

IMPROVING ACADEMIC WRITING IN AN ELT PROGRAM THROUGH WRITERS'
WORKSHOPS

KATHERINE BENJUMEA ECHEVERRI

LILIANA ESCOBAR MARÍN

VANESSA MORALES CASTILLO

UNIVERSIDAD TECNOLÓGICA DE PEREIRA
FACULTAD DE BELLAS ARTES Y HUMANIDADES
LICENCIATURA EN LENGUA INGLESA
PEREIRA-COLOMBIA

2011

IMPROVING ACADEMIC WRITING IN AN ELT PROGRAM THROUGH WRITERS'
WORKSHOPS

KATHERINE BENJUMEA ECHEVERRI

LILIANA ESCOBAR MARÍN

VANESSA MORALES CASTILLO

Trabajo de grado presentado como requisito parcial para obtener el título de
Licenciado en Lengua Inglesa

Asesor

Harold Álvarez Cortés

UNIVERSIDAD TECNOLÓGICA DE PEREIRA
FACULTAD DE BELLAS ARTES Y HUMANIDADES
LICENCIATURA EN LENGUA INGLESA
PEREIRA-COLOMBIA

TABLE OF CONTENT

Statement of the problem	10
Our Study and Research Questions	14
Theoretical Framework	15
Literature Review	20
Methodology	27
Type of study.....	27
Context	27
Participants.....	29
Researchers' Role.....	30
Instructional Design.....	31
Data Collection Methods.....	32
Data Analysis.....	34
Findings and Discussion.....	36
Students' conceptions towards academic writing.....	36
Students' conceptions towards the English composition course.....	36
Students' definition of academic writing.....	36
Students' difficulties with academic writing.....	38

Students' writing strategies.....	40
Students as academic writers	42
The role of the teacher on the students' motivation to write.....	44
Students' conceptions towards the writer's workshops.....	45
Positive impact of the writers workshops on students	45
Students as academic writers after the writers' workshops	46
The role of the teacher on students' motivation in the writers' workshops....	48
Students' writing production during the writers' workshops.....	50
Collaborative work and feedback.....	50
Students' writing strategies after the writers' workshops.....	52
The students' ideas in the academic written texts.....	55
The students' organization in their essays	58
Students' use of voice in their essays.....	62
The students' word choice in their essays.....	65
Students' sentence fluency in their essays.....	68
The students' use of conventions in their essay.....	72
Pedagogical Implications.....	76
Limitations of the study.....	78
Conclusions	79

References..... 83

Appendixes.....86

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Writing is an important skill in the language learning process, both in the mother tongue and in a foreign language. Its importance lies in that writing is an essential tool for intellectual growth because it is a process which helps writers to improve their critical thinking skills. Writing reflects and generates thought which EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students can use to create meaningful messages through a structured, organized and conscious writing process, which involves different stages such as brainstorming, drafting, revising and editing.

However, writing is not only the production of written texts, nor an individual and a solitary activity. Writing is also a social practice associated with different contexts having different purposes, uses and characteristics (Hyland, 2002). In the case of our study, academic writing takes place in a college setting for an academic audience: the English Language Teaching (ELT) program, which is characterized by sophisticated language, because of the use of formal or academic vocabulary. Academic writing is addressed to a particular audience depending on the area of knowledge. When EFL writers are composing their texts, they need assistance from the teacher and their peers.

It is very important that undergraduate students from the ELT program refine their writing skills in order to produce high-quality written texts in academic settings (Zúñiga & Macías, 2006). As students in the ELT program, we have faced difficulties when writing

academic papers. That is why we decided to choose the English Composition course as our particular population from the ELT program.

The Plan Nacional de Bilingüismo (PNB) in the present system of education in Colombia requires new graduates from ELT programs to have an English level equivalent to C1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL) (MEN, 2006). According to the CEFRL, at this level of proficiency students can express themselves in clear and well-structured texts, they can write about complex subjects in letters, reports or essays, and they can choose a style appropriate to the reader in mind. This means that students at this level of proficiency are able to produce academic written texts.

Nevertheless, the Ministry of Education in Colombia (MEN) has reported that bilingual teachers have a low-proficiency in the English language. The MEN presented a diagnosis which revealed that 63% of the English teachers from a sample of the central-Andean region of the country only reach the basic levels required by the CEFRL: A1 and A2. At these levels of proficiency, users can write simple letters, e-mails and postcards. Thus, if teachers are in those levels of proficiency, it is likely that they are not able to produce long and well-structured written texts; they can only write simple sentences. Therefore, we can assume that most of the bilingual teachers in Colombia are not capable of writing academically.

In view of teachers' low proficiency in academic writing, Zúñiga & Macías (2006) consider that the matter of introducing feedback through collaborative workshops in the classroom is very important to help students to write academically and use critical thinking to revise their papers. Using this strategy can help ELT undergraduate students to improve their written academic texts and their use of English. Thus, learners could obtain a higher-proficiency level of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) because, as we explained before, writing is an essential tool for intellectual growth in language learning.

Concerning academic writing, Zúñiga & Macías (2006) state that guiding the students' writing through workshops, where the learners can use brainstorming, drafting, sharing (peer-feedback), revising and editing is useful because they can be conscious about their performance and get better results in academic writing. Pappamihiel, Nishimata & Mihai (2008) also point out that the writing process involves cooperative activities in the classroom developed through invention, drafting, reviewing and revising.

The writing process must be seen as a positive and encouraging practice which includes collaborative workshops helping students to compose better written academic papers with minimal instruction from the teacher (Silva, 1990. Taken from Pappamihiel, Nishimata & Mihai, 2008). Otherwise, writing is defined by Murray (1972) as a process not a product which is divided into three stages: prewriting, writing and rewriting. However, Peha (1995-2010), has divided the process of writing into more stages such as pre-writing, drafting, sharing, revising, editing, publishing, and assessing. The author considers that the writing

process is a set of discrete stages where a writer engages in certain writing activities which change as the stages evolve.

OUR STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To explore the issues that surround the process of academic writing, we investigated how the implementation of writing strategies through writers' workshops – an approach to teaching writing in which the students can share ideas with their peers in order to develop their writing skills – could improve the quality of students' academic essays related to educational fields. That is why we decided to conduct this research project in an attempt to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the conceptions of the English Composition students from the ELT program towards academic writing prior to and after the academic writing instruction?
2. What are the responses of undergraduate ELT students to our writing instruction as given through the writers' workshops?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

“Writing is integrative, as it encourages the writer to organize ideas from text and about text into a coherent whole, establishing specific relationships between these ideas” (Graham & Perin, 2007). Furthermore, the authors consider writing to be a skill that requires the use of strategies such as planning, evaluating, and revising texts in order to achieve a variety of goals, such as writing a report or expressing an opinion with the support of evidence. Additionally, writing is a means to extend and intensify students’ knowledge, which acts as a tool for learning a subject matter.

The Writing Process

Pappamihiel, Nishimata, & Mihai (2008) define the writing process as a collaborative learning activity that includes brainstorming, drafting, reviewing and revising as important writing strategies. The researchers cite Silva (1990) to state that the writing process must be seen as a positive and encouraging practice which includes collaborative workshops to help students to compose better written papers with minimal instruction from the teacher. Peha (1995) describes the following strategies used in the writing process:

Brainstorming or Prewriting: is the stage in which the writer explores possible topics before selecting one to write about. Then the writer gathers details about the topic and includes them in his/her writing.

Drafting: is the stage in which the writer completes the first draft using the ideas gathered in the brainstorming step as a guide.

Sharing (Peer-feedback & Teacher-feedback): is the stage in which writers work with other people in order to get feedback and making changes based on the comments they received from their peers.

Revising: is the stage in which writers revise and improve their first draft taking into account the feedback given by their partners.

Editing: is the stage in which writers take care of any problem they have with writing conventions such as spelling, punctuation, and grammar.

On the other hand, it is essential to mention paraphrasing as a writing strategy which provides writers support to avoid plagiarism.

Paraphrasing

Sedita (1989) defines paraphrasing as the process of rewriting other's ideas in different words. The author recommended maintaining the original meaning but restating it in other words.

Academic Writing

Thaiss and Zawacki (2006) define academic writing as any writing that fulfills a purpose of education in a college setting. The authors also state that for most teachers, the term implies student writing in response to an academic assignment, or professional writing that trained "academics"(teachers and researchers) do for publications read and conferences attended by other academics.

Leonhard (1998) considers that academic writing takes place in a college setting for an academic audience characterized by the use of sophisticated language. Academic writing always is addressed to a particular audience depending on the area of knowledge

Collaborative Writing

Graham & Perin (2007) quote Yarrow & Topping (2001) to state that collaborative writing involves peers writing as a team in which students assist each other with meaning, organization, spelling, punctuation, generating ideas, creating a draft, rereading essays, editing essays, choosing the best draft, and evaluating the final product. Additionally, Graham & Perin (2007) consider that collaborative writing implies the development of writing tasks through working in groups to plan, draft, revise, and edit the compositions.

Writers' Workshops

Herrell & Jordan (2007) state that writers' workshops are a strategy which increases opportunities to write such as discussing ideas, working with a partner or group, and interacting with others verbally. The researchers also affirm that writers' workshops give students the opportunity to interact as they give and receive feedback from their partners and teacher. In addition, the authors claim that writers' workshops are an instructional approach used to teach writing in which the students can select their own topic and work through the process of writing by brainstorming, drafting, sharing, revising, and editing.

The 6-Trait® method:

Sebranek, Kemper & Meyer (2009) present the six traits: ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency and conventions as writing's qualities which are important for every essay, story, or report that writers develop. The researchers describe the six traits in the following way:

Ideas: Effective writing has clear message, purpose or focus. The writing contains plenty of specific ideas and details.

Organization: Strong writing has a clear beginning, middle and ending. The overall writing is well organized and easy to follow.

Voice: The best writing reveals the writer's voice or special way of saying things. The voice also fits the audience and purpose.

Word choice: Good writing contains strong words, including specific nouns and verbs. Strong words help deliver a clear message.

Sentence fluency: Effective writing flows smoothly from one sentence to the next. Sentences vary in length and begin in a variety of ways.

Conventions: Good writing is carefully edited to make sure it is easy to understand. The writing follows the rules for punctuation, grammar and spelling.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Writers need to be aware of the strategies that help them gain consciousness about the challenges involved in composing academic texts. When students are familiar with the strategies they need to improve their quality of writing, they can improve their academic written work in a more structured and enjoyable way. Research has demonstrated that raising awareness of the use of writing strategies is possible. In their study, Zúñiga and Macías (2006) chose twenty-five undergraduate students from eighth semester of an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) program at a Colombian public university. The students were given three writing tasks in which they were asked to use writing strategies such as drafting, peer feedback, and revising. Results showed that the use of methods for teaching writing and exposing students to practice writing can increase learners' awareness about their writing process because they can use that knowledge autonomously when they write.

Concerning the importance of being aware of the writing process, Zúñiga and Macías (2006) cite Schneider (2005) to support the idea that learners' awareness about academic writing is characterized by regular writing practice and exposure to proper samples of academic writing assignments. Moreover, this kind of exposure, in which students can read proper academic texts, helps them increase their ability to analyze different topics from their own critical perspective. Thus, reading academic papers can be seen as a helpful writing strategy for modeling the practice of writing academic texts.

In the same study, Zúñiga and Macías (2006) conducted some interviews to find out the students' attitudes towards writing. Results indicated that students were satisfied with the results of the study. They agreed that students' awareness of the different characteristics of the writing process help them to perform writing tasks successfully. These findings support our idea that giving the students the opportunity to be involved in the practice of writing and to instruct them with writing strategies helps learners to be aware of their own academic writing process. Thus, when students are aware of their own learning process and its different strategies such as brainstorming, drafting, sharing and revising, they can improve their written academic work.

According to Peha (1995), the writing process is divided into: Pre-writing, drafting, sharing, revising, editing, publishing, and assessing. Peha (1995) explains pre-writing or brainstorming, as the opportunity the students can use to experiment with new ideas, to gather thoughts and to choose a direction before they start to draft. Drafting, according to the author, is a preliminary version of a document; it means that the paper is not finished yet. Sharing occurs when the student works with other people, gets feedback and has the chance to make changes based on the comments he/she received. Revising consists of the student shifting his/her thinking from the reader's point of view. Peha (1995) divides Revising in four steps: "1. Adding things, 2. Moving things, 3. Cutting things, and 4. Leaving things alone." According to the author editing has to do with taking care of any problems the student has with writing conventions such as spelling, punctuation, grammar,

and usage. We consider that these five steps of the writing process proposed by Peha (1995) are very important for the development of the writer's workshops because they are very useful for the ELT undergraduate students when they need to write academic papers.

A writers' workshop is an approach used to teach writing in which the students can select their own topic (Herrell & Jordan, 2007) and work through the process of writing by brainstorming, drafting, sharing, revising and editing. The main purpose of the writers' workshop is to encourage students to write with the support of their teacher and classmates in order to move through the stages (Brainstorming, drafting, sharing, revising, and editing) in their writing process. Authors have shown that the process of writing involves a collaborative workshop environment in which learners can work through their composing processes (Silva, 1990 taken from Pappamihel et al., 2008). A study by Pappamihel, Nishimata, & Mihai (2008) evidenced that adult learners do not have opportunities for collaboration. In their study, Pappamihel et al. (2008) chose twenty-seven adult English-language learners enrolled in an intensive English program at a university. The researchers assigned to each participant two writing tasks in which they had to brainstorm ideas in their native language in order to write a five-paragraph essay in English. The researchers found that the writing process is a collaborative learning activity that includes the use of invention, drafting, reviewing and revising as important writing strategies. These findings suggest that the writer's workshop is effective at helping learners to develop their academic writing skills in a collaborative environment. In addition, Pappamihel et al. (2008) pointed

out that the participants who had a lower level tended to waste their attention and time inefficiently when they brainstormed in their L1.

In relation to collaborative writing, Herrell & Jordan (2007) argued that a writers' workshop is a strategy which increases opportunities to engage the students to discuss ideas, implement peer and group feedback, and interact verbally with others. The writers stated that a writers' workshop gives students the opportunity to interact as they give and receive feedback from their partners and teacher. However, the authors claim that students must be given plenty of time to write in order to make the writers' workshop effective.

Furthermore, Pates & Evans (1990) said: "A writing workshop is essentially a group of learners and tutors coming together for an intensive period to share writing as a group process." This means that the main goal of the writing workshop is to compose written papers with the partners' and teachers' help. The authors also stated that the writing workshops have two features that make it a powerful educational tool: The students' expressions and the sharing of experiences and problems when working in a group. Finally, Pates & Evans (1990) affirm that the writing workshop is a process. They explain that a writing workshop is more related to a process than to a product because the process gives the chance to explore one's relationship with language and to experience the creation and sharing of printed expressions.

In the study by Spalding, Wang, Lin, & Hu (2009), the researchers implemented a three-week writing workshop for fifty-seven Chinese teachers of English in a large, urban school district in southeastern China at the elementary through secondary school levels. For instruction, the Chinese teachers were divided into two groups: an elementary group and a secondary group. During the workshop, the teachers experienced a writing process divided into prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. Each class session began with a mini-lesson focusing on a specific concept or skill. The instructor modeled and participated in all the writing activities offered to the teachers. The participants drafted, revised, and edited their two pieces, receiving oral and written feedback from peers and from the instructor. Spalding et al. (2009) analyzed the data through the 6-Trait® method which consists in analyzing ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions of a written text (more detailed information about the 6-Trait® method is given in the Theoretical Framework). The researchers found that writing workshops are supportive spaces which invite the writers to write freely and with confidence. The authors also noticed that the workshop had increased the participants' professional knowledge and built a confident environment to learn and teach writing. Finally, we agree with Spalding et al. (2009) when they concluded that a “writing workshop is one pedagogical practice that is context-sensitive because it enables participants to write about meaningful topics in purposeful ways and in their own voices.”

