levels with a national certification, EXAVER, or an international one: PET, FIRST CERTIFICATE or TOEFL.

The options they have to take these lessons are: attending them at their department if possible, or join a Language Center where they have two alternatives: take the lessons in a classroom or take them as self-learners.

Recently, a new possibility came up: online learning. They take the lessons on the Veracruzana University Eminus platform and are supported by English teachers who acquired the facilitator role.

These last two learning modalities are innovative for the new university students therefore they do not feel confident in taking these options since to this point of their school life, they have only attended traditional learning, that is, in a classroom with a teacher in front, then becoming a self-learner or an on-line one is not a friendly idea.

Consequently, most of them prefer the traditional teaching, either at their Department or at the Language Center, which is not always possible due to the great number of students.

Frequently, is the University system which needs to insert students into either of one of those modalities: the online or the self-learning. However, sometimes they

take the choice by themselves because of one of its most important characteristics: time and place flexibility.

Benson (2001) mentioned that for self-instructed students to succeed is necessary a high degree of autonomy and students who chose distance learning and persist with it are "... those who already possess a sufficient degree of autonomy ..." (p. 133) which will permit them to develop the adequate learning strategies.

### **Open or Distance learning in Mexico**

Distance and Open learning became popular in Mexico in the 70's when the UNAM and IPN implemented them in order to promote wider education coverage. Additionally, the ITESM implemented by 1957 virtual rooms for business companies. Contrary, online learning is, to certain extent, new in Mexico. As stated by Silva (2010), by 2004 21 universities had already inserted virtual learning to their programs. This learning modality is only promoted by the most important universities all over the country such as the UNAM, UAG, the IPN, ITESM, Tecmilenio, Universidad Veracruzana, UAT, and UCOL; among others, which turns them into reliable experts about new learning options.

Consistent with Thomas & Reinders (2010) virtual learning environments (VLEs), Learning Management Systems (LMSs) or Content Management Systems (CMSs) are widely used to make resources available to learners and to offer both teachers and students an option for online communication tools.

What makes clear that virtual learning is only promoted at HE institutions, which gives no opportunity to students to have a previous training to work in this learning modality.

As we can observe, no training is offered for students to become self-learners before they get university. This aspect is important to consider because it can give us an idea of the reason why the results from these two learning options are not motivating at the Veracruzana University.

This problem was also recognized by Mata (2009) at the Poza Rica Language Center, where failure and desertion are also part of these two learning modes.

This paper has the intention to find out to what extent technology such as an educational platform such as Eminus, is useful to promote students' self-directed learning abilities through learning English at the Veracruzana context.

The virtual English program at the Veracruzana University started in 2009. It was offered as a new option for them to take their lessons. Unfortunately, not many students pass this subject in this modality.

It is important to remember that learning a language depends on different variables including personality, learning styles, motivation, beliefs, aptitude, etc. (Benson 2001)

Regarding to these students, firstly, they need to take English because it is a university requirement; secondly, most of the ones who enroll at online courses are, as they state, because they did not find opportunity in a face-to-face group, and it is better than take it as a self-learner at a self-access center since they do not need to come to an specific place to take the lesson. These two aspects would easily give us the idea that their intrinsic motivation is not totally present.

Moreover, they do not even take into account if they really have the time to do their activities; or if they have access to a computer.

All those aspects may be the reason why most of them do not succeed in this learning mode. Thus, this piece of research is focused in observing to what extent an online English course promote self-learning strategies; fostering their learning in a Face-to-Face class.

Some years ago I worked as a counselor at the Xalapa Language Center and I realized that becoming a self-learner was not an easy matter, and not many students were convinced with this learning mode; what they complaint the most was they had not had the chance to take a face-to-face group.

Then, I decided to give online students the opportunity to attend my face-to-face (FTF) class in order to them overcome what some of them named as "isolation" regarding the idea they need the physical teacher appearance who tells them what to do and how to do it. Though, the institutional platform offers some tools such as: the chat, e-mail or classroom which objective is promoting contact.

The Veracruzana platform EMINUS consists of two screens: the first one presents general information about the platform, includes tutorials and contacts. Here the students insert their user name and key to access to the different courses they take online.

The platform comprises different tools to promote communication and learning such as: forum, chat, collaboration area, classroom and activities. Moreover, it has a menu which includes five main areas: administration, exams, members, and accessories. (Appendix 12 )

I expect them to feel more confident when performing their activities and, from my point of view, more supported because they could come to my classroom whenever they need it as long as they are able to in addition to the counseling sessions they are offered as part of this *new* learning modality.

### **Literature Review**

To begin with, this project is based on the Constructivist theory which stipulates that “effective learning begins from the learner’s active participation in the process of learning”. (Benson, 2001, p. 36)

Going to the origins of autonomy, many thinkers gave form to the concept. Rousseau, in his book *Emile* considered children should learn what they wanted when they wanted. He suggested let the learner to discover, do not correct his mistakes, and let him to correct himself.

Dewey’s influence has been the most important to constructivism. He recommended learning activities should emerge from the learner’s experience.

His most important collaboration was the problem solving theory. Kilpatrick proposed “the project method” which included four kinds of assignments: the construction project, the enjoyment project, the problem project, and the specific learning project.

Talking about constructing our own language knowledge, it is important to recall some aspects regarding to learning a foreign language in general. To begin with, I will consider the different approaches about the way students learn. Willing, in Harmer (2002) classify students into four categories: *Convergers* the ones who prefer working on their own instead of working in groups; these students tend to be analytical and like to impose their own structures on learning; contrary to them, the *conformist* students are more dependent on authority and pleased working with non-communicative classrooms, just being told what to do; then, Willing considers a new kind which seems to be a combination of both: the conformist and the *converges*: the concrete learners who are very much alike the conformists, yet like

learning from experience; finally, his last group, the communicative learners includes the students who are more interested in social interaction than language analysis. They do not need teacher guidance.

Another approach is the proposed by the Neurolinguistic programming (NLP) called VAKOG systems, acronym for Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic, Olfactory and Gustatory; this systems "... offers a framework to analyze different student responses to stimuli and environment..."(Harmer, 2002, p. 46)

One more language learning approach is Garner's Multiple Intelligences, who in 1983 proposed the so-called seven intelligences: musical/rhythmic; verbal/linguistic; visual/special; bodily/kinesthetic; logical/mathematical, intrapersonal/interpersonal; later, in 1993, he added the naturalistic intelligence.

On the other hand, motivation is other core aspect when learning a foreign language. In line with Harmer (2002) motivation is "... an internal drive which pushes someone to do things in order to achieve something..." (p. 51)

Ellis (2000) states that "motivation involves the attitudes and affective states that influence the degree of effort that learners make to learn an L2." (p. 75)

He identifies four kinds of motivation: instrumental when students need the target language for some serviceable purpose: achieve an examination, improve job, etc.; integrative when the learner is concerned about the target language culture; resultative when it depends on the learners' previous achievement: if it was positive, the motivation for continuing learning may increase, if it was negative, it may decrease; and finally intrinsic motivation which he defines as "the learner's particular interests and the extent to which they feel personally involved in learning activities"(p. 76)

Duart & Sangra (2005) also mention that motivation can be understood from three angles: learner's motivation, materials' motivation, and facilitator's motivation.

Ortega in Müller & Schocker (2010) comments that tighter teacher control of tasks or little integration of tasks into the course promotes lower motivation. Contrary, "...the more the learners ... get out of a task the higher the motivation to become involved..." (Müller & Schocker, 2010, p. 30)

It is important to consider all these approaches when preparing our lessons, because they mean our students are all different and we need to consider all their

characteristics in order to cover all their learning channels. The more we promote learning through different learning abilities, the better students will learn.

