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THE IMPACT OF COLLABORATIVE WRITING ON GRAMMATICAL COHESION IN
DESCRIPTIVE PARAGRAPH WRITING IN A GROUP OF A2 EFL SEVENTH GRADE
LEARNERS

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The Impact of Collaborative Writing on Grammatical Cohesion in Descriptive Paragraph Writing
in a Group of A2 EFL Seventh Grade Learners

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Abstract

This qualitative study reports the findings of an action research project, which analyzed the impact of collaborative writing on grammatical cohesion in descriptive paragraph writing in a group of young learners at a bilingual school. The research design was guided by the principles of collaborative writing, grammatical cohesion, and writing as a process. Data, in the implementation stage, was gathered through artifacts, teacher's journal, and a survey. Findings reported that collaborative writing raised students' grammatical awareness, as their paragraphs were cohesively accessible by the end of the intervention. Additionally, students realized that grammatical cohesion plays a crucial role in a text to make it truly comprehensible.

Key words: collaborative writing, descriptive paragraph, grammatical cohesion, writing process.

Resumen

Este estudio cualitativo reporta los hallazgos de una investigación acción que analizó el impacto de la escritura colaborativa sobre la cohesión gramatical en la escritura de párrafos descriptivos en un grupo de estudiantes en un colegio bilingüe. El diseño de la investigación estuvo guiado por los principios de escritura colaborativa, cohesión gramatical y la escritura como un proceso. La información se recolectó a través de los escritos de los estudiantes, el diario del docente y una encuesta. Los hallazgos reportaron que el uso de la escritura colaborativa elevó la conciencia en el uso del lenguaje en los estudiantes. Además, los estudiantes comprendieron la importancia del buen uso de la gramática para que un texto sea realmente claro.

Palabras clave: escritura colaborativa, párrafo descriptivo, cohesión gramatical, proceso de escritura.

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Chapter One: Introduction

According to Harmer (2004), the ability to write in a second language has become recognized as an important skill for educational, business and personal purposes. Thus, writing is a vital skill for second language (L2) speakers as much as it is for learners using their first language (L1). Hence, the development of this ability empowers second language learners' skills and gives them more proficiency in the use of the language. Harmer (2004) also states that the development of this ability gives adults and children advantage over those who have not developed it.

Second language writing is a complex process which does not only demand that learners use mental processes, but it also requires that learners feel confident in the use of target language forms and conventions (Richards, 2000). Thus, developing a writing skill necessitates that language teachers fully master a deep knowledge of the target language, understand the process of language learning and language acquisition, and implement effective classroom strategies to provide learners with an appropriate model of the language they are expected to use.

In Colombia, bilingual education has not always been as important as it has been the last decade. The National Bilingual Programme, created by the Ministry of Education in Colombia, states that schools must encourage learners to improve English language proficiency within a vision of competitiveness and global development. Therefore, for many bilingual schools, developing the four language skills is a learning objective they constantly pursue, and Gimnasio Los Portales (GP, hereafter) is no exception. This private all-girls bilingual school, located in Bogotá-Colombia, acknowledges the importance of fostering writing skills and enhancing learners' awareness and abilities to become better writers as defined in the GP English Program.

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Consequently, language teachers face the challenge of facilitating learners' process of writing and contributing to the development of this significant language skill. Moreover, collaboration is a teaching approach GP has initiated due to an ever-increasing need for interdependence in all levels of our society and the new emerging social technologies. Considering this point, collaborative writing has a value as a means not only to foster writing skills but also to foster sociocultural interactions. This strategy allows learners to make decisions about the language they use to express their ideas and it also fosters social interaction and the development of critical thinking skills (Elola, 2010). This is why providing students with the tools to effectively work in a collaborative environment should be a priority (Bonk & Sking, 1998).

Given the above, this qualitative study examined how collaborative writing among learners impacted their writing skills. This section presents the statement of the problem, the rationale of the study and the research questions and objectives. The implications this study has on the EFL community are also addressed.

Statement of the Problem

This study targeted a class of 21 seventh grade learners, between 12 and 14 years old at Gimnasio Los Portales. The participants of this study attended eight 50-minute English classes per week. They were able to respond to fiction, nonfiction, and poetry using interpretive and evaluative processes. In doing so, they showed abilities to analyze word choice and content, examine reasons for a character's actions, create and present a product that effectively demonstrates a personal response to a selection or experience, examine alternative perspectives,

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evaluate the differences among genres, examine relationships among characters, and make and evaluate inferences and conclusions about characters, events, and themes.

However, the participants struggled to use correct capitalization and punctuation and elaborate information and ideas in speaking and writing. They functioned at the A2 level according to the Common European Framework (CEFR) whose criteria includes that they “can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment, and matters in areas of immediate basic need” (Council of Europe, 2002, p. 24). As the school expects all seventh graders to meet all A2 criteria by the end of the school year, they are required to create and construct organized and well-structured texts which are appropriate to a given audience, purpose, context using a variety of sentences, phrases, clauses correctly, punctuating them properly, and avoiding fragments and run-ons (GP English Program 2012-2013).

After two years of teaching at this level, the teacher-researcher noticed that although the participants were strong at identifying and understanding complex linguistic forms in oral and written interactions, their descriptive paragraphs exhibited many weaknesses, especially in terms of grammatical cohesion. These problems may have been partly caused by the grammatical focus of the English curriculum at that time. Firstly, they used to be taught grammar rules, formulas, and exceptions of those rules in sequence. Likewise, they were required to complete numerous decontextualized grammar exercises related to the language form studied during the English lessons. However, teaching grammar is necessary, as one of the school learning objectives is to foster the second language writing skill.

The participants of this study used to spend most of the instructional time completing the required grammar exercises; as a result, opportunities for developing writing skills were limited.

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Nevertheless, much attention was directed on having students work on exercises in which they studied and memorized the L2 linguistic system rather than really establish a relationship between forms, meaning, and use of those grammar structures in a variety of contexts (Nunan, 1999). Consequently, they misused basic grammar rules they had previously studied in class. This language issue was exhibited in most of the artifacts they handed in, such as postcards, descriptive paragraphs, and short stories.

Furthermore, the teacher-researcher used to play the role of a marker; she assessed writing tasks that consisted of describing situations. The participants were not given the chance to use peer-correction or share their insights before handing in the final version; they just received teacher's feedback on the artifact because of old methodologies implemented in this school. As a result, this particular group of students tended to make the same mistakes repeatedly, regarding reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction, as they were not aware of this problematic situation.

In 2012, English teachers reformulated the school English program in order to give the English class a literary focus and teach grammar in context. However, in a needs analysis, this group of seventh graders expressed they did not correctly use grammar structures when they wrote; they also agreed that the appropriate use of grammar structures was one of the language issues they wanted to reinforce.

Additionally, most of the participants answered that they enjoyed working in pairs or small groups of about 3 to 4 members when working on written assignments. Thus, the teacher-researcher proposed the implementation of collaborative writing as a strategy to address the language problem described and give them the opportunity to help one another when receiving

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peer feedback. This was also an advantage for the teacher-researcher as this is one of the strategies English teachers at Gimnasio Los Portales were required to use as directed by the GP English Program for 2012-2013. Moreover, they were familiar with wikis¹, as they indicated on the needs analysis that this tool enabled them to share ideas, collect information, and peer editing.

Given this problematic situation, the following research question and objectives guided this research project.

Research question

Writing includes a process of editing which is relevant to ensure that the information is clear, organized and relevant. Harmer (2004) claimed that it is necessary to revise structures and conventions within the text. Considering this process, a question and research objectives emerged in order to overcome the observed problem.

How does the use of collaborative writing in a group of A2 seventh grade EFL learners impact grammatical cohesion in descriptive paragraph writing?

Research objectives

- To analyze the impact of the use of collaborative writing towards grammatical cohesion in descriptive paragraph writing.
- To examine A2 EFL seventh grade learners' insights about improving grammatical cohesion in descriptive paragraph writing gained from the collaborative writing experience.

¹Wikis is a website that allows users to contribute or edit within the site and a record of all contributions is kept (Storch, 2011).

Rationale

Although this group of seventh graders had been constantly exposed to English grammar, they had not fully developed their writing ability to a level that satisfied the school requirements because the activities carried out in the classroom did not really foster the growth of that skill. Consequently, they still exhibited some recurrent mistakes in their artifacts in terms of grammatical cohesion.

Considering this deficiency, the teacher-researcher proposed the implementation of collaborative writing as a strategy that might allow students to learn from each other when assessing someone else's piece of work, given that students do also share knowledge on a common topic, and give and receive feedback at the same time (Harmer, 2004).

This study might have an important impact on the population being addressed and in further studies as the development of the writing skill will positively impact learners' second language use and will provide them with the opportunity to play a significant role in a professional community. In regards to this, Tribble (1996) claims "writing enables people to have access to social roles in an international community which uses language for trade or other types of contact" (p.12). Additionally, the implementation of collaborative writing might promote the development of learners' competencies and improve their language use when planning, adjusting, evaluating, and refining writing tasks for different purposes and audiences. Moreover, this strategy may stimulate their motivation and interest and raise their autonomy and awareness to become better writers, as they are constantly working together for a common goal (Storch, 2001). They also have the opportunity to increase their communication and interaction.

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The findings the teacher-researcher gained as results from the development of this study might help EFL classrooms to continue opening doors to the implementation of collaborative writing to foster not only writing skills, but also other L2 learners' competencies.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework

In this section, language learners' writing is examined by analyzing the implications this process has. The different constructs are presented as they frame this qualitative study based on the review of literature and the state of the art. First, the role of grammar in the development of language learners' writing competence is discussed, given the language issue presented in Chapter one. Second, language learners' writing process is reviewed as well as the stages of writing as a process; this permitted the teacher-researcher to understand how this process occurs. Then, collaborative writing is explored along with the benefits of this strategy to the participants' writing skill. Afterwards, descriptive paragraph is examined as the type of text to address and wikis are presented as a tool. Finally, the state of the art is provided to support the effectiveness collaborative writing has on the participants' writing skill.

The Role of Grammar within Writing

For the purpose of this study, it is essential to know how grammar contributes to enrich descriptive paragraph writing. In this regards, Scarcella and Oxford (1992) agree that grammar plays an essential role within second language learners' communicative competence; they claim that "without grammar, learners can communicate effectively only in a limited number of situations" (p. 172). Notwithstanding the wide range of knowledge a learner needs to have when he/she writes a text, he/she needs to know the conventions which belong to the target language linguistic system to fulfill the formal properties of a particular writing task. Therefore, the development of the grammatical competence is crucial for L2 writers as it enables them to express their ideas cohesively in academic texts. Additionally, Harmer (2004) explains that a

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piece of writing is truly accessible when it is cohesively and coherently written. He reinforces the fact that second language learners have to master the mechanics of the target language to be understood in written interactions. To do this, cohesion “contributes to the creation of a text as a unit of meaning” (Mahlberg, 2006, p.364). She claims that cohesion definitely contributes to the readability of any text and has an impact on the comprehensibility and clarity of the argument given. This is why the correct use of cohesive devices is crucial to construct a readable text. Researchers divide cohesion into two main categories: lexical and grammatical.

Given the problem stated in Chapter one, grammatical cohesion is the category to be reviewed in this study. Grammatical cohesion is divided into four categories: reference, ellipsis, substitution, and conjunction (Harmer, 2004; Halliday and Hasan, 1976). Reference relates two linguistic elements in what they refer to. Ellipsis is accomplished when one identical linguistic element is omitted in a text. Substitution is present when a linguistic element is not repeated; instead, it is replaced by a substitution item. Finally, conjunction is a semantic relation clearly marked in a text (Li, 2013; Halliday and Hasan, 1976). The appropriate use of these elements helps to avoid duplication and repetition, maintain a smooth transition between sentences, and make them closely linked together. In addition, readers are smoothly guided to grasp the connotation of the text (Li, 2013) (Table 1).

Reference		Ellipsis	Substitution	Conjunction
Personal	Demonstrative	William bought some books, and Peter [Ellipsis] some magazines.	-Would you like a <i>candy</i> ?	I have a car <i>but</i> I prefer to walk.
<i>Maria</i> likes sports. <i>She</i> always practices tennis.	I do not like <i>tigers</i> . <i>These</i> are dangerous animals.		-Please, give me the red <i>one</i> .	