The writers' workshop is also characterized by a collaborative learning environment. According to Smith & MacGregor (1992) "collaborative learning is an umbrella term for a variety of educational approaches involving joint intellectual effort by students, or students and teachers together." The authors explained that in these kinds of environments there is a shift from teacher-centered instruction in classrooms to a collaborative learning context which is based on the students' active discussion and work. Smith & MacGregor (1992) state that collaborative learning is an active and constructive process that depends on rich, social, and diverse contexts. Thus, collaborative learning is closely associated with the Vygotsky's socialcultural theory which explains that learning has a social origin. It means that learning takes place in a social context where the individuals interact with each other. An individual learns in a social context which makes the exchange of knowledge possible. Additionally, Caron (2008) cited Vygotsky (1962, 1978) to state that writing represents social communication in real contexts where higher levels of development and performance are achieved through learning in social and functional relationships with others and with texts.

We consider that academic writing is not only a process where the writers show clear ideas or concepts on a text. In the writing process, writers should build an academic identity and an academic voice to portray their ideas. In a qualitative study by Carbone & Orellana (2010), the researchers illustrated that the writing process includes the use of voice to describe individual expression in writing. The researchers chose bilingual sixth graders at a Los Angeles area middle school. The researchers requested the participants to write two persuasive essays for two different audiences in order to translate their voice in their essays.

This study evidenced that there is an important relation between identity and voice in the process of writing. The authors described the metaphor of voice (“to find my own voice”) by Elbow (2000) to show that everybody has the ability to write with individualism and fluency. Additionally, Carbone & Orellana (2010) cited Ivanič (1998) to illustrate the “discoursal self” (or discoursal voice) which is focused on how writers want to be projected in their writing and how writers want to sound and be heard by a particular audience. These findings suggest that students have to embrace their discoursal voice because that kind of voice is the key to promote academic writing.

In connection with teachers’ feedback, the study by Zúñiga & Macías (2006) showed that by giving feedback, students can become good writers. Likewise, Carbone & Orellana (2010) stated that taking into account what the students are really attempting to do when they are writing is crucial. The researchers affirmed that teachers must recognize the students’ attempts to assume an academic identity because teachers are guides in the development of identity on the academic field. These findings are significant to our study because they support our ideas about the relevance of giving instruction about the writing strategies in the writers’ workshop and the impact of the teachers’ feedback on the students.

Finally, it is significant to point out the importance of the implementation that the writers’ workshop has to support all the stages in the writing process the learners need. We consider that the aim of the writers’ workshops is to make students think of themselves as writers and to take writing seriously because they have the opportunity to share their work with their peers and get a high-quality written product.

METHODOLOGY

Type of Study

Our project was based on a qualitative research method because we were interested in the students' conceptions and responses towards academic writing in the development of the writer's workshops. Therefore, we used data collection methods such as observations, interviews, journals, and writing tasks to collect data. Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest & Namey (2005) consider that qualitative research is especially effective to obtain information about the values, opinions, behaviors, and social contexts of particular populations. The researchers also argue that qualitative research is characterized by the complex textual descriptions that it provides.

Context

The study was conducted in the English Language Teaching (ELT)¹ program at an urban public university named Universidad Autónoma de Risaralda (UAR) located in a middle-sized city in Colombia. The program population is approximately 586 students and 39 professors, who are specialized in different areas of knowledge. The program has 10 full-time and 29 by-the-hour professors.

¹ Pseudonyms are used for participants and institutions.

The ELT program draws from the levels of language proficiency of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL) as a guide to standardize the students' English language learning. The ELT program also applies the CEFRL as an English international standard of proficiency to test the English language proficiency in the students during their training. The students should reach a C1 level of proficiency, which, according to the CEFRL, characterizes a proficient user of English who can understand, speak, read and write fluently and spontaneously. The ELT program at UAR seeks to prepare professionals in the ELT area to perform teaching and research in educational fields. Thus, the ELT program provides to students the opportunity to practice the language in computers and interactive rooms. Moreover, the students have the possibility to get academic sources at the university library.

Students in the ELT program are enrolled in 45 courses for a total of 10 semesters. They are required to take four levels of English —Basic, Pre-intermediate, Intermediate and Advanced— from first to fourth semester. Moreover, the program incorporates Advanced Grammar and English Composition courses in fifth and sixth semester which are focused on improving the students' writing skills in English. The English Composition course was the specific context of our study, with 30 students, since this course imparts writing instruction in order to improve the quality of students' academic writing production. The time intensity of the English Composition course is normally of four hours of class during the week. The course topics are variable because of the changing of professors for this course. The English Composition course covers topics such as punctuation, paragraph

organization, critical thinking, how to write an essay, connectors, prewriting, the use of outlines, summaries, abstracts, and types of writing or writing genres.

Participants

The study involved 6 undergraduate students from the sixth semester of the ELT program and the composition teacher. The participant students are between 18 to 24 years of age. These students are native Spanish speakers who already had taken the four levels of English offered in the program. At this level, the students have been exposed to instruction on how to produce a variety of writing such as letters, argumentative essays, descriptions, and journals. According to our experience as previous students in this program, we know that the instruction employed in the prior courses to the Composition class was not focused on academic writing. The students' experience with English so far in the program led us to assume that the English language proficiency is close to a level B1/ B2. At this level of proficiency, students are independent users of English who can express opinions, describe experiences and events, understand main ideas of texts, interact with native speakers, and write clear texts (CEFRL). Although this year (2011) the academic writing component was more emphasized, the history of the English Composition course had changed. In the previous semesters, the course was only focused on punctuation and how to write the structure of an essay; academic writing was not the main focus of the course.

Although we implemented the workshops to all the students from the composition course, initially, we selected ten focal participant students based on the findings of an initial writing task (diagnosis). We designed the diagnosis task which allowed us to observe elements of coherence, cohesion, word order, and the use of academic language in their writing. We selected ten written papers: five with a high quality in writing and five with low quality, according to the 6-Trait® method: ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency and conventions (Sebranek, Kemper & Meyer, 2009). We decided to choose those different papers because we wanted to see the students' writing development contrasting their different academic needs in order to have a background to teach. However, during the workshops there was not consistence with the attendance of those ten initial participants. Therefore, we decided to select the six final focal participants from the initial ten, three with a high quality in writing and three with low quality, and who attended all the workshops.

Researchers' Role

At the beginning of our study, we wanted to be observers before our instruction. Then, in our instruction, Katherine and Vanessa were going to teach and Liliana was going to be the observer. During the workshops, two researchers were going to observe and one was going to help the students. Moreover, we all were going to exchange roles in each workshop because we wanted to have the same opportunities to experience teaching in the study. Nevertheless, we changed the researchers' role. We all were observers of the Composition teacher's instruction. In our instruction and in each workshop, Vanessa was

the facilitator, while Katherine and Liliana were the observers. We decided to do this change because we considered that Vanessa had more teaching experience and the observers should have a sequence with the observations in relation to the students' process of writing. Also, in order to create rapport in the workshops, we think that the students had to interact with the same teacher during the whole process.

Instructional Design

The focus of our instruction was to present to the students the characteristics of academic writing using the writers' workshop as an instructional approach. Before our instruction, we guided the diagnosis task with the purpose of selecting our focal participants. We did not guide or give instruction in the diagnosis task; we decided to ask the students to write an essay about *Plan Nacional de Bilingüismo*. Then, we conducted one two-hour lesson to address academic writing and to explain the specific stages of the writer's workshop they were going to experience in their papers (i.e., brainstorming, drafting, peer-feedback, revising, and editing). Also, we conducted four two-hour writers' workshops where the instructor monitored constantly and gave feedback as the students worked on their pieces. In each workshop the students worked in one essay which they improved during the process using the writing strategies such as drafting, revising, and editing. We taught the whole Composition group, but only six participant students were the focus of our study. We supported students in the writers' workshop when they asked for help and whenever difficulties were presented. We gave the students different pieces of writing which could illustrate problems in the writing that makes the text incoherent or hard

to understand to the reader, and different samples of academic writing which could point out what we wanted the students to produce in their texts during the development of the writers' workshops.

Methods for Data Collection

The methods that we implemented to collect data in our project were observations, interviews, writing tasks, and journals.

Observations and field notes

Taylor-Powell & Steele (1996) agree that observation is a valuable method because it provides the opportunity to gather activities, behavior, and physical characteristics in a document. We conducted seven observations of two hours each during the whole development of the study: two observations of the English Composition teacher's instruction and five observations of the workshops (including our instruction and the students' performance in writing). The first two observations were focused on the current writing instruction of the Composition class in order to identify topics and strategies the teacher used to impart instruction. The following five observations were focused on the students' writing process in order to identify the students' responses to our writing instruction through the workshops and what is required to design and implement a lesson. We documented our observations through field notes written by Liliana and Katherine because the field notes are very useful to describe in detail our teaching and the students' responses throughout the study. After each observation, we expanded our field notes to

include details using descriptions, dialogues, and characterization. Using field notes means to record observations in a narrative and descriptive way with the purpose of expanding what you saw or listened (Taylor-Powell & Steele, 1996).

Interviews

Murphy, Dingwall, Greatbatch, Parker, & Watson (1998) cite the idea from Patton (1980) that “interviews are used when the researcher wants to find out something which cannot be directly observed... The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter the other person’s perspective.” Thus, we conducted seventeen interviews during the study (5 minutes each approximately). At the beginning, one interview was conducted with the Composition teacher and one interview with each one of the ten initial participant students. At the end of the study, we interviewed the six final participant students. The focus of the student interview was to know their conceptions about their writing process. We conducted interviews before our instruction to know the student’s knowledge about academic writing. We also conducted interviews at the end of the study to know if the students’ conceptions had changed. The interview for the teacher had the purpose of having a background to impart our instruction and to develop the writers’ workshops. All the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for analysis (See appendix # 1).

Writing Tasks

We conducted five tasks: one task before the instruction and one task in each workshop (four tasks in total) during the study. The first task provided us data about the students' writing proficiency. The four following tasks presented us the students' academic writing development during the workshops. The writing tasks helped us to answer the research question about the students' responses to the writing instruction through the writers' workshops.

Teachers' and Researchers' Journals

Ortlipp (2008) consider that a journal is a strategy to facilitate reflection while the researcher is clarifying personal assumptions about his/her experiences. We (Katherine, Liliana and Vanessa) used researchers' and teachers' journals as a reflective tool for our process as researchers and teachers. We employed *tape recorders* in all observations to back up our notes.

Data Analysis

The data analysis started with the transcription's process of the interviews. The students' initial interviews were transcribed in order to know their perceptions about academic writing before our instruction. Then, the final interviews were transcribed to know the students' opinions after the implementation of the workshops. Through observations, we

analyzed the Composition teacher's instruction, the impact of the workshops on the students, and the writing process of the participants. Furthermore, we wrote in our journals after each workshop in order to gather our feelings, opinions, and perceptions, we also employed the journals to check the implementation's impact of the writer's workshops on the students.

To analyze the tasks each one of the three papers was reviewed taking into consideration the six traits for writing: ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency and conventions (Sebranek, Kemper & Meyer, 2009). In terms of ideas we focused on the message, purpose and specific details. Related to organization we emphasized the essay's structure with a meaningful beginning, middle and ending. To analyze voice we considered the writer's way of using words to attract the reader. In relation to word choice we paid special attention to the use of strong words including specific nouns and verbs. Concerning sentence fluency we focused on the variety, length and smoothness of each sentence. To analyze conventions we considered on punctuation, grammar and spelling. Finally, after the tasks' analysis we implemented graphics to have general information of the students' advancement in relation to the six traits in each of the three drafts. (See appendix # 3 to observe the rubrics we adapted to analyze the students' written tasks)

The final data was triangulated and a variety of findings were stated. The findings were categorized in two major themes: students' conceptions towards academic writing and students' writing production during the writers' workshops.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section describes general findings that emerged from the study “Improving Academic Writing in an ELT Program through Writers’ Workshops” with a population of six undergraduate students and the teacher from the English Composition course of the ELT program in a public university in Pereira.

1. Students’ Conceptions towards Academic Writing

1.1 Students’ conceptions towards the English Composition course

1.1.1 Students’ definition of academic writing

Before we implemented the writers’ workshops in the composition course, we conducted one interview to each participant with the purpose of detecting the students’ feelings, perceptions and opinions about academic writing. The first question was: ¿Qué piensa usted acerca de la escritura académica? ¿En qué consiste?²(see appendix 1 to see the questions we asked the participants). The following examples illustrate how academic writing was defined by the participants.

María: Pues para mí... la escritura académica, primero que todo, es muy importante porque es una de las bases en las cuales, pues, nosotros como

² What do you think about academic writing? What does it consist?

docentes nos tenemos que desempeñar. Eh... ¿en qué consiste? Pues... eh... (risa)... Mm... pues... (riéndose) la verdad no sé, como... no... (Risa)

In the answer above it is notable that the participant did not have a specific idea about academic writing. That issue was unclear for her though she expressed that she considers academic writing important for English teachers. We infer that the students from the English Composition course don't know the definition of academic writing because it has not been explained explicitly in class and they also have low exposure with the practice of writing academically.

Miguel: Mmmmm bueno la escritura académica... Pues ahora que estamos en la universidad yo creo que...

Interviewer: ummju

Miguel: es algo muy importante porque, si uno no sabe escribir..... no tanto escribir porque uno escribe desde que está en primerooo, no en primero no digamos que en tercero de primaria uno aprende pues a escribir pero de forma... de manera formal yo creo que eso es lo uno está aprendiendo aquí en la universidad, no no solo eso aprende uno muchas cosas pero como para uno desarrollarse profesionalmente eso es un buen punto.

Interviewer: umju y ¿en qué consiste? En que cree ustedddd

Miguel: pues yo creo que consiste en en saber expresarse a través del papel aaaa aaa de manera formal aaaaa a... personas importantes y no importantes porque pues entre mejor uno lo haga masss eeee a verrr como mas mas.... van a entender a uno yyy mejor punto de vista va a generar uno acerca de lo que uno escribioooo o lo que uno es.... algo así.

The students' definition about academic writing was not clear. When they were asked to define academic writing the students did not have a strong concept about this writing style, they expressed that they have not been exposed to it even though they already took all the

English courses of the ELT program. We consider that the lack of knowledge about academic writing of those students is due to the low exposure to explicit instruction of formal writing during the development of the English courses. Another possibility is that the students were exposed to academic writing but its definition is not clear for them. Because of the students do not know the definition of academic writing, we were worried about their proficiency in the practice of writing itself because we strongly believe that writing academically is a very important tool in college settings, as the ELT program is one.

Zúñiga & Macías (2006) stated that college students need to be prepared to write academically and have to function in an academic context. Because of the big importance academic writing has in college settings, we are worried about the ELT program students' knowledge of formal writing. Graham & Perin (2007) also explained their concern about the students' low proficiency in writing when they revealed that every year in the United States (US) students from high school graduate unable to write at the basic levels required by colleges. We can see that this situation is very similar to our Colombian context.

1.1.2 Students' difficulties with academic writing

In the interview before our instruction, we asked the participants to describe their difficulties with academic writing because detecting the students' struggles before

instruction is very important in order to have a background to design lessons. The following samples illustrate what difficulties the participants perceived before the implementation of the writer's workshops.

Interviewer: *Bueno, eh ¿qué considera usted que es más difícil en relación a escribir académicamente?*

Uriel: *ufff en relación...cohesionar las ideas de manera coherente, albanar un discurso eh...con una idea puntual... eso sería para mí lo... esencial.*

The participant explained that making their papers coherent is very difficult for him and he considered coherence very important in relation to writing. It means that even though students do not have a clear idea about academic writing, they know what it is and they can express their difficulties towards it.

Interviewer: *Aja, bueno la número dos es la siguiente ¿qué considera usted más difícil acerca de la escritura académica?*

Gabriel: *Pues, considero que lo más difícil no solamente para mí si no para la mayoría de los estudiantes es, empezar un texto...o sea saber cómo empezarlo, eh una introducción, y también a la hora de finalizarlo dar una conclusión exacta.*

In the previous sample we found that all of the six participants considered that they have difficulties with writing, even writing any kind of text. This problem is truly related to the first finding in which the lack of knowledge about academic writing is presented and portrays a bigger concern: College students consider themselves that they have many difficulties with academic writing.

Based on our previous experience as students from the ELT program, we consider that students have problems with writing because they do not write constantly. Zúñiga & Macías (2006) describe their participants' problems in relation to academic writing and they expressed that their greatest difficulty was the lack of experience in writing. Moreover, Peha (1995) state that having problems in the writing process is normal in young learners because they do not usually have ideas about how to start a text and how to finish it. Nevertheless, we believe that young learners, such as our participating students, are capable of writing academic texts if they practice by actually doing it.