Rubin & Thompson in Harmer (2002) express that they consider “a good learner [the one who]... can find their own way (without always having to be guided by the teacher through learning tasks), ... is creative, ... make[s] intelligent guesses, ... their own opportunities for practice, ... make[s] errors work for [him/her] not against and ... use[s] contextual clues...” (p. 42)

This definition has a lot to do with the description for what is expected a self-learner to be. To this point it is necessary to define what self-learning means and if there is any difference among, distance learning, e-learning, or online learning.

Consistent with Benson (2001) *distance learning* is commonly considered an *autonomus mode* of learning since it demands “... the learner to study independently of direct contact with teachers...” (p. 131)

As said by Moore, J. (2011) there is no agreement among researchers to define terminology due to constant technology evolution and Distance learning is normally used as umbrella term Keegan in Moore (2011).

As new learning modalities appeared, this term evolved and new concepts originated such as *online learning*, *e-learning*, *virtual learning*, etc. Conrad in Moore (2011), and due to the endeavor to identify the specific technology to each concept, again the terms are indistinctly used as long as learning depends on programs, website, applications, etc.

On the other hand, online learning is defined by most authors as the opportunity to learn using any kind of technology with a varied of interaction; and according to Benson in Moore (2011) “... online learning is a new version or an improved (one) of distance learning...” (More, 2011 p. 130)

This aspect is supported by Hampel in Thomas & Reinders ( 2010) who underlines the great impact Information and Communication Technologies had made on language education. He points out that institutional Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs); also known as Learning Management Systems (LMSs) or Content Management Systems (CMSs) are greatly used to make resources available to learners and to offer students and teachers an option of online communication tools.

He defines virtual learning environments as "...a software system that combines a number of different tools that are used to systematically deliver content online and facilitate the learning experience around that content..." Hampel in Thomas & Reinders (2010, p. 131)

Virtual Learning demands modification in the teaching learning process. To begin with, the teacher turns into a facilitator. Gibbs in Rowntree, (1992) defines a facilitator as the one in charge "...for helping groups to collaborate in a learning task and benefit from one another's insights and experiences..." (p. 80)

Also his/her roles vary. In line with Berge in Thomas & Reinders (2010), the facilitator develops four roles depending on the activity s/he performs: the pedagogical when the educational facilitator set sets the task, the social because s/he is responsible for the group cohesion, the managerial since sets the agenda, objectives and rules, and the technical role.

Holmber in Amador (2008) also suggest that a facilitator has another main function to heed: to support them emotionally, that is to say provide psychological tutoring.

Regarding the students, Stockwell & Levy in Thomas & Reinders (2010), consider six kinds of online learners standing on their performance: "...the low-motivation, the daunted, struggling, technophobic, the inconsistent, and the ideal high responder..." (p. 26)

Presence is another aspect that changes. As I mentioned before, the most common students' complaint is the lack of a physical teacher appearance. Picciano in Thomas & Reinders (2010) defines *presence* as "... [Students'] sense of being in and belonging in a course and the ability to interact with other students and an instructor although physical contact is not available..." (p. 27)

This is an important aspect to explain the students because, as I mentioned before, most of the times they think they will be completely on their own, and that boosts rejection to the course.

Picciano also explains that there are three kinds of presence: cognitive, which arises between the task and the related work; social, emerges when socializing or when beginning the tasks; and the teaching presence, directly related to "... the degree of the teacher's presence..."

Teacher's presence is significant promoting virtual learning communities since it links "... the learner's sense of a learning community and... the tasks..." (Shea et. al. 2005) in Thomas & Reinders (2010, p. 29)

This presence includes three degrees or commitment: the task design, facilitation and direction of the tasks. In my particular context, I am not responsible for the task design, but for the two remaining ones.

As we can see, differently from teacher-centered approach, on a virtual learning environment "...teachers and learners share the responsibility of promoting interactive learning... the teacher monitors the task process ..." Müller & Schocker in Thomas and Reinders (2010, p. 29) and his presence is more noticeable when learners demonstrate learning difficulties. Appel & Gilbert (2002) in Thomas & Reinders (2010, p. 29)

Another important aspect to consider is scaffolding which Ellis in Thomas and Reinders (2010) describes as "... the dialogic process by which one speaker assists another in performing a function that he or she cannot perform alone... (p. 137)"

Liaw (p. 34), suggests facilitator's main task is to provide technical and topic support and overcome communication problems.

However, Shekary & Tahririan (2006) in Thomas and Reinders, (2010, p. 34) also comment that students can provide scaffolding to each other too. Contrary, Beatty and Nunan (p. 34) remark that not all learners are able to handle open learning environments, and not frequently accomplish to provide reciprocal backing through collaboration.

One more important aspect to consider is the one related to strategies. Ellies (2000) defines them as the "approaches or techniques that learners employ to try to learn a L2. They can be behavioral or mental... and are typically problem oriented."(p. 77) It means, learners take advantage of strategies when they face some kind of problematic.

Strategies can be comprised in three kinds: Cognitive, the ones that consist of "...analysis, synthesis, or transformation of learning materials...Metacognitive ... involved in planning, monitoring and evaluating learning... [and] Social/affective [which] concern the ways in which learners choose to interact with other speakers..." (p. 77)

For online learning, Benson (2001) comments the most important strategies to overcome are related to “deal with [students’] isolation.” (p. 132) He also suggests that “may be ... [students need] a degree of autonomy in advance in order to use new technologies effectively.” (p. 140)

Regarding to online materials, Duarte (2005) also states they need to be attractive to the students’ profile, and meaningful to them. Since virtual students have no much time to study, they need to make the most of the time breaks during the day.

This is why Computer-Mediated-Communication (CMC) for online learners must be simple so as to be easily accessed.

#### Virtual Learning Environment

In this piece of research, the terms *online learning* and *virtual learning* will be indistinctively used; regarding to self-learning, it will be used when referring the learning carried out at the Veracruzana University Language Centers.

This project will promote a blended learning approach. This learning approach combines FTF classroom methods and computer mediated activities to form an integrated instructional approach. (Pennsylvania State University) taking advantage of the University learning platform created for such purposes and my FTF sessions.

This approach has not been totally set out at the Veracruzana English context; however, many attempts have been done to implement it as another option for students to take their different subjects.

Mata (2009) made a trial for a self-learning group, offering FTF sessions supported by a blog which helped to improve students’ performance at the Poza Rica self-access.

The results obtained were positive. She also recognized that learning online in general had not been totally explored, and even less the benefit in the English area. This appreciation is supported by Benson (2001) who recognizes “there has been very little research on the effectiveness [of distance learning] for language learning” (133)

This project takes the other way round of hers: I will offer the online students the support of FTF sessions to back up their learning since the most frequently complaint from students is the need of a physical teacher.

All of the previous aspects are important when constructing our knowledge relating to language learning.

## **Methodology**

### **Study design**

This piece of research was carried out under action research method. Although some authors, like Kemmis & McTaggar in Nunan (1986) consider Action Research as a group activity performed by practitioners who looks for changing things; Nunan (1986) considers that teachers can explore on their own when collaboration is unable to them for whatever reason; and also mentions that a descriptive case study can be considered as an action research example as long as it begins with a question, and is followed by data and interpretation. This kind of research is "... carried out by a practitioner investigating aspects of his or her own context and situation... (p. 18)"

Hopkins (2002) also suggests case study as the most appropriate data gathering for university courses when research in a higher degree. He considers two main advantages in this method: "... it is a relatively simply way of plotting a ... group's reaction to teaching methods; [additionally] case studies will tend to give a more accurate and representative picture than will any [other methods]..." (p. 124)

Moreover, Hopkings (2002) remarks that it is important data collection method not to demand a lot of teacher's time when carrying out the interpretation.

Yet, I considered it as the most suitable since this research would be carried out online due to students have a full schedule and they hardly ever had the opportunity to come for counseling. Consequently, I had no other occasion to have contact with them.

