

PRE-SERVICE ENGLISH TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND STRATEGIES
IMPLEMENTED IN ACADEMIC WRITING PROCESSES

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Our lives are made by events. Most of them are cause of our acts, and in this way our acts must be focused on reaching our goals in life. Reaching these goals give us the satisfaction of the accomplishment; however it is not possible without the people around us.

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ABSTRACT

To know students' necessities and how they perceive their own learning process of a foreign language in a classroom is very important, thus they can achieve upper levels in their learning. For this reason, this research reports the pre-service teachers' perceptions about writing and their strategies used at the moment of writing an academic paper. Nowadays there are not a considerable number of studies in the region in such field. In this way, this research intends to contribute and give insights in the field of academic writing, how students perceive it and the strategies developed around it.

With the purpose of aiming at this objective, eight interviews were developed. One interview to the teacher of the English composition course and seven to the undergraduate students who attended the same subject, in order to get insights about the academic writing in their learning process. Also an essay elaboration and the researchers' journals were other methods used to collect data for this study.

This study was conducted in a state university of Pereira Colombia, in which the data analysis showed a lack of awareness in the use of strategies at the moment of creating an academic product. Moreover this study conveys insights about how students perceived their writing process in relation to their strengths and weaknesses.

RESUMÉN

Conocer las necesidades y cómo los estudiantes perciben su propio proceso de aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera en un aula de clase es muy importante ya que así ellos pueden alcanzar niveles más altos de aprendizaje. Por esta razón, esta investigación informa las percepciones de futuros profesores de un programa de licenciatura acerca de la escritura y de las estrategias usadas al momento de escribir un documento académico. Actualmente no hay un número considerable de estudios en la región en dicho campo. De esta forma, esta investigación intenta contribuir y dar perspectivas en el campo de la escritura académica, cómo es percibida y qué estrategias de escritura son desarrolladas por los estudiantes de pregrado.

Apuntando a este objetivo, ocho entrevistas hechas a un mismo número de estudiantes de pregrado quienes asistían a un curso de composición inglesa fueron desarrolladas con el propósito de obtener percepciones acerca de la escritura académica en su proceso de aprendizaje. También la creación de un ensayo y los diarios de campo de los investigadores fueron otros métodos usados para la recolección de datos para este estudio.

Este estudio fue conducido en una universidad pública de Pereira Colombia, en el cual, el análisis de los datos mostró una falta de conciencia en el uso de estrategias al momento de crear un producto académico. Por otra parte este estudio comunica percepciones acerca de cómo los estudiantes percibieron su proceso de escritura en relación a sus fortalezas y debilidades.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In the last decades, teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) has gained priority in the Colombian schools' curricula. Therefore, with the purpose of improving the English competences of citizens (especially school students) in Colombia, the National Bilingual Program or Colombia Bilingüe (PNB; 2004) established that English teachers must be updated in teaching methods and new teaching approaches that must be included in their EFL classes. By taking into account the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference, 2001), the Ministry of Education launched the standards of competencies for English Language Teaching with an emphasis in giving importance and fostering the inclusion and practice of the linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences that comprises the four skills to be assessed and described in a language course. In this sense, the PNB based on the CEFR, which sets international standards for teaching a foreign language, highlights the importance of developing the skills involved in learning a foreign language: Reading, listening, speaking and writing.

Among these four skills, writing is one of the most challenging skills that needs to be developed, since it requires not only syntactic and lexical knowledge but also the capacity to develop and organize ideas in a coherent and clear way at the moment of conveying messages to the reader (Quintero, 2008). On the other hand, according to Emig (1977), writing is more an analytical process than just a transmission of information from a transmitter to a receptor. Writing also demands a mental connection between the literacy skills; reading and writing. In addition to

this conception, the writing process also involves revision and editing stages since a writing product is the result of a sustained reasoning process which involves progression from pre-writing to re-writing and editing (Logan, 1989). Finally, the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL, 2007) sets seven elements that must be present in a good writing product: content, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions and presentation. These elements alongside with Emig (1977) and Logan (1989) state a global idea of what the writing process meant to be.

As it was stated in the previous paragraph, writing demands a special consideration, however, even more than the required if the learner is a future teacher. In this regard, Zúñiga and Macías (2006) state that it is transcendental for an undergraduate students from a university program to become acquainted with the writing skill both as learners and as teachers because they will eventually instruct others in the development of this skill. Therefore, teachers to be require special preparation and good commanding in writing.

Moreover, the Ministry of education has established that English teachers in Colombia should have a B2 proficiency level for providing instruction at a high school. However, statistics show that just approximately the 10% of English teachers achieve such level required by the MEN (2006), and then these statistics also suggest the need to analyze and explore deeply teachers' competences in writing.

