AUTHENTIC TASKS IN EFL EFORUMS: A BRIDGE FOR KNOWLEDGE CONSTRUCTION AND INTERACTION ENHANCEMENT

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ABSTRACT

This study used sequential exploratory, mixed-method research that explored the influence of authentic tasks on adult language learners' interactions in eforums. The participants belonged to a blended-flipped program of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Eforum posting in the course aimed at encouraging beginner learners to exchange experiences; however, participation in the eforums did not evolve into spontaneous interactions. Therefore, authentic tasks were designed and implemented in the eforum. Data were gathered from learners' participation registers, surveys, and interviews and by executing a content-analysis procedure. After analyzing the data, one main category and three subcategories emerged. The main category showed that implementing authentic tasks on students' eforums interactions led to the collaborative construction of a cognitive-social elearning environment. The main category comprised three subcategories: (a) building a learning community by interweaving affective-communicative actions, (b) promoting an online learning environment through authenticity, and (c) moving from individual to collective knowledge construction. Findings suggest that the implementation of authentic tasks on eforums: (a) increased learners' meaningful interactions mediated by social, cognitive, and teaching presences; (b) helped to construct significant and lifelong knowledge collectively; and (c) fostered a stronger learning community through participants' affective-communicative actions.

Keywords: *authentic tasks, eforums, interaction, knowledge construction, social presence, writing skill*

INTRODUCTION

The needs of an increasingly technologically immersed society means scholars need to rethink the purpose of education from a constructivist perspective (de Zubiría, 2020) and to better understand the role that language, educators, and learners play in the construction of knowledge. Because of this, eforums and elearning communities have emerged (Rovai, 2007), which increases participants' feeling of being connected while supporting their own and others' learning. However, e-environments present the challenge of low student

engagement and participation in language learning contexts. This research responds to that challenge by implementing authentic tasks in the context of a virtual foreign language program to respond to the lack of student engagement with eforums. Authentic tasks foster real experiences to help learners make sense, reshape, and acquire meaningful understandings through a process of knowledge construction. Consequently, this study examines the influence of authentic tasks on students' participation in eforums and on the processes of construction of knowledge that emerge from their interactions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Knowledge Construction

Instrumental approaches to education have been shown to limit the role of both teachers and learners, as well as the curriculum (Lindblad & Popkewitz, 2000; Wenger, 1999). Nonetheless, the constructivism paradigm has had a large impact on the pedagogical and cognitive sciences (Piaget, 1958), and has shaped the way sociology and education are linked (Vygotsky, 1986). Under this theory, the construction of student-centered processes enhances lifelong learning for personal and professional purposes, and both educators and learners' language, thought, experiences, and prior knowledge are key elements of this process of knowledge construction (Goodman, 1996).

The collaborative knowledge construction process is cobuilt through interaction as a means to share, discover, discuss, and apply knowledge (Wang & Liu, 2020). To explain how knowledge is organized in our minds and how the mind intervenes in the construction of knowledge, different researchers have considered the schema theory. Van Kesteren and Meeter (2020), for example, defined schema as a mental structure that works as a scaffold in which prior and new information provide slots that allow the learner to make mental representations that are then linked to their experience. This process differs with each person's background and life experiences and brings about multiple interpretations that are negotiated, validated, and reconstructed through interaction.

Educational environments need to provide learners with opportunities to interact and be constantly involved in tasks within real social contexts for learners to construct knowledge (Woo et al., 2007). Studies have demonstrated (e.g., Baanqud et al., 2020; Vasodavan et al., 2020) that new understandings are mutually negotiated when learners discuss with other learners, and that collaboration among peers not only enhances their learning process but also develops their critical thinking skills.

Authentic Tasks

In a task-based language teaching (TBLT) approach, tasks are goal-oriented, pursue a communicative purpose, focus on meaning, and are as authentic as possible (Smith & González-Lloret, 2021). The successful completion of a task will involve achieving a communicative outcome that might be performed inside or outside the classroom but within the context of an authentic interaction. Contextual authenticity is achieved when the tasks are performed in the real world, and interactional authenticity is achieved when students and teachers are involved in a process of negotiation in the classroom (Colthorpe et al., 2021). The design of a task requires addressing its complexity by considering a progression from simple input and output to complex input and output (Ellis, 2017). Complexity is determined by the cognitive load the task requires from the student or by different variables that may affect the learner's performance within the task. Observing the task horizontally helps instructors to determine specific criteria related to progression and complexity (Ellis, 2017).

In this study, authentic tasks offer students the opportunity to use their creativity and resources in terms of knowledge, skills, and competences to tackle a task (Copobianco, 2022). Forum tasks are considered output tasks designed for the learners to demonstrate built knowledge and to interact by using EFL (English as a Foreign Language). We adopted Elli's (2003) and Bygate's (2016) classification of tasks from the TBLT approach, in which real-world tasks and pedagogical tasks are compared and contrasted to bring authenticity to the learning environment. Real-world tasks are taken from the outside world, while pedagogical tasks are specially designed for classroom use (Bygate, 2016). In this line,

Digital technologies and multimodal communication provide second language (L2) teachers with opportunities to design interactive, contextualized, and authentic tasks (Lee, 2016), which have demonstrated a positive effect on learners'

academic success, attitude, problem-solving, and creative-thinking skills development (Pullu & Gömleksiz, 2021). In Lee's (2016) study, authentic communication designed tasks enabled students to use the target language and practice linguistic forms. The findings showed that computer-mediated communication tasks related to real-world language use motivated beginner learners and engaged them in the learning process.

Blended-Flipped Learning and Teaching

Information and Communication Technologies have positively impacted education by creating more flexible learning environments that achieve a blending of the face-to-face classroom and the virtual learning environment. Higher education contexts have been a fertile educational ground for adopting a blended-learning modality for teaching. There are various possibilities to blend a virtual and face-to-face environment, and the emphasis on one or the other will depend on students' needs (Stacey & Gerbic, 2008). In this study, a blended-flipped instructional design (Caro et al. 2021) was adopted to strengthen the blended modality with a flipped classroom pedagogical approach. The flipped classroom encourages students to work independently on class materials before the synchronous or on-campus sessions, and it has been shown to increase students' higher-order thinking skills in English language teaching contexts (Aldaka, 2020; Alsowat, 2016).