Table 1. Grammatical Cohesion Categories.

Given the target population level and the requirements stated in the GP English program, this study is focused on the appropriate use of conjunctions, reference, ellipsis, and substitution within a descriptive paragraph.

According to Harmer (2004), all texts can be analyzed in terms of their sentence construction. This sentence construction is governed by a number of linguistic techniques which help the reader understand the text. Given the importance of the sentence construction in a text, learners must receive instruction on this process to produce an effective piece of writing. Certainly, learners do not learn grammatical structures efficiently when memorizing parts of speech or rules and practicing correct usage and mechanics through exercises which assume students will transfer what they previously learned about those grammar structures to their own pieces of writing. Instead, grammar structures are most efficiently learned when they are studied meaningfully as part of practical and functional grammar instruction (GP English program, 2012). In regards to this, Hyland (2003) points out that teaching writing as a second language is a typically a four-stage process:

1. Familiarization: the learner is taught certain grammar structures.

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2. Controlled writing: the learner should manipulate fixed patterns, often from substitution tables.
3. Guided writing: learners imitate model texts.
4. Free writing: learners use the patterns they have developed to write a text. (p.4)

Given the above, it is necessary to know how second language learners start writing to understand the early stages of this process.

Second Language Learner's writing

It is crucial to describe how a second language, L2 hereafter, learner starts the process of writing. Reading and writing skills are directly related. Regarding this point, Cameron (2001) refers to reading and writing skills as literacy skills which are described as the learner's ability to read and write different texts for different purposes. Thus, for the purpose of this study, it is pertinent to define this concept to have a clear understanding of how a young learner starts the process of writing in a second language.

Reading and writing are linked together in the concept of literacy. Literacy is illustrated as follows:

Reading and writing are essentially about understanding that readers will comprehend texts that they read by constructing a meaning for themselves, and that writers will try to ensure that their readers are able to understand what they write. (Cameron, 2001, p. 125)

Therefore, seventh graders at Gimnasio Los Portales must understand the importance of making their writing accessible to their readers. Moreover, literacy connects the reading and writing skills in learning a second language. This connection creates the necessity to explore in detail the

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knowledge an L2 learner has to master in order to produce a text. In regards to this, Hayland (2001) claims that a second language learner needs “a wide range of knowledge and experience” to successfully write in English (p. 32). In doing so, an L2 writer has to master knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, and the language system. That is to say, a fluent L2 writer needs to fully absorb the language linguistic system in order to produce an accessible piece of writing. Similarly, writing done by L2 learners needs to have a clear audience, purpose and topic, and also, they need to develop knowledge about genre and text organization; this refers to the components or particular type of organization a text has. This is why the L2 writer has to manage content knowledge, context knowledge, and culture knowledge (Saville-Troike, 2006). Saville-Troike (2006) affirms that L2 learners, at a beginning level, request for a model to construct their own texts; this would become an opportunity to encourage them to share their outline with the teacher or a partner. It would help them to use the language modeled by the teacher. This is in line with the objective of this study, as the implementation of collaborative writing aims to provide seventh graders at Gimnasio Los Portales with the opportunity to share ideas and knowledge with their peers and learn from each other.

Gimnasio Los Portales is concerned with teaching students how the language works and encourages them to increase their proficiency in the understanding and control of their language. Regarding this aspect, Cook (2008) states that L2 learners need to know “the rules and orthographic regularities of spelling; the punctuation and capitalization rules; and individual spellings of frequent words and of frequently misspelt words” (p.89) within the L2 writing system. In other words, L2 learners have to be acquainted with the structural elements of the new language in order to produce a well-structured and organized text. McKay (2006) reinforces this

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idea when illustrating that writing is essentially a product constructed by the writer in which he/she exhibits his/her command of grammatical and lexical knowledge. This process implies that the learner masters aspects such as grammatical, textual, functional and sociolinguistic knowledge of the second language. She also defines what learners need to know about each category as follows:

1. The textual knowledge refers to the explicit knowledge of the appropriate text structures for different audiences and purposes; it includes relationships between sentences and paragraphs.
2. The functional knowledge is what the learner needs to know in terms of style, formality and text structure to achieve the purpose she/he wishes to achieve.
3. Finally, the sociolinguistic knowledge is what the learner requires to know in terms of the target language culture to convey meaning to his/her audience.

In doing so, learners must receive training in the linguistic components of the language; they must also be aware of the role each component plays when writing a text for a specific audience and purpose.

Considering that second language learners need to have full control of grammar in order to produce a readable text, the participants in this study need to develop abilities to organize a paragraph logically, to use a range of grammatical structures, to meet the purpose and audience for a specific writing task. Thus, second language learners need to follow a process to develop these abilities.

The Writing Process

Researchers have examined what happens while a writer writes; they have developed their own models which illustrate the various stages of the writing process. A good writing process involves multiple opportunities to plan, discuss, and revise writing with the teacher who plays the role of an interested and informed reader (Waschaver, Shetzer, and Meloni, 2000).

Many researchers have pointed out that this process involves the thorough development of some stages. Nunan (1999) claims that in the writing classroom language teachers need to follow a process which helps learners to develop a set of writing skills. He expresses that the learner completes six intertwined recursive steps when writing a text: generating ideas, structuring, drafting, focusing, re-viewing, and evaluating. He also expresses that the writing classroom needs both models and appropriate procedures to follow.

Following the steps and the procedures aforementioned procedures, learners will present a refined version of their piece of writing. Like Nunan (1999), Scarcella and Oxford (1992) also agree that writing is a complex process which leads to the discovery and clarification of meaning. This process includes the following stages: pre-writing, writing or drafting, and revising (p.124). Likewise, Harmer expresses that:

It is better to see writing as a kind of process ‘wheel’ where writers move both around circumference of the wheel and across the spokes. And even when they have written what they think is the final version of their work, they might still, at the last moment, go back and re-plan or re-visit stages they had thought they had completed. (2007, p.326)

In reality, the process of writing is not linear; it is actually more complex as it is “dynamic and unpredictable” (Tribble, 1996, p.39). The figure of the dynamic writing process (Figure 1)

illustrates that the different stages within the writing process are interrelated and one stage depends on the completion of the next one.

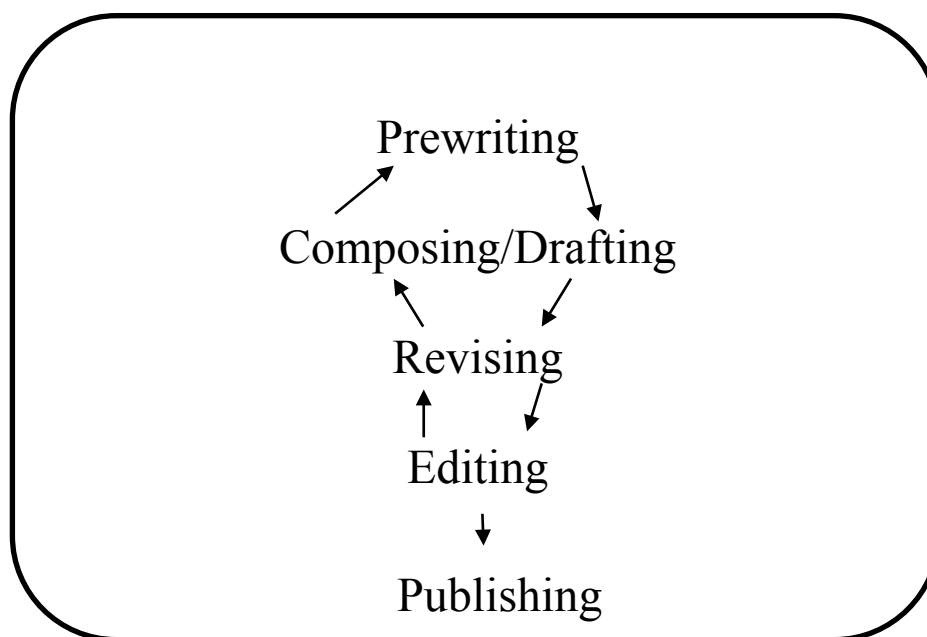


Figure1. Dynamic writing process

One of the learning objectives stated in the GP English program is to encourage students to become better writers; therefore, it is essential to have students follow a well-structured writing process. Scarcella and Oxford explains what second language learners should do in each stage of the writing process to enrich a text:

Pre-writing involves finding a topic, finding about the topic, and thinking about it in such a way that ideas are generated, shaped, redefined, and organized. In addition, pre-writing includes considering the audience and the purpose of the writing task. Drafting entails

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writing the words down that express the ideas. In revising, writers rewrite what they have written and delete, substitute, add, and reorganize. (1992, p.124)

The attention language teachers give to the different stages within the writing process mainly depends on the type of text, the content and the length of the piece of writing, the audience, and the medium learners use (Harmer, 2004).

Collaborative Writing

The teacher-researcher proposed collaborative writing as a strategy to address the problem the participants of this study were experiencing. As a strategy, collaborative writing falls under the umbrella of collaborative learning. Thus, the teacher-researcher firstly reviews what collaborative learning is; then, collaborative writing is examined. According to McInnerney and Robert (2004), collaborative learning is “a method that implies working in a group of two or more to achieve a common goal, while respecting each individual’s contribution to the whole” (p. 205). Learners working together for a common goal is what makes this strategy relevant to this study; essentially, collaborative writing is the coauthoring of a text by two or more writers (Storch, 2011). Proponents of this strategy agree that the “the fact that students are actively exchanging, debating, and negotiating ideas within their groups increases their interests in learning” (Dooly, 2008, p. 34); consequently, learners are encouraged to become critical thinkers. In this sense, Harmer agrees that:

Collaborative writing allows students to learn from each other. It gives each member of the collaboration access to others’ minds and knowledge, and it imbues the task with sense of shared goals, which can be very motivating. And in the end, although the

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collaborators may have to share whatever glory is going, still, any less-than-successful outcomes is also shared so that individuals are not held solely responsible for any shortcomings in what they produce. (2004, p.73)

In essence, the implementation of collaborative writing motivates students to work to achieve the aims of a particular lesson, promotes communication and interaction, raises their responsibility, fosters critical thinking and a greater awareness of the audience (Storch, 2011). Likewise, Storch (2011) claims that learners who write collaboratively produce more elaborated texts in terms of the grammar forms they apply. In addition, Dooly (2008) points out that collaborative learning tasks demand that each group member learns their assigned concept and takes responsibility for explaining or teaching that concept to other members of the group.

There are certain pedagogical implications in the implementation of this strategy which imply that the teacher guides learners to select leaders, discuss some group interaction techniques, provide sufficient time to carry out tasks, and have learners produce written drafts throughout the process (Nunan, 1992).

After defining collaborative writing and the benefits students' learning process receives from the implementation of this strategy, the type of text to be addressed during the intervention stage is reviewed.

Descriptive Paragraph

According to the participants' level and the Gimnasio Los Portales English program objectives, by the end of the school year, seventh graders are expected to write a structured and cohesively accessible descriptive paragraph. This descriptive paragraph has certain features of the

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narrative and expository genres as set in the English program. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this study, a definition of descriptive paragraph is presented.

A paragraph is composed of a set of sentences which are structurally connected, with a sentence being the simple unit of the paragraph itself. In this respect, Murray and Hughes (2008) explain that “a paragraph is a set of related sentences that develop one main idea” (p.51); when it expresses a detailed or complex idea, it requires ten or more complex sentences to support that idea and when expressing a simple idea, the paragraph might contain one or two sentences. A new paragraph is always written when the writer introduces a new idea. Moreover, this author illustrates the structure of a paragraph, which is, *a topic sentence* that indicates the main subject of that paragraph, its main idea, focus or point of interest. It can appear at the beginning to give the reader an idea of the content of the paragraph or at the end to summarize or make clear the information that precedes it in the same paragraph. *Supporting ideas* are a detailed explanation of or comment on the main idea, usually contain examples. *A conclusion* considers the information in the paragraph; it makes original statements based on the information presented earlier in the paragraph.