To carry out this paper, I decided to administer some surveys to students and one to the online facilitators to know about their teaching-learning believes; I also took field notes about students' performance during the research, and backed them up with documentary evidence such as students' examination papers, class concerns e-mail, and students assignments.

The first students' survey was designed to know their working online experience and believes about online and FTF learning; and the organization they have to work

online. It was important because it would point out their insights about both teaching modes.

The second interview has the objective to know their own characteristics in order to find out the kind of students they were; the third interview had two versions: the one designed for the pass students, and the one designed for the fail students, because they may have different perspectives from their online performance.

The facilitators' interview was aimed to know their online experience and their perceptions about their students. The information obtained from these interviews would be triangle with my field notes and the documentary evidence.

The online English course was analyzed to observe what strategies are promoted and if students took advantages of them.

### **Particular context**

This paper was accomplished with an online English 1 MEIF group at the Veracruzana University. This group was originally made up of 11 students. They were students mainly from Pedagogy Department, 81%; the remaining 18% were students from the Law Department, Atmospheric Science Department; and the History Department.

Some of them came from a second opportunity enrollment process to be part of the University since they were not accepted in a first registration process. When they were given the opportunity to matriculate as University students, they were told the Basic Area Subjects would be online: English was one of those. None of them have taken online lessons before.

This situation was particularly stressful for one of the students who stated: "...can you imagine teacher? If I can't learn English with a teacher in the classroom, I won't learn it online!" (Student 1)

Other students have decided to take it online because of the flexibility and practicality to take it anywhere as a result of a full school schedule.

Two of them, students 1 and 4, mentioned they worked.

The class was offered online; however, I had it scheduled Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 12:00 to 14:00 at the Unit of Library and Computer Services (USBI Spanish acronym). Students could come for counseling those days and times

whenever they need it. I sent them an e-mail explaining it at the beginning of the course. (Appendix 1)

Furthermore, I told them there would be chat sessions on Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 1 pm to 2 pm. and also mentioned them it was necessary for them to attend some FTF sessions in order to practice their speaking ability. (Appendix 2)

I could not make it compulsory because it would create more anxiety on them since, as I mentioned before, they had a very tight schedule. However, it was necessary they were aware they could join a FTF group in case they had the chance or needed the teacher appearance to achieve their course.

Moreover, this course was offered by the Pedagogy Department students and I had a FTF class in that area at the Anthropology Department, it would be easier for them to attend a lesson or a counseling session there because buildings are near each other.

The course consisted of 10 content units which included written activities, forum activities, and homework handouts; all of them should be handed in through the different platform tools; for example the Files and Forum.

Although the course was online, partial examinations required compulsory attendance at the USBI, so as the final oral and written examinations.

The evaluation was formed of 20% for final oral examination; 40% final written examination; two partial examinations 10%; 20% homework; forum participation 5%; and final project 5%.

The first aspect the course offers is the Course Program and the Week Planning according to the length of the course.

Then, the first unit in the course is for students to know the platform. It includes forum activities and piece of homework to integrate students to the course.

The course (Appendix 12) presents a homogeneous layout consisted of justification, competence unit, introduction to the topic entitled página principal, where all the grammar is explained; then, there is an activities link where they can practice what they have previously learnt from the introduction. In this moment, they can self-evaluate, and find any learning problem.

It also offers a forum area where the students can interact with each other following the guidance already stated.

These three aspects are not located in the same place along the course.

My main intention was to observe to what extent an online English course promoted self-learning strategies among the students, and, how much it would improve if they attended FTF sessions. For this reason, I offered them the opportunity to attend my FTF class as a support to their online course; it was not necessary them to come every single session, but it was advisable for them to attend as many as they could. However, I could not force students to come to my class because, for whatever reason, they had taken online option; furthermore, they would not receive other tangible benefit for attending my lessons since it was not part of the evaluation.

I took field notes every time I was at the USBI and checked their online documents: exams and platform performance.

#### **Instruments and collection procedures and organization**

As I mentioned before, I had no more contact with students but only through the platform tool “comunicados” e-mail format.

I gave them the welcome to the course and offered them all the relevant information for them to start their course (Appendix 1). There I mentioned the opportunity they had to attend my FTF classes as a complement for their learning.

However, during the first week of classes none of them made any contact. Consequently, I sent the e-mail again the next week. (Appendix 2)

No answer was received and again I sent a third reminder. (Appendix 3)

I also sent them a document asking for their collaboration for the research, and an authorization for being part of my research project to be signed and the first questionnaire. (Appendix 4)

Since I received no answer, I sent a third e-mail reminder asking them what the problem was and if it was my responsibility. (Appendix 5)

The only answer I received was from a girl who expressed a lot of reasons for no to take the online course. (Appendix 6)

So, I decided to administer it the same day they came for the first partial examination since it was compulsory.

The day came and only six students out of the thirteen came to the exam. I asked them for their collaboration and if they agreed I handed them out the authorization

to be signed. Only one of them rejected to participate. Then I handed in the first questionnaire (Appendix 4) to the five remaining students. One of them, student 5, told me he agreed taking part of the research and signed the authorization, but he was in a hurry and he would answer it later. He never came back to the USBI neither to any other setting.

Only four students were about to take part of this research project. From their answers to this first questionnaire, the following categories appeared.

Question 1: Why did you decide to take the course online? Shared aspects as follows:

1. ¿Por qué decidiste tomar el curso de manera virtual?	
<p>“No importa donde esté, yo podré realizar las actividades; no me exige asistir a algún lugar.” (Student 2)</p> <p>No matter where I am, I would be able to do the tasks; [the course] do not demand to assist to a specific place.</p>	Mobility
<p>“Porque se me facilita mucho el horario flexible.” (Student 3)</p> <p>Because the schedule is good to me.</p>	Time flexibility
<p>“Porque es una manera más práctica, y se acomoda más a mi horario.” (Student 4)</p> <p>Because it is a more practical way and fits my Schedule.</p>	

Two categories emerged from this question: Mobility and time flexibility.

Regarding question 2: What is your main course objective and how do you expect to achieve it? They also agreed in their answers as follow:

2. ¿Cuál es tu principal objetivo con este curso y cómo piensas lograrlo?	
“Tener el conocimiento suficiente.” (S1) To have enough knowledge.	Acquire knowledge
“Tener más conocimientos sobre el idioma.” (S4) To have more knowledge	
“Concluir el curso lo más satisfactorio para continuar con el siguiente.”(S2) Achieve the course satisfactorily to take the next course. (2)	Succeed the course
“Acreditar la materia.” (S3) To pass the subject.	

Two categories appeared from this question: acquire knowledge and succeed the course.

Regarding question 5: What do you miss most from your FTF courses when you are working with the platform? Their responses were:

5. ¿Qué extrañas de tus cursos presenciales cuando estás trabajando en la plataforma?	
“Que no hay alumnos y la facilidad de preguntar todo.” (S 1) Students’ lacking	Isolation Question clarification
“Mis compañeros y que si tenía dudas ellos me ayudaban.” (2) [I miss ] my classmates and their support when I had a question.	Isolation Question clarification
“Que es más fácil y directo aclarar cualquier duda que tenga.” (3)	Question clarification

It is easier and direct to clarify any kind of question I have.	
“Que me aclare mis dudas al momento.”(4) My right at the moment question clarification.	Question clarification

As we can observe, two categories were shared in these answers: isolation and question clarification either by a teacher or by classmates

In relation to question 6: What do you miss most from your online course when you are in your FTF lessons, it seems they misunderstood the meaning and, the answers to it were as follows:

6. ¿Qué extrañas de tu curso virtual cuando estás en tus clases presenciales?	
“Que te sientes un poco inseguro.” (S1)	
“Que puedo trabajar a pausas.” (S2)	Working at self-pace
“Que el horario se adapta a mis comodidades.” (S3)	Flexibility
“Que voy a mi ritmo sin tanta presión.” (S4)	Working at self-pace

Regarding this question, students recognized the benefit of working at their own pace.