Online Interactions

In blended-learning language courses, students are involved in authentic tasks mediated by technology (Smith & González-Lloret, 2021), and forum discussions are used to provide interactions with diverse characteristics and patterns. Forums might be created for providing feedback, discussing learning materials or content, providing technical support, and for socialization purposes (Wise & Cui, 2018). Content-related interactions support student learning because students engage with the course content, while noncontent interactions support engagement and motivation (Wise et al., 2017).

Online discussions involve the exchange of information from collective or individual understandings (Li & Yu, 2020); therefore, active interactions in eforums are linked to the learner's knowledge construction (Chen & Yeh, 2021). Interactions emerging from eforums develop closer relationships among peers (Ebrahimi et al., 2017), build a sense of community, and foster a supportive affective environment (Chatterjee & Correia, 2020). Eforum interactions also provide opportunities for enhancing critical and high-order thinking skills in learners (McLoughlin & Mynard, 2009; Szabo & Schwartz, 2011).

Research on the role of the instructor in eforums shows that too much participation by the instructor might negatively affect learners' interaction as they might feel less confident when sharing ideas (An et al., 2009). Nonetheless, students' confidence also depends on participants' learning achievements, which might foster student-student interaction and lessen the instructor-student one (Zheng et al., 2015). Students' interactions are positively influenced by the instructor's informal feedback since learners find it more encouraging and constructive (Balaji & Chakrabarti, 2010).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Participants in this study were adult language learners from a blended-flipped EFL program called Plan Umbrella (PU). The students in the program follow an asynchronous independent learning route before attending the weekly two-hour synchronous class. This approach prepares students to practice in class the content they have studied on their own. A weekly eforum output task allows learners to interact using the grammar and vocabulary learned in the input activities, and the teacher replies by providing them with insights on content and qualitative and quantitative feedback encourage interaction among peers and teachers before meeting in class.

Former eforums in PU aimed to foster the use of the target language but students did not find them relevant for their learning process. Some of their posts were clearly translated from students' first language (L1: Spanish) and, therefore, they were not using the expected target grammar and vocabulary of the week. Additionally, spontaneous participation and interaction rarely took place. The results from a survey and an analysis of the eforum tasks revealed that they were too complex and lacked authenticity, which might have unmotivated students to interact further.

To prompt students' eforum participation and encourage meaningful interactions, we

redesigned the 12 eforums tasks of the A1+ EFL course in which the participants were enrolled. The new tasks consisted of replying to the eforum prompt and then interacting with at least one peer by asking them one question. The redesigned tasks included a short instruction in which students were encouraged to build their participation based on their own experience and knowledge. The tasks also offered an example in which the length and grammar to be used were illustrated, the content was contextualized to the student's reality or interest (i.e., Colombian), and a vocabulary guide was included. Table 1 shows the change in the task design proposed for one eforum.

Table 1.
Initial and Redesigned Eforum Task

Initial eforum Task	Redesigned eforum Task
Tell us about your city! Tell us general information about your city (where it is, how big it is, important places, etc.). Compare your home city with another city. You can talk about museums, theaters, cafés, local food, weather conditions, transport people, cost of living, etc. Attach pictures of both cities. Post your ideas and pictures to the forum. Comment on at least one of your classmates' post.	Comparing cities Imagine you can live in another city, different from the one you currently live in. What city do you want to live in and why? Write two sentences using comparatives (more...than, _er than...). Bold the grammar of the module in your post. Example: "I want to live in Manizales because it is **quieter than** Bogotá. In Manizales there is **less** traffic and transport is **more comfortable**." Vocabulary guidance: Here are some words you can include: good/bad; fast/slow; crowded/empty; expensive/cheap; hot/cold; comfortable/uncomfortable; interesting/boring; quiet/noisy

Note. This table evidences the change in the instructional design of eforums.

The redesigned eforum tasks were implemented in an academic semester and the research was led by the following question and objectives.

Research Question

What influence do authentic tasks have on A1 EFL students' interactions when participating in eforums?

Research Objectives

- To identify the variables that might influence the interaction of students responding to authentic tasks in eforums.
- To establish the possible contributions of authentic eforum tasks on students' knowledge construction.
- To determine the type of students' interactions when responding to authentic tasks in eforums.

METHOD

Context and Sample

PU has an average enrollment of 116 EFL Colombian learners each semester as its hybrid and flipped learning approach make it appealing for adult learners. It offers seven English courses from A1 to B2 levels according to the Common European Framework (Council of Europe, 2018). This study's sample was conducted with five out of the seven adult learners enrolled in the Level 2 course (one male and four female participants), whose ages ranged from 30 to 60 years old and held the following professional degrees: a doctor, a physiotherapist, a journalist, a technological developer, and a specialist in business administration. For the purpose of this study, the participants were assigned a label with pseudonyms as follows: SAM, SAN, SLS, SLF, and SN. All the participants were studying a general English course for professional development purposes.

Design and Data Collection Procedure

Mixed-method research provides researchers with multiple perspectives for a more complete understanding of the phenomena studied (Creswell, 2013). In this sequential exploratory study, qualitative data was prioritized (Hanson et al., 2005), considering the theoretical perspective of the research objectives proposed to determine specific theoretical categories. This study was conducted in three phases: Preintervention, Intervention, and Postintervention. Qualitative data were gathered and analyzed in the Preintervention phase, then quantitative data were gathered during the Intervention phase and interpreted to support the qualitative findings. Finally, more qualitative data were gathered to deepen the comprehension and analysis of the findings. Thus, the quantitative data collected assisted in the interpretation of the qualitative data (Creswell, & Plano, 2018). Quantitative

data specifically contributed to exploring learners' task engagement, interactions, and initial and final participation in the eforums, which enlightened the findings to solve the second research objective proposed.