1.1.3 Students' writing strategies

In the interview before the instruction, we asked the participants about the writing strategies they usually used to write academically and how those strategies helped them in their writing process. This question was asked in order to know if the students used writing strategies and if they implemented them in their writing tasks. The following examples show the students' responses in relation to writing strategies.

***Interviewer:** aja, bueno, eeeee la tercera, en su experiencia ¿qué estrategias ha usado usted para escribir académicamente? Y ¿piensa usted que esas estrategias son de ayuda para usted como escritor?*

Miguel: *Puesssss la única estrategia que yo he utilizado ha sido.... eeee aveces copio algún párrafo en español o copio algunas líneas en español y de ahí parto para hacerla en inglés*

Interviewer: *si*

Miguel: *y pues con los resultados que me han mostrado las notas y y pues los profesores que me han dado las notas pues, yo creo que si me ha sido útil porque porque han sido muy buenos los resultados.*

The participant identified the use of translation as his main writing strategy. He also explained that using translations has worked for him when he is asked to write academically in the ELT program. The following example illustrates the response of another student in relation to the use of writing strategies.

Uriel: *Leer, leer mucho y el diccionario a la mano leer y leer.....utilizar el chart de los...conjunctions, emm... y contrast and subjections.*

Interviewer: *y piensa usted ¿que esas estrategias son de ayuda, pues le ayudan a usted como, como escritor?*

Uriel: *Pues de, para evaluarme yo mismo, no sabría decirlo, pero en los resultados que he visto si he tenido una avance y un logro académico.*

The previous examples are evidence of the lack of knowledge the students have about the writing process. In this question, most of the six participants mentioned what they considered as writing strategies. However, most of the students did not refer to brainstorming, drafting, reviewing, and revising as writing strategies. We think that the students' low consciousness about writing strategies is a problem in the composition course, because at this level of the process in the ELT program, the students have to be knowledgeable about the writing process and be competent as academic writers.

According to Peha (1995), the writing process is a set of stages where the students work on different writing strategies such as pre-writing, drafting, sharing, revising, editing, publishing, and assessing. Nevertheless, the results of this study revealed that the English Composition students did not have a clear concept about the different strategies that the writing process involves. Therefore, we infer that the students had not received appropriate instruction on the academic writing style.

1.1.4 Students as academic writers

Before our instruction, we asked the participants to express how they felt as academic writers. In this section, we intended to know the students' feelings when they write academic texts. The examples below can portray how students considered themselves as academic writers.

***Interviewer:** Sí, tiene mucha razón. Y entonces, ¿usted cómo se ve a sí misma como escritora académica?, ¿cómo se siente a la hora de escribir académicamente?*

***María:** ... Bueno, pues... por ahora yo diría que no muy bien, no hemos tenido mucho, ¿cierto?... Pues mucha enseñanza en cuanto a eso. No se nos ha inculcado como mucho... otras áreas. Entonces, yo diría que... no muy bien, o sea, lo poco que yo sé es algo que ha sido algo muy autónomo, y muy, cosa que uno hace, como, por cuenta de uno.*

In the answer given by the participant above, she explains that she did not feel comfortable when she wrote academically because she has not been exposed to it. The next

example can show another opinion regarding the same idea: Students do not feel comfortable when they write academic texts.

***Interviewer:** umju muy bien, yyyy la ultimaaa esss..... ¿cómo se ve usted mismo como escritor? o sea como cree usted que es su nivel..... Ooo si*

***Rafael:** como escritor, en estos momentos, no... no veo bien porque tengo muchas falencias en la escrituraaa a pesar de que se no utilizo estrategias..... (Interviewer: umju) En estos momentos como escritor no.... Si lo calificamos de uno a diez: tres.*

***Interviewer:** Y por qué tres... de uno a diez?*

***Rafael:** ehhhh... pues porque la verdad nos da miedo no no no escribir bien... y pues que el profesor nos ponga una mala nota.*

Most of the participants considered that they had to improve their performance in academic writing. They usually felt unsecure when they had to write academic texts because of their lack of knowledge and practice. Peha (1995) describes students' common problems when they write; one of them is that "students don't write because they are afraid of making errors". Thus, we can infer, from the students' answers to the question about how they feel as writers, that they knew they had to improve their academic writing skills because that is the reason why they felt afraid when they are asked to write academic papers.

1.1.5 The role of the teacher on the student's motivation to write

Before the implementation of the writer's workshops, we conducted two observations to the English Composition group. We were interested in identifying topics and strategies the teacher used to impart instruction and how the students responded to it. The following evidences taken from the observations portray how important the teacher is in the English Composition course as a guide and facilitator.

2:47 pm. Two students arrived to class. At this moment, one student was sleeping. He has his head resting on the desk. The teacher ignored this situation and he continued with the class. When the teacher was writing on the board, most of the students were laughing and there was a lot of noise.

We believe that the English Composition teacher was very knowledgeable in relation to academic writing because of his profile as a professional. Nevertheless, the teacher's knowledge was not a good reason for the students to take advantage of the course to improve themselves as academic writers. Thus, we consider that students' motivation to write is related to one of the common problems suggested by Peha (1995): "Students don't write very much". He explains that students do not experiment on writing or go beyond it when they are writing because of their lack of knowledge. On the other hand, we argue that the students' low interest is associated with the lack of intrinsic motivation, which is reflected on the natural human tendency to learn something (Ryan & Deci, 2000), because the students enter to the English Composition class with the idea that the class is not important for their professional development when it actually is.

1.2 Students' conceptions towards the Writer's Workshops

1.2.1 Positive impact of the writer's workshops on the students

After the implementation of the writers' workshops in the English Composition course, we conducted a final interview to each participant in order to identify the students' opinions, attitudes, and conceptions in relation to the writers' workshops. The first question was: ¿Qué piensa usted acerca de los talleres de escritura? (see appendix 1 to observe the complete interview). The following example reveals the students' ideas about the writers' workshops.

***Samuel:** Pues... los talleres de escritura estuvieron muy bien... cimentados porque pues, toda la información... eh... nos ayudó mucho, eh... nos mostró que debemos ser más conscientes de, a la hora de escribir, que tenemos que, eh... procurar...eh... escribir mejor, estar escribiendo más, eh... tenemos que... hacer mucho trabajo de escritura si queremos hacer una tesis bien hecha.*

One of the most important results from the implementation of the writers' workshops was that students become aware about the importance of academic writing. However, some students like Samuel were motivated to write because of the idea to develop a thesis project with a good writing quality. This fact led us to consider that some participants' motivation is reflected extrinsically, which is related to an activity the students do in order to accomplish a distinguishable outcome (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Miguel: eeee bueno, los talleres de escritura no pues son una una buena herramienta para uno afianzar y mejorar el conocimiento en lo que es la escritura, como tal.... y son muy buenos para uno como interactuar, intercambiar ideas tanto con el, con el instructor como con los compañeros acerca de lo que uno está escribiendo...

In this part, we noticed that the six participant students considered that the writers' workshops were helpful to work on writing. Most of the six participants also expressed that the idea to share their written papers with their partners and instructor facilitated their writing process. However, during the collaborative work activities students were more attentive to teacher's feedback than to their partner's comments. We infer that the workshops provided students the opportunity to refine their written papers supported mostly by the oral feedback provided by the teacher through the regular monitoring during the development of the writer's workshops. Therefore, we agree with Herrell & Jordan (2007) when they argue that a writers' workshop is a strategy which increases opportunities to write such as discussing ideas, working with a partner or group, and interacting verbally with others. Nevertheless, in the implementation of the writers' workshops, the ELT students did not take advantage of the opportunities of collaboration the workshops offered.

1.2.2 Students as academic writers after the Writers' Workshops

At the end of the writers' workshops, we asked the participants to express their feelings and opinions about the development and impact of the writer's workshops in their writing

process. The following evidences portray what kind of result the writer's workshops had on the 6 participants.

Interviewer: *Bueno, muy bien. Y, por último, ¿cómo se ve usted ahora como escritor académico?, ¿a la hora de escribir un texto académico, usted cómo se ve, cómo se siente?*

Samuel: *Eh... pues después de los ejercicios que hicimos, pues ya me siento mucho mejor porque... eh...pues, o sea, ya por lo menos uno tiene un conocimiento... previo... de, de lo que se debe hacer cuando se va a escribir y que no se debe hacer, qué vocabulario se tiene que manejar, qué vocabulario no se debe manejar, y que... pues o sea, a la hora de uno escribir tiene que manejar un vocabulario técnico para no parecer como... que los textos que los tuviéramos, los que, los textos que escribimos fueran como unos textos del común.*

In the first part of the findings, “Students as academic writers”, we concluded that the participants did not feel comfortable when they had to write academic texts because they were not exposed to formal writing instruction. On the contrary, after the writer's workshops, the participants expressed that they had improved their academic writing because they were exposed to it in the whole process of the workshops. Moreover, the participants stated that they now have the prior knowledge to write academically without being afraid of making mistakes.

Interviewer: *exacto, bueno, eeee ¿Cómo se ve usted aae como se ve usted como escritor ahora?...*

Rafael: *bueno, si lo ponemos.... yo lo ponía en una balanza en la entrevista pasada de uno a diez esta... por ahí en tres... cuatro... y ahora lo ponemos poner en seis.... creo que por ahí vamos.*

Interviewer: o sea que siente que si mejoró.

Rafael: si, siempre se mejoró mucho.

Interviewer: ah ya

Rafael: y uno se ve uno cuando en los escritos, en el feedback.... se notaba mucho la diferencia.

In addition, although all of the students declared that they have improved their academic writing, they were aware that they had to continue the process of making their writings better. The participants also noticed the change they had when they worked on their tasks in relation to the writing process, the writing strategies they used, and the feedback they received from the teacher and their partners. Zúñiga & Macías (2006) found in their project that their participants expressed that being aware of the aspects of the writing process helped them to develop their written tasks. Likewise, our participants obtained better results when they were aware of the importance of academic writing and its process.

1.2.3 The role of the teacher on students' motivation in the writer's workshops

To collect our data, we conducted one observation in each of the four writers' workshops which were implemented in the composition class. The purpose of the observations was to identify the teacher's impact on students' responses and attitudes

towards writing academically. The following evidence illustrates how the writers' workshops' teacher influences students' motivation to write.

At 2:57 while the teacher was monitoring the groups, Rafael came closer to the teacher in order to ask for help. They started to talk and it seemed that teacher pointed out Rafael's paper, after some minutes, the student returned to his chair, he sat down and it seemed that he started to correct his essay. During the monitoring process, students seemed comfortable to asked question to the teacher.

At 3:00 the teacher explain to students how to write a conclusion about the reading "PNB". After this, students started to write. The room was quiet and it seemed that all of the participants were engaged with the writing activity, since students asked questions frequently to the teacher. During this part of the class teacher monitored the groups constantly in order to clarify doubts and give feedback.

We consider that during the development of the writers' workshops, the role of the teacher as facilitator had a positive impact on students' attitudes towards academic writing since we could notice that with a minimal instruction on how to write academically students were capable of generating written texts by themselves. Therefore, we agree with Zúñiga & Macías (2006) who state that the role of the teacher as a facilitator is to assist students in the development of useful strategies to start writing such as: brainstorming (ideas'

generation), drafting (promoting several drafts), revising (ideas' modification), and editing (focusing on grammar and sentence structure).

2. Students' Writing Production during the Writers' Workshops

2.1 Collaborative work and feedback

During the development of the writers' workshops the students had to work on collaborative writing tasks giving and receiving feedback from the teacher and peers. However, the students did not take advantage of their partners' feedback. On the contrary, the students seemed to give more significance to the instructor's feedback. During the workshops' observations we could notice that although students worked in peers, they were asking for feedback to the teacher most of the time. Moreover, in the revision of the tasks we noticed that there was not a written feedback by the students. The following example evidences the students' responses in relation to the importance of the teacher's feedback through the development of the writer's workshops.

The instructor is monitoring the groups' work. Three students are asking for feedback. So, the teacher is trying to help them with their doubts. The students seem to be confused with some academic vocabulary. So, the instructor is giving them some academic words like "according to, agree, state".

To support the evidence given above, the following example shows that the teacher's feedback was more significant than the peers' feedback, for most of the six participants.

This is a student's answer about what he thought in relation to the writers' workshops and the teacher's feedback.

Miguel: eeee bueno, los talleres de escritura no pues son una una buena herramienta para uno afianzar y mejorar el conocimiento en lo que es la escritura, como tal.... y son muy buenos para uno intercambiar ideas tanto con el con el instructor como con los compañeros, sin embargo el feedback que el instructor nos proporciona es de mucha más importancia, porque el profesor tiene más fundamentos para revisar que los compañeros y pues personalmente el feedback que ustedes como facilitadoras me proporcionaron, me sirvió bastante para mejorar mi trabajo en cada draft y tener al final un buen resultado.

We consider that the less importance the students gave to the peer's feedback is due to the lack of exposure to collaborative work during the learning process and the great impact the teacher causes when he/she is the class center. As students of the ELT program, in the English Composition Class, we experienced this same situation in which the students only received feedback from the teacher and worked individually most of the time. We think that the students are accustomed to this kind of instruction because they consider that the teacher is the only who has strong bases and foundations to check and give appropriate feedback.

According to Van den Berg (2006), most undergraduate students take their peer's feedback seriously, and include the comments in their written work. However, the results of our study indicated that the peer's feedback was not valuable for most of the students. On the contrary, the students found the feedback given by the instructor most significant. This

situation is truly related to the Zúñiga & Macías' (2006) outcomes, which revealed that at the beginning of their project, the students paid special attention to the instructor's feedback, and that they did not seem to recognize authority from their peers when they shared feedback.

On the other hand, we think that the collaborative work is characterized by the feedback shared between students. Thus, Yarrow & Topping (2001) define collaborative work as the time in which students work together as a team to revise ideas, meaning, organization, spelling, and punctuation, in order to have a good quality in their written papers. Nevertheless, most of our six participants did not take advantage from their peers' feedback despite of they worked in groups.

2.2 Students' writing strategies after the writers' workshops

After the development of the writers' workshops, we conducted a final interview to each participant in order to find out the writing strategies the students considered most helpful to improve their writing skills. The subsequent example evidences the students' responses in relation to writing strategies they found more valuable in the writers' workshops.

Gabriel: *Los drafts, los encontré muy útiles ya que son como una secuencia que le ayudan a guiarse a uno y el brainstorming que es el que le, el que le*

sirve a uno de apoyo general, el que le saca, el que nos ayuda a tener en cuenta cuales son las ideas más importantes sobre él, el tema que va a hacer desarrollado.

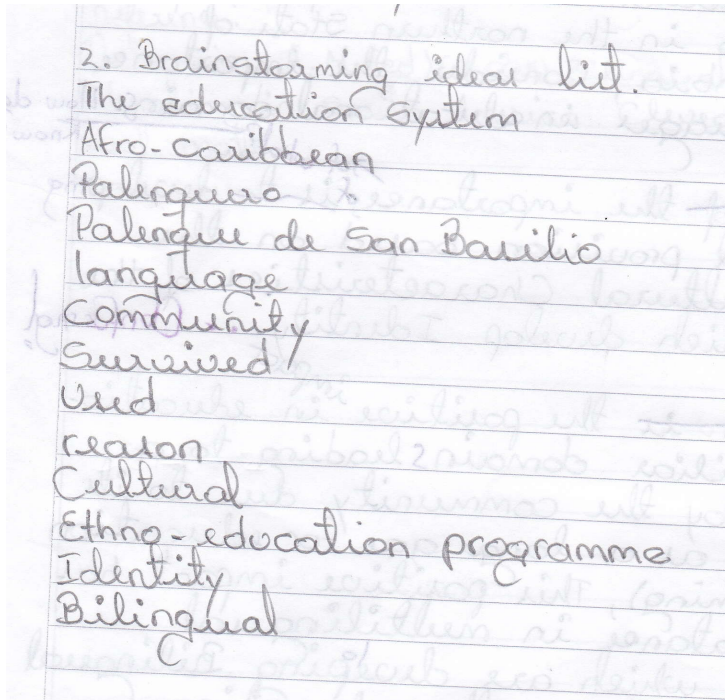
Although we introduced brainstorming, drafting, revising, sharing, editing, and paraphrasing on the writer's workshops, the participant students had preferences with three writing strategies such as brainstorming, drafting and revising.