7. ¿cuánto tiempo dedicas a realizar las tareas encomendadas?	
“Dependiendo del tiempo de una a dos horas.” (S1) Depending on time availability, one or two hours.	One hour in average
“1 hora al día.” (S2) An hour a day.	
“Dependiendo del tipo de trabajo. Por lo regular una hora.” (S3) Depending on the kind of task. Regularly	

an hour.	
2 ó 3 horas. (S4)	
Two or 3 hours.	

Regarding question 8: What do you need to accomplish the course activities? The categories were:

8. ¿De qué depende que realices las actividades del curso?	
De cómo te involucra a aprender o no la explicación. (S1) How the explanation connects or does not connect you [in the course.]	Material motivation
De mis demás tareas y actividades. (S2) Depends on my other tasks.	Time availability after other activities.
Del tiempo. (S3) Depends on Time	
Que me dé tiempo entre la escuela y el trabajo. (S4) Depends on the time availability between my school and job.	

From this question, two categories appeared: Material motivation and time availability.

Related to question 9: How do you organize to do your tasks? The following are the categories obtained:

9. ¿Cómo te organizas para realizar las tareas y actividades del curso?	
“Busco darle tiempo en el día.” (S2) I look for the time during the day [to work]	Organization and planning.
“De preferencia lo hago en mi tiempo libre. Por ejemplo, la hora de la	

comida.” (S3) I work preferently in my free time. My lunch time, for example.	
“Trato de organizar mi tiempo, darle lugar y hora.” (S4) I try to organize my time. Look for a moment and place to work.	

In relation to question 10: What do you worry about the course? Their answers gave the following categories:

10. ¿Qué te preocupa del curso?	
“Que no dé yo un buen resultado.” (S1)	Not to fulfill his obligation.
“Reprobar.” (S2)	Failing.
“El no adquirir el conocimiento básico.” (4)	Not to achieve any knowledge.

This question presented a general category failing is the only worriment for these students.

The last question was opened for students to share whatever comment they wanted to. Any other comment you want to share is welcome.

Only Student 2 suggested

11. Cualquier otro comentario que tengas es bienvenido.	
“quisiera menos tareas porque igual realizamos tareas de otras materias.”	Not much homework

The second questionnaire (Appendix 8) was sent online. What I expected to obtain from this second questionnaire was the learners’ profile as to know the potential they have to succeed the course.

Only one out of the four participants handed it in.

It was student 3, a nineteen year old, single girl, not from Xalapa, with a scholarship, who worked the course at home. She lived no with her family neither with a relative.

I had already been told by two of the students, 1 and 4, they worked. Student 1 was the only one who came twice to the USBI for advising. Both of them were psychological. The first time, he came to expose he had trouble working with the platform (Appendix 7).

He came to me and told me he was really worried because he had no computing skills to work with the course. I asked him why he had enrolled in this learning mode, he explained he had a part-time job. He had asked a friend to teach him how to work but she was about to leave and now he felt absolutely lost. I told him not to worry, and showed him how to work with the platform tutorials. He said he did not feel comfortable working with the platform because it was very complicated. So I offered him my classroom lesson but he refused to go because he worked in the morning and attended the History Department in the afternoon; however, he promised to integrate to the Anthropology sessions every time he could.

The second time he came was after the final examination. He just came to express his opinion about his own performance. He agreed he was not adequate to this learning mode.

Regarding the facilitators questionnaire, I only obtained support from one out of the four I asked for opinion. It was sent by email. The first six questions were aimed to know about the facilitators experience, number of students they average guide, how tutoring was offered and students tutoring preferences. The next questions were thought to distinguish how students behave in relation to tutoring

The categories I obtained from this questionnaire were:

Form question 1:

1. How long have you been working with on-line MEIF courses?	
I have been working with online MEIF courses for three years.	MEIF courses Online experience

The facilitator has an average online experience

Regarding question 2:

2. How many students do you have in your on-line groups?	
I usually have 20 students in every online group.	An average group size

The online group size is usually the same FTF group size.

About question 3:

3. Do your students receive a specific training for this course?	
Online students started been formally trained in groups last semester. Although, before this semester, they did not have that kind of training, but the one I provided them with.	Recent learners' training

Even this facilitator has been working online for three years, learners' training has just started.

Related to question 4:

4. How long is this training?	
It lasts one or two hours.	Fast training

The new implemented training is not very long.

In relation to question 5:

5. How often do you offer tutoring?	
I provide my students with tutoring sessions according to their needs. About the use of EMINUS, there are introductory videos and personal tutoring sessions at the beginning of the course. About the course, I have tutoring sessions when my students ask them for.	Online tutoring provided FTF tutoring depending on learners' needs.

Related to question 6:

6. What kind of tutoring do you offer: on-line, face to face, or both?	
Since the course is online, I provide my	

students with online tutoring, not many students ask for face to face tutoring.	Online tutoring is favored
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Facilitator supports the fact that learners prefer online tutoring.

In relation to question 7:

7. How many students do take the training?	
Formal training courses are for all the students in every group. There are introductory videos for the use of EMINUS as well. I usually provide the students with training sessions, which is taken by small groups, since many students know how to use a computer or EMINUS. Also, the first unit in every English MEIF course was designed with the purpose of introducing and exploring the course itself and EMINUS.	Different options for online tutoring.

Training is offered either virtually or FTF.

Regarding the question 8:

8. Do all your students take tutoring?	
Yes, they do.	Learners' involve in tutoring

Facilitator states all her learners attend tutoring

In relation to question 9:

9. What kind of tutoring seems to be better accepted by your students?	
Online tutoring.	Online tutoring was favored

Facilitator remarks online tutoring is preferred by her learners.

Question 11 offered the following category:

11. What do you consider is the main problem your students have with these courses?	
<p>Many students do not like reading; therefore, they decide to take the course at random. Also, they do not understand explanations or how to work.</p> <p>Some students just “take” the course because it is required by their authorities but they do not work on it.</p> <p>Some students just want to do final exams.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners dislike reading</li> <li>• They do not get used to the online procedures.</li> <li>• The course is a University requirement.</li> <li>• Some students just care about the final examinations.</li> </ul>

Form the facilitators’ point of view; many categories were obtained from this question: learners dislike reading; they do not get used to the online procedures; it is a University requirement; and some other just center their attention on the final examinations.

Related to question 12:

12. What kind of problems do you think your students have to face that affect their performance in these kinds of courses?	
<p>Students start the course late.</p> <p>They do not like reading.</p> <p>Some students do not “remember” deadlines.</p>	<p>Students dislike reading</p> <p>Students forget deadlines.</p>

13. How many students do pass the course? Less than 5, between 5 and 10, more than 10	
<p>In my experience, I would say that most of the time, more than 10.</p>	<p>Half of the group</p>

On the subject of the documentary evidence, about the use of the chat or classroom tools, I connected them every USBI session, but never had the opportunity to establish a conversation with them.

About the opportunity they had for attending my FTF class, only student 3, went to my Anthropology class to practice for the oral exam, but not any other time.

Concerning the students' performance in the platform, students 3 and 4 worked more constantly, though not frequently, with the activities than the rest of the group; they cleared their questions, which were not many, online. They only took either the first or the second partial exam. They were successful with the course.

From the five students taking part of this project, three succeeded the first partial examination and two did not. On the other hand, only one of them, student 4, came to the second partial examination, obtaining good positive results.

On the topic of the final examinations, I also e-mailed the information concerning the place and hour they had to take the oral examination and two of the students presented. They also took the final written examination in the place I told them to.

Conversely, Student 5 entered the platform to check the sent mails, but he did not complete any activity. He failed the course.

