WRITING: A PROFITABLE BUT NEGATED SKILL IN ENGLISH CLASSES IN UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMS

Blanca Lucía Cely Betancourt

Corporación Universitaria Minuto de Dios (Colombia)

Abstract

The present study describes a small scale project consisting in several workshops to improve the students' writing in English as a foreign language. The targeted population consisted of first level students in undergraduate programs at a public university in Colombia where low development of writing skills in the students' foreign language has been constantly observed in the English teaching process.

A diagnostic test administered to our students revealed that one of the possible causes of student's low performance in writing, was the lack of writing activities that serve as training for them to produce writing texts. Students showed the few opportunities they had concerning this kind of activities. The diagnostic data through questionnaires and interviews also revealed the lack of guided and controlled activities which help students to improve the process of writing, and the low motivation as the main result of this lack of activities. Last but not least, after the implementation of this writing workshop, students were more confident, they wrote high-quality texts and writing became an interesting activity for students.

Keywords: writing process, motivation, process approach, writing techniques, product approach .

Resumen

El presente estudio describe un mini-programa que consiste en varios talleres para mejorar las habilidades de escritura de los estudiantes. La población objetivo de estudio la conformaron estudiantes de primer nivel en los programas de pregrado en una universidad pública en Colombia, en la que la falta de habilidades de escritura en la lengua extranjera de los estudiantes se ha observado constantemente en el proceso de enseñanza de inglés.

De acuerdo con el diagnóstico previo, los principales problemas de los estudiantes eran la falta de actividades de escritura que les permitieran producir textos escritos. Los estudiantes mostraron tener pocas oportunidades de realizar este tipo de actividades. La información obtenida en cuestionarios y entrevistas reveló tanto la falta de instrucciones claras para los estudiantes como de actividades guiadas y controladas que ayudan a mejorar el proceso de la escritura y la baja motivación como el principal resultado de esta falta de actividades. Por

último, pero no lo menos importante, los estudiantes demostraron mayor confianza, escribieron textos de alta calidad y la escritura se convirtió en una actividad interesante para el alumnado.

Palabras clave: proceso de escritura, motivación, aproximación de proceso, técnicas de escritura, aproximación de producto .

1. Introduction

Writing has often been a neglected area in English language teaching. It has been only recently that some research into writing has been carried out. A recent research study demonstrates that combining strategies to teach writing has positive effects on students' learning process (Hillocks,1987). However, the implementation of these skills in the classroom is not successful nowadays, since there is a noticeable gap between theory and practice. In many cases, teachers avoid correcting compositions because they are time consuming. Another possible reason is "the absence of well-established or widely recognized models of writing" (Hedge 1988:5).

Writing is a complex and demanding process as it activates deep cognitive processes. First, it encourages critical reflection and learning, as it motivates communication and makes thinking available for reflection. When thought is written down, ideas can be examined, reconsidered, expanded, rearranged, and changed. Learners need to compose ideas, organize thoughts, go back and forth, clarify thoughts and correct as they revise and edit their pieces of writing through stages. This process implies prewriting, drafting, revising and editing. Nonetheless, learners experiment less pressure during writing activities than during other activities because they have time to plan and develop all the aforementioned writing stages without the apprehension to be right on the first try.

Additionally, interviews and questionnaires with teachers and students show the lack of opportunities students have to develop writing activities in the classroom, sometimes due to the reasons mentioned above or because it implies more work for teachers during the process of revising texts and giving feedback to students. It is really demanding and time-consuming and, on occasions, teachers do not have time to do this since they have to follow the institution syllabus and, in many cases, time is not enough to cover all the topics they have to teach according to the curriculum. Despite the fact that it is not an easy task, teachers try to deal with time and the syllabus they have to cover in order to include writing activities as part of the daily routine of the classroom.

The final purpose of this project is to demonstrate that students could create well-structured texts using appropriate grammar rules and vocabulary if they are motivated and if the teacher uses the appropriate approach. Teaching writing is challenging because motivation is the first and the most important factor for students to start producing a piece of writing on their own. It is necessary to provide students with effective tools and strategies to encourage them to produce their own compositions in a confident way and motivate them to continue with

their writing process in a lifelong learning fashion**.** The ideas portrayed in this paper can not only give teachers a new perspective in teaching writing but also make teachers and students conscious of the benefits this may have on a foreign language learning process.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Why to teach writing?

Language is the tool people use to communicate with each other. People do not only communicate when speaking, but also when writing, that is why they need to master writing skills. However, learning writing skills is not an easy task because it is a lengthy process that involves learning a new set of cognitive and social relations (Harmer 1988a: 323). In comparison with speaking writing reduces anxiety and frustration in many learners because it is a private activity that is developed in isolation, and students have the opportunity to check and revise before making their compositions available for reading. However, mastering the writing skills implies help and guidance from the teacher, who leads the process. Learning to write in either first or second languages is one of the tasks students find harder and many native speakers leave school without good writing proficiency (Tribble 1996: 52). Writing is not a final product but a series of activities that are described as a process (Keh, 1990). Additionally, it is an important process that needs to be constantly revised by giving students meaningful feedback so that they can improve their writing.

When we consider why asking students to write, we can find several reasons. Firstly, it is a good way to check your students' intake. Secondly, it triggers critical thinking, understanding and memory. Thirdly, it gives the students the chance to express feelings, thoughts, beliefs and information about themselves, so it enables teachers to know their students better and to extend their learning beyond lectures and other formal instruction situations. Writing also contributes to improving the students' communication skills. Finally, as writing is a private activity that needs effective guidance on the part of the teachers, it is an excellent opportunity to get teachers to interact more closely with students and to know their individual differences.