The data gathering instruments included a survey, a semistructured interview, and forum post registers. The Preintervention phase occurred when we administered a survey (see Appendix A) to determine the students' perceptions about the forums for English learning. The six-question survey focused on the students' perceptions of the authenticity of the eforum tasks, the fostering of interaction, the knowledge construction, and the usefulness of eforum tasks for their learning. The survey was initially designed with 12 open-ended questions that were reduced to six after a piloting process with 86 students enrolled in PU. The results from this survey consolidated the needs analysis that prompted us to redesign the eforum tasks and to conduct this study. Consequently, as part of that Preintervention phase, we worked on redesigning the forums. The Intervention phase occurred during an academic semester in which the sample of participants were taking the blended-flipped English course. Students were exposed to the redesigned eforum each week, and each student participated in a total of 12 eforums along the course. The eforum post registers provided qualitative and quantitative data. We adjusted them in terms of the instructions, the focus of the task, and the inclusion of an example to model the expected outcome to the student. At the Postintervention phase, the semistructured interview was administered. This interview was coconstructed by us based on the analysis done on the data gathered initially from the survey. It aimed to deepen the units of analysis: authenticity, interaction, and knowledge construction, which were the bases in the redesign of the eforums (see Appendix B). The interview took place with each of the five participants after one semester in which they had already experienced the 12 redesigned eforum tasks.

Data Analysis Procedures

A descriptive qualitative content analysis methodology was followed to analyze the qualitative data collected. This methodology suggests purposefully selecting the speech-texts (in this case, the eforum posts), which is the data to be analyzed and categorized after inferencing, interpreting, and constantly comparing the data (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2017). The established four-step procedure for the content analysis started by preparing data, then defining the units of analysis, developing categories and a coding scheme, and finally drawing conclusions.

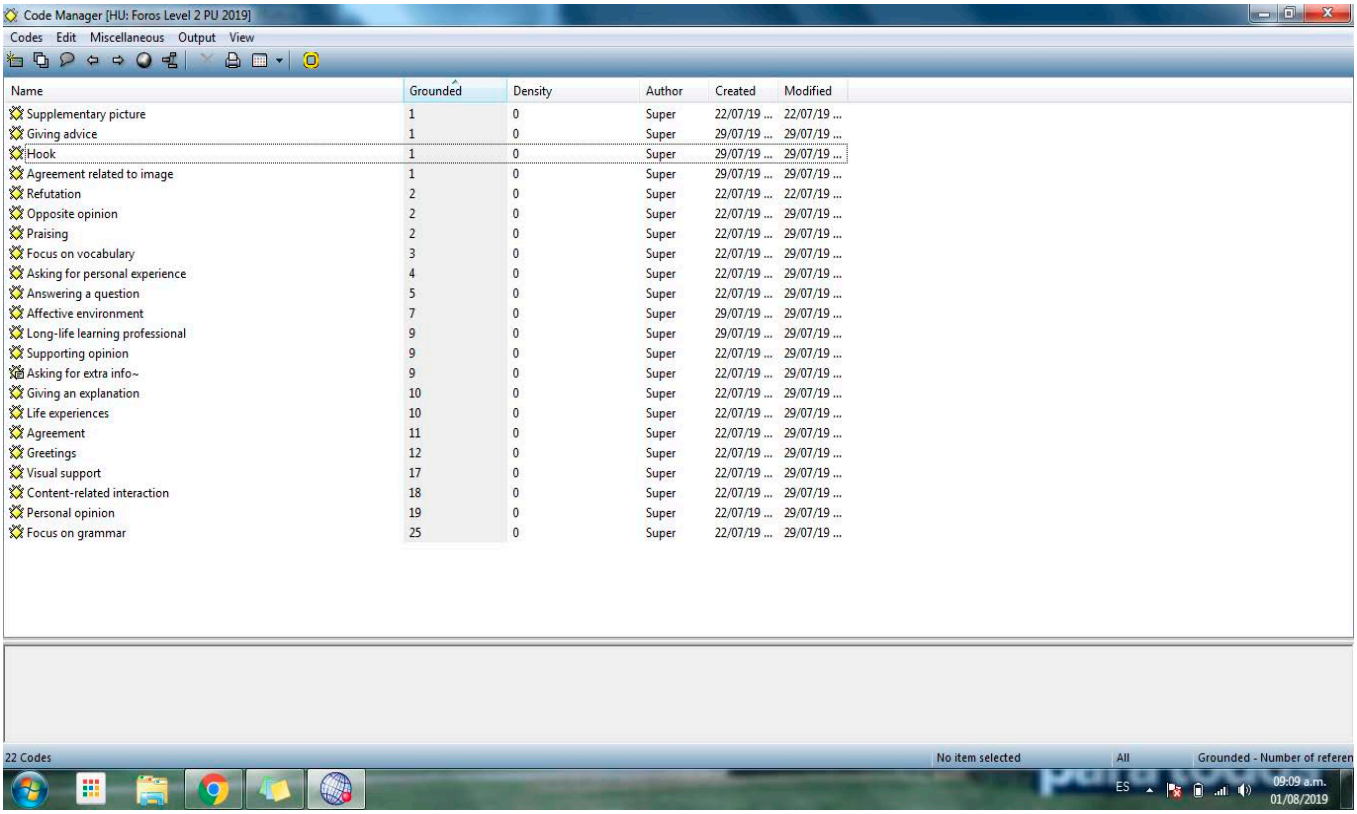
Preparing data. Screenshots of every eforum thread were taken and organized in a folder and an Excel spreadsheet was created to quantify the students' participation and interactions along the 12 course forums. Data from the survey were also consolidated into an Excel spreadsheet. The data were analyzed by constant comparison to determine the students' perceptions about the initial eforum tasks.

Eforum tasks with the highest density of interactions were selected, based on what Patton (2015) names as purposeful sampling. Eforum Tasks 3, 6, 8, and 10 had the highest density between 15 and 18 interactions, while Eforum Tasks 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 11, and 12 had the least with between 11 and 13 interactions. Five out of 12 eforum tasks were selected and transcribed into Word documents. The semistructured interviews were also transcribed into Word documents, one for each student. Once all the data were prepared, the data were uploaded to the software Atlas.ti for analysis.

Define units of analysis. Atlas.ti displayed the transcriptions of forum threads and interviews and we analyzed them. The constant contrast of the information allowed us to find initial codes, patterns, and units of analysis in the descriptive qualitative content-analysis method (DQCAM). This process is done by analyzing and assigning codes to specific chunks of texts (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2017). Figure 1 illustrates the units of analysis we found and their organization from low to high density.