Student 2 never did any activity, but only first partial examination. He dropped out the course; student 1 was more in touch with me than the rest of the students, however, he never got engaged by this learning mode, neither for the FTF program; he excused English had always been difficult to him, and online it was worse. Besides, he was in a School Program he did not like; he hoped to be changed in a future. Moreover, he had a part-time job.

### **Implementation Description**

Regarding the FTF implementation, it did not work to the extent I expected; nevertheless, one out of the four students who carried out this study, student 3 took the responsibility to appear into my FTF lesson the oral practice day.

One important aspect to consider is that this attending was voluntary, because I could not implement any additionally benefit, but the reinforcement of the online learning.

Students' performance was online, and they remained adhered only to their course activities and no more events even when they were in their favor.

Moreover, students made online contact for question clarification, I had the perception they were very clear they were enrolled in a virtual learning mode and did not present to FTF sessions.

### **Findings**

The analysis from data was based on the triangulation technique. I made a matrix obtained from the categories found from the students' opinions, the facilitator's perceptions, and my field notes. Then, the following results were established.

To begin with, the main objectives for students to defeat were succeeding the course and acquire knowledge.

This opinion was expressed as answer to question 2 and it was supported by facilitator's opinion to question 11 where she states it as a problem learners' have with the course.

Most learners feel isolated in this learning mode, as they state in their answers to question 5 which it was the general idea. The answer to this enquiry shows their need for fast question clarification either from their classmates or their teacher too. However, students 3 and 4 took advantage of e-mail platform to contact the facilitator and clarify their questions.

Learners' most worrying aspect in this learning mode is failing. It is easily observed when analyzing their answers to questions 2 and 10. Their main objective was succeeding the course and their main concern was failing it.

Also, since most of online students have a tight schedule and/or a part-time job, they agreed that working at their own pace was a benefit from this learning mode.

This is supported by their answers to question 2, where they stated mobility and time flexibility as their reasons to take this learning mode. Moreover, their answers to question 7 where, in average, it is showed learners dedicated as much as 2 hours to develop their tasks support their decision.

One more discovery was that learners forget deadlines. Student 3 forgot the date for the second partial exam. She told me the last day of classes.

Another interesting fact was that online students tend to make their tasks after completing other activities which they consider more important, for example, work.

Furthermore, learners may developed certain self-learning strategies through the English course; with reference to the metacognitive ones, having decided to enroll in this learning mode was their first decision making as self-learners. They were willing to take the risk. Planning their time, their everyday activities and the task they need to accomplish are also examples of these strategies. Additionally, they tried self-evaluation with the activities provided in the course, because the answers are displayed at the end of them. All of those are examples of metacognitive strategies developing.

As regards the social/affective strategies, learners mainly chose to interact with the facilitator, and hardly ever with their classmates. In the forum area, the activities devoted to encourage interaction among them were hardly ever achieved.

Regarding to materials, they are easily-accessed. The instructions were clear and simple. There were plenty of examples and activities for scaffolding their learning process. So, they could develop the cognitive strategies transforming the learning material depending on their needs and skills.

On the other hand, due to the lack of time these learners present, the implementation of a FTF support to their online learning did not work to the extent expected.

Most of them preferred online tutoring. The interviewed facilitator recognizes when responding to question 6 that this is the most chosen option. Similarly, she comments the application of FTF tutoring was only implemented when the learners needed it.

As an example to the previous behavior, one out of the four learners who took part of the project went to FTF session because she needed the oral expression exam practice. The other student, 4, had a job. I assume that was the reason why she did not attend it.

On the other hand, some students did not get used to the online procedures. Surprisingly, there were students who do not even have a computer to work with. (Appendix 6) or who mentioned a computing lacking. (S1)

Student 1, who expressed isolation when needed question clarification, was the only one who attended personal advising; looking for a solution to his learning problem concern.

Also, he was not an adequate candidate for my FTF support because my schedule was not suitable for him.

One more student, 2, did not finish the course, he dropped out.

After all of these findings I can mention that, online students usually have a tight schedule or/and a job and this is the learning mode that best fits their needs.

However, it is essential they find a more substantial reason to choose this learning option; otherwise it can turn demotivating and frustrating.

It is important them to bear in mind that some other factors are involved; for example, having a computer at hand is compulsory; being keen on technology would be advisable; having certain self-learning strategies being curious, being tolerant to frustration, being organized are desirable.

### **Discussion & Reflections**

To begin with, this project reinforces the usefulness of online courses for the students who are aware of their responsibility for learning and have a tight schedule or who have undertaken additional activities to school, such as work;

Benson (2001) observes that “those students who judge themselves to be more successful tended to have found real or imaginary ways to overcoming their communicative isolation (p. 132)”

This quote remarks isolation as the main concern for self-learners; students from this study support this theory when expressing what they miss the most from their FTF classes is their peers’ presence.

However, the kind of isolation they refer to was in terms of question clarification, so, when they overcome it through e-mail contact, the problem is gone. That is one of the main reasons because none of them attended my FTF sessions to overcome this feeling.

Benson (2001) comments that “learners who succeed in developing strategies to deal with their isolation may do so because they already possess a high degree of autonomy.” (p. 132)

This project may support the position that students perform better when their chosen learning option fits their needs. The two students, who achieved the course and took part of this study, knew were not able to join any other learning mode.

Even though they were mainly driven by an instrumental motivation as to achieve the course and improve their performance, they took the responsibility to accomplish their goal.

They performed what Stockwell & Levy (2010) named the ideal high responder, because they got engaged with the activities the course offered them the best way to overcome the course.

These students fulfill what Rubin & Thompson consider as a “good learner” because they found their own way to achieve their course. They did not cover all the requirements or activities, but what they considered more adequate to their needs and time availability.

They showed certain strategies developing when organizing their time to make their tasks, and when deciding not to go to the additional support offered at my FTF lessons, but to the speaking preparation; that is decision making.

On the other hand, students who are obliged to learn in a mode they are not comfortable with are more likely to fail. Lightbrown (1999) comments that when the learners’ main reason to learn is “external pressure, internal motivation may be minimal and ... attitudes towards learning may be negative.” (p. 57)

This idea is also supported by Ellis and Sinclair in Gardner and Miller (1999) who report students considered their learning a teacher’s responsibility and they rejected to work independently of the teacher; furthermore, they felt dissatisfied with the course and the result was a loss of motivation.

We can observe this behavior from Student 1 who had no previous computing experience and looked for advising expecting to have private lessons.

In this respect, let’s remember Benson’s opinion who considers desirable certain previous autonomy degree to handle technology efficiently.

When I offered him to check the tutorials, he rejected. Also he was not suitable for my FTF sessions because he had a job.

Student 1 fits all the non-desirable aspects for an online learner. To begin with, he did not answer questions 1 Why did you decide to take the course online? and 2 How do you organize to do your tasks? Which are substantial to this study.

These two questions would offer the main reasons why learners were involve in this learning mode. The fact he had not answered them would give the idea he had not consciously taken the decision himself.

However, he told me he had taken the course because he had a part-time job.

Furthermore, he can be considered what Stockell & Levy named " technophobic," since he recognized himself as a computing unfamiliar; moreover, he expressed as a variable to do the task the clear explanation of materials; however, there were very few access from him to the platform.

At this respect, according to Rowntree (1992) students who are required to learn something, reject the responsibility and expect the teacher to tell them what to do. This opinion is backed up by the interviewed facilitator who mentioned "... Some students just "take" the course because it is required by their authorities but they do not work on it. Some students just want to do final exams. .." (facilitator 1)

This behavior is easily observed among self-learners and online students when are confined to these learning modes as a result of the overcrowding.

A clear example was particularly this group originally made up thirteen students coming from a second opportunity to enroll in University. They were told as new matriculated to take Basic subjects online was compulsory.

