Writing process to improve journalism students' skills of the Technical University of Babahoyo

Proceso de escritura para mejorar las habilidades de los estudiantes de periodismo de la Universidad Técnica de Babahoyo

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ABSTRACT

Since the early days, writing has been considered as one of the most challenging skills to be promoted to students around the world because of writing, in a foreign language, reveals for many studies to be placed at a different level of complexity. On the one hand, the students' mother tongue interferes with the development of a foreign language, and they are also unwilling to write. On the other hand, other reasons can be connected on why students show difficulties in writing tasks, and that is why writing must be researched deeper. Therefore, this case study attempts to enhance students writing skills of fifth semester students of journalism school through the use of writing process, as well as, Anthony's quadrants method to gather the evidence. This study is developed in four sections. In the first part, it is detailed the core of the problem and the students' background in which this case study is focused on. The second part

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provides reliable information concerning the evidence gotten with the method applied throughout the writing process. The third part states the results and its analysis. In the last part details the conclusions of this case study based on the findings.

Keywords: *writing skills, the writing process, compositions, the students' background, Anthony's quadrant method, level of complexity*

RESUMEN

Desde los inicios, la escritura ha sido considerada como una de las destrezas más desafiantes para ser promovida en los estudiantes alrededor del mundo debido a que, según estudios realizados la escritura de una lengua extranjera tiene un mayor grado de complejidad. Por un lado, la interferencia de la lengua materna en el desarrollo de la escritura de un idioma extranjero, y a su vez, motivarlos a desarrollar la destreza de escribir. Otras razones pueden estar conectadas sobre el porqué los estudiantes muestran dificultades en las tareas de escritura, y por ello esta debe ser investigada con mayor profundidad. El propósito de este caso de estudio es mejorar las destrezas de escritura de los estudiantes de quinto semestre de la carrera de comunicación social mediante el proceso de escritura, así como también, el método Cuadrantes de Antony para obtener la evidencia. Este estudio está dividido en cuatro secciones. La primera sección detalla el problema central y los antecedentes de los estudiantes en el cual este caso de estudio está enfocado. La segunda parte provee información confiable de acuerdo con la evidencia obtenida con el método aplicado a través del proceso de escritura. La tercera parte determina los resultados y su análisis. La ultima parte detalla las conclusiones en base en los resultados encontrados en este caso de estudio.

Palabras claves: habilidad de escritura, proceso de escritura, composiciones, antecedentes de los estudiantes, método Cuadrantes de Antonio, nivel de complejidad

INTRODUCTION

"Writing is a personal act in which writers take ideas or prompts and transform them into "self-initiated" topics." Sari, & Kaba, 2019; in Hamp-Lyons 1990; O'Malley, & Pierce (1996:136). Since last 8 years learning English language in Ecuador has been disseminated as a compulsory requirement in high school and universities which has made students wake up their keens in acquiring this foreign language. However, teaching English, nowadays, needs to be improved

so Ecuadorian students can be competitive with international standards and be able to apply scholarships abroad, especially in public educational centers. On the other hand, writing is a skill that the students struggle most of the time at the moment of creating writing compositions. That's why, as teachers devote less time developing writing tasks in class.

At the Technical University of Babahoyo, the students are reluctant to write short or long compositions neither because most of them have no idea how to start writing, and other students dislike doing it. Thus, the writing section of the exams are left in blanks or showed inaccurate, isolated with poor ideas. The importance of this study is to find out why students show such difficulties in developing their writing skills in order to upgrade their writing conditions. For this reason, it was needed to involve a course of thirty-six students who are at fifth semester of journalism school in order to analyze their weaknesses and strengths throughout the application of each stage in the writing process as strategies of learning. All the evidence was collected with the use of Anthony's quadrants method.

These students, who were chosen to enhance their writing skills showed the same writing problems, but expressed different levels of proficiency, thus they were split in two groups allowing a comparison between the two subjects to be made. One student group will be referred to as students *A* and the other as students *B* throughout this paper. Both group of students, *A & B,* are currently on the same English classes, but in different schedules, which are considered to be pre-intermediate level courses regarding the level of language proficiency according to CEFR. Nonetheless, the students do not have the same module of fluency given that students *A* reached a grade of 7 out of 10 on the writing section of the entry test, while students *B* got 8 out of 10, but they both wrote small details in the writing section.