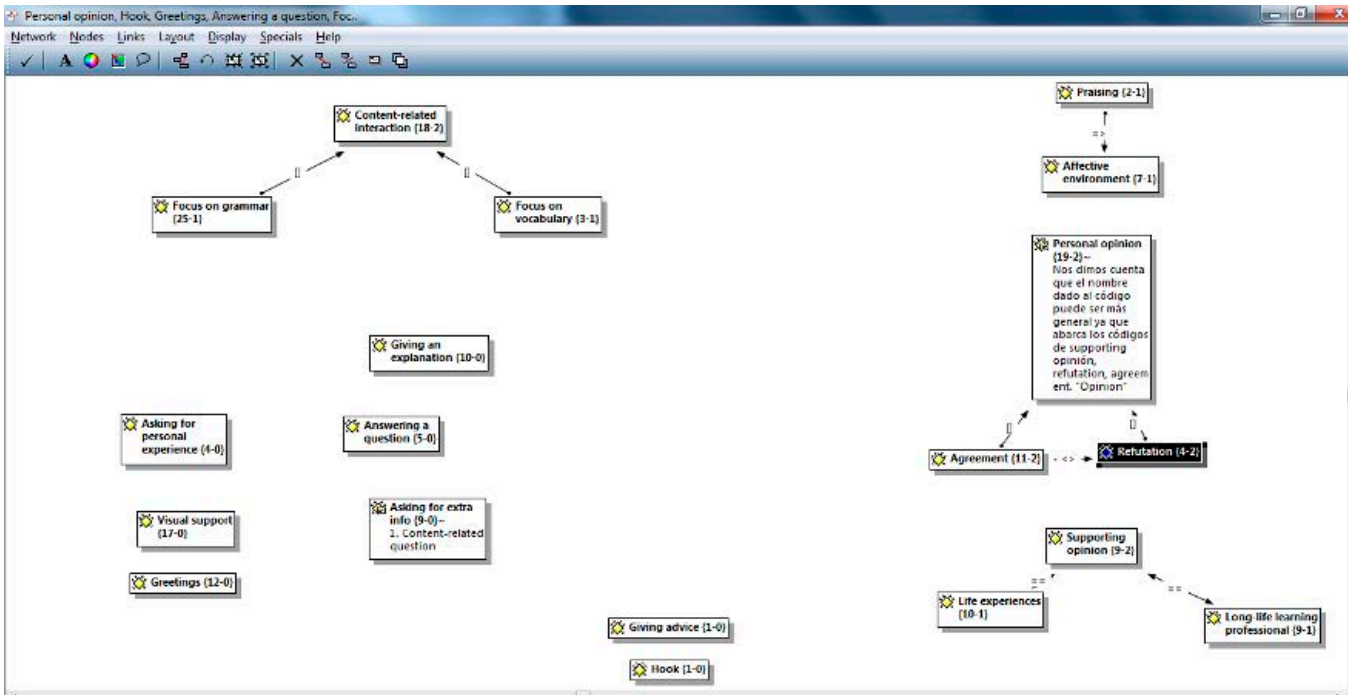
Develop categories and a coding scheme. After inductively developing categories, the initial units of analysis were interpreted, regrouped, and linked using the linking tools provided by Atlas.ti. Figure 2 illustrates a coding scheme in the development process of the categories in which each unit of analysis was connected to others and became part of a new hierarchy of codes, which after more interpretation and analysis became subcategories. For instance, the units of analysis

Figure 1.
Units of Analysis



Note. This figure shows the units of analysis found and their organization from low to high density in the Atlas TI software.

Figure 2.
Coding Scheme



Note. Figure 2 illustrates the coding process done in the Atlas TI software.

Personal Opinion, Agreement, and Refutation were connected and given a hierarchy. We considered Personal Opinion as a broader unit that encompassed both Agreement and Refutation. The latter units meant the actions taken by students when providing an opinion.

Drawing conclusions. In the following section, the categories and subcategories that emerged from the data analysis are explained.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

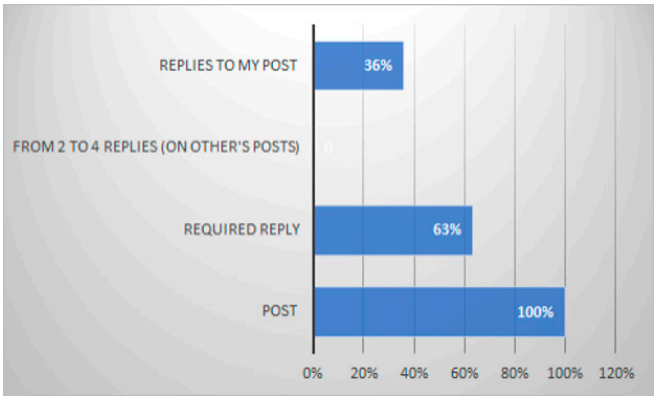
The quantitative data gathered from the eforum post registers were analyzed to find the influence the authentic tasks had on learners' participation and interaction. This quantitative data contributed to the second research objective in which we measured variables that impinged on students' interactions.

Figure 3 illustrates the interaction learners had in the eforum tasks with its original design in a previous English course as compared to the interaction that took place in the course in which the redesigned tasks were included. For the variable Post, which refers to the students' reply to the eforum tasks, there is a reduction of 3%. For the variable Required Reply, which refers to the students' reply to a peer, the percentage of interactions increased in the redesigned task from 63% to 75%. The variable From 2 to 4 Replies reflects the number of interactions initiated between peers by their own will (i.e., not required by the instructions). This comparison showed the highest difference in the compared situations since in the initial case students did not post any extra comments or replies to interact with their peers, while in the redesigned eforum tasks, four out of seven students were interacting. In the initial eforum tasks, 36% of the posts were replied to by the post owner to answer questions or comments made by classmates, while in the redesigned eforum tasks this percentage increased to 43%. These results demonstrate that the implementation of authentic tasks in eforums engage students and promote more participation and interaction among learners, contributing to a greater opportunity for learners to use the L2.