2.2. Principles for designing writing techniques

Nowadays, many textbooks which deal with writing skills present the metalanguage associated with "product" and "process" approaches. The first one focuses on the accuracy of grammar, vocabulary, spelling and punctuation while the latter focuses on the ongoing of planning, organizing, composing, drafting, reviewing, revising, editing, etc. (Anstending 1998: 135). There is not a right or best way to teach writing skills; it depends on some individual factors related to the type of students, the textbook the institution has, the school system and the teacher's philosophy.

Another teaching orientation sees writing as an opportunity to encourage art: writing is considered as a creative act of self-discovery as it is focused on creative expression (Anstendig 1998). On the other hand, writing focuses on genre. It activates ways of using languages for particular purposes. The central belief of this orientation is that we do not just write, we write for a specific purpose: to get things done, to tell a story, to describe something, to craft a love letter, etc. I will go deeper into each approach below.

2.3. The product approach

When teaching writing according to the 'product' approach, students are encouraged to imitate a model text which is presented and analyzed. Its features are highlighted: if the text is a formal letter students read it carefully, pay special attention to form and to the register used to making a request. Finally, students are encouraged to write a similar text. This orientation originated from the combination of structural linguistics and behaviorism learning theories applied to second language teaching (Harmer 1988b:256). Writing is seen as the product of imitating and manipulating models that teachers give to students. For teachers who adopt this model, writing is seen as an extension of grammar or as a mean to reinforce language patterns through habits of formation, encouraging learners to produce well-structured sentences. For others, writing is seen as a complex structure that can only enable students to manipulate grammar and lexis (Harmer 1988:256b). It implies the following approaches.

Familiarization: At this stage, grammar and lexis are taught taking the structures of the text as a basis. Learners read, manipulate and analyze the text to identify structures and new lexis.

Controlled writing: In the controlled writing activities, students manipulate fixed patterns, often from substitution tables. Teachers usually give charts with information and students start writing short texts using the information given.

Guided writing: Students imitate the model text. After having read a text and analyzed its structure, lexis and vocabulary, students write a similar one usually following the same grammar pattern and the specific lexis the text suggests.

Free writing: Learners use patterns they have previously developed. During this last stage students are supposed to manipulate structures, lexis they have learnt, and start writing their own compositions. Writing is controlled until students get to the stage of guided compositions, where they are asked to fill in gaps, complete sentences, transform sentences or complete exercises that promote accuracy and avoiding errors. All these techniques are currently used in the classroom, especially for lower levels of language proficiency for writing development, building vocabulary, scaffolding and increasing motivation and confidence in beginner learners.

2.4. The process approach

The process approach tends to focus on more varied classroom activities which encourage students to improve their language use. Students start generating ideas by brainstorming and discussion. Then, they organize ideas into a map which allows them to organize them hierarchically and define the structure of the text. Next, they start with their first draft, which is exchanged, revised and returned in order to be improved. Finally, students get ready to write the final outline.

These steps help learners to decide what to write about, how to organize what they write, and how to rewrite and revise what they wrote before getting the final draft. The steps are widely known as: pre–writing, writing the first draft, re-writing or revising and editing (Anstendig 1998:135). By following these steps carefully, learners could write more easily and get better results in their final production.

According to Zamel (1994:237), the original planning established by Flower and Hayes in 1981 is one of the most accepted by teachers nowadays because students have the opportunity to formulate their own ideas by an exploratory and generative process. The stages of planning, drafting, revising, and editing do not occur in a linear sequence but are simultaneous: learners can review, evaluate and revise their work at any moment. Even before the text has been produced, the writer can jump forwards or backwards to any of these activities in order to change or accommodate more data after more research on the topic has been conducted and improve their final version after going over feedback (McDougal 1990:290).

Some teachers who have adopted this approach argue that it encourages students to create their own personalized texts but it does not provide students with clear guidelines on how to construct the different kinds of text they have to write. Students could have disadvantages because they might not have a sound knowledge of these topics, so the teacher would need to help learners to acquire knowledge and create an appropriate schema for their work and he should also facilitate the information about the topic, structures and vocabulary they needed to create effective texts and various brainstorming tasks to generate ideas about their texts. These writing activities are useful for students with a good level of English proficiency since it is a more demanding approach that requires the students' cognition. It is also a good opportunity to encourage students to think about issues and topics to write in a new way and start producing their own essays. The following steps are recommended:

Pre-writing

One of the most important parts of the writing process takes place before the students put sentences together. This is called pre-writing or planning stage. During this stage learners have to accomplish two goals. The first one is to decide what they are writing about and find the best way to present ideas. In order to complete this first stage learners should start brainstorming topics that

are interesting for them, decide on the purpose of their writing, identify their audience, gather supporting information that may help them to sustain their ideas and strengthen and organize them. One interesting strategy is clustering or mapping (Anstendig 1998:245) by means of which students create a visual map springing from one word or phrase that serves as a nucleus.

Drafting

This is a similar process to the one artists make before they paint. Artists first make sketches previous to their final masterpieces. In the same way, writers need to present their ideas in an organized way. This act of writing is not a final step but an interim stage between gathering ideas and revising and editing. Students must be aware of the fact that this step is rough so they do not have to worry too much about details such as spelling or punctuation. They should rather concentrate on their ideas and let them flow smoothly. In order to make their writings more interesting, students should use some organizing strategies such as descriptions, showing how something looks, feels or smells; chronology, telling what comes first, second or next; use of analogies, comparing your point with something familiar; definitions, saying what something means, comparisons and argumentation (Hicks 1996:154).