Seventh graders at Gimnasio Los Portales are expected to incorporate the aforementioned elements into their pieces of writing when describing or explaining any situation, event or any other element, at a level that satisfies the reader’s understanding in their immediate surroundings. Essentially, writing a descriptive paragraph requires the description of events, places, objects or experiences by using vivid words that create a picture in the reader’s mind (Murray and Hughes, 2008). In doing so, participants can enjoy the benefits of using wikis; they agreed in the needs

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analysis that wikis are a useful tool due to the support their classmates give them while writing through this web 2.0 tool.

Wikis

Electronic communication can assist the process of writing (Waschaver, Shetzer, and Meloni, 2000) and it has become an essential tool in the language classroom. Nowadays, technological advances permit teachers to innovate their lessons with a set of tools which stimulate learners' interests. Among the variety of tools the Internet offers, wikis appeal to the participants of this study. According to Dooly (2008), wikis are pages which can be easily edited. This Web 2.0 tool allows multiple authors to co-write and co-edit to one common text, collect, and structure information that focuses on content and language at the same time. Furthermore, Dudeney and Hockly (2008) explain *wikis* as dynamic public web pages with multiple authors who can delete and edit information when needed. They also emphasize that wikis lend themselves well to collaborative writing. The mechanics of this tool are very simple because it is easy to see changes made to pages and by whom and when they were made, as well as to restore an earlier version of the page. These authors also emphasize that *wikis* permit language teachers to help learners focus on the writing process. Nevertheless, if the goal of the activity is not clear, the *wiki* can become unfocused. Dudeney and Hockly (2008) define three key uses for the wikis, which are: news, book reports, newspaper publication. The latter requires each member of the team to take a role in the *wikipedia* such as, reporter, editor, and publicity.

There are some advantages when working with wikis that benefit the learning process. First, learners are encouraged to become more creative and autonomous since *wiki* pages are

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easily edited. Students are also engaged in using the target language, and their cognitive skills of analysis, synthesis, categorizing, and critical thinking are developed as they learn to structure a text and its relevant links (Dooly, 2008).

Having examined the relevant literature above, it is pertinent to explore qualitative research studies conducted locally and internationally to foster EFL learners writing skills; this presents the viability of this study in other contexts where English is spoken as a second language.

State of the art

National and international studies have been carried out to explore collaborative writing as a strategy to enhance learners' writing skills. In 2006, Maria Eugenia Lopez, a Colombian language teacher-researcher, conducted a study to explore how learners EFL writing is built when producing a hypertext collaboratively in a university engineering program. Basically, the findings demonstrated that students understood and used key features of hypertext when writing collaboratively. In addition, collaboration among students was significant as they constructed their ideas in the foreign language when helping each other to convey vocabulary and make agreements.

Moreover, a qualitative research on the impact of peer editing on students' writing and interaction in a ninth grade EFL classroom in a public school in Bogota revealed findings relevant to this study. Learners who shared their knowledge with less capable peers helped bridge the gap between what was known and what was not known. They felt motivated in helping their peers and achieving common goals together (Diaz, 2010).

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Additionally, a qualitative study to foster writing skills throughout blogs was carried out as part of work-research alliance between University of Dundee, in Scotland and Distrital University, in Bogotá. Five schools from different countries (Colombia, Scotland, Chile, Canada, and Spain) and two Colombian universities were involved. Quintero (2008) found that a feature which characterized the community of writers was the feedback that the members in the group had through the interactions. Evidence showed that the group of people felt part of a community; they were committed to help the others to progress in their learning.

In 2010, Cuesta and Rincon conducted a research to help intermediate students improve short story writing skills through the use of genre-process and e-portfolio dossier at a public school in Bogota. Findings showed that students improved clarity of diction and sentence structure. These researchers reported that most of the groups improved the quality of their stories. Moreover, when students shared ideas and peer-assessed their work, they exhibited control of their performance toward their writing. Students also improved the clarity and connection between ideas so that readers could easily follow the storyline without difficulty. Students played the role of reviewers; this allowed them to discuss their peers' work and collaborate on its improvement.

Yate, Saenz, Bermeo and Castañeda (2012) examined the role of collaborative work in the development of elementary students' writing skills in their English classes at the Corporación Colegio San Bonifacio de las Lanzas; the results were very positive. The implementation of collaborative work encouraged students to become aware of their abilities and their capabilities. They learned about peer-correction and peer- work while developing the tasks proposed by the researchers who stated that there was meaningful and spontaneous learning taking place among

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the students while helping each other. This strategy also helped students to manage their time and execute the given tasks, as they were careful about the duties they had to perform. Language construction was positively affected through this implementation as students learned the function of words and structures that enabled them to interact with their writing as it progressed.

Tompson and Hen-Yu Ku (2010) analyzed online collaboration and team performance at the university level. They confirmed that a more collaborative team actively participated in group discussions, initiated more interactions among team members, generated more new ideas through discussion, and solved problems more independently with less guidance from the instructor. When compared with the other three groups enrolled in this research, the team that experienced more collaboration among its participants achieved better learning results. The researchers recommend Web 2.0 tools, which encourage users' participation, dynamic content, and collective intelligence, as an area of interest for future research.

Houat (2012) conducted a research on the implementation of a wiki collaborative writing project in a blended course. The researcher found that with the wiki there was time and energy gain and collective responsibility. Also, the hyperlinks to one another in the wiki helped participants to see each other's contributions and to self-assess and reflect on their own understanding. Additionally, when a wiki is used for collaboration in a hybrid context, a medium to high level of classroom community develops.

Furthermore, in 2001 a research on the implementation of collaborative writing approach to wikis was carried out at University of Agder, in Norway by Said Hadjerrouit. In essence, the hypothesis of the work was that a wiki alone cannot make collaborative writing happen unless students know how to participate and collaborate with others when they develop wikis. The

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results were analyzed from students' viewpoints toward the use of wikis; data was gathered through oral discussions and their artifacts. The researcher found that wiki-based collaboration is a meaningful activity that supports discussion and information sharing between group members. He also analyzed that collaboration is more beneficial when the tool is combined with human communication by means of face-to-face dialogue, and supplemented with social software tools and other Web 2.0 technologies. This indicates that the wiki tool was not used alone as the only communication channel between students. He concluded that it is worth making a clear distinction between collaborative and cooperative behavior when students work together in order to make this practice a successful experience for students. They need to get acquainted with the tool and its purpose before using it. Although the discussion forums among these students were not seen as successful as the researcher expected, students benefited from the comments and feedback they received from their classmates by means of peer-review.

In 2005, Montero, a Panamanian language teacher, implemented collaborative writing as a strategy to motivate EFL students to write poems. She found that collaborative writing presents not only a highly motivating learning experience for EFL/ESL students but also a creative pedagogical tool for teachers. She states that this strategy increased peer cooperation and motivation. In addition, she concluded in this study that when students work together on a writing assignment, they learn from each other and edit each other's mistakes. At the same time, the change from writing assignments individually to writing as a group can be very motivating for students who dislike writing. Also, collaboration brought personal satisfaction and boosted self-confidence for those students who felt a little overwhelmed by their writing tasks. Finally, she

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claimed that writing as an isolated activity, as had been the procedure in the traditional classroom, provided limited and delayed feedback to the writer.

Equally important, Tardy (2010) found that Wikipedia, which he says is a collaborative web-based wiki, served as a tool which encouraged students to enhance their academic writing. He reported that students went through different stages to compose their own Wikipedia articles, such as examining Wikipedia, gathering information, outlining and paraphrasing, drafting, revising and finally polishing and publishing. This collaborative tool introduced students to many skills of academic research writing in a manageable and interesting way when contributing and producing their articles. It also allowed them to draw on their multicultural resources and experiences. Also, students became aware of the audience and enjoyed seeing their work published.

Teo (2007) implemented paired collaborative writing to enhance ESL students' writing skills at a public school in California. He found that this strategy encouraged students to improve the fluency and mechanics of the language. They also became more independent thinkers and learners. Certainly, this method increased ESL students' proficiency and confidence in writing.

Although it was difficult to find studies conducted in the field of grammatical cohesion and descriptive paragraph, the studies presented above informed the teacher-researcher about the viability of this qualitative research in terms of fostering writing and collaborative writing. It was found that language teachers are interested in implementing collaboration as a strategy to foster EFL learners' writing skill. In addition, it was stimulating to see how positively students had responded when working collaboratively to achieve a common goal. This served as a motivator to achieve the main objective of this research project.

Chapter Three: Research Design

This section describes the type of research design, the teacher-researcher's role, the characteristics of the context and participants who took part in this study, and the instruments and procedures used to collect data as well as their validity, reliability, and triangulation. Additionally, some ethical issues are considered to avoid exploiting the participants.

Type of study

Qualitative research refers to the qualitative methods, which are implemented to explore phenomena concerned with understanding human behavior (Nunan, 1992). An important principle of qualitative research is that the researcher is engaged in observing the phenomena being studied in a natural setting in order to make interpretations in terms of the meaning people involved bring to it (Merriam, 2009). In regards to this, Merriam (2009) explains that data collection instruments are used to gather information to describe the phenomena and support the findings of the study, which is the case of this research project.

One of the qualitative research methods in education, which encourages language teachers around the world to be effective teachers who provide the best learning opportunities for their students, is action research (Burns, 2010). This research project was conducted under the principles and theoretical considerations of action research which is a method used to reflect on the teaching experiences. It is done by systematically collecting data on everyday practice, and subsequently analyzing that information to make decisions about what should be done in further practices (Wallace, 1998). The central core of action research is the fact that the teacher-researcher deliberately intervenes in the problematic situation with the purpose of causing

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changes and, improvements in practice (Burns, 2010). To do this, the teacher-researcher has to become a reflective practitioner in his/her role as a teacher and as a researcher in order to approach his/her practice critically and systematically. Then, the changes or improvements that the teacher-researcher decides to make are based on carefully collected data. Consequently, the changes derive from solid information gathered rather than assumptions about the way the researcher thinks a problem can be solved. In this case, the teacher-researcher decided to conduct an action research study to reflect upon the implementation of collaborative writing as a strategy which helped learners improve grammatical cohesion in descriptive paragraph writing.

The implementation of collaborative requires teacher's and students' involvement in the classroom context practices. In doing so, the teacher-researcher has to use suitable data collection techniques and articulate the gathered data with the theory to make the pertinent reflections upon the results obtained (Burns, 2010).

Researcher's role

The researcher's role was that of a participant who was actively involved in the research project observing the phenomena in the classroom context and analyzing that observation in order to make appropriate changes or adjustments to intervene in target context. The teacher-researcher was involved in articulating theories and deciding appropriate data collection procedures to gather the information to support this research project and improve further educational experiences (Burns, 2010). Furthermore, the participants and the teacher-researcher provided other practitioners with valuable insights about the use of collaborative writing to foster the writing skill.

Context

This research project took place at Gimnasio Los Portales, a private all-girls bilingual school located in the North area of Bogota, Colombia. This school was founded in 1987 by a group of parents who were interested in providing their daughters with an integral education with academic excellence which facilitates their ownership and develops their competences to confront the 21st century challenges. To achieve these aims, this school bases its pedagogical approach on the following principles:

- a. A pedagogical approach centered on the development of mental operations.
- b. Bilingual education.
- c. The development of curriculum programs aligned with the Ministry of Education “Basic Competences Standards” document².
- d. High level of teachers’ competencies and commitment with the school catholic philosophy and policies.

Regarding the teaching of English, the Portales English Department aims at facilitating the development of students’ communicative competence to understand and interpret their immediate surroundings, and to share ideas, feelings and opinions in communicative situations ruled by certain socio-linguistic behaviors proper of their own and the target language’s culture. Understanding a language’s cultural context is pivotal in acquiring real command of said language; therefore, Gimnasio Los Portales’ students study classic and contemporary literature, as well as poetry and non-fiction pieces in order to gain awareness and familiarity with the world

²Estandares Basicos de Competecias en Lenguas Extranjeras: Ingles. Retrieved from: http://www.colombiaaprende.edu.co/html/mediateca/1607/articles-115375_archivo.pdf

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vision of the English speaking communities, their unique lifestyle and behavioral patterns.