Uriel: Pues las estrategias que yo encontré más útiles en el ámbito de la escritura académica fueron revising and drafting.

Moreover, during the development of the workshops, we noticed that most of the six participant students followed the sequence of the strategies involved in the writing process such as brainstorming, drafting, sharing, revising, and editing.

2:20 teacher moved to develop an activity in which students had to read a conceptual article about the importance of native languages in Colombia. Teacher organized the class in groups of three people but the students had to work individually. When learners were organized, they were asked to read and brainstorm some ideas of the article. They had 15 minutes to work on brainstorming. We noticed that students were reading and writing in their notebooks.

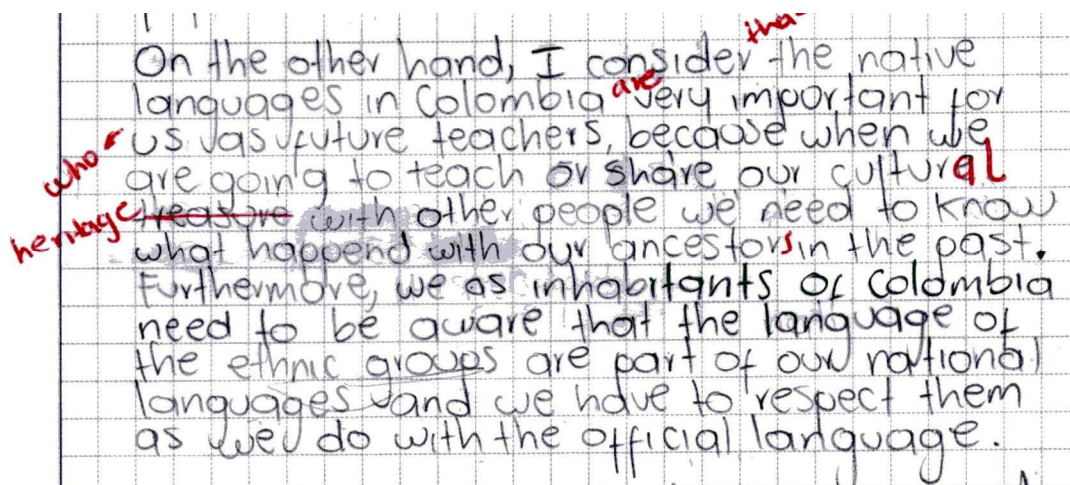
The following example evidences that the students worked on the brainstorming stage.



Contrary to previous findings concerning the students' writing strategies before the workshops, which revealed that the participants were not conscious about the writing process stages such as brainstorming, drafting, sharing, revising and editing; these results indicated that after the workshops' implementation the students realized the importance of the use of writing strategies to produce academic written papers. Most of the students found brainstorming, revising and drafting useful as important writing strategies. This fact makes us consider that the implementation of writing strategies through the writers' workshops caused a positive impact on the students' awareness as writers. These results are supported by Zúñiga & Macias (2006), who state that guiding the students' writing process through workshops is useful because they can be conscious about the writing strategies they use and their performance in writing.

2.3 The students' ideas in their academic written texts

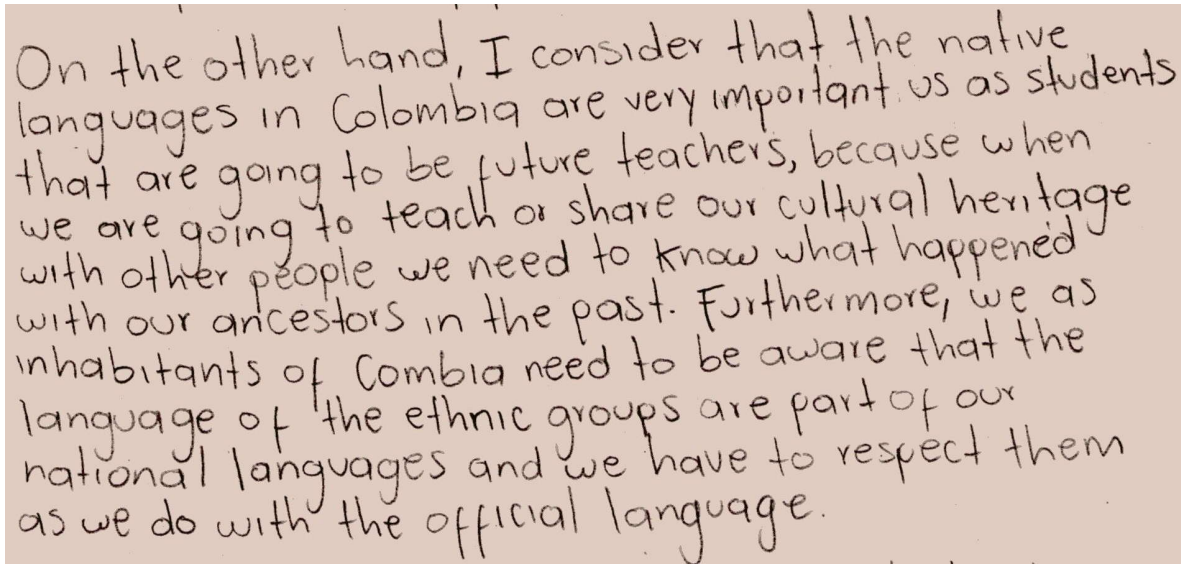
In the development of the writer's workshops, the six participants were asked to write an essay about the importance of native languages in Colombia. We gave the students one article about this issue to use it as an example of academic writing. In each workshop, the students were focused on drafting, sharing, and revising their written tasks. However, the first step to start a written paper is brainstorming ideas and developing them in the essay using accurate arguments and details. To analyze the written tasks from the participants, we used the 6-Trait®-method rubrics designed by Sebranek, Kemper & Meyer (2009) and we adapted those rubrics in order to focus on academic writing. In the rubrics, we stated in the higher trait that students have the statement, arguments, and details making the essay truly academic; and, in the lower trait, students need to rewrite their essay. The following evidences illustrate the students' process to gather and develop their ideas in their academic texts based on the 6-Trait®-method rubrics we adapted for academic writing.



On the other hand, I consider the native languages in Colombia ^{are} very important for us as future teachers, because when we are going to teach or share our cultural ^{heritage} ~~treasure~~ with other people we need to know what happened with our ancestors in the past. Furthermore, we as inhabitants of Colombia need to be aware that the language of the ethnic groups are part of our national languages and we have to respect them as we do with the official language.

Rafael's Second Draft

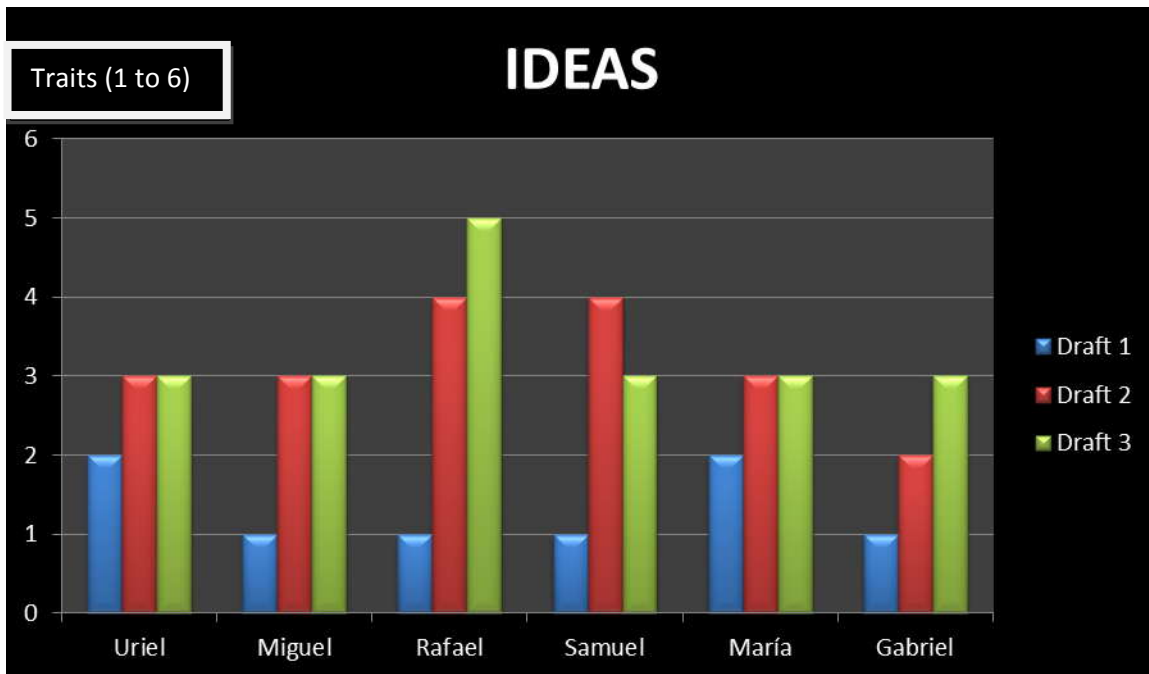
Rafael, in his second draft, pointed out that he considers the native languages a very important issue in Colombia and they should be respected by all the community. He explains that by knowing his cultural background, teachers can value their native language and the language they teach. In the example above, Rafael has a main statement which is the idea of recognizing the native language as part of our culture and he has developed it with strong arguments. Nevertheless, his writing should be corrected and improved because he did not develop enough arguments in his essay.



On the other hand, I consider that the native languages in Colombia are very important us as students that are going to be future teachers, because when we are going to teach or share our cultural heritage with other people we need to know what happened with our ancestors in the past. Furthermore, we as inhabitants of Colombia need to be aware that the language of the ethnic groups are part of our national languages and we have to respect them as we do with the official language.

Rafael's Third Draft

In the final draft, Rafael refined his writing by changing some words such as “treasure” for “heritage”. He also emphasized the matter of being a student who is going to be a teacher. In both cases, his high proficiency to develop ideas and strong statements is perceived.



In the graph 1, the development of ideas (Effective writing has clear message, purpose or focus. The writing contains plenty of specific ideas and details) on the students' written papers is portrayed. As it is exposed, most of the six students had a great improvement from the first draft to the second one. We consider that the improvement is due to the students' low written production in the English Composition class before the implementation of the writers' workshops. On the other hand, after our instruction, the students had to change their roles from passive to active students in the classroom. Before the instruction, the students were receiving lessons. However, during the workshops the students were writing actively.

Sebranek et al. (2009) highlight that the best writing starts with a well-chosen topic, continues with main points, and ends with important details. Thus, we consider that our

participants should improve the expansion of their main points by writing more details and arguments which reinforce their main topic or statement. For instance, Rafael has a strong statement but more important details were needed to make his essay stronger. For example, Rafael could give the names of the native languages that should be respected and how they are important for teachers of a second or foreign language.

2.4 The students' organization in their essays

As Sebranek et al. (2009) explain: “writing is made up of six main traits”. One of them is organization, which emphasizes strong writing with a clear beginning, middle and an ending. They also point out that an essay should be well organized from start to finish with the use of adequate transitions, interesting information, and supporting points and details. Thus, we focused on the organization of the students' essays in order to score their writing quality using the six trait method. In the higher trait, the essay should have organization which makes it coherent and easy to read; while in the lower trait, the essay needs to be reorganized. The following examples portray how the students organize their essays with the purpose of having effective writing.

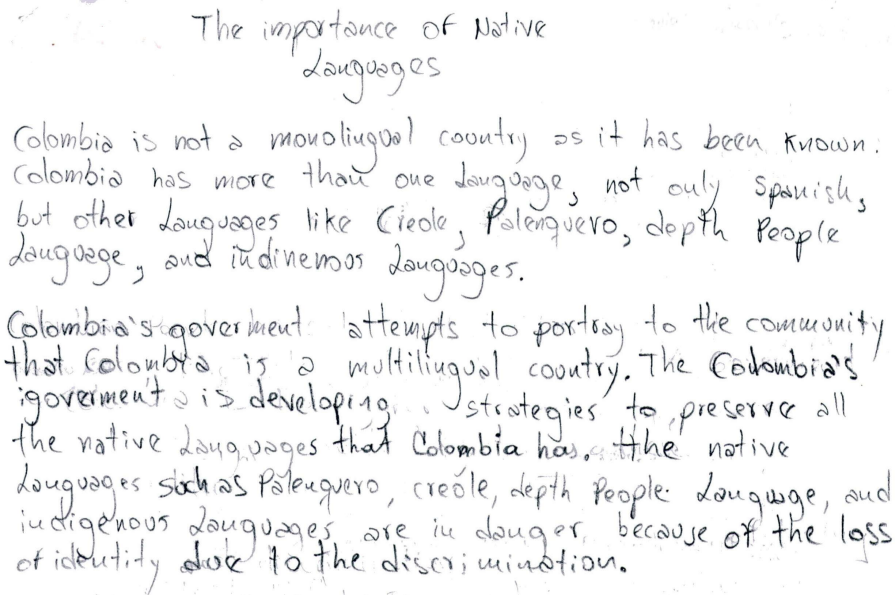
colombia is not a monolingual country as it has been known. Then, Colombia is ~~showing~~ ^{is formal} that has more than one language; ~~There is~~ ^{it is} not only spanish; ~~it~~ ^{There are} ~~is~~ creole ~~too~~, sign language, and indigenous, ^{among others} etc. Colombia's government is enhancing native languages using strategies like creating dictionaries in the

native language and pedagogical material. → what for?
How do you know?

.Samuel's First Draft

The previous example evidences that Samuel in his first written draft did not use the transitions correctly to connect one paragraph to the other. As we can see in the third line, the connector *then* is not appropriate to continue with the idea given before and the information does not present a clear focus to the reader. Moreover, in the seventh line, the student started with the second paragraph but he did not write a connector or a transitional sentence to make a relation between the two paragraphs. The student's ideas were not

complete. The following artifact evidences the student's progress related with organization from the first to the final draft.



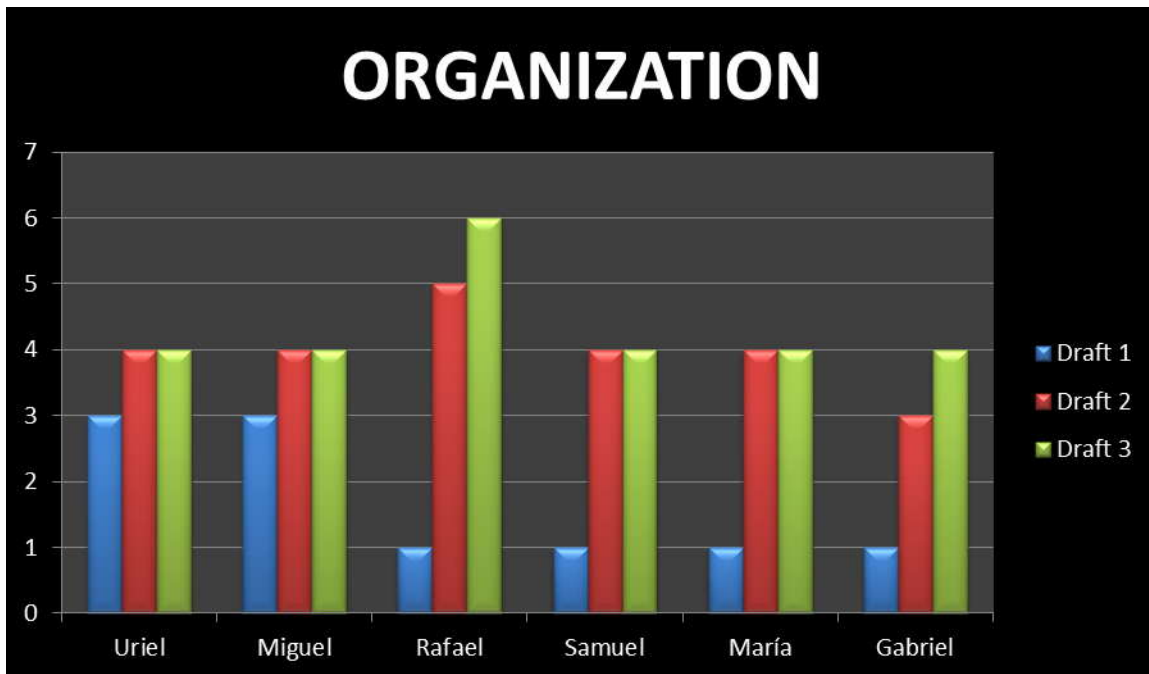
The importance of Native Languages

Colombia is not a monolingual country as it has been known. Colombia has more than one language, not only Spanish, but other languages like Creole, Palenquero, depth People language, and indigenous languages.