Revising

This stage is very important since it determines how good a piece of writing is. During this stage students detect and correct inaccuracies in word meaning, grammar and spelling mistakes, etc. Learners may even want to begin all over again rearranging ideas or improving the way they have expressed them. They should be encouraged to make several drafts of a piece of writing until they are satisfied. The teacher can use symbols to show mistakes in the writing draft related to punctuation, spelling, capitalization, and grammar mistakes.

Editing

When writers are satisfied and believe that the writing is clear and correct, they write their final copy, making it as neat as possible. When students finish their final work, it is necessary that they proofread their final work again, reading it aloud so that ears can catch errors eyes have missed.

The chart below shows the contrast between the two approaches adopted: process writing and product writing. The approach depends on the type of students and on the type of genre. Letters or postcards, for example, are more liable to be developed following a product approach, since students only need to read, analyze and follow a given model because this type of texts is focused on layout, while narrative texts are more suitable for a process approach because they focus on the students' ideas.

Process writing	Product writing
• sharing and brainstorming ideas • text as a resource for comparison • ideas as starting point • more than one draft • more global, focus on purpose, theme, text type, i.e., reader is emphasised • collaborative • emphasis on creative process	• imitate model text • organisation of ideas more important than ideas themselves • one draft • features highlighted including controlled practice of those features • individual • emphasis on end product

Figure 1 (Adapted from the British Council web page: http://englishagenda.britishcouncil.org/sites/ec/files/ELT-14-screen_0.pdf)

Reading to write

Reading and writing are two processes that are interrelated: reading supports writing. Students first need good input in order to start their writing process. Reading and writing are inverse processes since "the writer transforms his ideas into print and the reader transforms the print into ideas" (Harp & Brewer 1991:264), then reading and writing are understood as parallel, connected and complementary processes.

After reading or writing, learners need to go through several stages of these two parallel processes. They need to read actively in order to check and organize the information learned; in this way they will be aware of the structures they find in a text and will be able to start to organize their ideas. The connection between reading and writing enables students to adapt the skills learned in one area to another. When learners read they increase their knowledge and use their newly-learned information when they write, but it is important to clarify that integrated reading-writing instruction is more than a linear process consisting in writing about what they have read, it is the result from participation in activities that enhance both reading and writing. That is to say: a good amount of reading activities provides students with good input to write (Harmer 2009:170).

Krashen (1985:76) states that successful writing cannot be acquired by practicing writing in isolation but it also needs to be supported with extensive reading. Both intensive and extensive reading have a good influence on composition skills in various stages of proficiency because both processes are involved in constructing meaning and in the activation of existing knowledge of structures and contents. Extensive reading can supply a wide knowledge of conventional features of written texts including vocabulary, grammar and text organization.

3. Methodology

This project is based on the principles of action research since it implies a reflective and problem-solving process. This research project started from my own observation that teachers avoid writing activities in English classes because they think these kinds of activities are stressful for them and for students as well. The first step was to find an approach and some strategies to implement in the classes in order to make writing activities more friendly for both teachers and students.

The institution

This university is located in the capital city of "Departamento de Santander", which offers academic programs for undergraduate, graduate students and also specializations and masters for a low-income community. The university has good facilities with a big campus in the city. It has an English lab, audiovisual rooms, computer rooms, auditoriums, specialized rooms and excellent sports fields, where all students feel comfortable. It is a public university. As it is a state university, students are usually in conflict due to the government policies, which causes disturbances and protests inside the institution with strikes that affect the academic progress of students. But taking into account the low prices degrees have, students must get good academic grades in order to ensure their stability at the university since its academic requirements are high. The number of students per group in English classes depends on the students enrolled but each group may vary between 15 and 30 students. The intensity devoted to English lessons is low: students only have five hours of fifty minutes per week in two sessions. The English department has all the resources teachers need to carry out their classes: good audio equipment, DVDs, TV, textbooks, videos, video beams, smart boards, a good English lab and rooms to develop English classes in a successful way.

The students

This project was carried out with two groups of students, 18 females and 12 males from a public University in Colombia;[1] they were from different academic programs and terms. English here was taken as a curricular subject, which means it is compulsory. Students are supposed to do four levels as a requirement to graduate. In spite of the differences in levels and semesters students were between 17 and 25 years old. Their age varied according to the semester they were doing. Most of them came from low-income families since the research context is a state university and its cost is low. This university is located in the capital city of Santander. Most students came from small towns and villages, which explains the deficiencies in their English proficiency since schools in towns and villages do not usually have good English coverage, which means either that those students had weaknesses in the L2 learning process or were just having their first contact with L2 learning. On the other hand, students who

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[1] Universidad Industrial de Santander. UIS.Located in Bucaramanga (Santander).

came from the city had better proficiency since city schools have better English coverage and some of them had the opportunity to take extra English courses at languages institutes.

In spite of these differences, all students were conscious of the importance that English had in their university studies and in their professional life which was the reason why most of them were willing to learn. Most of them had not had any experiences with writing: they said their latest teachers rarely included writing activities in the class and the times they did, they did not know how good or bad they were in the process, since feedback was never given.

They also expressed they had some weaknesses writing in their mother tongue because they did not have enough training in it, so writing in the L2 caused a feeling of frustration and apprehension.