Besides, considering that writing is one of the communicative abilities, and as an ability, it needs to be developed in academic contexts (Harmer; 2004), it can be stated that academic writing in academic scenarios demands using more than an informal register of language (Murray & Moore, 2006). Nevertheless, research in the field of academic writing is limited and it needs to be explored more in depth. In this regard, Ortiz (2011) highlights that teaching writing in academic context has been widely investigated in United States since the late eighties, whereas in Colombia, there are not enough research products in the area of academic writing.

In addition, the research area of the university program, where the present study was carried out, found that the completion of the research paper as a requirement for obtaining the degree has become one of the major issues and challenges for the students. Students' writing products take longer than expected, something that in most of the cases is the cause of postponing the culmination of their thesis, but by observance, the reasons that have to do with this procrastination phenomenon could be related to the excessive feedback on writing that most of the research papers receive before obtaining final versions of them.

Therefore, it is essential to carry out studies where the competence of writing is further analyzed. This fact is supported in Jodelet's work (1989) who claims the necessity of understanding the performance of students' writing from what students produce, and how they achieve so. This is also stated by Ortiz (2011) who expressed her concerns around the practices of writing that have not been systematized or discussed in depth.

Consequently, and as a response to the already mentioned facts, the purpose of this current study was to analyze the students' perceptions and the strategies used at the moment of writing some academic products requested for a class of English Language Composition in a State University in Pereira, Colombia, in order to explore these students' academic written skills.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Principal Question

- What are the strategies that the students use when they are required to write academically in an English writing composition course of a foreign language teaching university program?

Sub questions

1. What are the teacher's perceptions in relation to the students' process and performance in the English composition course?
2. What are the students' perceptions at the moment of writing academically in the English Composition Course?
3. What High Order Thinking Skills are identified in the students' writing process?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to the statement of the problem, there are three constructs concerning the research questions: writing and writing in English, writing academically and students' perceptions. This literature review is devoted to present the aforementioned relevant terms and their definitions. The explanation of these terms will be provided to make possible the understanding of the jargon used through this study.

Writing and writing in English

According to the Oxford dictionary (2006), writing is the act of creating characters, letters or symbols to be written or imprinted on a surface with the purpose of representing the sounds or words of a language. Therefore writing is used to express or convey meaningful messages using language codes.

Additionally, Maltepe (2006) suggests that writing is not only a language skill but also a technique which enables higher levels of thinking. It is a complex task which takes place in stages that include steps that require cognitive control mechanisms such as synthesizing, planning, transforming, and reviewing. In this sense, Flower (1998) highlights that "writing enlists a multitude of cognitive and motivational processes: goal setting; content transformation; recall of topical, audience, and writing genre knowledge; self-regulation; and making multiple judgments of goal attainment."

It can be said that writing is a demanding skill that involves cognitivist processes with the purpose of producing an understandable text. In a similar way, writing in English also requires attention and clarity as Hyland (2007) proposes when he explains that English writing must be coherent and cohesive. In other words, when students start to write in English, they should be coherent in the sequence of their ideas and they should find cohesion using various linguistic alternatives to connect their ideas. Furthermore, to write in English, students should have been trained on grammar structures and writing rules. This process which is formally introduced in academic sessions on writing, requires a disciplined procedure that combines the student's knowledge of the target language and their abilities to register them in an accurate way. This type of discipline learnt when taking writing courses is influencing for the students to empower their own language learning process as Villas (2011) suggests because it makes learning relevant and their social realities result in greater interest, involvement and confidence in language learning in general.

In addition Li and Schmitt (2009) draw from Hyland (2007) that knowledge of vocabulary is obviously a pre-requisite for writing. This fact was evidenced in his research developed with a group of Chinese students that reached a considerable level of literacy through an approach named formulaic multi-word sequences, in which the teaching of vocabulary in a sequence way was the main purpose. It shows how vocabulary and the use of the grammar structures affects not only writing, but also the writing process, a fact that does not receive the importance

that it needs; as Harmer (2007) says: “for many years teaching of writing was focused on the written product rather than on the writing process.” (P. 11).

Besides, interesting findings from Ferris & Roberts (2001) reveal that L2 writers know that they need expert feedback and correction. These L2 writers are well aware of their unproficiency in English academic writing, and that far from being offended by it, they will be disappointed, anxious, or even resentful if teachers withhold it.