Colombia's government attempts to portray to the community that Colombia is a multilingual country. The Colombia's government is developing strategies to preserve all the native languages that Colombia has. The native languages such as Palenquero, creole, depth People language, and indigenous languages are in danger because of the loss of identity due to the discrimination.

Samuel's Third Draft

The above evidence illustrates the student's improvement from the first to the third draft in relation to organization. Although Samuel did not use a connector between the first two paragraphs, he completed his ideas with a clear focus. We can notice a change between the second paragraph of the first draft and the second paragraph of the third draft. In this final draft, Samuel introduced a different idea in order to link it with the introduction. Moreover, the student organized the final essay with a beginning, middle and ending; this situation did not happen in the first draft in which the student did not complete the essay. The following graph shows the students' advancement in their essays' organization from the first to the third draft.



In the graph 2, we can notice that the students had a notable advancement from the first to the second draft. However, there was not progress from the second to the third draft in most of the students. Only two students, Rafael and Gabriel, advanced in the three drafts in relation to organization. We evidenced that this situation was presented because most of the six participants had completed their essays with the introduction, body and conclusion in the second draft and they only added little details to the final draft such as academic words and word order. On the contrary, Rafael and Gabriel improved in each of the three drafts because they added more variety of transitional sentences and connectors to the final draft in relation to the second draft. Although there was stability in the second and third draft in relation to organization in most of the students, we consider that there was a significant development between the first and the third draft because the students organized their essays considering the introduction, the body and the conclusion.

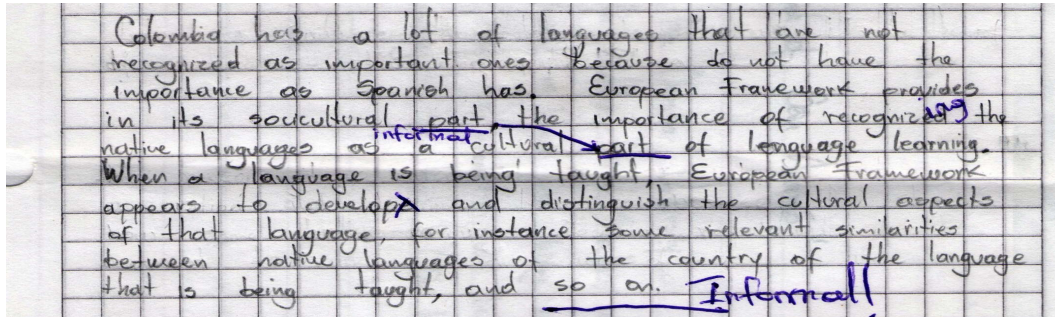
Sebranek et al. (2009) state that the essay's organization includes an introduction that attracts the reader, a body that supports the purpose, and a conclusion that reemphasizes the main ideas of the essay. Therefore, our results showed that most of the students did not advance on the final draft, although they structured their essays with the proper organization. We assume that this situation was presented because the students knew that they were going to write their final draft and maybe they felt that the time was not going to be enough to expand their essays with more information. We consider that the students still need to be exposed to a continual writing production in the composition class in order to improve their writing.

2.5 The students' use of voice in their essays

As we mentioned before, we applied the 6-Trait® method to analyze the students' academic essays. One of the traits is voice which Elbow (2007), cited by Spalding, Wang, Lin & Hu (2009), stated as writing with power. It means, the reader should identify the writer in the text. The researcher explained that writing with voice should be strong and sincere.

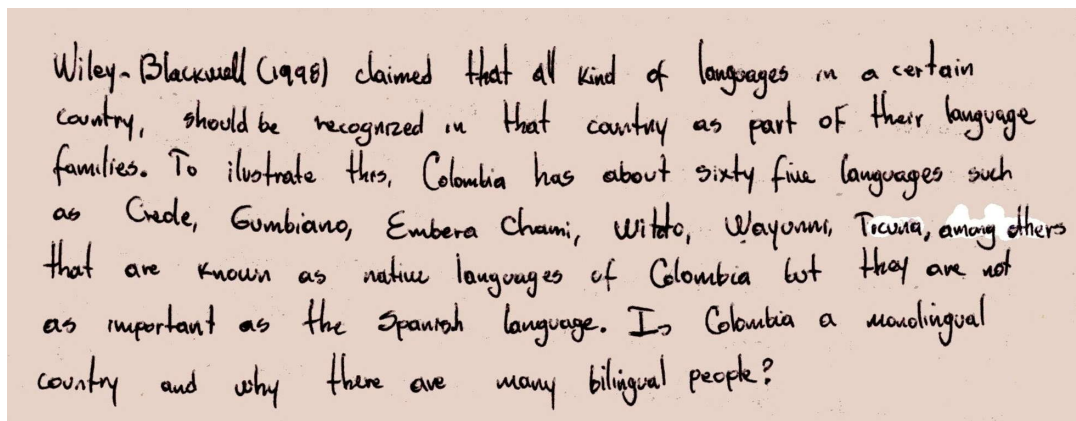
In the writers' workshops, we asked the students to write academic essays using writing strategies such as drafting, sharing, and revising. However, we never explained to them explicitly that they should put their voice in their papers although we analyzed that

component on their writings. The following examples portray the development of writing with voice in Miguel's first and third drafts.



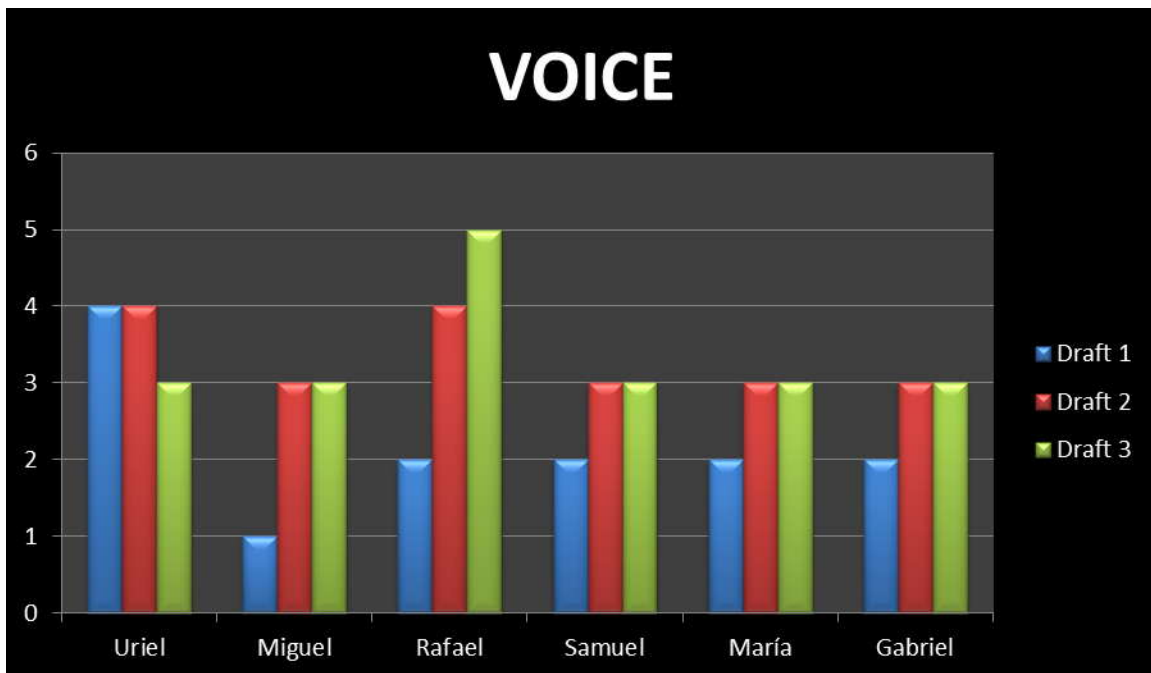
Miguel's First Draft

Sebranek et al. (2009) consider that a very important component in writing with voice is the audience and that audience should be taken into account. They explain that the audience impacts the tone of the writers' voices. For instance, when students are writing an essay for college, they should be formal, but when they are writing to a friend, they should be casual and relaxed. Thus, according to the evidence, we consider that Miguel's writing is informal and he should learn about academic voice because he uses expressions as "so on". That kind of language does not empower his voice to sound formal and academic in his essay.



Miguel's Third Draft

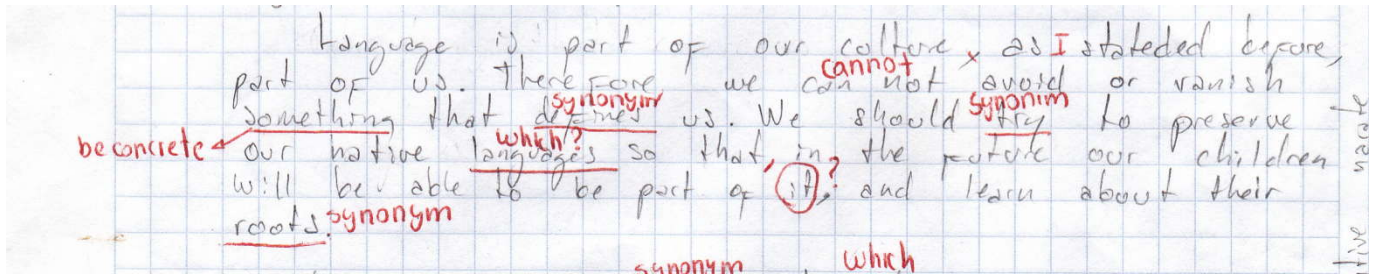
Miguel in his third draft tried to be more formal when he cited an author to strength his statement: Native languages should be recognized by the Colombian community. The participant also adds two questions to show the audience that he is wondering about the existence of bilingualism in Colombia. We consider that making questions in an essay enhances the writers' power in an academic text. Sebranek et al. (2009) cited the idea from the writer Murray that voice is the "person in the writing." They argued that "when the writer's voice is strong, the reader stays interested. Something about the writer's way of using words attracts the reader." Therefore, we agree with the researchers and we consider that a significant improvement could be seen in Miguel's drafts. The participant is now aware of the importance of empowering his voice by representing himself in his writing.



In the graph 3, most of the students improved their voice in their essays from the first to the third draft. However, most of the participants maintained their score in the second and third draft. We assume that the maintenance occurred because the students, when they were writing the third draft, they only worried about correcting their mistakes in terms of conventions such as punctuation, spelling, and grammar. We also did not mention to the students directly that their voice is important in academic texts as well. Therefore, the participants, at the end of the writers' workshops, put more attention on language form issues than on content. The lack of students' correction in content is perceived because the participants did not add significant details and arguments to their third drafts.

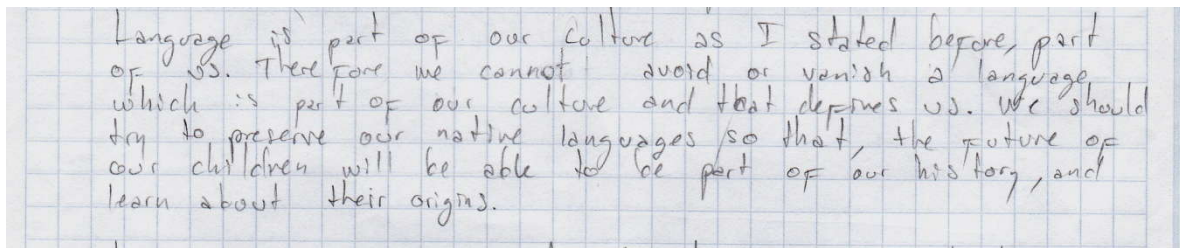
2.6 The students' word choice in their essays

To continue with the essays' analysis, we now focus on word choice. As the rubrics mentioned before, word choice contains a score that ranges from 1 to 6. One is the lowest trait in which the writer needs help finding academic words and six is the highest trait in which the words the students choose to make the essay very academic; the following sample reveals the lack of academic words included in the first draft of Maria's essay. This situation is presented despite the fact that Maria lived in the United States when she was a child, and she is continuously exposed to English at home.



Maria's First Draft

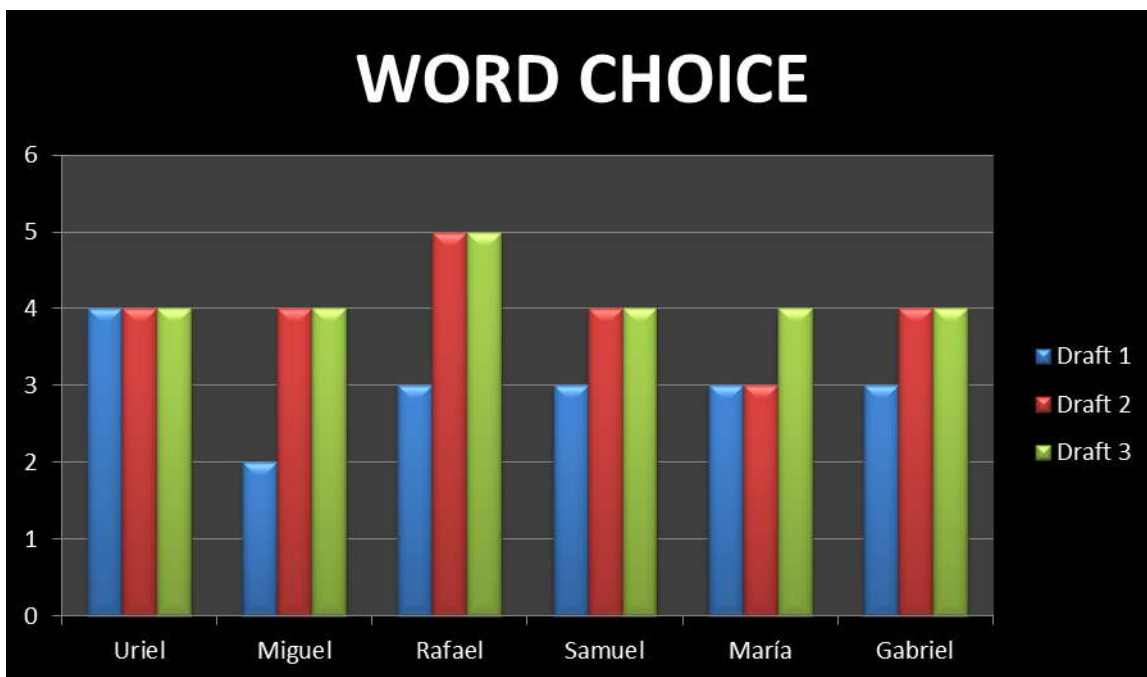
This evidence demonstrates that probably Maria has been exposed further to speaking than to writing. This fact is reflected on the lack of academic words that Maria employed in her essay.



Maria's Third Draft

We noticed that in the third draft, Maria did not take into account all the words' correction highlighted in the written feedback provided by the teacher "Vanessa" in the second draft. If we contrast both drafts, we can observe that in the first line of the third draft, Maria included the personal pronoun "I" and she corrected the negative form of the verb "can". Moreover, in the second line, she attempted to employ a more concrete word changing the word "something" by the word "language". However, in the same line she did not consider the corrections suggested by the teacher, in relation to the word "define" and the verb "try". Maria also replaced the pronoun "it" in the third line for the word "history"

and the word “roots” for the word “origins”. This information let us to affirm, that the feedback suggested to Maria’s essay during the writers’ workshops concerning formal vocabulary provided to her essay a more academic quality. However, we consider that Maria’s essay could be more academic in relation to academic vocabulary if she had taken into account the corrections concerning the verbs “Try” and “define” suggested by the teacher Vanessa.