The English Program is based on the comparable international standards set by the Common European Framework for second language competences at level B2/C1 and the National Bilingual Program in compliance with Law 115 of 1994, which establishes the acquisition of elements of conversation, reading comprehension, and the ability to be able to express oneself in at least one foreign language³. Additionally, this school aims at enhancing students' abilities to become better readers and writers to a level that they can effectively communicate messages in their immediate surroundings; in doing so, Gimnasio Portales' students have to demonstrate an understanding of conventional written and spoken expression and also discern and correct errors in spoken and written English. Therefore, this research project findings contributed to the improvement of grammatical cohesion.

Participants

This study targeted a class of 21 seventh grade learners, between 12 and 14 years old. This particular group of learners has been studying English for more than five years; however, they need to be encouraged to expand their range of vocabulary to describe real life situations in oral and written interactions. Moreover, they need to be engaged in activities that help them to incorporate basic language forms into their spoken and written language as appropriate. Furthermore, they require corrective recasts to accurately pronounce words of frequent use. It is also necessary that they expand their range of vocabulary to describe real life situations in written

³ (n.d.). *Law 115 of 1994*. Retrieved from: Ministry of National Education website: http://www.mineducacion.gov.co/1621/articles-85906_archivo_pdf.pdf

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interactions. Additionally, this group of students should practice incorporating basic language forms into their written language as appropriate.

Seventh graders exhibit a type of personality, which directly relates to inhibitions, empathy, self-efficacy, and willingness to communicate (Brown, 2007). Their lack of confidence that they demonstrate has somehow raised inhibitions to participate in classroom activities as they fear making a fool of themselves. This poses problems as well in their willingness to communicate messages by using the L2. Also, empathy plays a significant role in their interpersonal relationships due to their age. Seventh graders do not take wild or frivolous risks; they tend to request teacher's approval when giving responses and carrying out classroom tasks and activities; they always want their teacher to break up tasks and instructions delivery into more gradable steps (Brown, 2007). The Gimnasio Los Portales seventh graders are expected to identify and use specific basic grammar structures in oral and written interactions. However, they still struggle to correctly incorporate them into their written and spoken language. A couple of students exhibit poor development of some basic and fundamental mental operations such as identifying, coding/decoding, analyzing/ synthesizing, classifying, mental representation, divergent thinking, and deducing.

Data Collection Instruments

The data collection instruments chosen to collect the information which supported this study were the participants' descriptive paragraphs, teacher's journal, and a final survey (Appendices A to D).

Students' Artifacts: Descriptive Paragraphs

Given the nature of this study, one of the instruments chosen to gather relevant data was written artifacts. Burns (2010) defines students' artifacts as classroom documents which are all kinds of written documents teacher and students use in the classroom-syllabus guidelines, lesson plans, textbooks, readers, students' written texts, exercises, illustrations, maps, dictionaries. Any of these documents become a means for collecting data and identifying key issues. The teacher collected the descriptive paragraphs students wrote in the pre- and post-intervention stages as primary sources to examine students' progress in terms of grammatical cohesion. This instrument also provided significant information for the analysis of the language forms in which students demonstrated improvements to validate the research question.

Teacher's Journals

The other instrument used to gather data was a teacher's journal, which allowed the teacher-researcher to write any reflection which emerged during the study. Wallace (1999) states that journals have similar attributes as diaries⁴ but the main difference is that journals are written to be read as public documents. Therefore, their process of composition must be revised and edited by the researcher.

According to Sagor (2005), a researcher's journal plays a significant role in the implementation stage because it gives the opportunity to the researcher to record valuable information which would be useful at the end of this process. Sagor (2005) points out that the

⁴According to Wallace (1999), diaries are instruments used to confide whatever thought or feelings occur to the researcher. They are used to write reflections after each lesson (p. 62).

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more observations the researcher collects in his journal, the more information he will have available at the final stage of this process.

During the intervention stage the teacher-researcher wrote observations of students' insights towards the implementation of collaborative writing (Appendix A). The journal provided significant information about students' viewpoints regarding the collaborative writing experiences and their progress in terms of grammatical cohesion.

Survey

Likewise, a survey served as a source of students' feedback. This particular type of instrument is used to scan not only "a wide field of issues but populations and programmes with the purpose of measuring or describing any generalized features" (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2007, p 206). This instrument provides the researcher with descriptive, inferential, and explanatory information from a number of individuals, which is useful to corroborate the generalizability of results. The survey was applied to confirm that collaboration among students helped them to overcome their initial weakness in terms of grammatical cohesion in descriptive paragraph (Appendix B). Additionally, they were expected to precisely point out the language forms in which they noticed a positive progress.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection instruments were applied in three states during the research process; the three stages were: pre-implementation, implementation, and post-implementation.

STAGE	INTRUMENTS
Pre-Implementation	-Consent letters. -Students' artifacts (descriptive paragraphs).
Implementation	-Students' artifacts (descriptive paragraphs). -Teachers' journal.
Post-Implementation	Survey.

Table 2. Data Collection Procedures

In the pre-implementation stage students wrote a descriptive paragraph for the teacher-researcher to identify the language forms in which students experienced difficulties. During the process of implementation, the teacher-researcher used the teacher's journal to keep significant information about the participants' progress. In the post-implementation process the students completed the survey in which they shared their insights regarding their collaboration. Also, written artifacts were collected to examine their progress.

Ethical Considerations

Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007) state the ethical issues a researcher has to consider when conducting a research study. One of these is to protect the participants' privacy. Thus, the teacher-researcher informed parents and supervisors at school about the purpose of this research study and the kinds of instruments the participants were going to complete. Subsequently, consent letters were sent (Appendix C). Additionally, the teacher-researcher requested them to use nicknames to protect their identity.

Design and Validation of the Instruments and Procedures

The teacher-researcher piloted the instruments designed to verify the clarity of questions of the survey. This process took place one week before the intervention stage. Although it was not part of the pre-implementation stage, it was conducted to initially revise the validity and reliability of the questions in the survey and acquaint the students with the strategy to be implemented. The teacher-researcher found that some of the questions were biased as the participants were directed to provide information which benefited the objective of this study. Therefore, the questions in the survey were restated to gather reliable information. For example,

Question 1 in the survey: Why did you find helpful the implementation of collaboration for the improvement of grammar in descriptive paragraph writing?

The teacher-researcher assumed that the implementation of this strategy was helpful. This question was restated. So, participants were given the chance to critically state their viewpoints toward the implementation of collaborative writing.

Did you find anything helpful about the implementation of collaboration for the improvement of grammar in descriptive paragraph writing?
Positive ____
Negative ____
Explain your choice

The teacher-researcher gathered data using the teacher's journal before the implementation to verify if it was possible to collect data relevant to this study and found that significant moments of the class as well as the participants' interventions and responses during a lesson could be recorded to validate the data gathered through the other two instruments.

Lastly, the descriptive paragraphs the participants wrote were used as artifacts, and they were collected in two stages: during the pre-implementation and the post-implementation stages.

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The artifacts collected in the pre-implementation stage were used to diagnose the difficulties the participants had at the beginning of the intervention. The other artifacts collected in the post-implementation stage were used to observe the improvements at the end of this study.

Chapter Four: Pedagogical Intervention

Rationale

This aim of this stage of the study was to involve the participants in collaborative writing experiences to encourage them to enhance grammatical cohesion in descriptive paragraph writing. Consequently, the teacher-researcher's challenge was to design a set of lessons to address the problematic situation. To do this, the constructs reviewed in the theoretical framework were considered to provide a description of the vision of language, learning, and curriculum of this study. All this information enriched the instructional design, the resources, and materials used in the lessons proposed below.

Vision of Language

The understanding a teacher has about the components of a language might impact the approach she/he adopts in teaching the language. Many researchers tend to give a sophisticated definition about language; this definition reflects their linguistic vision toward this term. However, the definition of language implies more than a linguistic vision of it. According to Brown (2007), the definition of this concept involves eight statements, which also involve a complex journey into each of them. Brown explains that language is,

systematic and also it is a set of arbitrary symbols; these symbols are primarily vocal but also visual which have conventionalized meanings to which they refer. Language is used for communication, which operates in a speech community or culture. Language is essentially human, although possibly not limited to humans.

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Finally, language is acquired by all people in much the same way; language and learning both have universal characteristics. (2007, p.6)

Given the above consideration and in agreement with the school's view of language, this study adopts a view that participants do not learn grammatical language forms efficiently through memorizing and practicing correct usage and mechanics through drills and exercises, which assume they will transfer what they learn in grammar study to their own writing and speaking. Instead, language forms are efficiently learned when studied as part of practical and functional grammar. Consequently, the seventh graders are expected to develop control of sentence formation, conventional usage, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. Language usage focuses on students' developing increasing proficiency in the understanding and control of their language. This process involves developing vocabulary range, understanding of the importance and impact of word choice and syntax in a text, and also understanding the development of the English language in both oral and written forms (Gimnasio Los Portales English Program, 2012).

Vision of Learning

The perception a teacher has about learning is linked to his/her teaching. Brown (2007) provides a complex but pertinent definition of learning. The second language learner brings many variables into play in the learning of a second language; therefore, it is significant to consider an extensive definition of this process.

Brown (2007) defines learning as a process of acquisition or "getting". He points out that learning is also the retention of information or skill. This retention implies storage systems, memory, and cognitive organization. Moreover, he states that the process of learning involves

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active, conscious focus on and acting upon events outside or inside the organism. Learning is also relatively permanent but subject to forgetting, and therefore, involves some form practice and reinforced practice, and finally a change in behavior. Educators are called to review these stages to guide and facilitate learning, enable students to learn, and setting the conditions for learning (Brown, 2007).

Considering the above and in accordance with the school's emphasis on facilitating students' learning process by keeping them as the central core of it, this research project aimed to stimulate students' interest in writing and maximize their communicative skills and performance in the classroom by using mediation and collaboration. This is framed by guided discovery approach where students have to construct for themselves the higher level thinking required. Additionally, collaborative learning is one of the strategies English teachers at Gimnasio Los Portales have to implement to enhance not only students' learning process, but also their social skills. Thus, collaborative writing has become a powerful strategy implemented by teachers, in this context, to foster students' writing skill.

Vision of Curriculum

The curriculum at Gimnasio Los Portales aims to build knowledge through the development of communicative competencies as illustrated below:

- a. To foster respect and value for plurality and difference in students' immediate environment and the globalized one.
- b. To improve students' capacity to establish relationships with other people and cope with new situations.

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- c. To enhance students' learning awareness and abilities to be better readers and writers.
- d. To contribute to students' development of critical and analytical skills.

In order to help students develop these competencies, they are encouraged to understand and interpret their immediate situational contexts, and share ideas, feelings and opinions in communicative situations governed by certain socio-linguistic contexts, throughout this research project; the participants studied non-fiction texts to raise awareness and get acquainted with a globalized vision of the target language and the patterns of the communities in which it is spoken. To do this, students were involved in researching about real-world writers, creating, and constructing different types of texts; they also planned activities and gave feedback following certain patterns of drafting.

Instructional design

During the intervention, sessions were carried out within the English course, which combined three 50-minute face-to-face sessions a week, and two 60-minute asynchronous online sessions during the week at a time convenient for the participants. Topics and content were introduced in the face-to-face sessions; collaborative work, interaction, and assessment took place in the face-to-face and the online sessions.

The teacher-researcher considered blended features from the Communicative Approach and the Guided Discovery Approach for the development of the sessions as stated in the school English Program. Thus, sessions integrated the study objective with the English program requirements. Improving grammatical cohesion in descriptive paragraph writing and also collaborative writing, interaction, and communication among participants were part of the

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learning outcomes for each session to encourage students to achieve the learning objectives set in each of the lessons given.

The teacher-researcher used an adapted version of an ICELT⁵ lesson plan format because it provides professional readers with a detailed description of the teacher's and learners' roles in each stage of the lesson (see Appendix E).