The teachers

This institution had 35 qualified teachers, 20 women and 15 men with specializations or master's degrees, so they were conscious of the importance of improving the English learning process on their students and most of them focused on communicative approaches. Ten teachers were interviewed about the activities they usually did in their classes. Most of them stated that they avoided writing activities in the classroom because making corrections on the students' texts is a demanding task since ideas appeared terribly confused, especially during the first levels, and these activities were time consuming. Some of them agreed that they had to cover all the topics the syllabus proposed and time was not enough to develop all the activities that the book included and the extracurricular activities that the institution required. There was a group of teachers who claimed that writing activities could not be implemented during the first levels but only for the advanced ones because teachers could be wasting time. Some teachers said that they did implement writing activities but only for advanced level. However, they still had to spend lots of extra time checking and giving feedback to students.

Research Design

This project was carried out with two groups of students (18 females and 12 males) from different degrees and different levels. It is relevant to mention that students had not developed much awareness of the writing process; especially students from the first levels. During the first week of the first semester some questionnaires were administered in order to get information about the experience they had had with this skill and to know what they thought about the process they were about to start. In the same way, interviews were made to know which topics they would like to write about. During the second week, students were sensitized and encouraged to read some literary texts such as poems, riddles, tales and readings included in the guidebook. They took some texts to read at home and shared experiences during the following class.
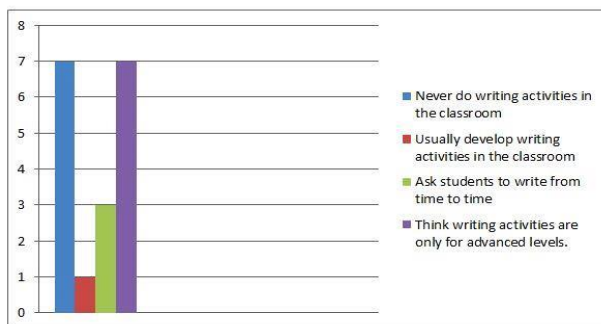
4. Objectives

1. General Objective

To improve the students' writing in English as a foreign language through the implementation of a series of writing workshops in first level students in undergraduate programs at a public university in Colombia.
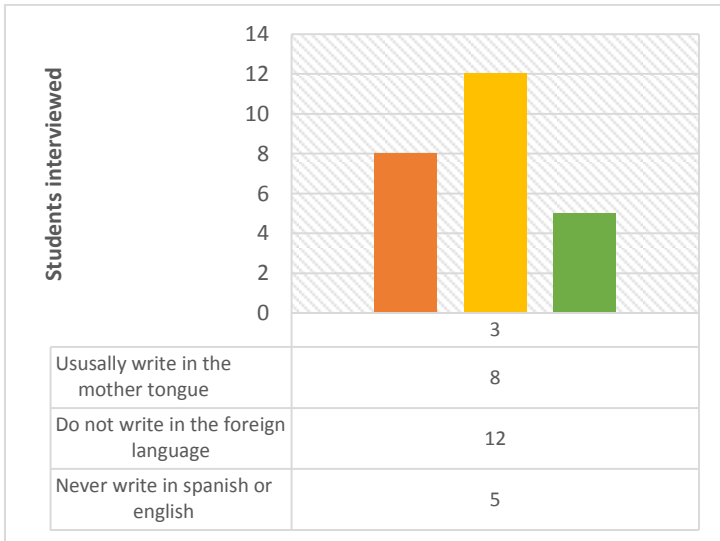
2. Specific Objectives

• To implement an approach to teach writing and observe the results it was having with students.

• To demonstrate that writing activities could be planned and developed from the first levels by giving students appropriate input and guided activities.

• To analyze thoroughly the current classroom reading habits and the students' proficiency, thoughts and beliefs related to the reading process.

• To know and analyze the frequency with which students read for pleasure and develop written activities in their English lessons.

• To know the regularity with which teachers carry out writing activities in the classroom and find out about the approach they use when they develop them.

• To plan and design strategies according to the analysis of the results and the theoretical support of some recognized linguists and researchers on the process of reading and writing.

• To observe the students' writing performance after the application of writing strategies through a series of reading workshops.

5. Results of the pre-treatments measures

To conduct this research, ten teachers were interviewed and fourteen students from the whole group of thirty in order to know about the teaching of the writing process in their classes. The results of their answers are reflected in the graphs below**.**

Teachers' writing practice in class. (Number of teachers interviewed: 10)

| Students interviewed	
Ususally write in the mother tongue	8
Do not write in the foreign language	12
Never write in spanish or english	5

Students' writing practice. (Number of students interviewed:14)

After the questionnaire and the interview with teachers and students were analyzed, it was noticed that teachers usually avoided writing activities since they claimed that students made a lot of mistakes when writing and it was too complicated to understand ideas in their texts because they do not know structures and vocabulary and usually introduce their mother tongue structures in their texts. Seven teachers interviewed stated that writing activities should be developed only for advanced levels. On the other hand, the students interviewed stated that they hardly ever wrote, either in their mother tongue, or in the foreign language.

It is important to mention that twenty students belonging to these two groups had not had good experiences with English at their schools and others were taking the same course for the second time, so my final purpose with this project was to make them feel confident and be conscious of their learning process.