On the other hand, writing is a skill that also complies a process that must be followed when any writer wants to produce an organized text. Such process is divided into four stages that, according to Harmer (2004), take place during the writing process: planning, drafting, editing and final version. In the first stage, planning, the writer is focused on a purpose for the paper. During this stage, Harmer (2004) mentions that both experienced and non-experienced writers use strategies such as brainstorming or outlines that are elaborated either jotting down ideas or just keeping them in mind. The second stage is “drafting” and Harmer (2004; p 5) also describes it as “the first piece of writing.” It means that it will be more than one writing product that link to the next stage: “editing”. For Harmer (2004), such stage of editing demands and requires to read, re-read, and include or exclude information in order to give a shape to the writing and produce a “final draft” that according to Harmer (2004) is the result, thus the final stage of the whole process.

In this regard, Murray & Moore (2006) also say that the same process for writing (explained in the last paragraph) goes beyond in academic writing. It involves exploring diverse writing topics and face different insights that allow to conceptualize them. Hence, Murray & Moore (2006) say that academic writing encompasses norms and values previously established in an academic setting, and likewise, it needs training or a group support in order to develop the academic writing skills that are necessary in the construction of essays, reports, presentations and research papers, which are some examples of the documents that must be written in academic style.

Writing Academically

Heinemann (2006) notes that academic writing requires a more elaborated structure (introduction, body and conclusion) and formal language, being necessary to avoid the use of informal vocabulary, jargon, and slang tolerated in an ordinary writing. It shows a level of complexity in contrast to the ordinary writing, clearly set in academic contexts. Heinemann (2006) also explains academic writing as any assignment that comes from a scholar setting as essays, teaching publications, thesis and similar papers. Agree with this, Irvin (2010) notes that academic writing is every writing task elaborated for an academic purpose.

As it was said in the last paragraph, in an ordinary writing is not indispensable the use of a formal language or structure because the main purpose is to transmit a message. On the contrary, in academic writing, apart from just transmitting a message, it is important to take into account the sentence structure

and the language (jargon). Nearby, Irvin (2010) adds that academic writing is a form of evaluation, showing knowledge of certain issues and linguistic skills.

So whether academic writing is set in academic contexts, it is evident the importance of the role of the future teacher, who, according to Draper (2000), must be a good reader and writer in order to guide students to develop an acceptable product at the end of the process, and not only in a course of writing, but also in other areas where a writing product is required. As Irvin (2010) expresses “writing the paper is never “just” the writing part. To be successful in this kind of writing, you must be completely aware of what the professor expects you to do and accomplish with that particular writing task.” (p.8).

In the same way, in order to set a distinction between writing and academic writing, using the theoretical concepts by Bean (2001), Murray and Moore (2006) note some characteristics of academic writing such as formal tone, use of the third-person rather than the first-person perspective, clear focus on the issue or topic rather than the author’s opinion, and precise word choice. Also, the structure of the writing product must follow some characteristics that Browker (2007) conveys such as an introductory paragraph (that contains an opening statement) whose aim is to contextualize the reader, the body of the paper and the paragraph that close the document.

The most important issue in academic writing is the originality of the written work. Bloom (1985) argues that academic writing is never isolated of other

people's work, previous work, or contemporary work. Therefore, the academic product has to be reviewed, discussed, and referred to a writer. Academic product that does not cite or refer to existing works on its topic, and uses other authors' idea in its writing can be settled as doing plagiarism. Whenever detected, this will result in serious consequences for studies and university programs.

Perceptions

According to NSA Family Encyclopedia (1992), perception is an ability possessed by animals (including humans) with a high developed nervous system. NSA Family Encyclopedia (1992) also notes perception "...involves the cortex of the brain, where complex responses to sensory stimulation are made." (P.198). In that sense, a perception is a mental process that implies a procedure of organizing the senses in order to produce knowledge of the world around, showing that perception is more than an instinctive reaction to an external incentive.

As it was said, a perception contains sensations. Taking this into account, Lindsay and Norman (1997) define student perceptions by making a difference between a sensation and a perception. They define a sensation as an immediate response to a stimulus. Moreover, a perception is explained as a mental process consisting on interpretations and organized sensations that produce understanding or awareness. Thereby, perceptions describe people experiences better, implicating a time to reflect on, thus making this process more complex than what a sensations is.

In addition Lindsay and Norman (1997) also note that this process is not a public act. It is a personal experience, and as such, it is just visible by the person self. However perceptions can be checked in an indirectly way. The perceptual process is not itself public or directly observable in students (except to the perceived oneself, whose perceptions are coming from oneself experience). The validity of perceptual theories can be checked only indirectly through qualitative research.

Besides Leibowitz (2005) points out that different from a text preparation and topic knowledge, students' academic expectations also influence their perceptions and performance of writing. Successful written performance depends not only on proficiency of English, but also on the degrees of familiarity with academic discourse. In addition, Ferris & Roberts' study (2001) draws that L2 writers are conscious about the lack of academic writing skills and for that reason the L2 writers experiment anxiety, disappointment or resentment. Also O'Malley and Chamot (1990) suggest that when learners are not proficient in their second language, they are not aware of the learning strategies that they use and why they use them.