Materials and Evaluation

The intervention lasted four and a half weeks and was composed of four learning cycles. Course materials for both face-to-face and online sessions were adapted from different websites, especially the educational web 2.0 tool Wikispaces classroom⁶ which was used to design the wikis for the online sessions. Moreover, assessment and evaluation was an on-going practice, which began on the first day. Participants handed in the descriptive paragraphs twice during the intervention, at the outset and at the conclusion, and the teacher- researcher analyzed and evaluated students' progress in writing in terms of grammatical cohesion. As students were already acquainted with the school rubrics English teachers implement for assessing writing and the code for correction, no class time was devoted to carrying out this process (Appendix E). The teacher-researcher used an adapted version of the school writing rubrics. Lessons were taught as illustrated below.

⁵ ICELT stands for the In-service Certificate in English Language Teaching.

⁶ Wikispaces classroom is a social writing platform for education, available at <http://www.wikispaces.com/>

Action Plan and Lesson Plan Description

Lessons were divided in four cycles. Each cycle included three 50-minute face-to-face sessions and two 60-minute hour online sessions a week. Face to face sessions took place Mondays and Fridays morning weekly and every face-to-face lesson consisted of the following stages (Figure 2):

- Warm-up.
- Exposure to the new language.
- Observation and analysis of the new language.
- Statement of the rule.
- Controlled Practice
- Instructions delivery for the online session.

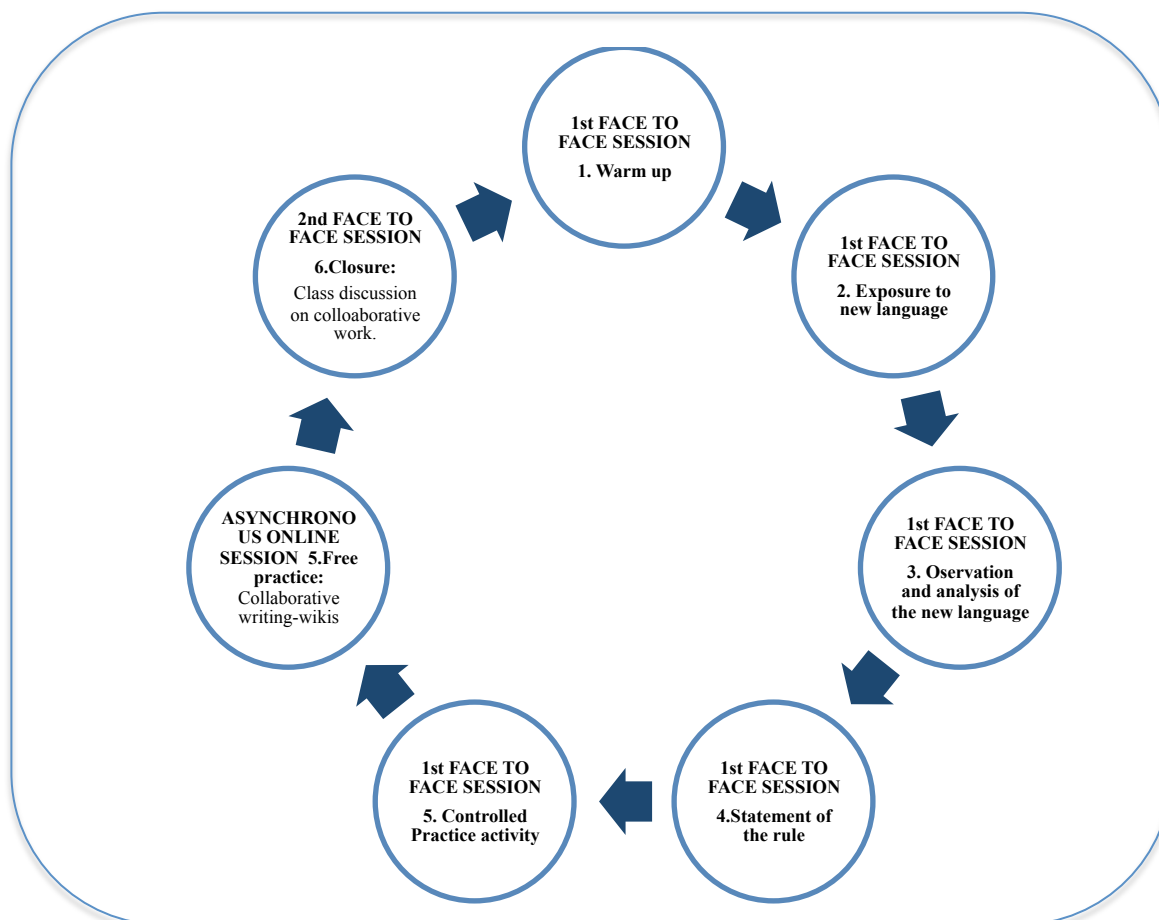


Figure 2. Instructional Design

In the first two 50-minute face-to-face sessions of each week, the participants studied a grammar topic inductively by following the stages described above (Figure 2). The last activity of this session consisted of the instructions delivery for the online session, which was the free practice exercise for the completion of the lesson (Appendix E). Teacher designed a wikispace where two 60-minute asynchronous online sessions were carried out (Appendix F). This online source was used for implementing the strategy and providing the participants with the opportunity to work collaboratively on the course writing assignments, available at <http://www.wikispaces.com/user/my/Englishclassgp>. The mechanics of this tool were very simple

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because it was easy to see changes made to pages, by whom and when, and to restore an earlier version of the page. The participants were able to set the time to arrange their meetings in the wiki space.

The instructions for working on the wikis were given in the face-to-face sessions a long with the deadline for the completion of each activity. Then, each student received an e-mail to take part in the assigned wiki in which they had to write a set of descriptive paragraphs by using the structures previously studied in class. Teacher followed students' work time to time. Finally, in the third 50-minute face-to-face session, the teacher-researcher and participants met in the classroom to evaluate the online activity. The teacher-researcher used the journal to write students' insights about the online session, which involved students in writing collaboratively. The participants were questioned about how they felt when working collaboratively by using the wiki as a tool, what they learnt in terms of the use of any specific grammar structure and from their classmates' feedback, and possible recommendations to improve further experiences. Participants studied the grammar topics below as stated in the GP English program and in concordance with this study general objective:

Cycle 1: The use of conjunctions: and / but / or / so.

Cycle 2: The use of conjunctive adverbs: firstly / secondly / thirdly / fourthly / finally.

Cycle 3: The use of conjunctive adverbs: in addition, moreover, furthermore

Cycle 4: Punctuation marks: period, comma, colon, and semicolon.

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Additionally, the paragraphs the students wrote during this intervention were focused on:

Cycle 1: A 200-word paragraph describing the physical characteristics, nutrition, and habitat of an endangered animal.

Cycle 2: a 200-word paragraph describing how they arrange the school event “So, we can dance”

Cycle 3: a 200-word paragraph describing the most recent movie seventh graders have seen.

Cycle 4: A 200-word paragraph describing the application procedure to get a passport.

Activities were carefully planned and carried out by following the stages mentioned above. All the activities were focused on studying specific grammar structures and writing collaboratively for an immediate audience. The participants’ insights toward this writing experience were essential to enrich the lessons during the intervention stage.

Chapter Five: Results and Data Analysis

This chapter explains the process used to analyze the data gathered from the participants' artifacts, a survey applied after the implementation and the teacher-researcher's journal, as well as the techniques and procedures used to validate the data. In addition, the chapter discusses the categories which emerged from the analysis of the data and how the information compiled into the categories is used to answer the research questions proposed in this study.

The method implemented in this research study for the data analysis was based on Grounded Theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1994). This approach allows the researchers to generate theory from the process of examining, analyzing, and establishing connections between concepts that emerge from the categories. The purpose of this study was to use collaborative writing as a strategy to enhance students' grammatical cohesion when writing descriptive paragraphs. In doing so, data gathered from written artifacts, teacher's journal, and a survey applied after the implementation was considered. The resulting findings were used to answer the research question.

Procedures of Data Analysis

The data gathered from the participants was analyzed by using the Grounded Theory approach, a method used to simplify and make data more manageable (Cohen and Morrison, 2007) and to facilitate the process of understanding the phenomenon in question. Also, contrasting and comparing techniques helped to systematically classify information for the identification of codes and concepts and finally the establishment of categories in which the constructs reviewed in this research project played a significant part (Cohen and Morrison, 2007).

The teacher-researcher used the color-coding technique to identify the units of analysis and simplify data into codes; it made data manageable. Then, the teacher-researcher coded the data by generating categories and subcategories where necessary, and integrating codes where relevant until the process was complete (Cohen & Morrison, 2007). Afterwards, the categories were juxtaposed with the theory reviewed. The teacher-researcher compared existing data from each category with the theory by identifying similar concepts and examining “the closeness fit” between them (Cohen & Morrison, 2007, p. 494).

To sum up, Grounded Theory is an inductive method that enables the researcher to “scan the data carefully, usually several times over, to see what categories suggest themselves, or ‘emerge’, from the data” in order to generate theory (Burns, 2010, p.107)

Data Analysis and Results

The teacher-researcher followed a set of systematic steps to analyze the data gathered. In the analysis of the participants’ artifacts, the researcher assigned a color to each aspect of grammatical cohesion: yellow to reference, red to ellipsis and substitution, and brown to conjunctions (Appendix G and H). Artifacts were grouped in two folders, the ones collected in the pre-implementation stage and the others from the post-implementation stage; this instrument was analyzed by using an adapted version of the school rubric.

Then, the teacher’s journal, which was written while observing students’ discussion on their experiences when working collaboratively to write descriptive paragraphs, was read by focusing attention on the insights that emerged from the collaborative work among students. For the analysis of this instrument the teacher-researcher also used color coding as well: pink for the

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insights regarding the improvement of grammatical cohesion in descriptive paragraph writing and green from the ones related to the positive aspects they found when writing collaboratively in the wikis (Appendix I). The information from the teacher’s journal was grouped into two files: one file had the information regarding insights about the improvement of grammatical cohesion, and the second file had information about the positive aspects when writing collaboratively students reported.

Afterwards, the survey was analyzed to identify codes related to aspects of grammatical cohesion and collaborative writing in students’ responses. These codes were highlighted by using yellow for aspects of grammatical cohesion students considered they improved and gray for students’ viewpoints towards collaboration as a strategy to enhance grammatical cohesion in descriptive paragraph writing. The answers were transcribed into an excel document as follows: students were numbered from 1 to 21 in a column and the answers to each question were written from 1 to 5 in files (Figure 3).

Student's code	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5
1	Yes, I improved my writing skills when applying grammar topics in a specific paragraph and I improved in text organization. I learnt how to use conjunctions, modal verbs and conjunctive adverbs when writing a paragraph.	Yes, when writing a paragraph grammar is very important because if you don't conjugate correctly the verbs and use the appropriate grammar structures then the reader is not going to understand the text.	Yes, we made mistakes when writing the paragraph our classmate corrected mistakes they found in the text.	Positive, I found it helpful because we worked together and helped each other when writing a paragraph and correcting information in the text.	I feel comfortable because I feel I improved my writing skills and that my paragraphs are going to be understood by the reader.
2	Yes, I think I improved my grammar and vocabulary because before I didn't know how to do it.	Yes, I think I learned how to write well because is very important that people understand me.	Yes, because when they corrected me I learned from my mistakes.	Positive, because sometimes I am not too good in grammar and I need some collaboration from others.	I think I feel more confident because I know more about conjunctions, connectors and I have improved my grammar.
3	Yes, I did improve my writing because when we shared the text I could see more mistakes because being a collaborative group helped to see and correct my classmates and my own mistakes. I learnt more about conjunctions	Yes, I learned about the role of grammar because when we read somebody's paragraph whose grammar is not the best we can't understand and I realize about my mistakes	Yes, I first wrote a part of the paragraph, then my classmates wrote more information and they corrected my mistakes and warned me on how to use the structures well.	Positive, I took into account all the corrections my classmates made. Every time I have to write a descriptive paragraph I am more careful with it.	When I have to write a paragraph I am more careful with what I write

Figure 3. Caption in “Survey Analysis”

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Finally, a process of triangulation was used to avoid subjectivity by grouping the codes that emerged from the analysis of the data and to check for validity of the information presented in this study. The teacher-researcher managed the data gathered from the three instruments by grouping codes which had similar information as follows: one group of codes with all the information which had to do with different aspects related to grammatical cohesion and a second group of codes with students' insights on the implementation of collaborative writing (Figure 4).