For the implementation process to begin, the students were introduced to the general idea of the project and the kind of activities they would develop during the following weeks. They were also given the materials they would need. First, the students answered a questionnaire developed by the researcher to identify the students' reading difficulties and habits, their use of reading strategies, as well as their reading and writing habits and interests. The specific Reading Pre-test was used to identify the students' level of comprehension skills and their level of everyday vocabulary knowledge before planning pedagogical interventions, so that these results could be compared with the post-treatment test. According to this test, students had serious difficulties in reading comprehension, as will be

shown in the graph below. Thirty students were evaluated, fourteen got five correct answers out of ten, two students got three right and one student got four, which shows the lack of vocabulary students had.
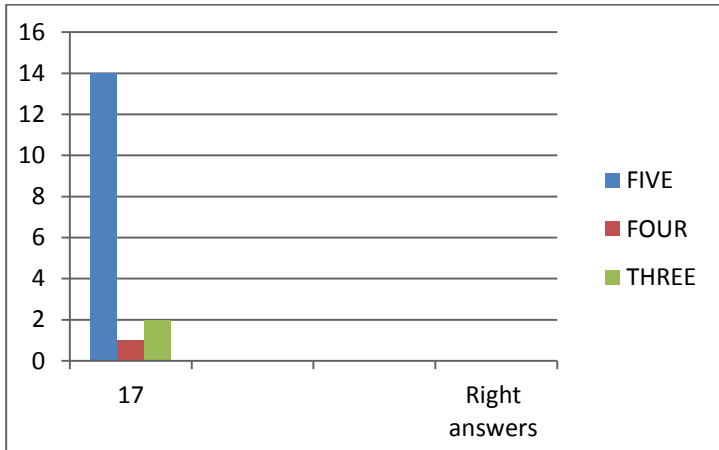
At the beginning some students were extremely unconfident and unenthusiastic writers, as the pre-treatment diagnostic test showed. They were asked to write about personal information. The texts they created were not good: they did not have much to say and there were a lot of grammar mistakes.

Pre-treatment diagnostic test

Implementation of the treatment

In order to start with the implementation of this project, first it was important to decide on the appropriate approach and to take into account the time students had per term and per week in order to plan the activities. The semester had 16 weeks and we had 5 hours a week, so we had a total of eighty hours per term. There were two sessions per week; each one lasted for two hours and thirty minutes.

During this process, students were motivated with the reading texts; they received enough input: students were provided with reading comprehension activities, vocabulary and structures bearing in mind the topics the text book proposed. Students read short tales, sometimes the mother tongue was used in order to negotiate meanings. Students practised extensive reading tasks. They were allowed to choose their own reading texts, according to their own likes and interests.

According to Krashen's Input Hypothesis', "the key factor determining acquisition of competence in an L2 is exposure to large amounts of meaningful, interesting, or relevant L2 input material" (Krashen 1985:93). Reading becomes comprehensible input provided that texts are both interesting and understandable so that they capture the learners' attention. His research on reading exposure supports the view that it increases not only reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition, but also improves grammatical development and writing style. He states that "reading exposure is the primary means of developing language skills" (Krashen 1985:122).

The second step in this process was to motivate students to write and create a welcoming environment to do that task. According to the text book the students used, the first topics had the following contents: personal information, introducing other people, the verb to be, pronouns and possessives. After the students had developed all the activities related to each topic, they were encouraged to write about themselves.

Other important strategies were to invite students to read their work or hear their work read by members of the class. Sharing with peers provides a powerful opportunity to reflect on one's own work. They were taught ways to organize their thoughts before putting them down on paper and made sure that they could produce clear and coherent texts.

Another important strategy was to provide time for peer-to-peer and student-to-teacher discussion prior to writing. They were asked to talk about their topics one-on-one with another student. Or conduct a thorough class discussion, writing key words on the board for reference. This opportunity allowed ESL students to try out and rehearse the foreign language to express their thoughts.

Before each writing activity, the whole class was conducted to a discussion about the topics they were going to write about. The topics were taught using the four skills, listening, reading, speaking and writing. Students first listened to information about the topic, then they read, then they spoke and wrote about it.

Vocabulary and structures were shown on the board for reference. During the writing activities students wrote their first draft by using handwriting, mistakes were checked and sometimes they did peer-reviewing as a cooperative learning strategy. Finally they typed their final version and sent it to me. To publish their writings, their pieces of work were displayed on the floor and I invited them to write about their classmates' texts and comment on them. Four workshops were applied.

In workshop one, students wrote about daily routines. It was noticed that they were more confident, and fewer questions were asked during the activity. For this activity, they were encouraged to make illustrations because drawing helps to organize thoughts. They first made drawings about their daily routines and shared the pictures before starting to write their compositions.

Continuing with the second workshop, physical appearance, it must be noticed that students were motivated: they enjoyed writing about others. The group showed interest in learning more vocabulary about physical appearance and they felt motivated towards using the dictionary. The activity was really enjoyable since they had to analyze and find the best way to describe people.

Concerning workshop number three, students brought pictures from their places of birth and they displayed them on the wall. The students first shared information about the town or cities where they were born, and they had the opportunity to ask questions about each other's place. This activity offered a great opportunity to correct and cover language in both the spoken and written forms. Finally, they started to write about this topic. Students showed their motivation, creating visual materials, adding pictures and different colors to make their texts more attractive.

Writing activities for workshop number four were closely related to daily routines. The first idea was to share information about the activities students usually do in a typical weekend by applying the vocabulary and structures they had learnt. At the end students were invited to read their work or listen to their work read by members of the class. This activity was helpful because sharing with their peers gave them a powerful opportunity to critically reflect on their own work.

The next workshop was about poetry. Students devoted part of the lesson to reading outside the classroom and sometimes we even read poems aloud. Poetry is more enjoyable when it is read aloud: students enjoyed doing it. During these sessions students had the opportunity to practise pronunciation, intonation, stress, rhythm, and oral expression. Reading poems facilitated comprehension of vocabulary, idioms, cultural aspects, and plot. This activity stimulated interest, conversation and interaction between students. It also created a good classroom atmosphere. Cooperative learning was materialized here because they were ready to help their peers when they made mistakes in pronunciation or intonation.