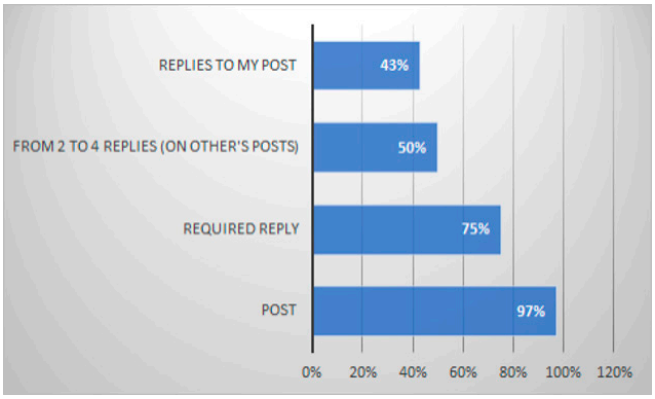
Figure 3.

Comparison of Interaction in the Initial and the Redesigned Tasks

Initial task



Redesigned task



Note. This figure compares the percentages of interactions and participation of students in the eforums before and after the redesign of tasks.

As a result of the Descriptive Qualitative Content Analysis carried out, one main category and three subcategories of results emerged. Each of these provides an answer to each of the research objectives stated for the purpose of this study (see Table 2).

MAIN CATEGORY AND SUBCATEGORIES

Main Category: Cobuilding a cognitive-social elearning environment through authentic tasks in eforums.

Despite the traditional view that the control of the teaching-learning processes resides with the owner of knowledge and the receiver of it, this study has confirmed that by interacting with their peers, participants were allowed to transform, validate, confirm, and shape personal stances into communal understandings while advancing in their EFL proficiency level. We used data content analysis techniques to elucidate the main category, which shows that implementing authentic tasks on students' eforums interactions led to the collaborative construction of a cognitive-social elearning

Table 2.

Categories and Subcategories

Main Category	Subcategories	Research objectives
Cobuilding a cognitive-social elearning environment through authentic tasks in eforums.	Building a learning community by interweaving affective-communicative actions Triggering an online learning environment through authenticity From individual to collective knowledge construction.	To determine students' kinds of interactions when responding to authentic tasks in eforums. To identify the variables that might have an influence on the interaction of students responding to authentic tasks in eforums. To establish the possible contributions of authentic eforum tasks on students' knowledge construction.

Note. This table explains the main category and subcategories that emerged after the data analysis, and their connection to each research objective.

environment. The main category comprised three subcategories: (1) building a learning community by interweaving affective-communicative actions, (2) promoting an online learning environment through authenticity, and (3) moving from individual to collective knowledge construction. Along with these subcategories, three different learning presences took place that allowed participants to coconstruct knowledge (see Figure 4).

Figure 4.

Social, Cognitive, and Teaching Presences

Note. This figure illustrates how the process of knowledge construction through interaction is mediated by the coexistence of the social, teaching, and cognitive presences.

Task authenticity encouraged an online learning environment where knowledge construction took place through communicative actions. This authenticity was attributed to the teaching presence in which the teachers assumed the responsibility of transforming regular eforum tasks into authentic ones to drive students' motivation to interact. Learning a foreign language within a cognitive-social environment allowed participants to learn the L2 meaningfully by displaying their personal and professional identities, and it paved the way from individual to collective knowledge construction. This process became significant for participants when they shared with, relied on, and interacted with others. This also allowed them to go beyond reinforcing, clarifying, and practicing grammar and vocabulary, and take part in discussions where their professional and personal background and their cognitive presence were used to argue and support their position, which favors the development of critical thinking as found by Singh et al. (2022). Participants embraced the idea of belonging and constructing a group history.

The learning community was strengthened by participants' online social presence that embraced open communication and the admission of affective expressions among the group. The participants' eforum interactions evolved into a learning community by interweaving affective and communicative actions, and they also developed a sense of community that contributed to learners' motivation to collaborate throughout the eforums and to persevere while pursuing their learning goals.

SUBCATEGORY 1:

Building a learning community by interweaving affective-communicative actions.

In blended learning programs, participants strengthen the learning community by interacting in both the face-to-face and online environments. However, switching from one environment to the other requires from learners and instructors a certain level of adaptability that increases the need for social presence (Whiteside, 2015). Social presence is developed when participants feel affectively connected to one another (Kozan & Richardson, 2014) and this connection is revealed by the participants' affective responses, such as emotional expression, use of humor, and self-disclosure (Kilis & Yildirim, 2019). In this study, the participants expressed their emotional connection by using humor, such as the following post by SN in Eforum 10: "Hahahaha Andrea, what type of exercise do you recommend strengthening the heart? These exercises are also done by my dog Miley. Hahaha." Participants also

expressed the strong level of familiarity developed inside the group, which helped them communicate better and opened the possibility to post jokes: "The friendly environment and all that is interesting, it provides us with opportunities to send a smile, send a joke, do something with the language, [...] and that helped us a lot to communicate among each other" (Interview, SN. Authors' translation). Affective and communicative actions were interweaved by participants, who developed a learning community that strengthened their online social presence.

Social presence also entails open communication (Kilis & Yildirim, 2019), which involves replying to a thread, acknowledging other participants' responses by quoting them, asking direct questions to other participants, complementing a response, expressing agreement or appreciation, and other types of interactions (Kilis & Yildirim, 2019). The findings in this study showed that social presence was encouraged by an active open communication, which similarly triggered students' level of engagement with the course and motivation to participate in the eforums as expressed by SN: "from my point of view the forums are great, they actually allow us to communicate things" (Interview, SN. Authors' translation). Students constantly quoted each other, complemented their responses and showed agreement and appreciation: "SLS, Congratulations. What kinds of exercises do you do and what is the purpose other than feeling good?" (SLS, Eforum 10). "If you practice (Yoga) constantly, you will see the results quickly. I recommend them!" (SLP, Eforum 10).