On the one hand, *Students A* are on theirs 20 years old and live with their families in rural areas, so *A* travel every day to study in this university. Although *A´s* class schedule is reduced, these students participate actively in class. The majority of *A´s* writing compositions are very short but have very long sentences that seem never to end. So, we would call them "run-ons" and need to be broken up into several sentences. On the other hand, Students *B* are also on their 20 years old, but *B*'s families live in urban areas, and the schools that *B* attended are considered relatively "decent" in teaching English. It could be said that *B´s* schooling backgrounds are relatively "good." Regarding to participating in class, *B* are quiet students who speak lowly but usually

provide the right answers when asked questions about general English topics covered in class. However, **B** shows the same writing issues as **A**.

These issues are highlighted in this study, due to, both groups of students **A** & **B** are good participants, but they do not write accurately and efficiently in their compositions.

In this case study, the methodology section displays the data collection process gathered in each stage of the writing, as well as, the data analysis which provides a wider perspective comparing a prior writing task vs a composition after the application of the writing strategies. Results and Conclusions sections are focused on the analysis of the evidence gathered in the writing process.

METHODOLOGY

The type of this method is exploratory because it is a useful strategy when developing and testing a new instrument according to research Rundowns (2018). Furthermore, it allows to analyze socially constructed nature of the reality in the writing process. The data gathered in this study is going to be divided into two sections, data collection and data analysis. Based on Anthony Quadrants, the data collection was gathered to evidence both students' progress in the writing process throughout the use of the classroom measure, observation process and observation product due to the fact they can be used to assess the four skills (Kuhlman, 2017). The analysis is focused on the evidence that the students provide during this observational study.

1. Data Collection

To collect the information in the present case study, "Anthony´s Quadrants" were taken into account which are classroom measure, observation process, and observation product. They were helpful to evaluate the whole process of teaching writing skills to two group of students.

Classroom measure

The evidence collected in this quadrant was focused on practicing grammatical structures and lexical forms taught previously. First, they identified and classified specific groups of the word from a reading activity. They also completed an e-mail with the missing words to make a reservation in a luxury hotel, and then they wrote a new one using the model of the first e-mail which was evaluated through criteria for assessing writing.

Observation of process

The performance-based assessment was composed of writing a final unit project where both groups of students *A & B* wrote about their ideal vacation. Thus, the data source in this quadrant

used anecdotal records to monitor the written work of the students in each stage. It attempts to give teachers insights into what learning strategies students felt more confident and comfortable. Then, the interpretation of the comments and the observation was reflected in a process writing checklist to be presented as a final report of the assessment.

Peer-assessment was also applied in the editing stage so as to students learn to gauge the work of their peers by recognizing whether or not the writing process stages were used to their peers' work. Furthermore, they corrected grammatical and lexical form errors.

Observation Product

So that students could be aware of their learning strategy use, they were provided self-assessment of writing strategies in this quadrant. It tries to give students positive and constructive feedback on their strategy selections. Finally, criteria for assessing writing to evaluate the final product and a learning log were also other data sources involved in this research to know how students felt after the whole process.

2. Data Analysis

The usefulness of this case study is that it could be applied to the rest of students, who present similar writing conditions as these groups of students *A & B*, so they can enhance their writing skills. That is why this analysis attempts to show how was carried out the development of the writing process in the classroom through the use of performance-based assessment with the integration of the four skills.

In the ***classroom measure,*** first intervention asked both, students *A & B* to classify groups of words in a table from a previous reading with the aim they can be able to identify the word order used in sentences. See picture one. So, both groups of students, *A & B* chose a small paragraph to write in the right column of the table, the nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and prepositions. Then, the key answers were shown to students *A & B* to compare theirs by crossing out the wrong words, picking the right ones, and also write and underline the missing ones. It could help both groups of students reduce the most common mistakes that they make in their writing tasks. The following analysis reflects fundamental viewpoints that will assist in the improvement of the students' writing skills over time.

In picture two, it can see that one of students *A* shows difficulties in recognizing adjectives and some nouns, but he/she could identify the prepositions and verbs. It demonstrates that although the text was accessible, this student A had problems.

Picture N° 1. This is a classroom activity that involves the four skills (Oxenden, Clive, Latham-Koenig, Christina, Seligson, Paul: Books., 2020).