In this image we can observe that most of the students improved their academic vocabulary from the first to the second draft. We assume that, the majority of the students improve their written papers in relation to word choice, because they included the feedback provided by the teacher and partners in their essays. This improvement is principally reflected on Rafael’s essay. However, there was no progress from the second to the third draft. This fact allow us to think that most of the participants did not expand the feedback concerning academic vocabulary during the revising stage, in which students were required

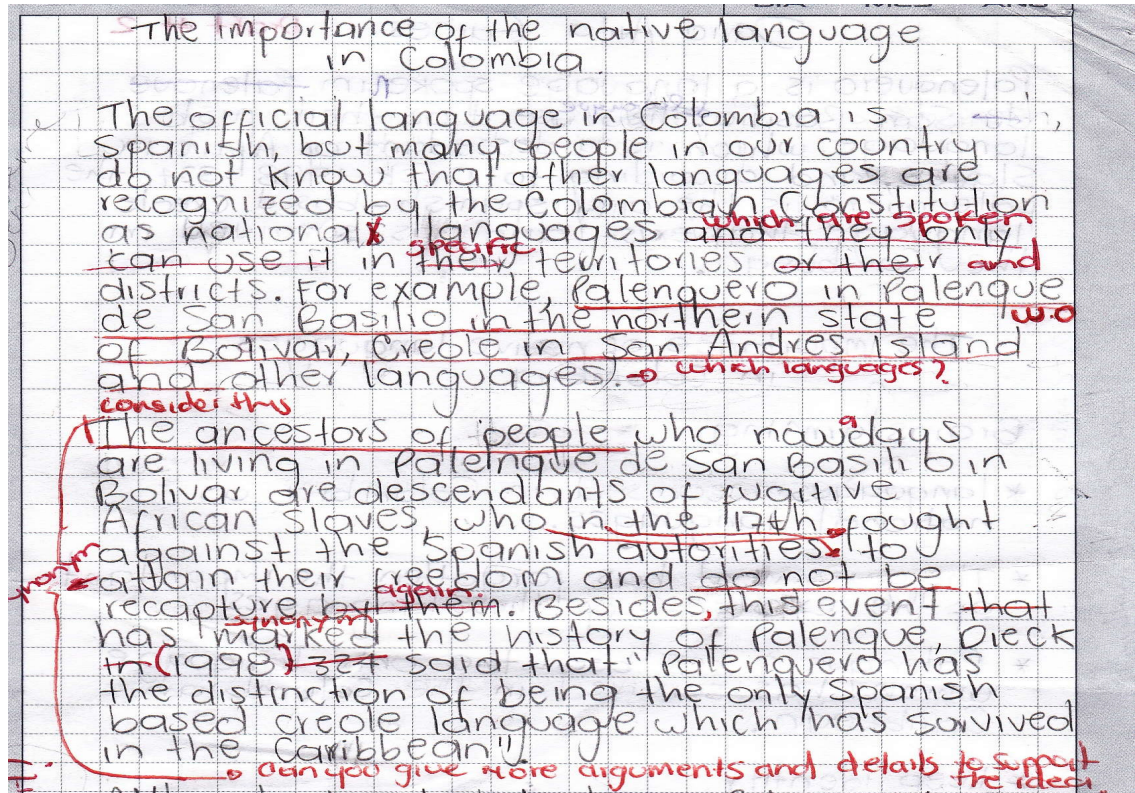
to modify their thinking from the readers' point of view in order to consider the audience to which the writing was addressed. In this case, the essay was addressed to an academic audience. Nevertheless, it seemed that the modifications done by the students in relation to formal vocabulary during the revising stage did not give to their essays significant improvement from the second to the third draft.

In relation to the previous finding, we consider that the use of formal vocabulary to create written papers provided a more academic quality to the students' essays. This idea is supported by Sebranek, Kemper & Meyer (2009) when they state that "your writing is only as good as the words that you use". However, we believe that most of the students, especially Maria, need to continue refining their vocabulary in order to develop better quality academic texts.

2.7 The students' sentence fluency in their essays

Effective writing flows smoothly from one sentence to the next one because of the use of transitional words to connect ideas. Sentences vary in length and begin in a variety of ways (Sebranek et al., 2009). In the revision of the students' essays, we paid careful attention to the sentence fluency in each paragraph. In the higher trait, the sentences should flow smoothly and be very understandable; in the lower trait, most sentences need to be

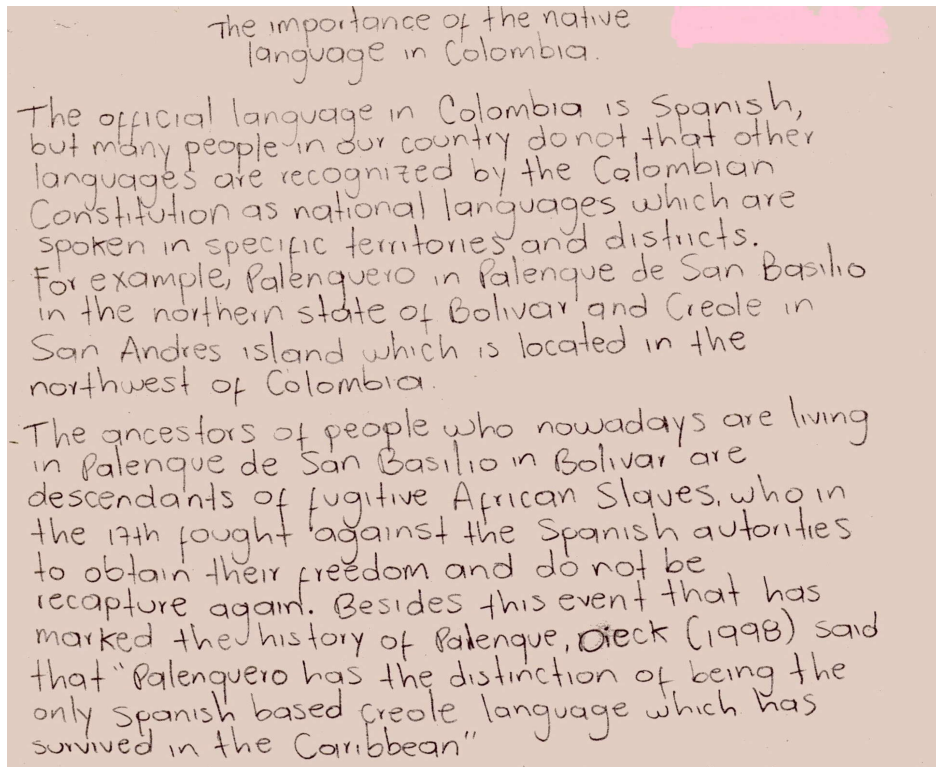
rewritten because many are incomplete. The next example is an evidence of the students' sentence style. This is Rafael's second draft:



Rafael's Second Draft

In the previous example, we noticed that the Rafael's ideas were understandable. However, he did not expand the sentences with more specific details and he presented problems with some grammar structures. Additionally, Rafael did not use transitions to link the first paragraph to the second paragraph. In general, the problems mentioned before did not totally affect sentence fluency of the paper because the information which Rafael presented in his essay was comprehensible; he used a variety of sentences to create an effective style on his writing. Consequently, we consider that Rafael's needs in the second draft were more related to the lack of arguments and supporting details. The following

example evidences Rafael's improvement from the second to the third draft in relation to sentence fluency:

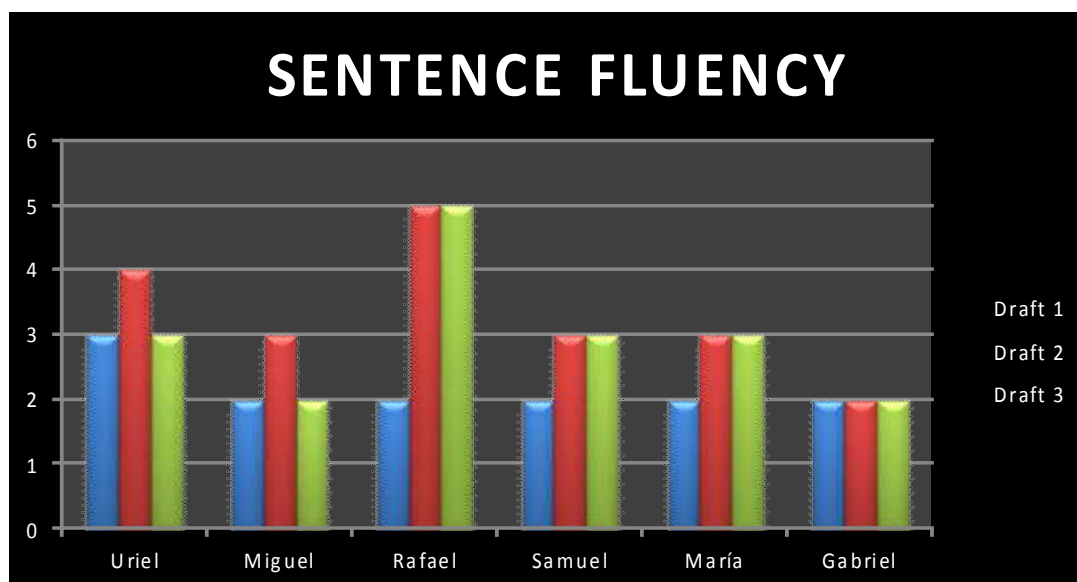


Rafael's Third Draft

In this example we can perceive that Rafael improved the paragraphs because he modified some grammar structures and the manner in which he cited. However, there was not a notable advancement between the two drafts regarding sentence fluency. The participant student did not add significant details to his essay. On the contrary, he maintained the style and the information used in the second draft, and the flow and rhythm of the essay did not have relevant changes. Thus, we consider that there were no major changes in both drafts, because Rafael's did not add more content to the final draft, he only

focused on the change of words and the use of connectors, but he did not take advantage of some comments we wrote on the final feedback about arguments, maybe because he did not have enough time to add more information.

The next graph illustrates the general information in relation to the students' sentence fluency in their essays:



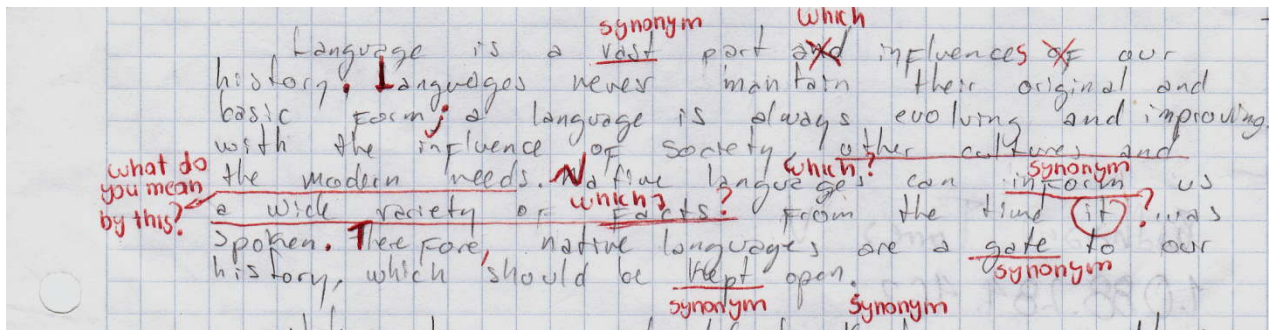
In the prior graph, we can notice that most of the students maintained similar sentence fluency in the second and third draft. Other participants, such as Uriel and Miguel, descended from the second to the third draft. They did not increase the variety of the sentences in their essays and some others sentences do not read smoothly. Therefore, we consider that this situation was presented because most of the students were limited to adding simple details such us words and connectors in the final draft, but they did not focus

on expanding their essays using several sentences with strong arguments to improve their writing quality.

According to Sebranek et al. (2009) effective writing contains a variety of sentences which vary in length and which are fluent when they all work together to make the writing enjoyable to read. However the results indicated that most of the six participant students did not focus on expanding their simple sentences in a variety of ways. The students still need to improve their sentence style in order to make their writing more fluent.

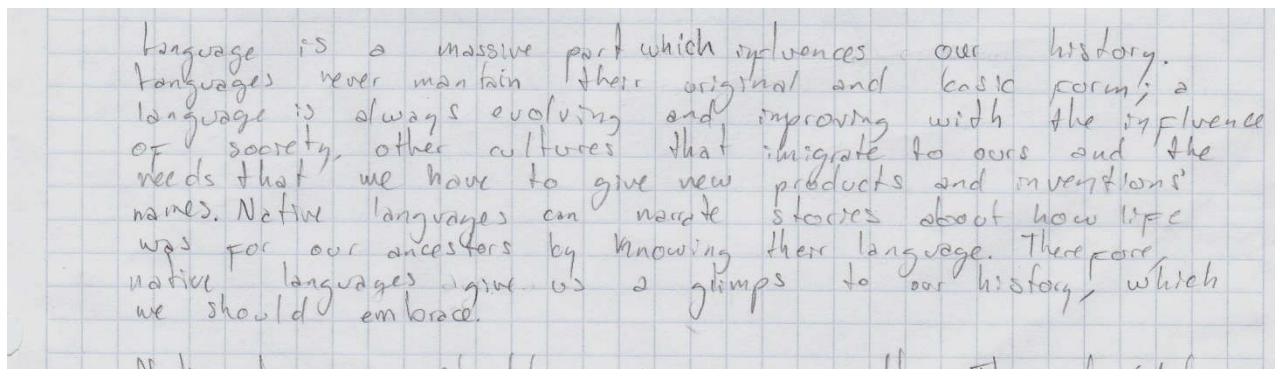
2.8 The students' use of conventions in their essays

Conventions are part of the 6-Trait® method employed to score the written tasks developed by the students during the writer's workshops. According to Sebranek, et al. (2009) conventions are essential rules of the language which include punctuation, grammar, capitalization, and spelling. This rubric was modified in order to categorize the participants essays' quality concerning to the use of conventions. Conventions include a score in which number six represents the highest: Punctuation, grammar, and spelling are correct. Additionally, number one is the lowest score which corresponds to the lowest score in which help is needed to make corrections. The following evidence illustrates inaccurate use of punctuation in Maria's essay



Maria's Second Draft

In the first example we can observe that Maria did not have problems with spelling. In relation to punctuation, Maria presents some mistakes; in the second line of the paragraph she put a comma after the word “history” where she should put a period. Furthermore, in the third line she wrote a comma instead of a semicolon, and in the seventh line Maria missed the comma after the connector *therefore*. Concerning capitalization, in the fifth line of the paragraph Maria did not capitalized the word “Native”. Moreover, in the sixth line she confused the singular personal pronoun “it” with the personal pronoun “they”.

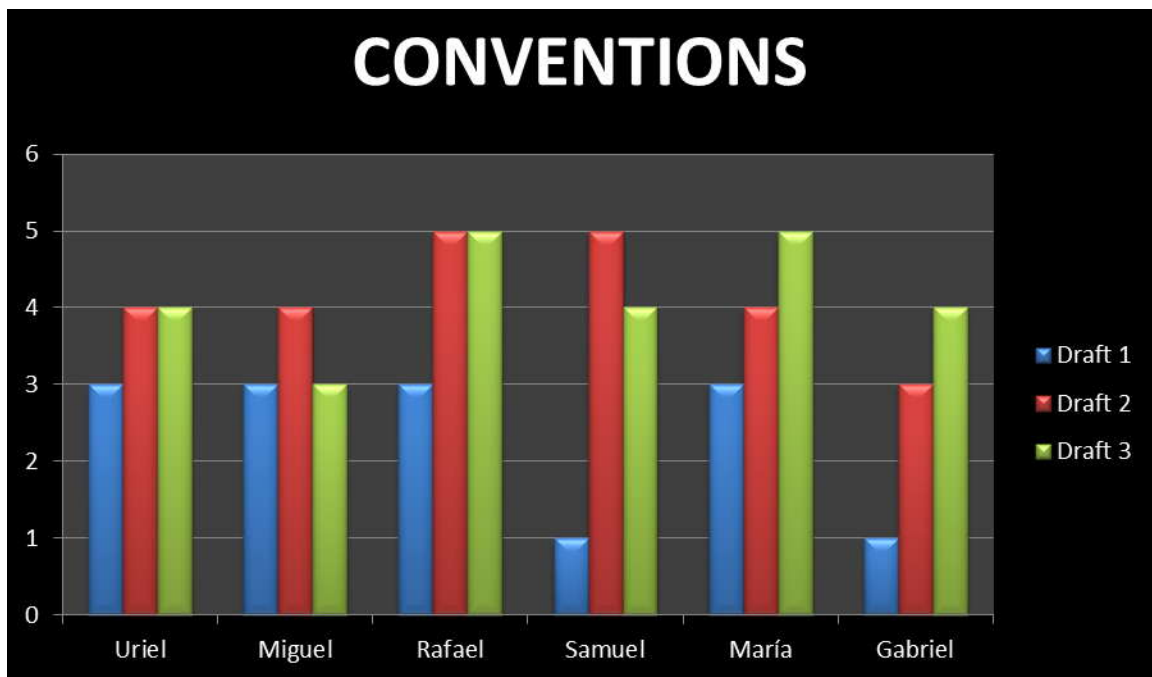


Marias' Third Draft

Contrasting the first and second draft, we realize that Maria added to the third most of the corrections suggested by the teacher through written feedback. Her third draft also has

good quality in relation to punctuation. However, in the third paragraph, Maria’s essay contains a problem with the spelling of the word “glimpse” which did not emerge in the second draft.