They were also ready to congratulate and value their peers' effort. After some sessions reading poems about different topics such as love, friendship and

some funny poems, I invited my students to write their own poems. I have exclusively included the last poems we read about colors. My students decided to take them as a model to write their own.

At the end of these workshops all the students' writings were shared with other teachers. Most of them showed motivation and wondered at the compositions by first level students. They showed admiration about the texts students were able to write and expressed their interest in developing this skill in the classroom. It was important because teachers that were skeptical at the beginning noticed that implementing writing skills was not a difficult task as they supposed.

The aim of the project was successfully achieved, since students wrote clear, coherent and well-structured texts making use of contextualized vocabulary and structures. On the other hand, writing in the class became a customary and completely familiar activity for students, without the constraints and stereotypical beliefs they used to have at the beginning. It must also be said the project motivated teachers, who were enthusiastic about it and started to implement it in the classroom.

6. Results of the post-treatment test

After the process students presented a post-treatment test. I introduced the topic they were going to write, I selected the same topic for the pre writing test in order to compare and notice their progress. During the writing activities students did their first draft by using handwriting, I checked their mistakes and sometimes they did peer-reviewing as a cooperative learning strategy. Finally, they typed their final version and sent it to me. To publish their writings I displayed all the pieces of work on the floor and invited them to write about their classmates' texts and comment on them.

Comparing the pre-treatment diagnostic test with the text that the same two students wrote after the pre-writing and reading activities. Students wrote interesting texts that were completely different and we can easily notice significant changes. Students wrote clear, coherent and well-structured texts making use of contextualized vocabulary and appropriate grammar structures, students were able to come up with new ideas to write their compositions. And their compositions clearly showed motivation**.**

On the other hand, writing in the class became a customary and completely familiar activity for students, without the constraints and stereotypical beliefs they used to have at the beginning. These results also motivated other teachers who were enthusiastic about it and started to implement the same strategies in the classes of English. During the writing activity students were more confident and enjoyed the activity, they were able to write a longer text, including new vocabulary, appropriate structures and clear information. Although they had some mistakes in the writing texts, there was a noticeable improvement. They were required to write information about their personal information, however

they decided to include diary routines, likes and dislikes. They made appropriate use of the verbs in the third person, frequency adverbs and verbs patterns to express likes and dislikes, besides, their writings had coherence and cohesion.

My full name is Lorena Duarte Peña, I'm seventeen years old, I'm from San Gil but I live in Bucaramanga, I'm a student, I study chemistry at UIS, I'm in first semester and I like my career. I have got a small family, my mother's name is Edilma Peña and my father's name is Fabio Duarte, I've got a brother, his name is David, he is thirteen years old and he is a student. My family lives in Bucaramanga with me, I love them.

I usually get up at six o'clock in the morning but on weekends I often get up at half past eight in the morning, then I take a shower and I brush my teeth. I usually have breakfast at half past six in the morning, I sometimes have egg, bread and chocolate for breakfast, I like it; I often start classes at seven o'clock, my favorite class is chemistry, I love it. I usually have lunch at twenty to one and I sometimes eat meat, rice, potato and salad, and I often drink natural juice, I don't like carrot juice. In the afternoon, I study, read and watch TV; I often play in the computer and I share with my family; I usually have dinner at seven o'clock, I sometimes eat fast food, my father dislikes the pizza, he likes hot dog. I often go to bed at half past ten at night.

On weekends I usually rest, watch TV and do the homework, I sometimes visit my grandparents, they live in Socorro. I often go to restaurants a lot or I go to cinema a lot. Sometimes, I also go swimming, I like leaving with my family and my friends. I love writing and reading, I hate playing soccer and volleyball.

My Life

My name is César Augusto Prada Medina, I'm nineteen years old and I'm from Bucaramanga. Now I live in Bucaramanga with my family and I study Biology at 'Universidad Industrial de Santander'. Initially I am going to talk about my family. My father is called Ricardo, he´s an electric engineer and he´s a quite person but he´s very intelligent. My mother is called Olga, she´s very demanding and wants that all people be too. I think that my mother is a good person and I'm sure that she loves me.

I have got an eldest brother and a younger sister. My brother is called Ricardo, he's twenty-four years old, he lives in Bogotá and he´s single but he´s got a girlfriend, her name is Natalia and she´s a doctor. They haven't got children. My sister's sixteen years old, she´s a student and I suppose that she´s single.

Is moment for talking about my life. I love many things but there are some things that I love so much. For example I love so much the Biology, to walk through natural roads, to read about politics, to drink a good coffee, to listen to classical music and obviously I love so much drinking a very cold drink with my best friends talking about our life and politics today.

Although I love many things, I hate others. For example I hate cleaning and washing my clothes. My favorite food is the fusion food (comida fusión), I love the exotic smell and taste that fusion food offers to me.

7. Conclusions

The most important factors in teaching writing are motivation and a good amount of input during the first stage of the writing process. Giving students motivating and clear instructions and presenting activities that are related to the topics students learnt in class are good strategies. If students are given a model for writing a text it is easier to come up with their own slightly different version.

Students need to participate or model FVR (Free Voluntary Reading). In other words, reading needs to become a structured class or family activity. Krashen (1985: 205) also provides a variety of research which asserts that reading affects our ability to write. He concludes that we do not learn to write by writing, but rather by reading. We acquire writing skills via exposure to written language-reading. He also suggests that parents and teachers should provide access to light reading, such as comic books, graphic novels, children's series, magazines and teen romances.