Differently from students 3 and 4 from this study, two students from the original group, never accessed to the platform; moreover, most of the enrolled students either read the messages (Appendix 14) or observe the activities but did not perform any task.

Besides, from the five students who took part of this project, only two of them maintained the pace and succeeded.

What is important to remind is the fact that online students have a tight schedule or a part-time job; or both. Consequently, they devoted less time to the course activities than to other obligations. To the question What do you need to accomplish the course activities? Student 4 reported "Depends on the time availability between my school and job." Student 3 answered to the same question "depending on the time [I have]."

Subsequently time is an important aspect to take into account for online learners, since this is one of the main reasons they took this learning option.

Duart (2005) expresses that online student's profile includes a lack of time person, who takes advantage of any time break to study.

This aspect was observed when only one of them came to the oral exam preparation at the FTF class.

All of those were reinforced by students' answers to question 7 where the average time they invest in doing their tasks is one hour a day.

Moreover, learning is considered "...as an active, cooperative and social process..." (Beckwith, et al in Howard) consequently "the full richness of ... distance-learning ... can only be achieved if some significant level of social interactivity is possible..." (105)

This aspect can be seen when the two successful learners maintained the questions clarification through the platform e-mail. They kept certain contact with me, and obtain the social interactivity they needed. No any other kind of interaction was observed from them.

As regards the course materials, they are simple as they are required for virtual learners.

At this respect, student 1 mentioned as an important aspect to be involved in the task, the importance of how the explanation connects you or do not implicate you. He was the only one affected by the material motivation.

However, Benson (2001) states "self-instructional materials appear to do little to foster autonomy." (p. 133)

One more aspect to consider is the influence students have from previous experiences; Rowntree mentions that students "may be so dominated by top-down memories of earlier education that they feel bewildered." (p. 62)

Student 1 told me in an advisory session, he has always had problems with English learning.

All of those evidences only show the great need that exists of promoting self-learning strategies on a FTF classroom. If students were more self-confident, they may have a better performance on an online course.

We as teachers, no matter the level, require stimulating more constantly those strategies in class, so that they improve their learning and at the same time increase their strategies.

It would be advisable to work collaboratively to ensure we are all going to the same objective.

### **Conclusions and Implication**

As a conclusion I can start by saying that, based on my previous role as advisor in a Self-Access center, and as facilitator for online elective English courses, it was my perception that online MEIF students needed a physical teacher appearance to overcome their course.

I can assume that a mixture of different factors is responsible for the learners' success in online courses. To begin with, even though they may share an instrumental motivation: to pass the exam, a certain degree of autonomy is necessary to overcome the course.

Even when it may sound obvious it is necessary they have a computer on hand and know how to work with it. They use technology for entertaining activities, but not as a learning tool.

Another important aspect is online learners need to be more assertive and let their facilitator to guide them, especially when they face this learning for the first time and it increases their anxiety.

It is essential for them to trust on their facilitator as the nearest person to look for advice; it may help them to manage isolation, anxiety and question clarification.

Besides, it is necessary them to let themselves being guided to learn how to organize their time, the course agenda and the activities they have to accomplish. Also, to get more involved in the course activities, and feel free to contact their facilitator as many times as they need.

Also, facilitators must be aware of the great responsibility we have as in charge of the technical, pedagogical and motivational aspects, and that learners demand a quick answer to their questions, so it is our duty to be in constant contact with them.

It is our concern to promote interaction between the students so that they meet each other and feel more comfortable when working collaboratively.

Finally I would recognize that, even though the online course may promote self-learning strategies, it is necessary learners to be open- minded to learning new alternatives.

In other words, it is essential them to unlearn old routines and learn new options.

This study was only centered in a group in Xalapa. It would be interesting to observe students' performance in other University contexts where online learning may behave differently.

A research should be conducted in relation to the new modality University is conducting: blended learning for English as Specific Purposes. It would be interesting to perceive if there is a different behavior among their participants.

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## Apendix

### 1. WELCOME TO THE COURSE. First Communication E-mail.

HOLA A TOD@S:

BIENVENIDOS AL CURSO VIRTUAL DE INGLÈS I MEIF. February 20th.

El presente correo es para ponerme a sus órdenes como facilitadora del Curso:

Soy la Mtra. Martha Edna García Ramírez. Primeramente quiero decirles que no quiero que se sientan solos en este camino virtual para lo cual **me localizan en la USBI los Lunes, Miércoles y Viernes de 12 a 14 hrs. Si tiene necesidad y oportunidad de acudir a mis sesiones presenciales en la Unidad de Humanidades Edificio J aula 3 los martes y jueves de 12 a 15 hrs. y en la Fac. de Psicología aula 11 los Lunes y Viernes de 18 a 20 hrs. serán bienvenidos.**

Al mismo tiempo les recuerdo que esta Experiencia Educativa es tan importante o más que las de su área, ya que al ser parte de las del Área Básica, si no la aprueban, no podrán acreditar su Programa Educativo, no lo olviden.

A continuación les doy una breve introducción a la forma de trabajo de este curso. Les sugiero lo mantengan a la mano para posteriores referencias:

Para iniciar este curso, es necesario que realicen las actividades marcadas en el programa que encontraran en el menú de la izquierda, apartado MI CURSO. Les va a desplegar el Programa Correspondiente.

En la parte de abajo, en el apartado OPERACION DEL PROGRAMA encontraran la distribución del curso por semanas de trabajo. En esta semana estamos propiamente iniciando la primera unidad del curso. La unidad inicial anterior a ésta fue para que Ustedes conocieran la plataforma y las forma de trabajo. Es necesario que realicen las actividades que corresponden a dicha unidad, aunque también es importante que no se atrasen en las actividades de nuestra primera unidad de contenido.

En el apartado GLOSARIO aparece el glosario correspondiente a todos los temas del curso, aunque, en cada unidad hay un glosario específico para cada una de ellas.

Dentro de cada unidad encontraran un ARCHIVO ADJUNTO, en él aparece la información correspondiente y necesaria que realicen.

Igualmente, encontrarán en cada unidad la Justificación, la Unidad de Competencia a desarrollar y el Contenido Principal de la misma.

Tendrán que participar en todos los foros de cada una de las unidades con las actividades que les solicitan y enviar las tareas correspondientes.

Las actividades de Práctica no las enviaran porque tienen hojas de respuesta que te apoyaran en tu aprendizaje.

Tendremos sesiones de chat los días lunes, miércoles y viernes de 13 a 14 hrs. sin embargo, en épocas de exámenes parciales les voy a solicitar acudan a alguno de los grupos mencionados arriba para que realicen sus prácticas de expresión oral, las cuales son sumamente importantes para su examen oral final.

Cualquier duda o comentario estoy a sus órdenes.

Saludos

Mtra. Martha Edna

Facilitadora del Curso

## 2. 2<sup>nd</sup>. ONLINE REMINDER

MARCH 4<sup>TH</sup>.

HOLA A TOD@S NUEVAMENTE:

Les recuerdo que el foro de integración se cerró la semana pasada. Hemos iniciado propiamente con el curso y es importante que realicen las actividades que se marcan para que no se les acumule el trabajo.

**Les comento que en la semana del 1 al 5 de abril, estaré realizando prácticas para el examen oral con mis alumnos presenciales, y es necesario que Ustedes acudan para que practiquen con ellos.** Por favor me informan a dónde van a tomar sus prácticas: Lunes y viernes de 6 a 8 Fac. Psicología aula 11, entrando a la derecha; Martes y jueves Humanidades Edif. J aula 3, entrando por la reja de atrás el edificio que está exactamente a la izquierda. (LOS PRESENCIALES DE PSICO. LO HARAN EN SU GRUPO)

También les aviso que el examen parcial está programado entre el 12 y 20 de abril. Será virtual en la USBI. Necesito que me autoricen el uso del equipo y yo les informaré en otro correo. Por el momento, vayan considerando las fechas para disponibilidad. (LOS PRESENCIALES DE PSICO. LO HARAN EN SU GRUPO)

Cualquier duda estoy para servirles.