Picture N° 2. This is one of the students A' evidence performed in class prior the writing process.

In picture three, one of the students ***B*** more accurately identified verbs and prepositions, but ***B*** also shows problems with the recognition of some nouns and adjectives.

Picture N° 3. This is student B' evidence performed in class prior the writing process.

As a second intervention to evaluate the same quadrant, students completed an e-mail about making a reservation in one of the most luxurious hotels, the same model that was used as a

model to write their email later. The goal of this activity was to make students refresh their memory and relearn vocabulary about vacations, and also measure their language knowledge about this topic.

In picture four, it is seen that the same student *A* could not match two words successfully in spite that they were given the missing words. Meanwhile, in picture five, the same student *B* could do it perfectly.

Picture N° 4. This is student A' evidence performed in class prior the writing process (Oxenden, Clive, Latham-Koenig, Christina, Seligson, Paul: Books., 2020).

Picture N° 5. This is student B' evidence performed in class prior the writing process.

Although this student *A* used the model of the previous exercise, this student had mechanic problems like punctuation, spelling, and capitalization as it is illustrated in picture six. Above all, it is not seen in the text a huge variation in comparison with the original model which means

that students do not feel the confidence to write his/her own ideas. Perhaps, it makes students reluctant to write creatively.
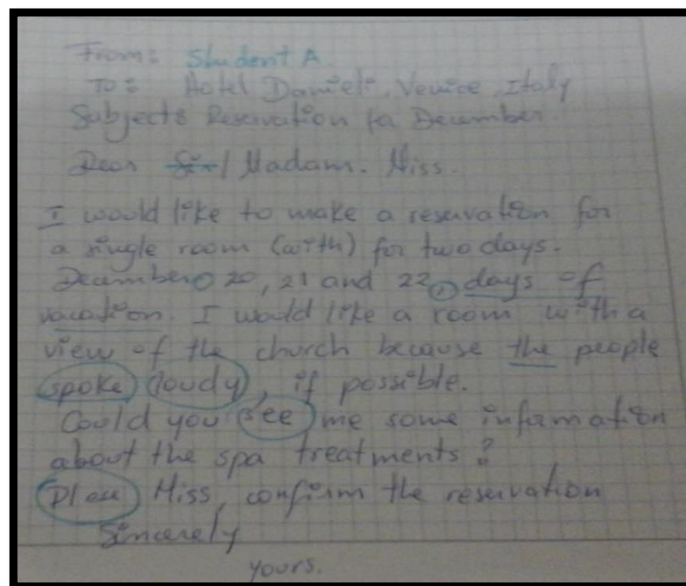
Picture N° 6. This is student A' evidence performed in class prior the writing process.

In picture seven, student **B** had problems with spelling, punctuation, and word use, but also with the format. Nevertheless, it can be seen clearly from the picture that the text had shifts which indicate that **B** wrote his/her ideas without using the text of the model.
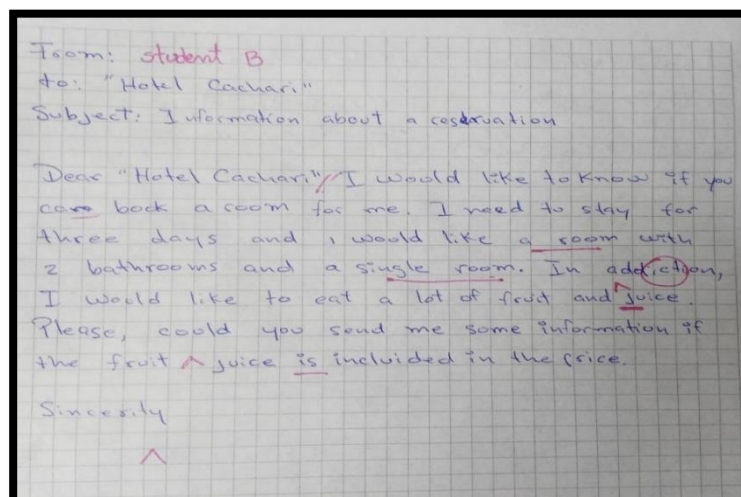
Picture N° 7. This is student B' evidence performed in class prior the writing process.

Writing process

As regard, the evidence collected on performance-based assessment, where, both students *A &
B* wrote a project about a description of their ideal vacation, revealed variations in their attitudes
towards writing.