Writing, writing academically and students' perspectives

Ling He & Ling Shi (2008) found that an important factor influencing students' perceptions when writing essays concerns to the topic knowledge required in the writing prompts. Hence compared with those students who focus on vague ideas because of their lack of topic knowledge, students with good

knowledge of the topic could perform their writing better by concentrating on organizing ideas. In this sense, Broadfoot (2005) proposes that the different students' perceptions when writing an academic text emerge due to the lack of knowledge of the topic and lack of preparation in assessment. In other words students' perceptions and performance in writing skills are related to their learning backgrounds in terms of text preparation experiences, topic knowledge, and knowledge of academic expectations (Ling He & Ling Shi, 2008). Thus, it can be said that the perceptions of a student who possess a good background in writing and feels well prepared are different from a student who does not possess a good record in writing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the following section, we will present some studies that took place in second language classes in relation to the use of strategies and students' perspectives according to academic writing. These researches by Mc. Daniel (1994) Roberts (2001) and Thep-ackrapong (2005) were developed in Thailand and United States. Some examples include the interference of the mother tongue, problems with the concluding paragraphs in an essay, feedback and correction, etc.

Mother tongue interference

The interference of the mother tongue in the learning process of a second language is present in the four skills, and writing, as one of them, is not an exception as it is shown in a research conducted by Thep-ackrapong (2005) in which the writing products of 28 Thai students were analyzed. These writing products were part of the students' final exam in a basic writing course.

In Thep-ackrapong's research, the analysis of the documents were focused on four approaches: contrastive analysis, error analysis, interlanguage analysis and contrastive rhetoric. In this way Thep-ackrapong (2005) discovered a strong interference of Thai language in lexical and syntactic structures, especially regarding subject-verb agreement and passive voice. Therefore, students perform several grammatical errors in their academic writing influenced by their mother tongue.

Concluding paragraph problems in essays

Bloom (1956) illustrates a concluding paragraph as the part of a paper where it is set a summary that reminds the reader the main points that explain the significance of the arguments.

In addition, Mc. Daniel (1994) found in his study that Thai writers have problems with the concluding paragraphs in an essay since they did not include a brief summary of the main points of the essay as it is required in academic essays. In the same way, Broker (2007) found that the participants had challenges with the concluding paragraphs because they tended to finish their essays abruptly without concluding ideas or letting the reader realize the essay was finished.

Factors that affect students' academic writing

On the other hand, Ferris & Roberts (2001) analyzed in their study how the different ways of feedback affect students' writing. This research took place in English second language (ESL) classes in a high school that belongs to the francophone system of Quebec, Canada.

The research consisted on the application of three methods of giving feedback: direct corrections, peer correction and group correction. The findings of this study from Ferris & Roberts (2001) reveal that L2 writers expressed to have needed expert feedback and correction. They recognized their lack of proficiency in

English academic writing but they did not feel insulted. Instead, they hold feelings like disappointment, anxiety, or even resentfulness when the teachers deny these students' situation.

Similar studies by Power and Fowles (1999) were carried out in an English institute of language assessment in Michigan. In four years investigating students' writing in aspects such as topic domain, rhetorical task, prompt length, task constraint, prompts expected grammatical person of response, and number of writing tasks, the results reported that the participating examinees preferred writing prompts that elicited strong feelings or opinions related to their personal experiences and background knowledge of the different examination topics. In this relation, Powers & Fowles (1999) found that a factor that may affect students' perceptions when facing academic writing is the diversity of cultures. Students from a different cultural background may have a lack of knowledge of the topic required in the essay prompts and may have little awareness of the expectations of the readers (Bacha, 2002; Johns, 1991). Therefore, the situations resulted from the studies previously explained show that not having enough or any single knowledge on a topic may affect the quality of the written product.

Therefore, topic knowledge is influencing as can be noted with other similar research by Ling He et Ling (2008), who analyzed a standardized English proficiency tests in western Canada in fifty post-secondary students with different English levels, notes an important factor influencing students' perceptions and performance of writing concerns to the topic knowledge required in the writing

prompts (Ling He et Ling Shi, 2008). In the same way, Ling He & Ling Shi (2008) found that an important factor influencing students' perceptions when writing essays concerns to the topic knowledge required in the writing prompts. Hence, compared with those students who focus on personal ideas because of their lack of topic knowledge, students with good knowledge of the topic could perform better by concentrating on organizing required topical ideas.

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this section is to describe and explain the methodology deployed in this study. This section also describes the geographical area where the study was conducted, the study design and the population. The instruments used to collect the data, including methods implemented to maintain validity and reliability of the instrument are described in order to examine the pre-service English teachers' perceptions and the strategies implemented in academic writing processes.