Student's code	Instrument	Grammatical Cohesion	Students' insights towards Collaborative Writing
12	Teacher's Journal	I corrected the pronouns and conjunctions many times.	----
1	Survey	I learnt how to use conjunctive adverbs when I wrote with my friend	When we wrote together I learned because my friend knows more grammar
05/08/10	Artifacts	Conjunctions / Demonstratives/ Conjunctive adverbs were correctly used.	----
14	Survey	I learnt how to organize a paragraph.	Grammar is very important because if you do not use grammar well the reader will not understand
20	Teacher's Journal	It is easy to use conjunctions.	My classmate helped me a lot.
7	Survey	I use "and" and "but" many times. The paragraph is not clear.	I felt better when my friend helped me.

Figure 4.
Caption
in "Triangulation of Data"

A core category and two subcategories emerged as a result of this process. These two categories answer the research questions below which emerged from the research objectives (Figure 5).

- a. What is the impact of collaboration among A2 EFL seventh grade learners on grammatical cohesion in descriptive paragraph writing?
- b. What insights about improving grammatical cohesion in descriptive paragraph writing can be gained from the collaborative writing experience?

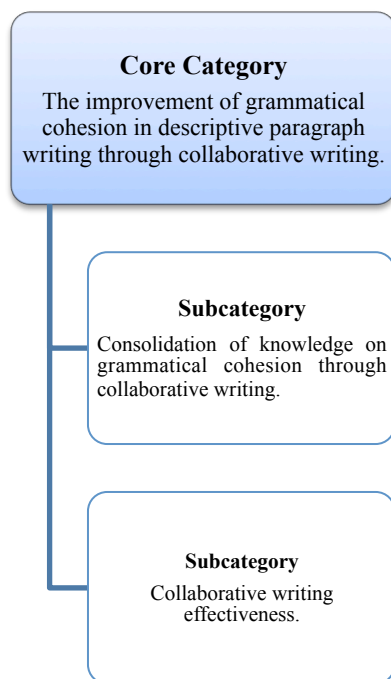


Figure 5. Categories and Subcategories

Categories

The main category is the improvement of grammatical cohesion in descriptive paragraph writing through collaborative writing which is divided into two subcategories: consolidation of knowledge on grammatical cohesion through collaborative writing and collaborative writing effectiveness. The first subcategory focuses on the grammatical cohesion itself and the evidence of students' progress in this area revealed through their artifacts. It also refers to the understanding of concepts and consolidation of knowledge students had on grammatical cohesion when writing a descriptive paragraph collaboratively. The second subcategory, collaborative writing effectiveness, demonstrates how helpful the peer support was when writing

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collaboratively. It shows how students wrote descriptive paragraphs collaboratively and illustrates, from the students' perspective, improvements in grammatical.

The improvement of grammatical cohesion in descriptive paragraph writing through Collaborative Writing

Grammatical cohesion makes a text readable and comprehensible to readers. It is divided into four categories as follows: reference, conjunction, substitution, and ellipsis. These categories were considered for the systematic review and analysis of the participants' artifacts which provided significant information regarding the enhancement of the grammatical cohesion and the effectiveness of collaborative writing in the target population.

Consolidation of knowledge on grammatical cohesion through collaborative writing.

After a comprehensible revision and analysis of the students' artifacts, the teacher-researcher found that most of the students wrote descriptive paragraphs which were cohesively accessible. The units of analysis of the participants' documents were focused on formal aspects of the language such as reference, ellipsis and substitution, and conjunctions. Based on the information gathered from students' artifacts in the pre-intervention stage, the teacher-researcher observed that participants overused conjunctions such as so and but. Additionally, they did not use them correctly. Although aspects of personal reference such as subject pronouns, object pronouns, and possessive pronouns were mostly used appropriately, demonstrative reference was not. The data also revealed that students did not use elliptical structures or substitutions (Appendix I).

After having participants involved in the process of writing collaboratively during the intervention stage, the artifacts collected in the post implementation stage showed their progress

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in the use of language structures when constructing the descriptive paragraphs. They were more careful when using conjunctions, such as the ones above pointed out, and used the conjunctive adverbs learnt in class correctly, which were mostly included to add information and show sequence of ideas when constructing the descriptive paragraphs. The participants of this study continued using personal pronouns, possessive adjectives, and possessive pronouns correctly becoming even more aware of the use of those pronouns.

Grammar is very important because you have to use correctly the verbs, pronouns and nouns. (Student 8, survey, April 22nd 2013)

Something I learnt was the pronouns I always confused his with her. (Student 21, teacher's journal, April 22nd 2013)

The participants used personal reference to avoid repetition of nouns when writing. Also, when participants assumed the role of readers to edit the descriptive paragraphs, they ensured that their classmates had used reference correctly to convey the proposed meaning which results in an elaborated product.

Equally important is the fact that students properly included determiners before nouns to refer to something specific which shows that demonstrative reference was correctly used as a result of the collaborative writing experience (Appendix H). Likewise, to avoid repetition of nouns, seventh graders used substitution, which is an aspect of grammatical cohesion they began to use once they were given the chance to write collaboratively.

The artifact below is a sample of the descriptive paragraphs students wrote. It illustrates the progress students made in terms of grammatical cohesion (Figure 6). The participants consistently used personal reference through the entire paragraph. In addition, this sample exhibits how students used conjunctive adverbs to make transitions between ideas in order to

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make them more comprehensible for the reader. Moreover, in this opportunity, the participants demonstrated control of the use of conjunctions, which basically gave options and added information in the text. Similarly, another cohesive device that the participants used while elaborating the paragraphs was substitution. Substitution was used at the clausal and nominal levels to avoid repetition of words and contrast sentences.

Conjunction

There are a few steps to follow in order to get a UK Passport. Firstly, you have to determinate whether or not you are eligible to obtain one and in order to know this you must go to <https://www.gov.uk/british-passport-eligibility> and check if you are eligible or not. Secondly, you must fill the application form with your real information, applicants over the age of 15 must submit a C1 application form and applicants under the age of 15 must submit a C2 application form. Thirdly, you must present supporting documents or evidence that proves you are eligible for this passport, if there is not enough evidence the application will be denied and the supporting documents you must provide depends on how you are claiming your British citizenship. Fourthly, you must provide 2 pictures that fulfill all the requirements and specifications as well as your birth certification. The specifications are given in the application form. Fifthly, submit your application, you can go personally or you can send it to an official office depending on where you live. Finally, you must pay the required fee in order to get the passport. You will get your passport more or less in 4 to 6 weeks depending on the day you submitted the application unless you pay extra to get it faster. You only need to follow these steps in order to get a UK passport.

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8mBybgh1Uik&list=PL6561AC358DB0CDB5>

mul 8/4/13 07:54
Comment [1]: Conjunctive adverb
 mul 8/4/13 08:15
Comment [2]: Personal reference
 mul 8/4/13 08:31
Comment [3]: Substitution
 mul 8/4/13 07:56
Comment [4]: Demonstrative reference
 mul 8/4/13 08:15
Comment [5]: Personal reference
 mul 8/4/13 08:13
Comment [6]: Substitution (Clausal)
 mul 8/4/13 07:54
Comment [7]: Conjunctive adverb
 mul 8/4/13 07:54
Comment [8]: Conjunctive adverb
 mul 8/4/13 08:03
Comment [9]: Demonstrative reference
 mul 8/4/13 08:14
Comment [10]: Demonstrative reference
 mul 8/4/13 08:16
Comment [11]: Personal reference
 mul 8/4/13 08:18
Comment [12]: Personal reference
 mul 8/4/13 07:55
Comment [13]: Conjunctive adverb
 mul 8/4/13 08:19
Comment [14]: Personal reference
 mul 8/4/13 08:19
Comment [15]: Demonstrative reference

Figure 6. Caption in “Students’ artifact”

Figure 6 shows that collaboration gave students the chance to access language knowledge to elaborate a readable descriptive paragraph. In regards to this, this learning experience allowed them to hear and react towards their own descriptive paragraphs, as well as those of their peers.

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They read those pieces of writing critically and provided their peers with some assistance. Certainly, this experience encouraged them to learn from each other and master knowledge on the use conjunctive adverbs, conjunctions, nouns, pronouns, and determiners.

When we shared the text I could see more mistakes because being a collaborative group helped to see and correct my classmates and my own mistakes. I learnt more about conjunctions. (Student 3, survey, April 22nd, 2013)

Using language forms correctly when writing requires that writers have full control of grammar and satisfactory understanding of concepts and knowledge used to describe language functions. In this case, the participants demonstrated to have gained certain knowledge and have control in the use of grammar structures as their peers drew their attention to errors they were not aware of.

I think I learned how to write well because is very important that people understand me. (Student 2, survey, April 22nd, 2013)

My writing is now better because I think before I write because I need to use grammar correctly. (Student 20, teacher's journal, March 8th, 2013)

Assuming the role of readers and editors, the participants had to break the descriptive paragraphs into smaller structures to convey meaning. Thus, they expressed in the post-implementation survey that they learnt how to use conjunctions through the collaborative writing experience because they had the opportunity to share their pieces of writing, make comments, and receive feedback from their peers. This process helped them become aware of the mistakes they made when writing a descriptive paragraph.

Yes, because when they corrected me I learned from my mistakes. (Student 2, survey, April 22nd 2013)

I took into account all the corrections my classmates made. Every time I have to write a descriptive paragraph I am more careful with it. (Student 3, survey, April 22nd 2013)

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I learn how to use conjunctions well because my friends corrected me and helped me to understand the topic. (Student 17, survey, April 22nd, 2013)

Similarly, they realized that English grammar plays an important role when writing as it makes a paragraph cohesively accessible. They also acknowledged that using grammar forms as appropriate has a great value. It definitely helps them be understood by a reader as grammar enables learners to express their ideas cohesively in academic contexts (Appendix H). The excerpts below shows what students reported in the survey. Certainly, they affirmed that after the implementation, they were able to correctly use a specific aspect of grammar such as conjunctions.

Grammar is very important. If you don't use grammar structures correctly people will not understand your text. (Student 18, survey, April 22nd 2013)

When writing you have to use grammar correctly, because the reader will not understand of you make many mistakes. (Student 21, teacher's journal, March 15th, 2013)

Another aspect that was improved was the organization of a descriptive paragraph. This demonstrates that the experience of writing collaboratively gave the participants the opportunity to become aware of the use of some elements of organization (i.e., cohesion, coherence, logical connectors) which need to be considered when writing a descriptive paragraph.

I do improve my way of writing because when we shared the text, I could see my mistakes because being in a collaborative group we helped finding mistakes, correcting them and learning to use conjunctions and the organization of a paragraph. (Student 8, survey, April 22nd, 2013)

The collaborative group helped me to use conjunctions and connectors. I learnt that they make my writing clearer and easier to read. (Student 5, survey, April 22nd, 2013)

Moreover, the participants' viewpoints towards writing proved that this process is essentially about "understanding", in which writers ensure that readers are able to understand

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what they write (Cameron, 2001). The excerpts below demonstrate that the participants gained understanding of the correct use of grammar structures to make a text comprehensible to an intended audience, as their peers became that real audience.

I think grammar is important because if you have a bad grammar the reader won't be able to understand the text. (Student 4, survey , April 22nd, 2013)

When writing a paragraph grammar is very important because the use of appropriate structures help the reader understand the text. (Student 15, survey , April 22nd, 2013)

As the participants adopted the role of readers when constructing and editing the paragraphs, it challenged them to be more than checkers, they made valuable contributions to the elaboration of the expected writing product; they assumed an active role in the process of writing which became a motivator to improve their performance in this field. In doing so, the participants changed their attitude towards this aspect of the language as they realized grammar plays a crucial role when writing.

Collaborative Writing effectiveness

Positive aspects of the implementation of collaboration were identified in students' feedback. Due to former methodologies used to teach grammar and the fact that students only received the teacher-researcher's feedback on their artifacts, students repeatedly made the same mistakes in grammatical cohesion when writing a descriptive paragraph; they were not given the chance to use peer-correction or share their insights before handing in the final version of their writing compositions.