In the prewriting stage, both students *A & B* had difficulties in stating their purpose and thoughts
clearly to make each students' outline. The notes from the anecdotal records taken at this stage
express the following issues:

Students *A* indicated that "*it was hard to start the composition because they did not know what
to write.*"

Moreover, students *B* pleaded complained that *"it was never taught in class before because the
writing was done as an informal task comprised of four or five lines, not formally that implies
to make a project of 150 words".*

Based on these previous notes and the pictures eight and nine below, it is seen that students *A*
could do this stage showing few problems, while students *B* could perform it; however, they
emphasized that "*through these instructions, they could organize better their thoughts when they
start writing on a particular topic.*"
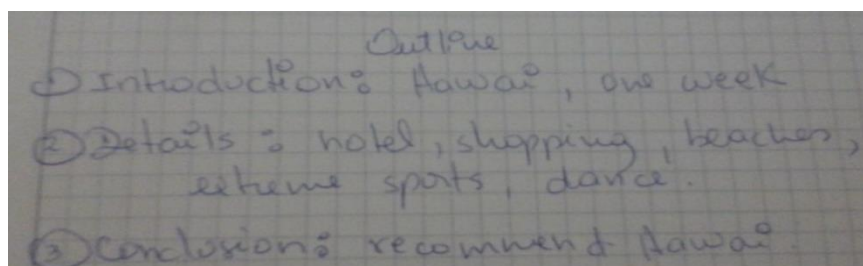
Picture N° 8. This is student A' evidence performed in prewriting stage.
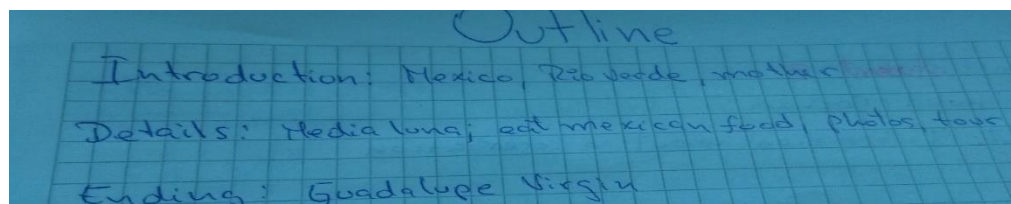
Picture N° 9. This is student B' evidence performed in prewriting stage.

In the ***drafting stage***, both groups of students wrote their first draft in class in 30 minutes which helped monitor their weaknesses more than their strengths. During this intervention, the student's comments and attitudes appealed the attention such as:

Students *A* alleged that *"30 minutes was not enough to write the whole outline wasting time and showing difficulties"*.

It reveals that this group does like to write; perhaps the reason is that group *A* feel insecure about writing. Students *B* started writing immediately and during this stage kept quietly doing it alone with the help of a dictionary. It makes the distinction between the other group; perhaps students *B* like writing.

In ***revising stage*** according to anecdotal notes, it was observed that the students *A* made more adjustments than students *B*. Maybe, the students *A* felt unsecured on their ideas, while, the students *B* made few changes not to use repetitive and straightforward words. Moreover, for ***editing stage***, students exchanged their writing, and they were provided a Peer Evaluation and Editing Form for Writing.

As shown in picture ten the peer assessment corrections to students *A*, which are partly accurate. Those corrections highlight that students *A's* works provided extensive and well-organized texts (beginning, middle and ending), but with poor grammatical variations such as "***I would***" that was overused. Additionally, mechanical problems for instance in spelling "***ordinal numbers***," in punctuation "***period and question marks***", but Student A had a clear idea of how to spend the week, even if it is a little naïve. For instance:

Picture N° 10. This is one of students A' evidence performed in the revising and editing stages.