Type of study

The current study was a qualitative one in which the researchers collected the data through personal interviews, diaries and artifacts. Brown (2002) explains that one of the characteristics of a qualitative research is gathering data via interviews and questionnaires. As researchers, it was necessary to seek people's perceptions when writing for a course of English composition and the reality that the students perceived from it. According to Stainback (1988), a holistic description of events, procedures, and philosophies occurring in natural settings is often needed to make accurate situational decisions. Thus, this research explains a social fact in its natural setting along with the collected data that were confronted and analyzed, based on the data and the theory, which was built as the final product.

This study was descriptive, in the way that it reported the performance and behaviors observed during the course of data collection, without attempting to objectively evaluate outcomes, however the research also implied to seek patterns about the phenomenon of study in this research: academic writing. In this sense, Merriam (2002) argues that rather than just describing what was observed: participants' behaviors or a phenomenon, the investigator might take all the data and develop categories that conceptualize different approaches to the task. Based on Merriam's model, the researchers divided the data collected in different categories. The categories were created according to the similar information so that the researchers found evidence collected through the three data collection methods.

Consequently, the research project was interpretive due to the fact that the researchers attempted to understand phenomena through the analysis and the interpretation of specific artifacts (written products) that the participants had to complete for the study. Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991) suggest that "interpretative studies assume that people create and associate their own subjective and intersubjective meanings as they interact with the world around them". Therefore, it was not a hypothetical deduction or a pre-conception. Instead, this study pretended to understand the social process under investigation.

Context

The research project was developed in a state university which is located in a neighborhood named La Julita in Pereira, Colombia. This university offers

different programs. One of those programs is the English Bachelor Program that according to its statistics, during the second semester of the year 2010, the university had a teaching staff of 24 people. Some of them (7) had a full time contract with the university, and 17 teachers were hired part time by the language department. In accordance with the statistics taken from the state university (2010) there were 596 students attending the university program. They came mostly from a socioeconomic middle class.

The English bachelor program was created on April 12th, 2004, by resolution 923. And it had its first graduated students in the first half in 2009. In the first four semesters of the bachelor program, the English courses levels were established into four courses named: Inglés Básico, Inglés Pre-Intermedio, Inglés Intermedio and Inglés Avanzado. Besides, on the fifth and the sixth semesters, there were included subjects as Gramática Avanzada and Composición Inglesa which aimed to develop academic writing. Taking into account this, the English composition course provides tools targeted at creating academic documents.

The mission of the English bachelor program was to prepare English teachers in order to increase the English level of education in the region. For that reason the program developed its standards based on the CEFR. This English bachelore program also provided the students with different resources such as: one interactive room, one computer laboratory, video beams, tape recorders and a variety of books related with pedagogical and literary works.

Setting

In the first four semesters of the licenciatura program, the Basic English levels were established. Besides, on the fifth and sixth semester, there was an inclusion of subjects as Gramática Avanzada and Composición Inglesa (English Composition Course), which aims at developing the academic writing skills. The English composition course is the subject where this research was carried out, two teachers oriented this course, and both of them had a bachelor degree in a state university. There were nearly fifty students who were attending the English composition course. These students were exposed to four hours per week, and sixty four hours at the semester.

Participants

A total of seven (7) participants and also the teacher (1) took part of the research. This research took the teacher into account in order to know his strategies and perspectives towards student's development. The number of participants had a relation with a qualitative study, since the number of participants were not important. The purpose was to look for deeper analysis of the data in order to understand the phenomenon of this study and answer the research questions (Sampieri, Collado and Baptista, 1991).

Participants were randomly selected by taking into account what Robinson (2003) says that when the whole population is known, every individual is potentially selectable. In this case the selection criteria was students who were attending the English composition course from a bachelor program of a state university. The

researchers selected seven students from the sixth semester. Students' ages ranged between 18 and 25 years old and these participants have been raised in Spanish speaking contexts. In addition, all participants had already been exposed to formal English classes before. However none of them had lived in an English speaking country. The participants came from the low-middle socioeconomic status. All of them mentioned to have come from state schools. ¹

Researchers' role

The research was conducted by two pre-service teachers. They assumed the role of observers, since the researchers did not take an active part in the development of the classes. As Keyton (2006) explains, the complete observers' role is hidden entirely into the setting. The researchers focused on the teacher's strategies towards learners writing performance. The researchers also collected the data from the learners' behaviors at the moment of writing academically.

Researchers described with arguments what they observed. Lave and Kvale (1995) argument that a human being (e.g.himself) is sufficiently complex to comprehend and learn about himself by his or her own. In this way, in the research process, the researchers analyzed the data collected in order to understand and learn about students' perspectives and writing strategies.