Through the analysis of the post-implementation survey, positive aspects regarding the implementation of collaborative writing to enhance grammatical cohesion were identified. The

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participants of this study agreed that this strategy was helpful since they received their peers' support in the paragraph construction. It gave them the chance to become aware of the grammar mistakes they made and learned from one another when adopting the role of readers. The excerpts below illustrate that actually writing is not an isolated activity as it was traditionally carried out in the past. Writing is a social activity that lets writers not only share information but also knowledge. This is why collaboration plays an essential role as it gives writers the chance to interact through the elaboration of an accessible piece of writing text.

When we read somebody's paragraph whose grammar is not the best we can't understand and I realize about my mistakes. (Student 3, survey, April 22nd, 2013)

We checked each other mistakes and created a really good text. (Student 19, survey, April 22nd, 2013)

I found positive the implementation of collaboration for the improvement of grammar in descriptive paragraph writing because this helps all the girls improve and learn from their mistakes. (Student 7, survey, April 22nd, 2013)

Positive, because sometimes I am not too good in grammar and I need some collaboration from others. (Student 2, survey, April 22nd, 2013)

Language learners who actively exchange, debate, and negotiate ideas within a group increase their interests in learning. In class discussions most of this study's participants expressed that this strategy encouraged them to be aware of the mistakes they used to make when writing a descriptive paragraph (Appendix I). They realized that before the implementation, their paragraphs lacked clarity as they misused conjunctions and repeatedly made the same mistakes. Once they had the chance to write collaboratively in the wikis and received their peers' feedback, they shared ideas to construct the paragraphs and also language knowledge as some classmates were strong at using grammar structures correctly.

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Having the participants work collaboratively to write a descriptive paragraph not only enhanced grammar aspects but also motivated them to continue learning and improving their writing skill. They reported that after the implementation, they did not feel frustrated when they faced a writing assignment. Instead, they felt they had gained some knowledge that let them write a strong paragraph at the correct level.

I feel comfortable because I feel I have improved my writing skill. My paragraphs are now better and they are going to be understood by the reader. (Student 20, survey, April 22nd, 2013)

When I have to hand in a paragraph I am more sure of what I write and I am more careful with what I write. (Student 16, survey, April 22nd, 2013)

In addition, students felt that their classmates were an excellent support when writing. They realized that they could not only help each other but also learn from each other. Before the implementation, they mistakenly thought that the teacher was the only person who could teach and help them to improve their writing skill. After the implementation, they realized that their own classmates were good resources they could consult to improve the quality of a text.

I feel more confident when writing because I know that my classmates can help me. (Student 12, survey, April 22nd, 2013)

My classmates helped me a lot. We worked together to write the paragraph and it was a good experience. (Student 10, survey, April 22nd, 2013)

The majority of students expressed their positive feedback towards this strategy. However, two of the participants reported that the collaborative writing experience was not completely useful because they felt more comfortable when writing individually. These two participants reported that they did not like to receive their peers' comments and corrections as they thought their peers were not qualified to make helpful contributions. Also, they reported that

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two teams were not homogenously arranged as only one member of the group did the assigned work.

I think that there are some girls who do not know how to work in groups. They are not responsible. (Student 7, teacher's journal, March 15th, 2013)

I think the implementation of collaborative writing was not helpful because I had to write everything. (Student 18, survey, April 22nd, 2013)

I think I did not learn anything because my classmates did not know grammar. Next time I would like to work with another classmate. (Student 18, survey, April 22nd, 2013)

All in all, the findings reported in this chapter are the results of the implementation of a comprehensive approach in which the teacher-researcher triangulated the data gathered in order to prove that collaborative writing is a strategy that satisfied these participants' needs.

Furthermore, it can be concluded that this strategy prompted students to enhance grammatical cohesion and the quality of their descriptive paragraphs. Collaborative writing not only helped them to improve the aspects of grammar they failed to apply properly before the implementation but also this strategy motivated them to continue improving and learning from each other.

Chapter Six: Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications

Conclusions

In this study, the teacher-researcher essentially studied the impact of collaborative writing on grammatical cohesion in descriptive paragraph writing in a group of A2 EFL seventh grade learners. The findings indicated that the implementation of collaborative writing has a significant impact in the improvement on grammatical cohesion when writing descriptive paragraphs although this was the first time this methodology was implemented at Gimnasio Los Portales. This study found that students who collaborate are able to make several types of significant improvements over students who write individually. As encouraging students to become better writers is one of the main learning objectives set by the English Department at Gimnasio Los Portales, collaborative writing is a strategy that provides them with opportunities to overcome problems regarding grammatical cohesion when writing a descriptive paragraph.

Furthermore, the participants of this study made significant improvements in terms of grammatical cohesion when writing collaboratively in tasks set by the teacher-researcher. They constructed descriptive paragraphs by using conjunctions, conjunctive adverbs, reference, and demonstratives as appropriate with their peers' support. At the end of this study, participants produced pieces of writing which were truly cohesively and coherently accessible. They presented a range of ideas with reasonable precision by using adequate range of grammatical structures and produced descriptive paragraphs skillfully organized and coherent for the intended audience. This demonstrates that the implementation of collaborative writing allowed the participants to enrich and consolidate their language knowledge.

Similarly, this research study showed that the implementation of collaborative writing encourages students to have full control of grammar and adequate understanding of concepts and knowledge used to describe language functions. This strategy provides the opportunity to have two or more people contributing components to a document and modifying it, by editing and/or reviewing it. Therefore, this strategy boosted the participants' language knowledge as they critically read and reacted towards the descriptive paragraphs when pointing out grammatical errors.

Moreover, the findings showed the effectiveness of collaborative writing in the target context. This strategy raised the participants' language awareness when they had the chance to edit the descriptive paragraphs. This is why the participants directed their attention to making themselves understood. The implementation of collaborative writing helped them become aware of the lack of clarity their ideas had when writing individually; they realized that readers definitely struggled to understand what they wanted to express. Additionally, this strategy encouraged them to understand the essential role grammar plays when writing a descriptive paragraph. The participants of this study understood that the appropriate use of grammar structures help them to communicate their ideas effectively and precisely.

Pedagogical Implications

Collaborative writing proved to be an effective strategy that helps learners to improve grammatical cohesion when writing descriptive paragraphs. It aids language learners to participate in written tasks collectively and involves them in an enjoyable collaborative writing experience; however, teachers have to thoroughly organize the tasks which students will carry

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out. As this strategy is time-consuming because of the amount of time devoted to reading and editing a text, students need to be given clear objectives, duties and roles to ensure the success of the implementation of this strategy. The organization of the activities to be carried out as part of the implementation of this strategy will guarantee the effectiveness of the strategy itself.

As collaborative writing implies that a group of students work together to construct a text, teachers have to consider the individual characteristics of each student group as well as their personalities when setting the collaborative teams. It is important that groups be homogeneously organized so that each group member has the same opportunities to make contributions and has equal participation when writing a text; this ensures that students learn and support each other.

When writing a text collaboratively, the tool that students use to work together and show their writing products plays an important role. There are many tools teachers can use in order to implement collaborative writing. Therefore, students' view points regarding this aspect must be considered as they are the ones who will be dealing with the tool because it is important that they feel comfortable when using it. A positive aspect of this study was the fact that the participants had previously got acquainted with wikis. Consequently, it created a positive and collaborative atmosphere when using the wiki and decreased the participants' constraints.

Finally, teachers have to consider that this strategy can be used not only to direct students' attention to the accurate use of the mechanics of the language when writing a paragraph, but it can also be used to foster writing as a process not as an ended- product. In regard to this, collaborative writing helps students understand that writing is a continuous process in which errors are part and ideas are valued.

Limitations

Despite the benefits resulting from collaborating writing used to improve grammatical cohesion in descriptive paragraphs, this research study had some limitations. Firstly, there was a constraint regarding group work arrangements. The groups varied from task to task considering that students had the opportunity to work with different classmates; however, this idea was not good as those students who were close friends did not assume the responsibilities they had in the group; they did not do what they were expected to do when they had the opportunity to work with their friends. This was a constraint because only two students in the group worked on what they were assigned. Therefore, teachers have to keep in mind the particular characteristics a group of students has in order to prevent a similar problematic situation.

Moreover, the participants of this study comprised a small group. Therefore, the positive results obtained in this study do not guarantee that this strategy will be effective when implemented it in a large group. It might be difficult to keep the homogeneity of the collaborative teams in a large group and to give feedback to students in a short time as the teacher has to revise and analyse a larger number of artifacts than the ones the teacher-researcher in this study analysed; this aspect could become a constraint.

Moreover, it is relevant to mention that the implementation of collaborative writing was time-consuming. The participants had to devote two hours working asynchronously on the descriptive paragraphs, which is a considerable amount of time given that the participants had other academic responsibilities. Likewise, the teacher-researcher devoted considerable time monitoring the participants' asynchronous work, checking whether or not they were appropriately

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working on the assigned tasks, and revising and analyzing the artifacts. This could become a constraint when working with a group of students with different characteristics, needs and size

Certainly, after the implementation of this study, it emerged the need for further exploration in the field of collaborative writing and the benefits this strategy might bring to language learners' writing skill. This research may be focused on the social interaction area and social technologies affordances. Nowadays, there are many e-learning technological tools that can serve as mean to foster collaborative writing in EFL contexts.

Additionally, there is a need to explore a variety of writing tasks which can be supported by the use of technology. As this study was exclusively focused on writing descriptive paragraphs collaboratively by using wikis as a tool, the teacher-researcher cannot affirm that wikis' affordances in the process of writing a descriptive paragraph would be the same when constructing a different type of text; thus, the positive results obtained in this study can not be generalized to other writing tasks.

Further Research

Based on the results found of this research study regarding the improvement of grammatical cohesion when writing descriptive paragraphs collaboratively, this researcher suggests further research into the effectiveness that collaborative writing has on the writing process, and the benefits students might receive from this strategy implemented from another perspective.

Due to the importance of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in the educational context, additional investigation on exploring the impact that the use of web 2.0 tools

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has on writing texts collaboratively and how they can be used to enhance repertoire of vocabulary and range of grammatical structures is recommended.

Also, it is advised to implement collaborative writing in interdisciplinary projects in which different areas are intertwined, for example, English and Social studies or Math and Biology. It might benefit the teaching and learning process and provide the chance to explore and use this strategy from another perspective. Lastly, this strategy can be also used with learners at different levels to explore students' reaction towards each other's writing, foster written and oral interactions when sharing ideas, exchanging information, and discussing issues.

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Appendix A: Teacher's Journal

Teacher's Journal		
Date:		
Lesson's aim:		
	Student's name	Comment
Student 1		
Student 2		
Student 3		
Student 4		
Student 5		
Student 6		
Student 7		
Student 8		
Student 9		
Student 10		
Student 11		
Student 12		
Student 13		
Student 14		
Student 15		
Student 16		
Student 17		
Student 18		
Student 19		
Student 20		
Student 21		

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Appendix B: Survey

Gimnasio Los Portales
The Impact of Collaboration among Seventh Grade A2 EFL Learners in Descriptive Paragraph Writing

Name: _____ Grade: __ Date: _____

Dear students,

The survey below has an academic purpose. The information gathered will be dealt with confidentiality. Answering all questions will take approximately 10-15 minutes. Thank you for your participation and positive attitude towards this process.

1. Did you improve any specific aspect of English grammar when writing a descriptive paragraph?

Yes ___

No ___

If so, explain your answer

2. Did you learn something about the role of grammar when writing a descriptive paragraph?

Yes ___

No ___

If so, explain your answer

3. Did your classmates provide effective feedback to overcome your problems with grammar when writing descriptive paragraphs?

Yes ___

No ___

If so, explain your answer

4. Did you find helpful the implementation of collaboration for the improvement of grammar in descriptive paragraph writing?