Cohesive responses are indicators of social presence, as noted by Kilis and Yildirim (2019). Group cohesion was evident by the use of cohesive responses even from the first eforum tasks when the participants barely knew each other. Participants always used common salutations and vocatives (Kilis & Yildirim, 2019) to greet the group or partners: "Hello classmates" (SLS, Eforum 3), "Hi SN." (SAM, Eforum 10). Cohesion also indicates participants' friendship (Akcaoglu & Lee, 2016). The results in this study showed that learners' motivation to participate in the eforums was fostered by the friendships they had developed and their sense of community. Participants felt that replying to the eforum task was not enough and expressed the need to interact on a deeper level by going further than the eforum task instructions. For example, SN revealed their need to reply to peers by using positive feedback and cohesive responses, and by providing them with new ideas and suggestions from their own area of expertise, which was technology, as depicted in the following excerpt:

> I also think that the forums are successful because the interactions did not finish there, because the dialogue did not stop with the accomplishment of the task but it went further, "ah I read what you said to me and I don't agree." Even if we did not use English, at least, we interacted in another way, "I like your comment" or "you should try this other tech tool." (Interview, SN. Authors' translation)

Online social presence mediated by eforums permitted participants to learn from their peers and to improve their performance, as expressed by SLS:

> I relate the aims of forums to the words "sharing" and "practicing," because I frequently read first what others have posted and that gives me ideas on how to improve my own post and I also think that we can share with our peers our own knowledge of a given week topic and learn from each other (Interview, SN. Authors' translation).

These findings coincide with the results of other studies about social presence in online environments. Law et al. (2019) found a positive effect on students' performance thanks to their willingness to self-initiate interaction with others in the learning activities and thinking, which showed their motivation and commitment.

Overall, online social presence was strengthened by open communication interweaved with affective expressions that contributed to building participants' sense of community, which consequently, motivated them to explore ideas and perspectives collaboratively and to persist in their learning (Dempsey & Zhang, 2019; Molinillo et al., 2018). Social interaction and collaboration are key elements of high-quality online learning experiences (Ke, 2010) because they increase participants' engagement and social presence. Eforums authentic tasks supported the development of an effective social environment and provided an environment of trust and connectedness (Akcaoglu & Lee, 2016), which, in turn, increased the online social presence of the group.

Molinillo et al. (2018) claimed that a higher level of social presence encourages active learning and fosters learners' greater effort in their learning, which was clearly evidenced in this study.

SUBCATEGORY 2:

Promoting an online learning environment through authenticity.

Teaching presence, which involves teachers' facilitation of cognitive and social processes to attain meaningful learning outcomes (Anderson et al., 2001), marked a fundamental role in the new eforums' instructional design. The teachers redesigned the tasks to be authentic pedagogic tasks (Ellis, 2003), including contextualized activities with clear purposes to drive students' motivation to learn by being exposed to challenging learning (Herrington, 2006). The results showed that the redesigned tasks favored the use of the language learned to express participants' personal experiences as mentioned by SAN: "We were learning the simple past, and the weekend before I had been to Raquira city. So, I was able to relate my real experience to the task and grammar of the module" (Interview, Authors' translation). Additionally, SLP expressed, "the forums are always adjusted to the class topics and invite us to use not only the module's grammar but also to recycle grammar that we have previously worked on" (Interview, Authors' translation).

Students constructed an elearning environment facilitated by the task authenticity. Authenticity results from the dynamic of the interaction between the learners and the proposed task (Herrington et al., 2003) and the interactions with their classmates to collaboratively build knowledge as evidenced by SLS: "you do not want to repeat the same theme as your partner but on the contrary, to add value so that we all learn more" (Interview, Authors' translation). The following eforum interaction highlights the learners' involvement in the task and the knowledge construction that emerged from the participants' interactions around their shared professional context, the health field:

> SAN: In my opinion, the Humans will be fat and very sick, because in this moment, the 80% teenagers don't have physical activity and their nutrition is deficient. I believe that Humans might be bigheads and small and might not move the legs.
>
> SAM: I agree with you when you say that young people do not have physical activity and have poor nutrition because they have increased diseases such as diabetes which will be controlled by exercise and balanced nutrition. On the other hands, I believe that the human body might be change to lack of exercise and poor nutrition as you can see in your drawing of the *Wall-e* movie.

This interaction shows some of the features of an activity authentic: (a) the opportunity to collaborate in order to learn from each other and to reflect upon their learning and social context, (b) real-world relevance, and (c) a variety of outcomes that are not limited to a single correct answer (Herrington et al., 2003). Similarly, the redesigned task influenced students' participation or perceptions of connectedness with others, a result that was previously mentioned in Aragon (2003) and Akcaoglu and Lee (2016). The results from the eforum participation registers also confirmed the incidence of the redesigned eforums over learners' engagement and participation. Quantitative results indicated an increased interaction from 63% to 75% where students replied to their peer's posts between two and four times. These were voluntary interactions that emerged naturally as part of the conversation. Before the redesign, students did not comment or reply to interacting with their peers, while after the redesign, most students were engaged in interacting. Replies from the post owners also increased from 36% to 43%, which shows that students increased their participation when other classmates demonstrated interest in their own posts.

Teaching presence was also validated when providing positive and specific feedback on students' forum posts, which encouraged meaningful interactions beyond the task and contributed to encouraging learners' participation (see Appendix C). For example:

> SAN: Teacher I asked a question last night and today I answered to Diana I'm busy.
>
> Teacher: Thank you SAN. I have just adjusted your feedback and grade. Regards.

Overall, the redesigned eforum tasks proved to be the context for learners to construct knowledge through communicative actions by creating an elearning environment. Teaching presence was fundamental in the process of redesigning the authentic tasks to engage students' learning (Kilis & Yildirim,

2019). Learners also benefited from the technological tools offered by the platform to increase their participation by adding images or videos to complement and contextualize their posts.

SUBCATEGORY 3:

Moving from individual to collective knowledge construction.

This subcategory illustrates the importance of peer interaction within an educational and communicative environment to generate collective knowledge construction. Collective knowledge construction is possible when individuals' experiences and backgrounds converge in the same environment and are then correlated to be able to construct new knowledge (Goodman, 1996). In this study, collective knowledge construction emerged when students expanded the conversation to appraise their classmates' professional expertise. SAM's participation involved their professional knowledge, and participants SLF and SN showed interest in SAM's post by asking further questions in Eforum 8:

> SLF: Thank you very much for your answer, you are definitely very expert in this area of knowledge.
>
> SAM: Thank you Sofi: I will be but I only know smaller than part of that knowledge.
>
> SN: Ana, very interesting. In my opinion the use of these drugs are very important. Do you think that you have the appropriate support to investigate?