¹ Information provided by a teacher that makes part of the staff of the area of investigation from E.L.I. Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira (UTP, 2010)

In order to consider the ethical considerations of the study, the students and the teacher signed a consent letter to accept their participation and allowed the researchers to collect data and analyze the information resulted from the artifacts and the interviews. This procedure was necessary for avoiding judicial implications in the future.

DATA COLLECTION

The data collected for this study aimed to gather information from students who attended the English Composition course through methods as: interviews, researchers' journals and student's artifacts. Such types of methods are explained in detail subsequently.

Interviews

In the research project, the aim of the interviews was to determine students' perceptions in the last part of the course. This determination was based on what Kvale (1996) explains of qualitative research interviews that seek to describe meanings of central themes in the life of the subjects. It should be noted that the final period of the course was significant for the participants so they could express their opinions on the process of learning writing acquitted during the course, and in this particular case, by means of interviews.

The interviews were semi-structured, for the reason that they were flexible, therefore they allowed to bring new questions that could be asked during the interviews as a result of what the interviewee was saying. This procedure went in accordance with Lindlof and Taylor (2002) who explain that the interviewer in a semi-structured interview generally encounters with a framework of themes to be explored.

Furthermore the English composition teacher was also interviewed, in order to know his perspectives towards the course and his students' academic writing. Interviews were particularly helpful for getting the story behind the participant's experiences. In this regard, McNamara (1999) explains that the interviewer can pursue in-depth information around the topic, and this was evident when the teacher provided information for the interview.

Artifacts

Other important instrument to gather information was the use of artifacts. As explained by Hubbards and Millers (1999), artifacts are a rich source of data for teachers researchers. Artifacts are real evidence of student's performance in different writing processes. In this study, the artifacts collected were essays taken and used to analyze the students' performance in writing.

The artifacts were collected after the interviews. In this way, the artifact method was aligned with students' learning experiences. The data obtained from the artifacts was triangulated with the information provided in the interviews and the researchers' journal.

Researchers' journal

Research journals allow to register a description of particular situations during the research process (Thomas, 1995). In this concern, Thomas (1995) also highlights that a journal as a public document, can be read by others. Taking this into account, the research journals were developed at the moment of drawing

specific situations, and in this order, they could be used in an applicable way in the analysis of the data. In addition, in this research, the researchers' journals were individually developed by each researcher, at different moments when the researchers felt it necessary.

DATA ANALYSIS

This present data analysis was produced as a result of using the method of “qualitative research” based on Grounded Theory (GT). As proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1960), the method of qualitative research developed through Grounded Theory (GT), manages to give answer to a phenomenon by producing a respective theory empirically by resorting to observation and procedures that help to root or ground theory. Therefore, the researchers analysed the collected data by categorising (by theories), filtering, coding, grouping and drawing conclusions in order to research questions.

In order to analyse the data, the researcher performed the following process: The researchers had to listen to the recorded interviews with the purpose of transcribing them. The researcher also read some artifacts written by the participants. Such transcriptions and opinions were registered on a set of spread sheets generated by Microsoft Excel that permitted to categorise information of such data, the researchers designated the categories and subcategories by using the information and theories related with academic writing. Therefore, the data obtained from the several instruments of collection could be classified according to their related theories. In this way, the researchers could easily connect and analyse the theories with their corresponding pieces of data.

In this way, the researchers coded the data using the following categories: ‘writing in English’ and ‘writing academically’. Each category was divided into

'learning to write' and 'writing techniques', and Writing academically included the subcategories of 'learning to write academically' and 'elaboration of an academic text'. These subcategories names resulted from the explanations given by theory concerning academic.

As stated before, each subcategory was placed in an order that facilitated the action of discriminating ideas within the transcribed data. It should be noted that the complete data was registered into a spreadsheet. That factor allowed filtering the organised data in an easy way. Besides, the researcher could choose, from the organised information some proper excerpts for supporting the findings. These excerpts were coded by using the following order: initials of the participants' name, number of the participation order, and initial of the instrument of data collection (Ex: VH-6A). In this way appear the codes above the excerpts or evidences used in this study had

Additionally to the explained process in which the researchers had to read each subcategory to depict ideas and interpretations, the researchers also took into account the perceptions that were written in the researchers' journals. Some of those perceptions were used to interpret the findings and discussions better.

Therefore, and to summarise, the triangulation of interviews data, artifacts data, perceptions written on the journals served as the raw material for analysis interpretation. So this study had the characteristic of researching qualitatively due to the fact that the data collected was obtained through observation and empiric

methods. Then, such characteristic permitted to answer the research questions as well as to draw and clarify the findings with the corresponding theoretical input and evidence supports.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the most relevant findings are presented, interpreted and discussed. After analyzing the data collected through the interviews, research journals and artifacts. Next in this study and going through a careful process of codifying, grouping and categorizing, four main findings emerged and they are exposed in detail as follows.