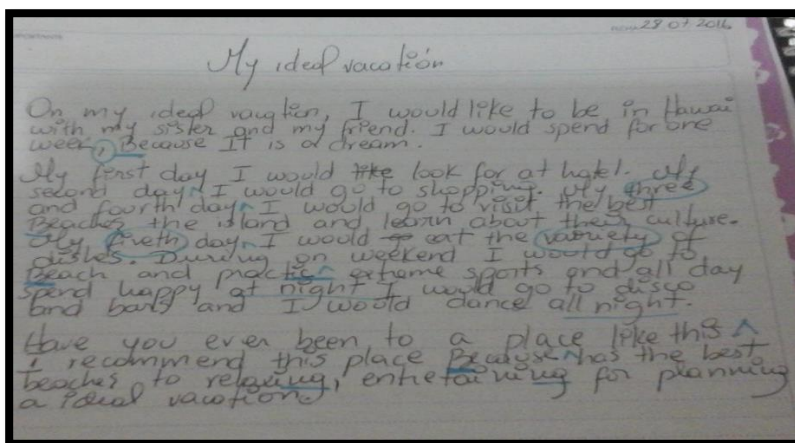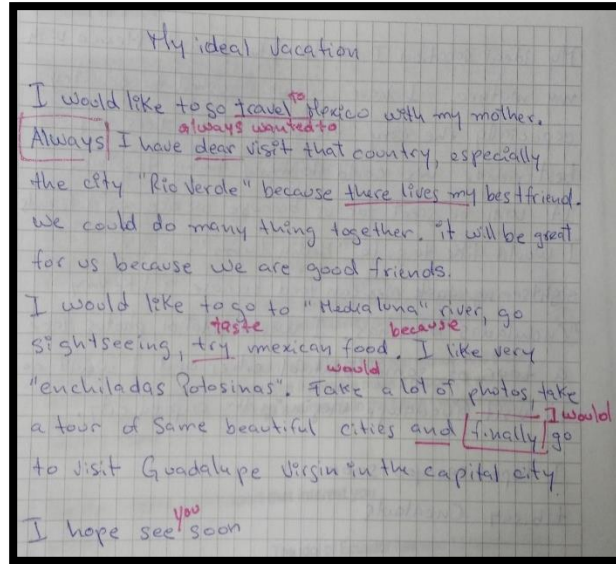**Picture N° 11. This is one of student B' evidence performed in class prior the writing process.**

In picture eleven student ***B's*** evidence text shows the inappropriate use of word and sentence, for instance, the incorrect subject-verb agreement "***go travel***" or "***dear***" instead of "***want***," and also incomplete sentences with mechanics problems such as punctuation and spelling. The text is short, and there is not a definite ending. Nevertheless, the whole text is partly organized with good details in the middle which makes it understandable, and also it shows more grammar variation and vocabulary.

Finally, for ***publishing stage***, both students ***A & B*** presented the final projects, and they were also asked to bring a previous writing which was sent as homework a week ago to make a comparison whether or not they had improved their writing skills.

C. Results

In the two charts below are described the analysis of both tasks shows before and after the application of the writing process of each group.

Students A:	Before the process	After the process
Purpose and Organization	Unclear ideas, confusing words and incoherent ideas.	Well-organized text (introduction, details, and conclusion), coherent ideas.

Word / Sentence Use	Overuse simple words and long sentences.	Few new words, short sentences, and overuse of "would" but it was understood.
Mechanics / Format	Some spelling, punctuation and capitalization problems.	Few spelling and punctuation issues, but there were not capitalization problems.
Editing	It was not applied.	Re-read and peer-assessment

This information was obtained from the criteria for assessing writing of the unit project.

Students B:	Before	Now
Purpose and Organization	Disorganized text, few bright ideas, and confusing words.	Well-organized text (introduction and details, but a weak conclusion), some coherent ideas.
Word / Sentence Use	Repetitive words, long sentences without ending, grammatical difficulties.	Few grammatical structures problems and few new lexical forms provided.
Mechanics / Format	Some spelling and punctuation problems, but there were not capitalization problems.	Few punctuation problems.
Editing	It was not applied.	Re-read and peer-assessment

This information was obtained from the criteria for assessing writing of the unit project.

The criteria from both tables demonstrate that students *A* and students *B* have enhanced in different writing areas. On the one hand, both groups of students show improvement in the organization of their text with clear ideas and purpose, as well as, provided a few new words. However, it is needed to recall punctuation and subject-verb agreement. On the other hand, both groups of students **A & B***'s* confidence increased and soured after checking their drafts by themselves and peers, due to the fact, they receive feedback.

Broadly speaking, it is seen the enhancement of students' writing skills in this study, based on the analysis of the shreds of evidence which show twelve students of group B out of eighteen had their last writing tasks improved rather than group A, with eight students out of eighteen.