The eforum authentic tasks prompted participants' interactions and constantly involved them in tasks within real social contexts that they could correlate with their professional expertise. Learners constructed new insights in specific fields (Woo et al., 2007) and communication permitted building diverse opinions and points of view (Vasodavan et al., 2020). The participants in this study discussed the eforum prompt and extended their interactions to topics related to their own professional interests, which enriched the conversation and fostered enjoyment, as affirmed by SAN:

> Because sometimes we are given a specific topic, but also we can have varied topics; for example in the last level the topic was jobs, and we were asked about these jobs we work on, in my case I work as a physiotherapist, and I like working with athletes. But my classmates have different professions, one of them is an engineer. So, that makes that during interactions we get to know about different topics, expand on the topic, ask our classmates why, how, when and where. That is why I consider these forums are valuable. (Interview, SAN. Authors' translation)

Participants also indicated that being in the same small discussion group throughout the semester enabled them to build a group history supported by trust in their ability to communicate with classmates (Akcaoglu, & Lee, 2016). The participants formed personal and productive relationships based on open communication, group cohesion, and useful personal connections (Garrison et al., 2010; Law et al., 2019). The use of the target language as a common code was adopted as a strategy to improve their proficiency level as their collective goal, and this motivated them to make an effort to understand each other. Their sometimes dissimilar use of L2 did not limit the way in which knowledge was shared and learned. L2 interaction was a means through which diverse perspectives converged, as seen in the following excerpt:

> I think that forums are a space in which we can interact with other people different from your classmates. I used to comment on the other peoples' posts, the ones who were not my classmates, even if I didn't know them. Maybe if students were told to participate in other people's posts, and the emphasis on this action was stressed, it would improve participation as we all are at the same level. (Interview, SAM. Authors' translation)

Participants used their contexts and experiences when establishing the meaning of a word and when interpreting or making a judgment. Some participants repeated some vocabulary to get the word's meaning. Although being aware of formal language aspects is not the most relevant part in the comprehension process, it is something that cannot be set aside. The schema theory discloses that knowledge is constructed by relating prior and new information (Anderson 2018; Kern, 2000), an assertion that helped us understand how each participant's cognitive presence (based on concrete and emotional knowledge from past and present experiences) and new information (shared by them

in the eforums) elucidated the way comprehension is achieved and molded into a collective form. The next quote, taken from Eforum 6, shows this:

> AN**:** Transmilenio is a transportation system is the most used in Bogota. This has **had** a **great change** in the last years, since before people could not go up to sell things, nor to ask for money. Before it was a **safe**, **clean**, **fast** and very **efficient** transport it is now very **dangerous**, **dirty**, **unsafe,** and **expensive**. At some hours of the day the stations and buses are **crowded**
>
> AM: Hello Ana Maria, That's so true, The Transmilenio in this moment is dangerous and dirty, also the user doesn't respect the rules.
>
> LS: I believe that the most used public transport in Bogota is the transmilenio, which is very unsafe, uncomfortable, not clean, and very expensive. Also it is crowded; however stops on the stations at certain set times; I do not like transmilenio because it is not safe, it is dangerous. This is the transmilenio.

As seen, adjectives are used, repeated, and highlighted by participants so as not only to describe a means of transport, but to give account of their vocabulary acquisition process in the L2. The use of first person pronouns reflects that all participants brought about personal experiences regarding the topic, and these were used to associate the vocabulary in the foreign language. The use of an image by participant LS was incorporated into the discussion and reinforces the way vocabulary was associated.

The eforum task instructions indicated that learners were expected to be aware of the grammar and vocabulary they used in their post replies. It also encouraged learners to read their partners' posts. This helped them to review and enhance the knowledge of the L2 while making sense of the different assumptions and readings around a specific topic. As stated in the previous subcategory, the environment within this research allowed participants to display their cognitive presence and foreign language understanding in terms of grammar awareness, specific vocabulary, and topic-related ideas, that, when shared orally and in written form, reaffirm, validate, and improve each participant's cognitive presence.

Eforums are comprehensive and significant to EFL learners when discussions are related to their past and present experiences. Participants' cognitive presence is evident when each of them identifies, delineates, and interprets their daily practices and the influence these have in their knowledge construction process. This finding confirms what other authors found as effects of encouraging cognitive presences on learner's higher-order thinking skills (Singhet al., 2022). The following quote, taken from Eforum 3, displays the ideas previously discussed:

> EN: My Villa de Leyva! I want to live in Villa de Leyva because **it is quieter than** Cajica. In Villa de Leyva the temperature **is warmer than** in Cajica. In Villa de Leyva it is **quieter** than in Cajica. In Villa de Leyva the cultural o er **is more interesting**. Cajica **is more boring** than Villa de Leyva. (Picture)
>
> AN: I'm sure with SN, I belive is Villa de Leyva the **more beautiful than** Cajica.
>
> AM: Hello Javier. Villa de Leyva is beautiful, but I believe that is very expensive and small.
>
> LS: Cajica is smaller than Bogota and is quieter there is more nature than Bogota.

Overall, by being involved in a communicative and authentic learning environment mediated by eforums, participants conceived of learning a foreign language as a meaningful process since they were not encouraged to learn isolated vocabulary or grammar structures, but to make sense of others' interpretations of the world. Respect and understanding for others' points of view in relation to a topic emerged as a result of reading, commenting on, and learning from their partners' contributions to the weekly eforum task. Collective knowledge construction contributed to the construction of personal and collective identities through interaction, in which learners were able to share, negotiate, and support each other's viewpoints. Participants constructed meaning and became significant helpers while at the same time facilitating that construction for others.

CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

This exploratory mixed-method research

reported the influence that authentic tasks had on A1 EFL adult learners' interactions when participating in eforums of a blended-flipped program. We found that these authentic tasks encouraged a cognitive-social online learning environment in which (a) social, cognitive, and teaching presences mediated and increased learners' interactions; (b) meaningful and lifelong knowledge was collectively constructed through content and prior knowledge interactions, and (c) a learning community was built by means of the affective-communicative actions undertaken by the learners and the teacher.