Saludos y buen inicio de semana.

MTE Martha Edna García Ramírez

Facilitadora del Curso.

## 3. 3<sup>dr</sup>. ONLINE REMINDER March 8<sup>th</sup>.

Hola a tod@s:

EL motivo del presente es para recordarle a la gran mayoría que están inscritos en el curso de Inglés I virtual y hasta hoy no he recibido señales de vida de muchos de ustedes.

**Les recuerdo que estoy a sus órdenes en la USBI lunes, miércoles y viernes de 12 a 14 hrs. o en el chat de la plataforma de 1 a 2.**

Por favor no dejen de realizar sus actividades porque se les va a terminar el tiempo y luego no van a poder realizar sus trabajos.

A los que ya ha trabajado, les recomiendo que tengan cuidado al subir sus archivos: cerciórense que sea el correcto y que lo suben al foro correcto, de lo contrario se obstruye la dinámica del foro.

Cualquier cosa estoy para servirles.

Saludos

MTE. Martha Edna García Ramírez

Facilitadora

## 4. 1<sup>st</sup>. QUESTIONNAIRE

Como parte de una investigación que estoy llevando a cabo, te agradeceré contestes las siguientes preguntas cuya respuesta será absolutamente confidencial:

1. ¿Por qué decidiste tomar el curso de manera virtual?
2. ¿cuál es tu principal objetivo con este curso y cómo piensas lograrlo?
3. ¿Habías tomado cursos virtuales de cualquier tipo antes de éste? \_\_\_\_  
¿cuántos? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Si tu respuesta anterior fue afirmativa por favor comenta sobre alguno de ellos: lo que te gustó, lo que te disgustó, lo difícil y lo fácil.
5. ¿Qué extrañas de tus cursos presenciales cuando estás trabajando en la plataforma?
6. ¿qué extrañas de tu curso virtual cuando estás en tus clases presenciales?
7. ¿cuánto tiempo dedicas a realizar las tareas encomendadas?
8. ¿de qué depende que realices las actividades del curso?
9. ¿cómo te organizas para realizar las tareas y actividades del curso?
10. ¿qué te preocupa del curso?
11. Cualquier otro comentario que tengas es bienvenido.

Gracias por cooperar con esta investigación.  
MTE Martha Edna García Ramírez  
Facilitadora del Curso

5. **LOOKING FOR REASONS E-MAIL**  
2013

April 1st.

Hola a tod@s:

El motivo de este comunicado es que a la fecha ninguno de Ustedes a realizado ningùn tipo de actividades en el curso virtual de Inglés I al que se inscribieron.

Màs allà de su responsabilidad a este curso, mi interès va hacia las razones por las cuàles no han dado ningùn tipo de respuesta a mis comunicados ni tampoco han realizado las actividades.

En realidad me interesa mucho conocer sus razones porque, existe la posibilidad de que estemos fallando en algo como responsables del curso, sin embargo, si Ustedes que son los usuarios no nos manifiestan ningùn tipo de observaciones, nosotros no vamos a ser capaces de corregirlas.

Les agradecerè mucho que me envíen una respuesta sincera a mi interrogante, independientemente de cual sea.

Tengan la plena seguridad que no se tomarà ningùn tipo de represalia, màs allà de que no estèn preparados para sus Exàmenes Finales Oral y Escrito, cada uno de Ustedes conoce sus capacidades.

Por favor, tomense el tiempo de enviarme una respuesta, Saludos y excelente regreso a Clases.

MTE Martha Edna

Facilitadora del Curso.

#### 6. REASONS ANSWER

April 8th. 2013

MAESTRA LO QUE PASA QUE AMI ME ROBARON MI LAPTOP BUENO DE HECHO NO ERA MIA Y PUES LA TENGO Q PAGAR . YO SOI CASAD Y MI ESPOSO NO TIENE TRABAJO POR AHORA CREO Q NO ES UNA EXCUSA PERO LA VERDD NO TENGO FUENTES PARA IR A UN INTERNET TENGO UNA BEBE TAMBIEN Y PUES TENGO Q CUIDARLA MIL DISCULPAS MAESTRA YO HUBIESE QUERIDO TOMAR ESTA CLASE PERO PUES NO PUDE LE AGRADESCO MUCHO SU COMPRESION Y POR LO MISMO NO PODIA AVIZARLE LO SUCEDIDO. SALUDOS.

#### 7. STUDENT 1 REASON

May 21st.

Buenas tardes maestra

por este medio me comunico con usted para informarle que en estos días me gustaría contactarme con usted para hablar de una serie de problemas que eh tenido con el curso pase

una linda tarde atte: STUDENT 1

#### 8. 2nd INTERVIEW

Hola, como parte de la investigación que estoy llevando al cabo te agradeceré que respondas a las siguientes cuestiones:

1. ¿Cuál es tu edad?
2. ¿Qué semestre estás cursando?
3. ¿De dónde eres?
4. ¿cuál es tu estado civil? ¿tienes hijos?
5. ¿Tienes beca?

6. ¿Vives con tu familia? ¿algún familiar cercano? ¿en una pensión?
7. ¿Trabajas? De ser afirmativa tu respuesta: ¿en qué horario? ¿cuántos días a la semana?
8. ¿Tienes televisión?
9. ¿cuentas con servicio médico?
10. ¿Tienes tiempo libre? ¿qué haces con él?
11. ¿Cursas alguna otra experiencia educativa virtual? ¿por qué?
12. ¿Qué opinan tus amigos de que lleves curso (s) virtual(es)?
13. ¿Te ha funcionado esta forma de trabajo?
14. ¿En dónde realizas tus actividades?
15. ¿Cuentas con un cronograma personal de trabajo para esta experiencia educativa? ¿te apegas a él?

### 9. FINAL INTERVIEW

1. ¿Por qué decidiste tomar un curso virtual?
2. ¿Habías tomado un curso virtual antes?
3. ¿Crees que tienes los suficientes conocimientos en computación e idioma para llevar esta EE en línea?
4. ¿Por qué no pudiste terminar tu curso?
5. ¿Volverás a tomar esta EE virtual? ¿por qué?
6. ¿Crees que el apoyo de tu asesor fue suficiente? ¿por qué?
7. ¿Por qué no acudiste a las sesiones de apoyo en los grupos presenciales de tu asesora?
8. ¿Crees que ahora estás mejor preparado para llevar otra EE en línea? ¿por qué?
9. ¿Alguno de tus compañeros se interesó por llevar Inglés en línea a partir de tu experiencia? ¿por qué?
10. ¿Crees que culturalmente estamos preparados para aprender en línea? ¿por qué?
11. Si tienes algún comentario que externar te lo voy a agradecer.

### 10. ADVISORS' QUESTIONNAIRE

Tutors' perceptions about on-line MEIF English students' performance

1. How long have you been working with on-line MEIF courses?
2. How many students do you have in your on-line groups?
3. Do your students receive a specific training for this course?
4. How long is this training?
5. How often do you offer tutoring?
6. What kind of tutoring do you offer: on-line, face to face, or both?