The High Order Thinking Skills evidenced in participants writing

When the participants were assigned the task of writing an essay, they were informed about the dynamic of the interview. Let us recall that such dynamic consisted in writing an essay applying the writing instruction that the learner had received in the English composition course. Besides, they were also informed that after performing the composition of an academic paper, they had to answer some questions for an interview inquiring their perceptions and the strategies on academic writing.

Within the subsequent analysis of the written products that the students provided in the interview meeting, it was evidenced that although the students did not cite authors and neither included a reference list within their products, they made use of theories or literature related to the topic (writing strategies and perceptions towards learning to write in English). This is demonstrated in the following example taken from an artifact:

VH-6A²

“... according to some linguistics, it is better to teach a language when the learner is able to compare it with the native one.”

The excerpt above shows how the writer knows the information because she had the knowledge about it. The inclusion of theories or concepts demonstrates acquaintance with certain concepts and the application of thinking processes that Bloom (1956) labels as High Order Thinking Skills. High Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) is a taxonomy that contains six cognitive domains. Three learning domains taken from Bloom's taxonomy were evidenced in the participants' products; knowledge, comprehension and evaluation. In this finding, each skill will be described in detail. So, based on this Bloom's theory, we are going to explain the participants' process in the following order that is the HOST order:

Knowledge

As Bloom (1956) notes knowledge is a learning domain that is evidenced when the learner is able to describe, define, identify, retell and reproduce certain concepts through the use of memory. The following sample from an artifact shows this:

SD-2A

“Errors are very difficult to correct when the learners have used and mastered those wrong structures. I will try to define some categories of error...when a

² 'VH' refers to the initial of a hypothetical name of the participant, then followed by a hyphen appears the number '6' that resents the order in which the participant participated in the study, and the following letter 'A' refers to the type of instrument for data collection. Then, the following codes that appears in the coming evidences use different initials, numbers and initials for the instruments, e.g. 'I' for interview.

learner makes an error which change the whole meaning of the thing he is talking about, that is considered a Global Error, but when a learner makes an error which just change the meaning of a part of the talking, that is considered as a Local Error.”

In the sample above, the participant wrote about concepts of “Global Error and Local Error,” showing the use of memory needed at the moment of conveying definitions. In this particular case, memory is related to knowledge because the student made use of prior and memorized information and this action attests the presence of the domain that Bloom (1956) coined as knowledge. The facilitator of the composition course also confirms the fact that knowledge is usually present in students’ writing.

FG-7I

...Es decir si van a escribir un ensayo sobre las teorías de Krashen, y van a utilizar la teoría de adquisición y aprendizaje, entonces en sus productos se notan que han leído sobre esa teoría, perdón, hipótesis, y la han plasmado a través de sus propias palabras y lo que plasman pues no es algo traído de los cabellos es algo que tiene mucha lógica.

It is evident that in academic writing tasks, the students take advantage of theories, hypothesis or concepts that they have been exposed to. This is evidenced in the professor’s remarks.

It should be noted that the students could freely write about any topic concerning teaching English. Most of them wrote about different topics of English Language Teaching, but, we can infer that the use of reading about teaching English could enabled the participants of this study to count on input such as theories or concepts of language teaching in general that they could use at the moment of writing the essays about teaching.

Comprehension

According to Bloom's Taxonomy (1956) comprehension is the capacity to get the meaning of a message, the act of understanding the sense of what is written. Paraphrasing is part of the comprehension domain and it is also a tool for developing writing products. The following words stated by the teacher go in accordance to what Bloom (1956) says:

FG-71

...otra fortaleza que tienen es que muchos de ellos parafrasean bien, es decir, cuando leen un autor y necesitan parafrasearlo no cambian la idea del autor, la esencia...

The extract took from the teacher's interview confirms what in the artifacts was evidenced; that is to say student's use of paraphrasing. Another event that shows comprehension is when a concept or an idea is explained with the necessary support to make it credible. The following data taken from an essay illustrates this.

AS-4A

...A good way of implementing this method in class is linking the content of other classes in the English class.

Despite the participant did not mentioned the concept, (Content Based) it is evident that the writer was referring to this concept. It was seen that the participant uses the definition of this approach in order to suggest it as a good way for teaching in an English class. Another fact that according to Bloom's Taxonomy (1956) means comprehension is the inclusion of examples as it is noticed in the following sample of an artifact.

IS-1A

As teachers we need to have different strategies and new elements to complete our classes, for example, if we have artist abilities we can mix these abilities in our class from easy elements to complex elements to different English level students.