Another important factor in writing exercises is to get students to be personally involved in the writing process so as to make the learning experience one of lasting value. The role of the teacher in this process must be active since it requires high involvement, good selection of materials and topics and guidance with writing activities. All through this process learners should be encouraged to participate in all the activities programmed. The teacher should be clear about the type of activity s/he intends to develop.

The classroom atmosphere plays an important role because it can make students feel secure and prepared to take the risk to participate, so the first step is to make students feel they are not alone in the process but they have their teachers' support. It is also important to pay attention to the learners' language, culture, likes and preferences, using topics which are relevant to the learners' particular needs and focusing on meaningful communicative activities appropriate to the learner's age and needs. Last but not least, it is essential to ensure that assessment tasks, activities and criteria are relevant to the students' stage of English language development.

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ANNEX 1: Students' final compositions

MY FAVORITE TOWN

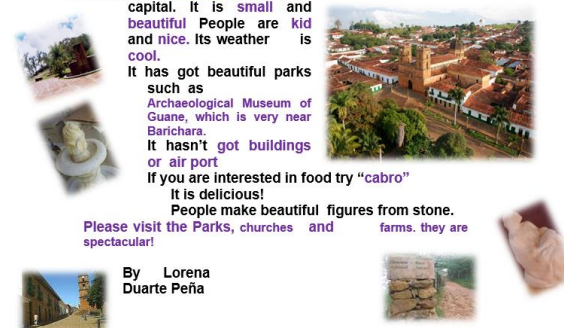Barichara is in Santander. It isn't the capital. It is small and beautiful People are kid and nice. Its weather is cool.

It has got beautiful parks such as Archaeological Museum of Guane, which is very near Barichara.

It hasn't got buildings or air port

If you are interested in food try "cabro" It is delicious!

People make beautiful figures from stone.

Please visit the Parks, churches and farms. they are spectacular!

By Lorena Duarte Peña

Pictures by Lorena Peña.

MY DAILY ROUTINES, LOVES, LIKES AND HATES

My name is Giselle and I am from Bogota, but now I live in Bucaramanga with my father. I am seventeen years old and I study law at the UIS

Every morning I usually get up at six o'clock, next I take a shower at half past six and I get dressed at seven o'clock. Then I often have breakfast at quarter past seven, I usually have eggs, bread and chocolate. After that I always go to university. my father. I usually Then I have lunch at twelve o'clock, I often have meet, rice, vegetables and juice. I sometimes have class in the afternoon. Finally I go back home to stay with have dinner at nine o'clock, I often do the homework at half past nine and go to bed at quarter past ten.

I love pop music, but I don't like reggaeton music. I like dancing in friend's parties and watching TV on weekend. I also like going to the cinema with my friends. I like surfing the internet, traveling to different places of Colombia and listening to music at night and like riding a bike. It is purple, fast and beautiful. I also love pets like dogs. I don't like drinking beers.

I hate football and spiders. I hate running and eating Chinese food and mushrooms, but I like chocolate ice cream. I also hate doing housework or doing nothing.

I love writing and receiving e-mails, because I want to make friends. I also love computer games, reading magazines and cooking. I want to know the other daily routines of my partner in the class room.

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1.   Musical Life

My name is Alejandro, I'm from Colombia and I Live in Bucaramanga. I have a small family, I only have a brother, his name is Mario, he is the oldest. My parents are called Olga and Eduardo. My girlfriend is fantastic, her name is Jessica, she is an accountant, she is intelligent, sweet and a wonderful woman. I study music at UIS University, I'm in second semester, and I like playing the piano, the guitar and the drums. I always listen to music at night, then go to sleep. My life is very musical, and i like it . I get up at seven o'clock in the morning, to go to the university, then, I go home at two o'clock. I Study in the afternoon and rest at night.

On weekends I like to the cinema, and playing football with my friends. I often go to the farm with my family, my mother loves nature. I would like playing drums around the world, accompany by all my family. This is my life, this is my musical life!

Students' poems

Names
César Prada   2090022
Luis Carlos Serrano 2090792
Elvis Damian Ordoz 2091619

Green is the nature
Green is feeling my breath
Green is the real peace
Green is taste of limon
Green are her beauty eyes
Green is my crazy loves for you

Names:- Paula Andrea Barrios
        - Giselle Paola Barajas
        - Lorena Duarte Peña
        - Ingrid Hernandez.

- Black is feeling of the loneliness
- Black is the beauty of the midnight
- Black is the symbol of elegance
- Black is the color of your mistery eyes
- Black are the fears that harass your life
- Black is the color hurt soul
- Black is your body's shadow that sun draws in the wall.

HEINER HERNANDO HERNANDEZ MOSCOSO   2091437
SAMMY MARTINEZ ULLOA   2092122
HUGO ARMANDO DÍAZ TOLOZA   2091336

GREEN IS THE SOUND OF NATURE,
GREEN IS THE COLOR OF LIFE,
GREEN IS THE FEELING OF HOPE,
GREEN IS THE AROM OF RIPERS FROITS,
GREEN IS THE COLOR OF THE EDUCATION,
GREEN IS THE COLOR OF PEACE, AND
GREEN IS THE BEGINNING OF LIFE.