According to the information mentioned above, Maria’s essay shows a significant improvement from the second to the third draft concerning punctuation and capitalization. We can affirm that, this fact gave to Maria’s essay a more understandable quality. Nevertheless, we consider that Maria needs to continue improving the use of conventions in order to develop essays with high academic writing quality.



This graph illustrates that, the majority of the students achieved a significant improvement from the first to the second draft. We consider that all participants progressed

in relation to the use of conventions in their essays, because they included the feedback provided by their teacher and partners during the writers' workshops. However, from the second to the third draft some students, instead of improving the third draft, retrogressed. This fact let us to suppose that most of the students did not take advantage of the editing stage in which writers need take care of any problem they have with writing conventions such as spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Nevertheless, students like Maria and Gabriel seemed to employ the editing stage effectively in terms of the use punctuation, grammar and spelling, which provide to their essays clear ideas that make their essays understandable.

In relation to the finding stated above, we consider that when students advance in relation to the employment of conventions in their essays, the written papers can acquire a more understandable quality that provides pleasure to the reader. We agree with Sebranek et al. (2009) who argue that when the writer follows essential language rules such as grammar, punctuation, spelling and capitalization to develop written texts, the reader can realize that the writing is understandable and pleasure is taken in reading the document.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The writers' workshops increase the opportunities for the students to write by discussing and sharing ideas with others. Therefore, we could notice the great necessity of implementing the writers' workshops in the English Composition class permanently since they provide the students the opportunity to be involved and conscious about their writing process. Hence, the students will be prepared at the end of the program to write their thesis projects easily.

This study portrays that the participants took great advantage of the teacher's feedback. Thus, we consider that the need of creating groups of work in order to implement the writers' workshops early in the ELT program is vital because we found that the continual exposure to academic writing improves the students' writing proficiency.

Likewise, we found motivation very important for the students to write. We strongly believe that the students' extrinsic motivation (which is reflected in an external control) should be increased inside the English Composition class with the purpose of obtaining better writing results. Therefore, we support the idea by Zúñiga & Macías (2006) when they suggest publishing the students' papers in magazines or journals in or outside the university. We consider that this activity engages the students to write for a real audience.

When we analyzed the data, we found at the end of the study that students were aware of the importance of empowering their voice by representing themselves in their writings. However, in the third draft, the students were more concerned about correcting mistakes in terms of conventions than on content. Thus, we advise the teachers when they are instructing writing that they should teach the use of voice directly to the students because of its importance in academic writing.

On the other hand, we could observe that when we asked the students to work in groups to check their partners' work, they did not take advantage of their peers' feedback. It would be relevant to explore to what degree students value peers' feedback in comparison to the teachers' feedback and instruct them in how to give it. We believe that students tend to undervalue their partners because of their teacher-centered-traditional idea since the teacher is in charge of giving grades.

Finally, further studies could be done on the instruction of the 6-Trait® method. It is necessary to instruct the students on the characteristics that involve good writing quality, since good writers have to pay careful attention to the ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions in their writing production.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

During the development of our thesis project we faced two limitations that caused difficulties to acquire data:

1. When we started to collect data, we made interviews to our participants but one of them rejected the interview. She was in disagreement because she thought that the data was going to be published. This situation was presented despite the fact that we explained her that we were going to use pseudonyms in order to protect the participants' identity.
2. On the other hand, we had difficulties with the amount of the participants we chose to our project. At the beginning of the study, we selected 10 focal participants but we only could work with six of them because of the non-attendance of some participant students during the development of the workshops.

CONCLUSIONS

Through the writers' workshops implementation in the English Composition class, the students improved their academic writing. In addition, the participants now have different conceptions of academic writing and its importance in college settings. The students changed their conceptions and they gained consciousness about the importance of academic writing since they were involved in the writing process stages such as brainstorming, drafting, sharing, revising, and editing and they obtained better results in their writing.

In relation to the students' conceptions and use of the writing strategies, the students showed a change during the writers' workshops. At the beginning of our study, the participants expressed that they used some writing strategies such as drafting, translating paragraphs from the L1 to the L2, and reading examples. However, the participants did not use those strategies with a theoretical support; they assumed that those strategies could help them to write accurately. On the other hand, at the end of the implementation of the writers' workshops, we observed that the students increased awareness about the importance of using writing strategies to write academically.

Furthermore, we found a positive impact of the writers' workshops on the students. They claimed they acquired knowledge of the writing process and improved their writing skills. They found the writers' workshops very helpful because they wrote actively and

received feedback from the teacher constantly. Therefore, at the end of the workshops, the participants considered themselves as better writers. In contrast to the students' answers at the beginning of our study, in which they affirmed they had to improve their academic writing skills; they considered themselves as average writers because they had not been exposed to a continual writing production.

Concerning the role of the teacher with respect to the students' motivation, the participants considered the teacher's guidance very helpful because they worked intensively with the instructor monitoring them. They argued that the teacher's critiques were useful for them to improve their drafts. Therefore, when the students received feedback from the teacher, they felt more secure and wrote more actively.

Thus, we can conclude that most of the six participants considered the suggestions given by the instructor very beneficial because they gained significant contributions to their writing in terms of content and form of the texts. Nevertheless, regarding peers' feedback we found that the students did not take advantage of their partners' suggestions when they were working in groups because they have the traditional idea of teacher-centered classes and they consider that the teacher is the only who has strong bases and foundations to check and give appropriate feedback.

In relation to the students' responses to the writers' workshops, we found that most of the six students improved their academic writing proficiency during the workshops. Within the aspect of learners' ideas in their texts, we can conclude that though the students had a great improvement from the first to the third draft, they should reinforce their expansion of ideas, main topics, and statement in their essays.

In connection with the students' organization of their papers, we consider that there was a significant development between the first and the third draft because the students organized their essays considering the introduction, the body, and the conclusion. In terms of the students' use of voice in their essays, we can conclude that though we did not mention to the students directly that their voice is important in academic texts, the participants are now aware of the importance of empowering their voice by representing themselves in their writings.

Regarding to word choice, we found that the majority of the students improved their written papers in relation to selecting formal or academic vocabulary, because they included the feedback provided by the teacher in their essays. In connection with sentence fluency, the results indicated that most of the six students did not focus on expanding their sentences in a more variable way. Thus, we consider that the participants still need to improve their sentence style in order to make their writing more fluent.

Finally, in relation to the use of conventions, we observed that at the end of the writers' workshops, most of the six participants advanced in the use of punctuation, spelling, and grammar in their essays. The students are now aware of the importance of the use of essential language rules such as grammar, punctuation, spelling, and capitalization to make their written texts understandable.

In general terms, we can conclude that the six participants improved their academic writing through the implementation of the writers' workshops because they expressed the positive impact of the workshops in their writings. Their written papers also showed us the improvement the students had during their writing process in the writers' workshops.

REFERENCES

- Carbone & Orellana (2010). Developing Academic Identities: Persuasive Writing as a Tool to Strengthen Emergent Academic Identities. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 44(3), 292-316.
- Cárdenas, M.L. (2006). Bilingual Colombia: Are we ready for it? What is needed?. 19th Annual EA Education Conference 2006. English Australia.
<http://www.mineduacion.gov.co/cvn/1665/article-107731.html>
- Caron (2008). Teaching Writing as a Con-artist: When is a Writing Problem Not? *College Teaching*, 56(3), 137-13.
- Graham, S, & Perin, D. (2007). *Writing next: Effective strategies to improve writing of adolescents in middle and high schools – A report* Carnegie Corporation of New York. Washington, DC: Alliance for excellent Education.
- Herrell, A. L., & Jordan, M. (2008). *50 strategies for teaching English language learners*, 3rd ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Hyland, K. (2002). Options of identity in academic writing. *ELT Journal*, 56(4), 351-000.
- Kemper, D., Sebranek, P., & Meyer, V. (2009). *Write source: A book for writing, thinking, and learning*. Wilmington, MA: Great source Education Group.
- Leonhard, B. H. (1998). *Discoveries in academic writing*. Fort Worth, TX: Heinle ELT.
- Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest & Namey (2005). *Qualitative Research Methods: A data collector's field guide*. Family Health International. North Carolina 27709

- Murphy, E. Dinguall, R., Greatbatch, D., Parkers, S., & Watson, P. (1998). Qualitative research methods in health technology assessment: A review of the literature. *Health Technol Assessment*, 2(16), 1-260.
- Ortlipp, M. (2008). Keeping and using reflective journals in the qualitative research process. *The Qualitative Report*, 13(4), 695-705.
- Pappamihiel, N.E., Nishimata, T., & Mihai, F. (2008). Timed writing and adult English-language learners: An investigation of first language use in invention strategies. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 51(5), 386-394.
- Pates & Evans (1990). Writing workshops: An experience for British adult literacy. *Journal of Reading*. 34(4), 244-248.
- Peha, S. (1995). *An introduction to the Writing Process: Tools and Techniques for Helping Students Turn Raw Ideas into Polished Prose*. Carrboro, NC: Teaching That Makes Sense, Inc.
- Ryan & Deci (2000). Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations: Classic Definitions and New Directions. *Contemporary Education Psychology*. 25, 54-67.
- Sedita, J. (1989). Summarizing and paraphrasing. *Study skills: a landmark school teaching guide*, 2nd ed. (pp. 63-68) Land mark Outreach Program.
- Smith & MacGregor (1992). *What is Collaborative Learning?* Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education.

- Spalding, Wang, Lin, & Hu (2009). Analyzing Voice in the Writing of Chinese Teachers of English. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 44(1), 23-51.
- Thaiss, C. J., & Zawacki, T. M. (2006). *Engaged Writers, Dynamic Disciplines: Research on the Academic Writing Life*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/ Cook, Heinemann.
- Taylor-Powell, E., Steele, S., (1996). *Collecting evaluation data: Direct observation*. Madison, WI: Cooperative Extension Publications.
- Zúñiga, G., & Macías, D.F. (2006). Refining students' academic writing skills in an undergraduate foreign language teaching program. *Íkala, Revista de Lenguaje y Cultura*, 11(17), 311-336.

Appendix # 1

Questions for the interviews

Before the instruction/for students

1. What do you think about academic writing? What does it involve?
2. What do you consider most difficult about writing academically?
3. In your experience, what strategies have you used to write academically? Do you think those strategies are helpful to you as writer?
4. How do you see yourself as writer?

At the end of the study/for students

1. What do you think about writers' workshops?
2. What difficulties did you face in your writing process during the workshops?
3. What strategies did you find helpful for improving your academic writing?
4. How do you see yourself as a writer now?

Before the instruction/for the teacher

1. When you teach writing, what are the aspects that you emphasize?
2. Do you teach the students to write academically? How?
3. What do you know about the writer's workshop? Have you implemented them in your classes?
4. What writing strategies have you taught to your students?
5. What do you think is needed to improve academic writing in the students?

Appendix # 2

LESSON PLAN

The Instruction: Presenting the writing process

Group: English Composition Course	Date: October 4, 2010	Time: 2:00 pm - 4:00 pm	No of Students: 30
Material: Copies with information about writing, a computer, a video beam and writing worksheets.		Length of the lesson: 2 hours/120 minutes	Level: B1 and B2 Semester: 6th
Learning Aim: Learners will be able to acquire knowledge about the writing process, academic writing, and the writers' workshops in order to improve their writing production.			

Time	Stage	Aim	Anticipated Problems and Solutions	Procedures	Interaction	Material
10'	Warm up	To present ourselves as their teachers and to know them as students. To let students know what they are going to learn in the class.	P: Ls might not understand the instructions about what they are going to experience during the lesson. S: Teacher can encourage one student to repeat the instructions to the whole class.	The teacher is going to present herself and ask the students their names. The teacher is going to tell the students what she intend to teach during the lesson.	Whole class	Not needed.
45'	The writing process instruction	To present specific concepts about academic writing, the writers' workshops, the essay's structure and the stages involved in	P: Ls might not understand the information presented to the class about writing. S: The teacher will give the information printed to	Firstly, the teacher is going to hand out copies with the concepts she is going to present in order to help students to follow a sequence (see appendix 4) Secondly, the teacher is going to give a brief description of her thesis project	Whole class	A copy with information about academic writing, the writing process, writers' workshops and essay's structure.

		the writing process (brainstorming, drafting, sharing, revising and editing).	support the students' understanding about the topic.	<p>based on a power point presentation because the students must know the study in which they are going to be enrolled.</p> <p>Thirdly, the teacher is going to use slides to give instruction about academic writing, the writers' workshops, the essay's structure and the stages involved in the writing process</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Brainstorming. 2. Drafting. 3. Sharing. 4. Editing. <p>Finally, the teacher is going to hand out some writing worksheets to develop during the class.</p>		<p>Writing worksheets.</p> <p>A computer and video beam.</p>
50'	Writing activity	To help students to identify academic texts, giving them examples of formal and informal writing essays.	<p>P: Ls might not understand some vocabulary included in the texts.</p> <p>S: Teacher is going to give to students a list of vocabulary with the definitions.</p>	<p>Firstly, Students will read two examples about formal and informal writing and they will identify the formal and the informal paragraph (see appendix 5)</p> <p>Secondly, the students will read two essays about the cultural differences in writing. Moreover, they have to answer four questions about the readings (see appendix 6)</p> <p>Finally, the students will read another essay and they will</p>	Individual and whole class.	Writing worksheets.

				<p>answer some questions related to the topic (see appendix 7)</p> <p>Note: In each one of the exercises the students will share their answers to all the class.</p>		
--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Appendix # 3

6-Trait® method Rubric

Attribute	6	5	4	3	2	1
Ideas	The statement, arguments, and details make the essay truly academic.	The essay is academic with clear arguments and specific details.	The essay is academic with a clear statement. More specific details are needed.	The statement of the essay needs to be clearer, and more specific details are needed.	The statement needs to be expanded. Many more specific details are needed.	The essay need to be rewritten.
Organization	The organization makes the essay coherent and easy to read.	The beginning interests the reader. The middle supports the statement. The ending has a good conclusion.	The essay is divided into a beginning, a middle, and an ending. Some transitions are used.	The beginning or ending is weak. The middle needs a paragraph for each main point. More transitions are needed.	The beginning, middle, and ending all run together. Paragraphs and transitions are needed.	The essay should be reorganized.
Voice	The writer's voice sounds confident, knowledgeable, and formal.	The writer's voice sounds formal.	The writer's voice sounds formal most of the time.	The writer sometimes sounds informal.	The writer's voice sounds informal.	The writer needs to learn about academic voice.
Word Choice	The word choice makes the essay very academic.	The vocabulary makes the essay formal.	Some nouns and verbs could be more academic.	Academic vocabulary is needed.	Informal or missing words make this essay hard to understand.	The writer needs help finding academic words.
Sentence Fluency	The sentences flow smoothly and are very understandable.	The sentences read smoothly. A variety of sentences is used.	Most of the sentences read smoothly, but more variety is needed.	Many short sentences need to be combined to make a better variety of sentences.	Many sentences are incomplete and need to be rewritten.	Most sentences need to be rewritten.
Conventions	Punctuation and grammar are correct. Spelling is correct.	The essay has a few minor errors in punctuation, spelling, or grammar.	The essay has several errors in punctuation, spelling, or grammar.	Some errors confuse the reader.	Many errors make the essay confusing and hard to read.	Help is needed to make corrections.