Positive ___

Negative ___

Explain your choice

5. In few words, describe how you feel when you are requested to hand in a descriptive paragraph now?

Appendix C: Consent Letter

Bogotá, Febrero 27 de 2013

Familia Ospina Ballesteros

E. S. M.

Estimados padres de familia,

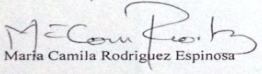
Actualmente me encuentro realizando la maestría Didáctica del Inglés con Enfoque en Medios de Aprendizaje Autónomos- Master in English Language Teaching Autonomous Learning Environments- en la Universidad de la Sabana.

Este programa requiere llevar a cabo un proyecto de Investigación-Acción, razón por la cual estoy interesada en realizar con las alumnas de Séptimo Grado un estudio titulado "The Impact of Collaboration among Seventh Grade A2 EFL Learners in Descriptive Paragraph Writing" que pretende fortalecer la habilidad de expresarse por escrito de forma coherente haciendo buen uso de las reglas gramaticales, a través del trabajo colaborativo y recursos electrónicos a la vanguardia de la educación moderna.

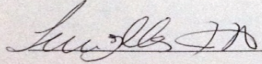
Por lo anterior, comedidamente solicito su consentimiento y colaboración para realizar mi propuesta de investigación, que se llevará a cabo durante el año escolar 2012-2013. Para hacer el seguimiento del desarrollo de este estudio se realizarán algunas encuestas, las cuales servirán como colección de datos y soporte para analizar la incidencia del trabajo colaborativo en la escritura de párrafos descriptivos. Los resultados no sólo beneficiarán el proceso de aprendizaje de su hija para el futuro sino que también permitirá adoptar en la práctica docente nuevas estrategias de aprendizaje de la escritura para las generaciones futuras.

Por otra parte, a su hija se le garantizará estricta confidencialidad con la información que se obtenga.

Atentamente,


 María Camila Rodríguez Espinosa
 Docente de Inglés

Autorizamos a nuestra hija GINA F Ospina B a participar en la investigación "The Impact of Collaboration among Seventh Grade A2 EFL Learners in Descriptive Paragraph Writing" que se llevará a cabo durante el año escolar 2012-2013.


 Firma de los padres

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Appendix D: Descriptive Paragraph Writing Rubric

	4	3	2	1
Focus/Ideas	The paragraph is completely focused on the task and has a clear purpose.	The paragraph is generally focused on the task and the purpose.	The paragraph is somewhat focused on the task and purpose.	The paragraph does not have a clear focus or purpose.
Word Choice	The writer uses colorful words and phrases. The writing is very descriptive and detailed.	The writer uses some colorful words and phrases.	The writer does not use many colorful words or phrases.	There are very few details and very little description.
Sentences	The writer uses a variety of sentences. The writing flows smoothly.	The writer uses some variety in sentences.	The writer does not use much variety in her sentences.	There is little or no variety in sentences. Some of the sentences are unclear.
Grammatical cohesion	There are few or no errors in the use of conjunctions, reference, substitution and ellipsis.	There are a few errors in the use of conjunctions, reference, substitution and ellipsis.	There are some errors in the use of conjunctions, reference, substitution and ellipsis.	There are many errors in the use of conjunctions, reference, substitution and ellipsis.

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Appendix E: Lesson Plan Excerpt

Stage	Aim	Procedure Teacher and student activity	Time and interaction
Warm-up	Teacher will activate students' schemata.	Students will see this video http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zw5mn4IWGFg about endangered species. Afterwards, teacher will orally ask the questions below; she will choose students at random: -What are the causes of endangerment? -How does endangerment affect people's lives? The earth? -What are possible solutions to solve this situation? Teacher will ask the question below to make transitions among the activities: According to the video, what do you think the next activity will be about?	20 min T-SS S-S
Exposure to the new language.	Students will be exposed to the new language in context. Student will focus their attention on significant points.	In pairs, students will read an article about endangerment (see appendix A). Students will underline the most important aspects about the issue with the endangered species act. Once students read the article, they will answer the following questions orally: - Who are the enemies of the endangered species act? What do they complain about? - What are the areas, which need more protection? - Who are the people or organizations that request protection for endangered animals? Teacher will ask the question below to make transitions among the activities: What do you think you need this information for?	30 min T-S T-SS PW S-S
Observation and analysis of the new language.	Students will observe and analyze new language.	In groups of three, students will be given a matching exercise; they have to correctly match the sentences given (see appendix B). Teacher will choose some groups at random to convey the answers. Teacher will ask the question below to make transitions between the activities: What caught your attention in this exercise?	10 min T-SS GW3
Statement of the rule.	Students will come up with the rule to use conjunctions (and /or/ but).	Teacher will tell students to focus their attention to the words in bold. She will ask the questions below to guide students' observation and analysis of the language presented. Students will state the rule to use conjunctions. What do the words in bold have in common? What do think do you use them for? In what position in a sentence do you think you have to place them? According to the article, in which cases do you use them? One student will help to write on the board the rule stated.	15 min T-SS
Controlled practice	Students will use conjunctions in a controlled practice exercise.	Individually, students will complete a workshop to have plentiful practice on that particular language form. Teacher will choose some students at random to convey the answers. Students must provide an answer and explain their choices (See appendix 3).	15 min T-S T-SS
Collaborative writing/ Online session	Students will be prompted to peer-correct.	Teacher will set seven groups of three students. Each group will be assigned an endangered animal from the list below: African elephant Blue whale Tiger Asian lion Giant panda Jaguar Snow leopard Sea otter Instructions are given in the face-to-face session.	120 min SS-SS T-SS

Appendix F: Caption in “Englishclassgp wikispace”

The screenshot shows a Wikispaces user account page. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the Wikispaces logo, a search box, and a user menu containing 'Englishclassgp', 'Mis Wikis', 'Ayuda', and 'Cerrar Sesión'. Below the navigation bar, the page is titled 'My Account' and includes a 'Dashboard' button, a 'New Wiki' button, an 'Ajustes' button, and a notification icon with the number '0'. The main content area features a welcome message: 'Bienvenido/a, Englishclassgp'. Below this, a notification box states: 'Hemos añadido 20 de sus wikis a su lista de wikis favoritos. Puede añadir más de sus wikis desde la [lista copleta de wikis a los que pertenece](#). También puede añadir el wiki que quiera escribiendo su nombre debajo, o eliminar un wiki utilizando el menú Acciones. Usted puede hacer clic y arrastrar las filas para ordenar la lista en la forma que desee. [Esconder este mensaje](#).' The section is titled 'Wikis Favoritos' and contains a list of five favorite wikis, each with a small icon, the wiki name, the role 'Organizador', and an 'Acciones' dropdown menu.

Wiki Name	Role	Actions
AfricanElephant	Organizador	Acciones ▾
Tigerendangeredspecie	Organizador	Acciones ▾
bluewhaleendangeredspecie	Organizador	Acciones ▾
asianlionendangeredspecie	Organizador	Acciones ▾
giantpandaendangeredspecie	Organizador	Acciones ▾

Appendix G: Student's artifact. Pre-implementation Stage

Personal reference: subject pronouns, object pronouns and possessive pronouns

Overused conjunctions

a memorable birthday

My friend Juliana Angel was celebrating her birthday. She invited me to celebrated with her, so I went to her house and she was waiting me with other friends. So we went to the park and Juliana told us to put some clothes to swim. So we put it and started playing with water. We were very we. So we made a hot chocolate and make fire when we were dry. We went to play with her dogs and she told me that a dog didn't had a home and that she was looking for someone to take care of him, he was black and with blue eyes. That was the day when I decide to adopt my dog tommy.

Appendix H: Students' artifact. Post-implementation Stage

There are a few steps to follow in order to get a UK Passport. Firstly, you have to determinate whether or not you are eligible to obtain a Uk passport and in order to know this you must go to <https://www.gov.uk/british-passport-eligibility> and check if you are eligible or not. Secondly, you must fill the application form with your real information, applicants over the age of 15 must submit a C1 application form and applicants under the age of 15 must submit a C2 application form. Thirdly, you must present supporting documents or evidence that proves you are eligible for this passport, if there is not enough evidence the application will be denied and the supporting documents you must provide depends on how you are claiming your British citizenship. Fourthly, you must provide 2 pictures that fulfill all the requirements and specifications as well as your birth certification; the specifications are given in the application form. Fifthly, submit your application, you can go personally or you can send it to an official office depending on where you live. Finally, you must pay the required fee in order to get the passport. You will get your passport more or less in 4 to 6 weeks depending on the day you submitted the application unless you pay extra to get it faster. You only need to follow these steps in order to get a UK passport.

Appendix I: Teacher's Journal Sample

Teacher's Journal	
Date: March 19th 2013	
Lesson's aim: students will write 200-word paragraph describing A 300-word report describing the impact of racism by using conjunctive adverbs as appropriate.	
General description of the lesson: Teacher asks students to organize the classroom in a round table. She opens a class discussion on the work done in the wikis by displaying questions below on a power point presentation: Did your classmates' collaboration help you to write the descriptive paragraph? How did you feel towards your classmates' feedback? Did you learn anything from the collaborative writing experience? Did you reinforce the use of any grammar structure? She tells them to read the questions and discuss the answers in pairs. After that, she starts choosing students at random to share their insights. Students express the following:	
Students' code	Comment
Student 1	I could not work because all the information was erased.
Student 2	I realized that my classmates did not understand my writing. It helped me to work in groups because they helped me to correct my mistakes.
Student 3	I think my classmates' collaboration was useful because we now know the mistakes we make and we will try to correct them in the coming writings.
Student 4	Now, I do not make the same mistakes because my classmates' corrections helped me to identify them.
Student 5	My classmates' help was positive; she helps me to correct grammar mistakes. I think that now my writing is clear and easy to understand.
Student 6	My grammar is bad. But, my classmates' corrections helped me to improve it. Now I know how to use conjunctions and punctuation marks.
Student 7	I think that there are some girls who do not know how to work in groups. They are not responsible.
Student 8	Sometimes you do not see you own grammar mistakes but when you correct someone's work you are more aware of the grammar mistakes you can make.
Student 9	Conjunctions are useful to make the text more clear. I feel that they help me to use more difficult sentences when I write.
Student 10	I think the conjunctions make me organize the paragraph. I have now more vocabulary.
Student 11	I did not know that conjunctions were important when I have to write a paragraph. Now, I feel I use them correctly.
Student 12	For me it was difficult to use the conjunctions because I did not know how to use them. My classmates helped me to use them. Now, I know they are important because they make my writing clear for the reader.
Student 13	Valentina is good with grammar. I taught me how to use conjunctions, punctuation and tenses.
Teacher's comment: Students found the strategy useful; however, there were some constrains in two groups since the members were not responsible with the work they were assigned.	

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Appendix J: Pedagogical Intervention Timeline

Pre-Implementation						
Month:	Date	Wednesday	Activity	Instrument		
February	18th	One-hour Face to face encounter.	Diagnosis.	Students' artifacts first delivery.		
Implementation						
Month: February to March						
Cycle	Topic	Writing product	Date	Monday	Tuesday to Thursday	Friday
1	Conjunctions: and /but/ or/ so	A 200-word paragraph describing the physical characteristics, nutrition, and habitat of an endangered animal.	25th to 1st	1st two-hour face to face encounter.	Asynchronous online session takes place.	2nd one-hour face to face encounter.
Month: March						
Cycle	Topic	Writing product	Date	Monday	Tuesday to Thursday	Friday
2	Conjunctive adverbs: firstly/secondly/t hirdly/fourthly/ finally.	A 200-word paragraph describing how they arrange the school event "So, we can dance"	4th to 8th	1st two-hour face to face encounter.	Asynchronous online session takes place.	2nd one-hour face to face encounter.
3	Conjunctive adverbs: In addition/ moreover/further more	A 200-word paragraph describing the most recent movie seventh graders have seen.	11th to 15th	F1st two-hour face to face encounter.	Asynchronous online session takes place.	2nd one-hour face to face encounter.
4	Punctuation marks	A 200-word paragraph describing the application procedure to get a passport.	18th to 22nd	F1st two-hour face to face encounter.	Asynchronous online session takes place.	2nd one-hour face to face encounter.
Post-Implementation						
Month	Date	Tuesday	Activity	Instrument		
April	2nd	One-hour face to face encounter.	Pedagogical Intervention closure.	Survey.		