Nelson Javier Mendes   2092042
Nixon   Cardona   20 92016
Andres   Arouyo   2100975
Xuli   Andrea lòpez   2092775

GREEN POEM

Green is hope of peace
Green are my country lands
Green is passion of my heart
Green is the color of my soccer team
Green is the sight of my soul
Green is the richness of my country

ANNEX 2: Some workshops.

CUTTING EDGE TEXT BOOK MODULES FOR FIST LEVEL

Activities: Writing Poems

To begin your own poem, write these five phrases, leaving space for him to complete the phrase:

> **In summertime, I see _____.**
>
> **In summertime, I hear _____.**
>
> **In summertime, I feel _____.**
>
> **In summertime, I taste _____.**
>
> **In summertime, I smell _____.**

Exercise I

Yesterday evening I got home from work at 6 o'clock. My wife had prepared dinner which we ate immediately. After I had cleaned up the kitchen, we watched TV for about an hour. Then we got ready to go out with some friends. Our friends arrived at about 9 o'clock and we chatted for a while. Later we decided to visit a jazz club and listen to some music. We really enjoyed ourselves and stayed late. We finally left at one o'clock in the morning.

Exercise II

Write out the following sentences onto a piece of paper to form a paragraph. Provide the correct form of the verb in the past and the correct prepositions.

- Yesterday evening Jack _____ (get) home _____ (preposition) half past five.
- He immediately _____ (make) himself a cup of _____ (preposition) coffee and _____ (sit down) to read a book.
- He _____ (read) the book _____ (preposition) half past seven.
- Then he _____ (make) dinner and _____ (get ready) to go out with his friends.

- When his friends _____ (arrive) they _____ (decide) to go out to see a film.
- He _____ (stay out) until midnight with his friends.
- Finally he _____ (fall) asleep _____ (preposition) about one o'clock.

Exercise III

Now that you have a good feeling for the form of a narrative paragraph. Fill in the gaps in this paragraph with information about what you did yesterday evening.

Yesterday evening _____ at _____ o'clock. I immediately _____. After _____, I (or we) _____. Then I (or we) _____. I (or we) _____a while. Later I (or we) _____. I (or we) finally _____.

Exercise IV

Answer the following questions by choosing the words that best fit your habits.

- When do you get up?

I *usually / sometimes / rarely* get up *early / late* .

- What do you usually do on Saturday mornings?

I *often / sometimes / never* go to *the supermarket / the gym / the park* to *do some shopping / take a walk / get fit* .

- Do you go to *the temple / the mosque / church* on *Fridays / Saturdays / Sundays* ?

Yes / No , I *go / don't go* to *the temple / the mosque / church* on *Fridays / Saturdays / Sundays* .

- What do you like doing in your free time?

Sometimes / Often I like *reading books / playing sports / watching TV / listening to music / walking in the countryside* . I also *sometimes / often* like *reading books / playing sports / watching TV / listening to music walking in the countryside* .

Exercise V

Now that you have a good feeling for the form of a narrative paragraph describing habits, fill in the gaps in this paragraph with information about what you usually do on Sundays.

**Sunday is a _____ day for me. I _____ like _____. I _____ get up _____ and then I _____. After _____, I often go _____.
Sometimes, I like _____ . In the evening, I _____ like _____ . I usually go to bed around _____.**

Free Practice

Ask friends about what they usually do on Sundays and write a narrative paragraph describing their Sunday habits.

ANNEX 3: Questionnaires

<u>QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDENTS</u>.

Read the next questionnaire attentively and answer the questions according to the given indications:

1. Do you like to read in English?   Yes   No
2. How many hours do you read in English at your school/at your home per week?

            _____ hours at school
            _____ hours at home

3. Do you usually write in Spanish? Yes_____ No _____

4. Do you usually write in English?   Yes_____ No _____

5. What is your main writing difficulty in English/ in Spanish? (you can check one or two options in each column)

        <u>English</u>   <u>Spanish</u>

        _____ the unknown vocabulary   _____ the unknown vocabulary
        _____ the unknown structures   _____ the unknown structures
        _____ to organize my ideas   _____ to organize my ideas
        _____ to apply structures   _____ to apply structures
        _____ to support the ideas   _____ to support ideas
        _____ to get a good text structure   _____ to get a good text structure

6. What kind of topics would you like to write about?
____poetry ____ personal anecdotes ____ messages ___ articles   on specific topics ____ tales ____ letters for friends ___ postcards ___ formal letters

7. Why is it important for you to learn to write in English? (you can check one or two options)

_____ to communicate ideas in a proper way
_____ to register important events
_____ to practice and apply structures I have learnt
_____ because writing helps to learn English
_____ for other reasons
What reasons? _____

8. Does anybody or anything motivate you to read and write in English? (you can check one or two options)

_____ my parents
_____ my friends and classmates   _____ magazines
_____ my English teacher   _____ some interesting books
_____ internet pages

9. Mention three books you have recently read in Spanish.
a. _____
b. _____
c. _____

10. Mention three books or tales you have read in English.

a.   _____
b.   _____
c.   _____

<u>PRE-TREATMENT QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TEACHERS OF THE PROGRAM</u>

1.Do you usually motivate your students to read for pleasure and write? Yes_____ No_____
Why?
_____
_____
2.How often do you carry out writing activities in the classroom?
_____
3.Has it been easy or difficult to carry out writing activities with your students? Describe about your experience.
4.What has been the main writing difficulties you have realized on your students?
5.What do you think is the best moment to carry out writing activities?
6.What kind of topics do you usually ask your students to write about?
7.What kind or reading approaches do you implement in the class: intensive or extensive reading?
8.What kind of activities do you develop during the reading activities? (skimming /scanning)