The first objective of this research was to determine the kinds of interactions students had when responding to authentic tasks in the eforums. We found that the interactions were facilitated because of the intertwining of social, cognitive, and teaching presences, similarly to Singhand Matthees, who found that those presences facilitate successful educational experiences for online learners (Singh et al., 2022). The interactions were strengthened in both the online and face-to-face learning environments and sometimes the type of interactions built in the in-person classroom were transferred to the online environment. However, interactions in the online environment were more mediated by students than by the teachers. The interactions in this EFL community were of three kinds: (a) content-related interactions that focused on vocabulary and/or grammar; (b) affective interactions evidenced by affective/personal responses, open communication, and cohesive responses; and (c) socialization interactions, which were built through communicative actions.

The second objective of this study was to identify the variables that might have an influence on the interaction of students responding to authentic tasks in eforums. This study revealed that the task redesign, in terms of its authenticity and complexity, was an important variable that positively promoted learners' authentic online conversations using L2. Other variables that influenced learners' interactions were students' online social presence and their sense of belonging to a learning community, the participants use of additional artifacts to complement their posts and show their personality with multimodal features, such as images or videos, and the development of friendships that allowed them to interact with jokes or funny comments. The use of varied multimodal communication has been found to be effective for building a sense of learning community (Berry, 2019).

The third objective was to establish the possible contribution of authentic eforum tasks to knowledge construction. We found that participants built knowledge by relying upon their cognitive-affective dimensions, which gave expression to their personal and professional experiences. Knowledge was constructed while participants shared, negotiated, and supported their viewpoints and brought to the discussion their former and current experiences. The knowledge constructed was reinforced by the participants' sense of community and their shared L2 learning purposes. This finding is supported by Yin and Yuan (2022), who stated that cognitive presence and social presence are both positively correlated with learning performance.

We recommend further research to shed light on the incidence of social, cognitive, and affective presences in EFL virtual environments to identify the role each member plays in the construction of knowledge, and to understand the way that the personal and professional background of the participants aligns with particular aspects of the foreign language learning.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to express our sincere thanks to Universidad de La Sabana for its support throughout this research project. We thank the student-participants who were always willing to collaborate. We would also like to acknowledge the IT team from the Language Resource Center Studium.

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APPENDIX A.

Survey

Apreciado Estudiante Plan Umbrella,

Te agradecemos dedicar 10 minutos al diligenciamiento de este cuestionario. Las preguntas buscan reunir información sobre TU EXPERIENCIA con los FOROS de VirtualSabana en Plan Umbrella. Tus respuestas son ANÓNIMAS y no tendrá efectos sobre tu desempeño académico o laboral. Los resultados nos servirán de insumo para realizar acciones de mejora en el Programa. De antemano gracias por tus aportes.

1. ¿Qué fin crees que tienen los Foros en Plan Umbrella?
2. ¿En algún momento has dejado de realizar un Foro? ¿Si, No? Explica brevemente.
3. ¿Qué ventajas y desventajas consideras que tienen los foros? Explica brevemente.
4. ¿Los temas propuestos en los foros contribuyen (o no) a alcanzar tu(s) propósito(s) personal(es) de aprendizaje del inglés (que manifestaste en la inducción al programa)?
5. ¿A través del desarrollo de los foros has sentido (o no) progreso en tu aprendizaje del inglés? ¿Si, No? Explica brevemente.
6. ¿Encuentras útil (o no) comentar y recibir comentarios de tus compañeros y profesor sobre tus intervenciones en los foros? ¿Si, No? Explica brevemente.

APPENDIX B.

Semistructured Interview

7. ¿Cómo relacionas la tarea de los foros con tu aprendizaje?
8. Los estudiantes nos respondieron que el propósito de los foros es: Interactuar, Comunicar/Dialogar, Compartir, Practicar ¿Con cuál opción te identificas más? ¿Por qué?
9. 2. Algunos participantes mencionan que puede haber pérdida de espontaneidad en las interacciones de los foros ¿tu qué opinas? ¿Qué sugerirías para evitar esta pérdida?
10. 3. Algunos participantes mencionaron que aprenden más con las intervenciones de los compañeros en los foros ¿Cómo explicas esto? ¿Cómo lo viste reflejado en tu experiencia con los foros?
11. 4. Algunas desventajas mencionadas fueron depender de los compañeros para poder interactuar ¿Te sentiste así en algún momento?
12. 5. Algunos estudiantes opinaron que los foros les permiten aplicar los conocimientos en contextos reales y personales de interacción ¿estas de acuerdo? ¿tienes un ejemplo?
13. 6. ¿Cómo relacionas los foros con lo trabajado en clase y en los módulos de Virtual Sabana?
14. 7. La mayoría de los coinciden en que los foros les permiten progresar en su aprendizaje del inglés porque pudieron identificar debilidades y mejorar, enfrentar experiencias, reforzar, aprender de los errores de los compañeros, practicar, conocer el idioma cotidiano. ¿Con cuál de estos te sientes identificado? ¿Cómo fue tu experiencia con eso?

APPENDIX C.

Samples of Teacher-Student Interaction

Re: My best friend

de [redacted] - jueves, 1 de marzo de 2018, 08:00

Dear Sofía,

You have a great friendship!.

Please find in the next chart detailed feedback and comments about your post:

Descriptor	Yes	No	Comments
All the required information was included	x		YES!, Excellent job!.
Shows use of simple present tense and frequency adverbs.	x		] You showed excellent use of simple present tenses. You showed use of frequency adverbs "Occasionally " and frequency time expressions "Sometimes".
Make a question to one of your classmate's post		x	You did not participated in anyone's post.
Answer to your classmate's questions in your post.	x		Yes, you did.

General comments:

+ Great effort building ideas with your own words.
+ Great use of capitalization
- Check this: "...healthy foods" (Unecessary plural)
- Check this: "coffe" (Spelling)
- Check this: "often we talk about our family" (Word order, please check where in the sentence the frequency adverb should be)
- Check this: "mee" (Spelling)
- Check this: "Friends daughter" (Possessive 'S)
- Check this: "mi" (Spelling)

My best regards,