Nevertheless, it is important to mention that students performed a better composition in comparison with their earlier tasks. Although it was provided additional evidence on the improvement of students' writing skills, they were asked as homework to write a composition about "what makes them be unique" by using the writing strategies they have already learned in the process.

D. Conclusion

This study has highlighted the importance of enhancing students' writing skills to write compositions in a creative way. In addition, the students at this university can improve their writing grades as shown both groups, once more than the other because their learning backgrounds. The findings of this observation express that many students could present writing difficulties when the writing process was not explained to them or employed in class which is what happened in this case study based on the results and analysis of the information collected through "Anthony's Quadrants". According to many types of research conducted in Karachi, most of the time young students' writing difficulties are due to the lack of teacher training. In addition to this, Yaacob (2019) states based on the findings of a study in Indonesia that "the teachers used limited strategies in teaching writing due to their lack of knowledge and understanding of the writing approaches". To whom at first glance, assigning and gauging writing tasks seems like a simple matter (Oberman and Kapka, 2001, cited in Nasir, L., Naqvi, S., Bhamani, Sh., 2013, p.1). This might be suggested as another source of the problem which could be taken into account as an important implication for solving in a future research project. Such situations, (Nasir, L., Naqvi, S., Bhamani, Sh., 2013, p.1) indicate that the writing process must be developed adequately and more efficiently, it makes use of the five stages which are comprised of Prewriting, Drafting, Revising, Editing, and Publishing. They also say that these steps should not be developed in this order, meaning that one of them could be skipped and introduced at another moment which means it will depend on the needs of the students.

For instance, it is seen that students' B are more sophisticated than students A's concerning on their writing compositions about vacations. Students A wrote random things, organized by day which displayed not only lexical limitations but also subject-verb agreement limitation. Whereas students B had a purpose and gave details about each part of the vacations, so there is more depth to the content, but this student shows many mechanical errors.

To monitor students' progress in the writing process, (O'Malley and Pierce, 1996, p.148) say that teachers must apply writing strategies that assist them in accomplishing the enhancement of students' writing skills in each stage. According to (Calkins, 1986, Mak & Conium, 2008, Walker et al, 2005 & Nasir et al., 2013, cited in Parida, Rout, & Swain, 2016, p.20) they suggested that "every stage of the writing process should be studied and demonstrated by both, teachers and the students in order to develop the writing abilities". Thus, to illustrate, teachers could implement writing conferences, written summaries, and self-assessments in writings such as dialogue journals, learning logs, surveys of interest and awareness, writing strategies and checklists, as well as, peer assessments in the pre-writing, production, and post-writing stages. Another fundamental issue in this study is that students had difficulties in mechanics and word/sentence use problems. As cited in Coombe, C. (Weigle, 2002) states that "writing is often seen as a support skill for practicing the structures and vocabulary taught in class." This emphasizes that conducting writing assessments should involve using a broad scale of criteria when evaluating students' writing. It must call the teacher's attention when it is administered tests to students who should be straightforward and accurate whether the aim is to assess specific language structures or grammatical and lexical forms learned in class. She also states that "in all tests, issues of reliability, validity, and practicality must be considered, both regarding a task or prompt and concerning scoring."

On the one hand, regarding evaluating tasks, ensuring reliability involves ensuring that every student is measured equally given the same instructions under the same standards, such as time and topic; meanwhile, concerning scoring, every student should be applied to the same criteria of evaluation. On the other hand, validity concerns the content of test or writing assessment which would be representative of the skills and knowledge being taught. Meanwhile, regarding scoring, it implies that the criteria used to evaluate students' writing would be stated clearly in the scoring rubric, and at the moment they are being employed by the teacher (s) who is scoring the test.

Above all, the tests should be practical, which means the involvement of realistic expectations such as the time they could take to perform it, the time to score the responses, and also, the time for the actual test administration. Finally, as cited in Coombe, C. (Weigle, 2002) also highlights that teachers are not willing to spend time in class correcting papers, rather they should spend the time helping the student to create writing without pressure. She considers a great alternative

idea for many writing teachers, which is the use of portfolio assessment, where students could submit all writing tasks once they have been revised based on teacher or peer feedback. It is also other approach could be applied in a future study.

To sum up, it is remarkable important that the recommendations mentioned above must be disseminated to both teachers and students to be taken into consideration and contribute to the student´s development writing tasks. It is expected that this research will also contribute for solving future studies on writing skills.

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