In your experience:

7. How many students do take the training?
8. Do all your students take tutoring?

9. What kind of tutoring seems to be better accepted by your students?
  10. What kind of students do you think take tutoring more constantly?
  11. What do you consider is the main problem your students have with these courses?
  12. What kind of problems do you think your students have to face that affect their performance in these kinds of courses?
  13. How many students do pass the course? Less than 5, between 5 and 10, more than 10
- Thanks for your collaboration

### **11. Tutors' perceptions about on-line MEIF English students' performance ANSWERS**

1. How long have you been working with on-line MEIF courses?  
I have been working with online MEIF courses for three years.
2. How many students do you have in your on-line groups?  
I usually have 20 students in every online group.
3. Do your students receive a specific training for this course?  
Online students started been formally trained in groups last semester. Although, before this semester, they did not have that kind of training, but the one I provided them with.
4. How long is this training?  
It lasts one or two hours.
5. How often do you offer tutoring?  
I provide my students with tutoring sessions according to their needs. About the use of EMINUS, there are introductory videos and personal tutoring sessions at the beginning of the course. About the course, I have tutoring sessions when my students ask them for.
6. What kind of tutoring do you offer: on-line, face to face, or both?  
Since the course is online, I provide my students with online tutoring, not many students ask for face to face tutoring.

In your experience:

7. How many students do take the training?  
Formal training courses are for all the students in every group. There are introductory videos for the use of EMINUS as well. I usually provide the students with training sessions, which is taken by small groups, since many students know how to use a computer or EMINUS. Also, the first unit in every English MEIF course was designed with the purpose of introducing and exploring the course itself and EMINUS.
8. Do all your students take tutoring?  
Yes, they do.

9. What kind of tutoring seems to be better accepted by your students?  
Online tutoring.

10. What kind of students do you think take tutoring more constantly?  
There is no a specific kind of students.

11. What do you consider is the main problem your students have with these courses?

Many students do not like reading; therefore, they decide to take the course at random. Also, they do not understand explanations or how to work.

Some students just “take” the course because it is required by their authorities but they do not work on it.

Some students just want to do final exams.

12. What kind of problems do you think your students have to face that affect their performance in these kinds of courses?

Students start the course late.

They do not like reading.

Some students do not “remember” deadlines.

13. How many students do pass the course? Less than 5, between 5 and 10, more than 10

In my experience, I would say that most of the time, more than 10.

## 12. EMINUS PLATFORM

The screenshot shows the EMINUS v2.4 platform interface. The header includes the logo of Universidad Veracruzana and the text 'EMINUS v2.4 SISTEMA DE EDUCACIÓN DISTANCIA'. The left sidebar contains several navigation menus: 'Administración' (with sub-items: Mi Curso, Análisis, Actividades, Recursos, Foros, Calificaciones, Configuración, Datos), 'Exámenes' (with sub-items: Ver exámenes, Suspensión y levantón), 'Interfaz' (with sub-items: Lista de integrantes, Equipo de trabajo, Seguridad), 'Herramientas' (with sub-items: Foro, Chat, Espacio colaborativo, Salvo de clases, Activar/Desactivar), and 'Accesos' (with sub-item: Calculadora). The main content area displays 'Inglés I CIX X03' and 'Unidad de Integración'. Below this, there is a 'Justificación' section with text describing the course's focus on developing communication skills and using digital tools in a distance learning environment.

## 13. CONTENT UNIT EXAMPLE



Universidad Veracruzana *emhus* v2.4 Sistema de Educación Distribuida

Introduce el número, parte del ID de la unidad o el nombre del comunicado deseado

**Nuevo** | **Responder** | **Reenviar** | **Eliminar** | **Marcar como:** **Selecciona** | **Actualizar lista** | **Desplegar:** 20 **per página**

Ver: **Todos los comunicados recibidos** | Agrupar comunicados por: **Inglés 1 CIC X01**

**Comunicados recibidos:** 289 comunicado(s) | 33 por línea | **1 a página** 14

Asunto	Enviado el -	Enviado por	Curso / Exp. educativa
EXTENSIÓN DE FECHA PORDS	Vié, 01 Mar 2012 23:08 hs	Genia Patricia Verna Bora	Inglés 1 CIC X01
[Mensaje Leído] FIN DE LA UNIDAD 1	Vié, 01 Mar 2012 21:54 hs	HERNANDEZ AGUILAR IVAN OBERTS	Inglés 1 CIC X01
[Mensaje Leído] RE: DUDA DE ACTIVIDADES	Mié, 27 Feb 2012 19:28 hs	MARTINEZ HERNANDEZ JAZMIN GUADALUPE	Inglés 1 CIC X01
[Mensaje Leído] RV: INICIO DE CLASES	Mié, 27 Feb 2012 14:58 hs	HERNANDEZ FERNANDEZ OSCAR	Inglés 1 CIC X01
[Mensaje Leído] FIN DE LA UNIDAD 1	Mié, 27 Feb 2012 14:08 hs	HERNANDEZ FERNANDEZ OSCAR	Inglés 1 CIC X01
[Mensaje Leído] RE: DUDA DE ACTIVIDADES	Mié, 27 Feb 2012 13:37 hs	Genia Patricia Verna Bora	Inglés 1 CIC X01
[Mensaje Leído] RV: INICIO DE CLASES	Mié, 27 Feb 2012 13:08 hs	DE LA CRUZ RIVERA LUIS ANGEL	Inglés 1 CIC X01
[Mensaje Leído] Curso Virtual	Mié, 27 Feb 2012 13:04 hs	DE LA CRUZ RIVERA LUIS ANGEL	Inglés 1 CIC X01
[Mensaje Leído] FIN DE LA UNIDAD 1	Mar, 28 Feb 2012 18:32 hs	RIVAS CALLEJAS ODIAR	Inglés 1 CIC X01
[Mensaje Leído] RV: INICIO DE CLASES	Mar, 28 Feb 2012 18:31 hs	RIVAS CALLEJAS ODIAR	Inglés 1 CIC X01
[Mensaje Leído] Curso Virtual	Mar, 28 Feb 2012 18:30 hs	RIVAS CALLEJAS ODIAR	Inglés 1 CIC X01
[Mensaje Leído] INICIO DE CLASES	Mar, 28 Feb 2012 18:26 hs	RIVAS CALLEJAS ODIAR	Inglés 1 CIC X01
[Mensaje Leído] RV: INICIO DE CLASES	Mar, 28 Feb 2012 18:26 hs	MARTINEZ HERNANDEZ JAZMIN GUADALUPE	Inglés 1 CIC X01
[Mensaje Leído] RV: INICIO DE CLASES	Mar, 28 Feb 2012 15:02 hs	MARTINEZ HERNANDEZ JAZMIN GUADALUPE	Inglés 1 CIC X01
[Mensaje Leído] Curso Virtual	Mar, 28 Feb 2012 15:01 hs	MARTINEZ HERNANDEZ JAZMIN GUADALUPE	Inglés 1 CIC X01
[Mensaje Leído] RV: INICIO DE CLASES	Mar, 28 Feb 2012 15:01 hs	MARTINEZ HERNANDEZ JAZMIN GUADALUPE	Inglés 1 CIC X01
[Mensaje Leído] RV: INICIO DE CLASES	Mar, 28 Feb 2012 15:00 hs	MARTINEZ HERNANDEZ JAZMIN GUADALUPE	Inglés 1 CIC X01
DUDA DE ACTIVIDADES	Mar, 28 Feb 2012 14:54 hs	MARTINEZ HERNANDEZ JAZMIN GUADALUPE	Inglés 1 CIC X01
[Mensaje Leído] FIN DE LA UNIDAD 1	Mar, 28 Feb 2012 13:34 hs	BADILLO ORTIZ DIEGO DE JESUS	Inglés 1 CIC X01
[Mensaje Leído] INICIO DE CLASES	Mar, 28 Feb 2012 12:59 hs	MARTINEZ HERNANDEZ JAZMIN GUADALUPE	Inglés 1 CIC X01

Administración

- Mi Curso
- Archivos
- Actividades
- Recursos
- Fuentes
- Calificaciones
- Configuración
- Dudas

Exámenes

- Ver exámenes
- Supervisión y revisión

Integrantes

- Lista de integrantes
- Equipos de trabajo
- Seguimiento

Herramientas

- Foro
- Chat
- Espacio colaboración
- Salón de clases
- Activar/Desactivar