Appendix # 4

Academic writing takes place in a college setting for an academic audience characterized by the use of sophisticated language

Pappamihiel, Nishimata & Mihai (2008) pointed out that the **writing process** involves collaborative activities in the classroom developed through **brainstorming, drafting, sharing, revising, and editing**.

Drafting

- ❑ Preliminary version of a document or text
- ❑ Tells you that it is not finished yet

Revising

The time you have to shift your thinking from the reader's point of view to consider the audience in your writing

Audience

Who the writer is addressing the message to

Brainstorming

- ❑ To experiment with quick and new ideas
- ❑ To gather thoughts
- ❑ To choose a direction

Sharing

- ❑ To work with other people
- ❑ To get feedback
- ❑ To have the chance to make changes based on the comments you received

Editing

Taking care of any problems you have with writing convention such as spelling, punctuation, grammar, and usage

Writer's Workshop

An approach used to teach writing in a collaborative setting in which the students can work through the process of writing by brainstorming, drafting, sharing, revising and editing

Encourage students to write with the support of their teacher and classmates in order to move students through the stages in their writing process

Essay Structure

- Introduction
- Thesis
- Body Paragraphs
- Conclusion

Introduction

- Acquaint the reader with the topic
- Give a startling example or statistic
- Tell a story
- Use a relevant quotation
- Ask a pointed question

Thesis

- Allow readers to get their bearings
- What point am I attempting to make in this essay?
- Has this point been clearly indicated to my audience in my essay?

Body Paragraph

- Develop and prove the thesis
- Provide details and explanation
- Give vivid examples
- Cite statistics where appropriate
- Include research as necessary
- Be descriptive

Conclusion

- Bring the essay to a satisfying close
- What have I learned from having written this essay?
- What are the implications or consequences of my thesis?
- What is the last impression with which I want to leave my audience?

Appendix # 5

Examples of formal and informal writing

<u>Writing</u>	<u>Writing</u>
<p>Capital is a difficult thing to understand. We can explain it in different ways, and in accounting we can look at it from different angles. Accountants talk about legal capital, financial capital and physical capital. How we apply financial and physical concepts of capital isn't easy because people in business use it differently...</p>	<p>Capital is a complex notion. There are many definitions of the word itself, and capital as applied in accounting can be viewed conceptually from a number of standpoints; that is, there is legal capital, financial capital and physical capital. The application of financial and physical concepts of capital is not straightforward as there are various permutations of these concepts applied in the business environment...</p>

Appendix # 6

Essay Test Answer 1

Professors in this culture have specific formal rules. First, they want papers to be neat. This is true in other cultures too. But in our culture, we have to remember little things. Such as put the holes on the left, not the right. We also have to skip lines and live the margin empty. Because the paper will be easy to read. Moreover, professors here want us to use only the front of the paper, not the back. We aren't supposed to flip the page over wrong. So what should be the top is used as the bottom, this is confusing.

Second, a composition is supposed to be like a picture. The words are the picture and the margin is the frame. We think this is beautiful. But maybe people in other cultures think something else is beautiful. Cultures are different, nobody is right or wrong. Also, if my paper is sloppy, it looks like I did it at the last minute. Professors here expect us to pay attention to details. Not just with format but with spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. For example, one of my professors gave me a C, I had too many mistakes.

Third, we have to type the right way. If a paper is typed wrong, our grade goes down. We have to double-space and leave spaces on the side. We also have to use font 12, not 15. If we use a computer to write our papers and print them, we have to make sure we tear the pages apart and put them in order. Professors do not like to do that for us. I think if nonnative speakers know these rules, they will do well with format. But they need to have interesting content, too. Because a paper won't get a good grade just because it looks nice.

In conclusion, it won't be hard for nonnative speakers to learn these rules, they are easier than thinking of ideas. [324 words]

Essay Test Answer 2

Cultural differences regarding the presentation of an academic paper may not be significant, but nonnative speakers should be aware of the format rules they will be expected to follow in academic courses.

First, effective academic writing in any culture looks polished and professional. In other words, it is well presented, not sloppy or illegible. Literally, the word

“paragraph” means “picture of words.” The completed writing assignment is pleasing to the eye and easy to read. Good writers care as much about the paper’s appearance as its message. Writing a good paper takes effort, and the “format” of the paper is the wrapping on the gift. The professor will be more willing to appreciate the message if the presentation is pleasing to the eye. Such a paper demonstrates the writer’s eye for detail in the completion of the paper, whereas a sloppy paper indicates a slipshod job, perhaps a last-minute attempt. A paper that looks professional will not necessarily get an “A” in a university here, but a carelessly assembled, messy paper will be lucky to get a “D,” especially if the content is poor. Although good academic writers in most cultures have high standards with respect to the presentation of their writing, the format rules they follow may vary in other cultures. To begin with, the use of holes, lines, margins, and the paper space are different from culture to culture. For example, in some cultures, writers prefer the paper holes on the right, not the left. Thus, their front page is the back of the page in this culture. Moreover, writers in other cultures may not like to waste paper, so they fill all the space on a page, including the margins. Professors here, however, will expect empty margins and double spacing to allow room for comments and aid readability. Also, the pages should be clearly numbered and in order, and the back of the paper should not be used. If the back is used, the writing should not be upside down. The paper, therefore, should not be flipped over from the bottom; the top of the back page should correspond to the top of the front page, not the bottom. Finally, there are other format rules to learn regarding typed papers. Typed papers should be double-spaced in font 12. The margins should be adequate also. Professors expect the pages to be numbered, torn apart if printed, and handed in the correct order.

In conclusion, nonnative speakers need to realize that, regardless of neatness, the format they are used to may be distracting to a professor here. Learning these rules is easier than learning how to compose a paper. [441 words]

Discussion Questions

Now that you have read the above Essay test answers, answer the following questions.

1. Which essay test Answer sounds the most academic in tone? Why?

2. Which one has the most formal and sophisticated in tone? Why?

3. Which one has the best control of style and language? Why?

4. Which one has the most effective content and organization? Why?

Appendix # 7

English academic writing: The “A” Paper

Academic writing is writing completed in a college or university setting for an academic audience consisting of professors, instructors, teaching assistants and students. There are several features of English academic writing which make it of value for nonnative speakers to learn. Failure to master the rules for effective academic writing in this culture will affect the learners’ success in a course.

Effective English academic writing, particularly the “A” paper, has three major characteristics. It has convincing content, clear organization and effective use of the English language.

First, the “A” paper has convincing content. To begin with, the content is informative and thought-provoking. The purpose of academic writing is to convey knowledge and understanding of a topic in a persuasive, formal and objective manner. Such writing is not too general. In order to be convincing, academic writers in Western culture are expected to use specific and logical details, examples, facts, statistics and case studies to support generalizations. Overly general and illogical content is not well received by professors. Second, the support is relevant. That is, the support relates directly to the thesis, which clearly presents the writer’s topic, purpose, method and opinion in an essay, and topic sentences, which do the same thing for each developmental paragraph in an essay. Writers are taught not to digress by telling stories or making “by the way” statements, which are out of tone with the assignment despite attempts to be creative and entertaining. All of the sentences content well-thought-out ideas and relevant supporting points. Third, although objective academic writing can be creative in that the writer is able to demonstrate effective critical-thinking skills. The content, that is, has depth of thought. The writer effectively analyzes the information, interprets the facts, makes judgments, draws conclusions, summarizes and defends opinions. Shallow writing is indicative of weak critical- thinking skills, and such papers, often describes as “sophomoric” receive low marks. Finally, an “A”

paper has a clear purpose, which helps direct the reader, the audience. This is because the writer has clear objectives and strong control of the content. The message is clear, logical and to the point. Indeed, paper with strong, unified support which demonstrates effective critical-thinking skills are well received by professors.

In addition to be convincing, effective academic writing in Western culture is well organized according to certain patterns and rules which may vary from culture to culture. The general pattern is described as linear because of the direct relationship between generalizations and their supporting points. Academic papers generally have a deductive approach, in which the generalization is stated first and then supported by specific details, examples and other kind of support. Sometimes however, academic writers use an inductive approach, in which the specific support is given before the generalizations. English academic writing is also organized on the rhetorical level. There are several classical patterns used: narration, description, definition process, classification, comparison, cause/effect and argumentation. The pattern chosen is the method by which the writer will convey the content. This involves learning the organizational cues for the patterns and ways to order the support with these rhetorical devices. The success of a paper depends on how well the writer handles these organizational principles.

Finally, good English academic writing demonstrates sophisticated use of the English language. First, "A" papers are clearly written at the sentence level. Organization is important not only at the rhetorical level; it is crucial at the sentence level. Disorganized sentences disrupt the flow of thought in a paper and interfere with the meaning of the passage. Frequent agreement errors, misspellings, incorrect punctuation and other such problems also demonstrated lack of control of English and distract the reader. Second, style is important. Effective English academic writing demonstrates control over a variety of sentence types. In western culture, complex and compound-complex sentences, which contains dependent clauses, are preferred in academic papers. Papers containing too many simple sentences and the conjunctions *for*, *and*, *nor*, *but*, *or*, *yet*, and *so* are considered boring and unimaginative. A wide vocabulary range is another characteristic of effective academic writing. Because information is conveyed in content words, weak (basic) vocabulary demonstrated weak thinking. Since effective sentence organization and

vocabulary contributes to the content of a paper, writers who have a command of the English language are more convincing than writers who cannot articulate complex ideas.

In conclusion, nonnative speakers studying in the U.S or Canada will benefit for learning, what will be expected of them in their academic writing. If the professor's expectations are not met with regard to content, organization and language, the papers may not be well received. Mastering the fundamentals of English academic writing will enable nonnative speakers to succeed in their academic studies.

Questions

1. What is the writer's purpose for this essay?
2. Which are the three characteristics of English academic writing?
3. Briefly, define the following:
 - a. Thesis statement
 - b. Topic sentence
 - c. Relevance
 - d. support

DEDICATION

We dedicate our thesis Project to God, who gave us inspiration; to Katherine's mother who has fought tirelessly all her life to provide Katherine a good education; to Lilliana's mother who has been her support and her reason to achieve her goals; to Vanessa's father and mother who have been next to her when she has needed them and they have supported her in every endeavor.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, we want to thank God, because He has been our light in all this process of becoming professionals. Moreover, God has given us the support, the patience, the strength, and the knowledge to overcome every difficulty that we have faced during these five years at the university. ¡All the glory to you my Lord!

Second, we are grateful with our families because they have provided us the emotional and economic support, not only throughout this time at the university, but also during our whole lives. They encouraged us to persist when we felt down and they taught us that with patience and effort we can achieve every dream we have.

Third, we recognize Angela Maria Lopez Velasquez for being an excellent professor, a person with great human qualities and for giving us her sincere collaboration to develop the first step of our thesis project.

On the other hand, we are grateful with Frank Giraldo because he helped us with his professional advisement without any obligation when we needed more support.

We also recognize the professor Harold Alvarez Cortes, because he was our advisor from the start of the second part of this project to its end, and he helped us despite all the obligations he had.

Finally, we want to extend our gratitude to our friends and classmates since they shared with us happiness and sadness every time. They gave us their friendship and love in an unconditional way. Thanks friends for every hug, every word, and every smile.

RESUMEN

El presente estudio fue realizado como respuesta a las necesidades reflejadas por un grupo de estudiantes universitarios de un programa de licenciatura en enseñanza de la lengua inglesa, para perfeccionar su escritura académica. Para poder lograr este propósito, se implementó una serie de talleres de escritura en la clase de composición de sexto semestre. Los talleres de escritura fueron enfocados en concienciar a los estudiantes acerca del proceso de escritura académica, incluyendo estrategias como: generar ideas, compartir, redactar un borrador, revisar y editar.

De hecho, nosotras como estudiantes de la licenciatura en inglés percibimos las dificultades que los estudiantes del programa enfrentan durante el proceso de la escritura de textos académicos. Por esto decidimos llevar a cabo este proyecto, con la intención de responder las siguientes preguntas: ¿cuáles son las concepciones de los estudiantes de licenciatura en enseñanza de la lengua inglesa sobre la escritura académica antes y después de nuestra instrucción? ¿Cuáles son las respuestas de los estudiantes de licenciatura en enseñanza de la lengua inglesa hacia nuestra instrucción a través de los talleres de escritura?

Para responder a las preguntas mencionadas previamente y recolectar los datos de nuestro estudio, llevamos a cabo dos entrevistas a cada uno de los participantes antes y después de nuestra instrucción. Además, observamos cada uno de los talleres de escritura

y diseñamos tareas de escritura para determinar el progreso de los estudiantes en relación con la escritura académica.

Por otra parte, los resultados de este estudio revelaron que los talleres de escritura generaron un impacto positivo en los estudiantes, en cuanto al proceso de escritura y las estrategias que hacen parte de él. Además descubrimos que, el feedback oral y escrito brindado por el profesor durante los talleres de escritura, contribuyó a desarrollar la habilidad de los estudiantes para producir escritos con una calidad más académica.

También encontramos que, el profesor influyó positivamente en la motivación de los estudiantes, ya que a través de su monitoreo constante y feedback, los participantes fueron capaces de producir mejores textos académicos. En consecuencia, este estudio indica que, los talleres de escritura son un enfoque que, no solo proporciona a los estudiantes conciencia respecto al desarrollo de su propio proceso de escritura, sino que también, brinda a los estudiantes la posibilidad de mejorar la escritura académica, con la guía y el feedback del educador.

ABSTRACT

The current study was developed in response to the needs revealed by a group of undergraduate students from an English Language Teaching (ELT) program to refine their academic writing skills. In order to achieve this purpose, we implemented the writers' workshops in the composition class of sixth semester at this program. The writers' workshops provided to students awareness concerning the writing process which incorporate writing strategies such as brainstorming, sharing, drafting, revising, and editing.

In fact, we as previous students of the ELT program noticed the difficulties the students face in the program when writing academic texts. That is why we decided to conduct this project in an attempt to answer these questions: What are the ELT students' conceptions towards academic writing prior and after instruction? What are the responses of undergraduate ELT students to our writing instruction through the writers' workshops?

In order to answer the research questions mentioned above and collect data, we conducted two interviews to each one of the participant students: one previous and one after our instruction. Moreover, we observed each one of the writers' workshops, and we designed writing tasks to measure the students' academic writing improvement.

On the other hand, the findings in this study revealed that the writers' workshops generated a positive impact on the students' writing process and what it involves. In addition, we found that the written and oral feedback given by the instructor during the

writers' workshops contributed to increasing the students' ability to produce writing with a more academic quality.

Moreover, we noticed that the teacher influenced students' motivation to write positively since through teachers' monitoring and feedback, the students were capable of producing better academic written texts. Thus, this study suggests that the writer's workshop is an essential instructional approach which not only provides students awareness concerning the development of their own writing process, but also the possibility to improve academic writing supported by the instructors' guidance and feedback.

INTRODUCTION

This research study was focused on the implementation of writers' workshops as a tool to improve the students' academic writing in an English Language Teaching (ELT) program in a public university. The focal participants were six students from the English composition course of 6th semester. This group of students had a range of ages from 20 to 30 years old, and they already had taken the four English courses required by the ELT program: Basic, pre-intermediate, intermediate, and advance.

During the development of the project, we guided one two-hour lesson to present the students the most relevant definitions about academic writing and the specific stages of the writers' workshops (brainstorming, drafting, peer feedback, revising and editing). Moreover, we conducted four two-hour writers' workshops with the purpose of helping students to improve their academic writing skills.

Furthermore, in this qualitative study we employed different data collection methods such as interviews, observations, tasks, and journals, in order to identify the students' responses to our writing instruction and their conceptions towards academic writing prior to and after the implementation of the writers' workshops. Those methods were triangulated to analyze data and acquire relevant findings.

The findings showed that through the implementation of the writers' workshops in the English composition class, the participant students improved their academic writing and changed their conceptions about the writing process. At the end of the study, the students agreed that they had increased their consciousness about the importance of using writing strategies such as brainstorming, drafting, and revising to improve their academic writing skills. They also stated that the guide and the feedback given by the teacher were useful for them because they could improve their drafts.