In this part of the artifact it is observable that besides the words *for example*, the student is making an explanation of what she is writing about, in order to convey ideas more clearly. This is a sample of comprehension, as it is mentioned in Bloom's Taxonomy (1956).

Evaluation

Bloom's Taxonomy (1956) highlights evaluation as the process in which the previous knowledge of the person is compared and analyzed with the new input, as a result of the comparison a judgment emerges, a critique or a reformulated appraisal. The below sample taken from an artifact evidences evaluation in the students' writing.

IV-5A

At the moment students have to speak in a class the result is awful. This result exposes the lack of ability in the speaking skill, hesitation, long pauses and a poor vocabulary are the result of speaking class. The teacher should create activities where students participated in a relax way since some teachers push students to speak when they feel uncomfortable.

At the beginning of this paragraph there is a notorious critic of a specific moment of an English foreign class focused on the oral production. The student suggests that teachers must create a relax environment at the moment of preparing the class. In this sample, we can evidence aspects such; criticality, argumentative statements and suggestions, facts that according to Bloom's Taxonomy (1956) are part of the evaluation domain. This is confirmed in the sample below taken from an interview when the same student described her own process of writing.

IV-5I

Yo voy desarrollando la idea a medida que escribo. Muchas veces uno si se apoya en la teoría pero siempre termina escribiendo su propio concepto

In the fragment presented above, the student expresses that she supports her point of view with theory, however she finishes the paper stating her own idea. This shows how the knowledge that she obtained was contrasted with her previous concepts and as a result, new judgments emerged, process that according to Bloom's Taxonomy (1956) is labelled as evaluation.

Students' perceptions towards the academic writing process

The data collected for this research also ascertained to show how students perceived their progress in their writing skills through the English composition course. As a result of the classification and categorization of the data, important perceptions with regards to their writing process and their challenges around academic writing were recognized and set below.

Perceptions about the writing process

In this study, the data collected shows diverse insights about students' writing process. One of these insights is the knowledge about how an essay or other kind of academic writing is structured and the strategies used for developing an academic writing product. An example of this is evidenced in the subsequent extracts taken from the interviews, when some students answer to the question about the strategies that they usually apply at the moment of writing an academic paper.

SD-21

No pues siempre son los métodos (las estructuras) que enseñan en composición, introducción, descripción y después conclusión, y estas pues con su topic sentence y todo eso.

VH-6I

He mejorado mi Paraphrasing y summarize, fácilmente hago que un texto grande sea resumido en pocos renglones.

LG-3I

Uff, mucho, desarrollo mejor las ideas, con más claridad, y la mayoría de las veces en menor tiempo.

These entries show a pattern about the students' perceptions since they argued that they had developed their academic writing skills due to the strategies taught in the English composition course. They mentioned that strategies such as paraphrasing, rereading, summarizing, brainstorming contributed to improve their writing skills. These elements are highlighted by the students as strengths that had been developed during the English composition course. Data is aligned to what Harmer (2004) considers as good strategies for students to develop in their writing skill, he explains the different stages that take place in a writing process and also sets leading strategies as brainstorming and drafting. The fact of being exposed to these strategies apparently helped students develop and connect their ideas better using less time. These stages were also perceived in the teacher's interview.

FG-7I

En Brainstorming yo les doy varias estrategias como Clustering o una palabra en la mitad y luego que desprenda las otras o un approach como un enfoque a través de preguntas como where para narrativo por ejemplo why, o también

otro tipo de Brainstorming que hemos utilizado es el vocabulario, se define el vocabulario en verbos que vamos a utilizar, los adjetivos que vamos a utilizar, tipo de oraciones también. Luego del Brainstorming viene un Outline más estructurado donde ellos a través de frases claves empiezan a estructurar el texto y que en ese Outline se note la introducción, el cuerpo y la conclusión, y durante todo el proceso yo les doy feedback o entre ellos se dan feedback. Una vez eso ya, vienen los borradores. El primero y recibe feedback, el segundo y recibe feedback y el tercero ya sería el producto final.

According to Harmer's (2004) theory, the facilitator of the class used the strategies (that are underlined in the sample) in different stages of the process along the course. Harmer (2004) sustain that including the teaching of the highlighted writing strategies creates a successful language class. Based on this, it seems to be that the instruction on these strategies has contributed to the participants' writing skills, or at least this is what they stated. Students are also conscious about the benefits of being acquainted with what the writing process implies, since they are able to evidence a more structured process and product.

Participants' perceptions about challenges

Since the main focus of the English composition subject is writing, most of the tasks are focused on this skill. Data concerning participants' perceptions towards the writing skill reveal that they are not very keen to write in the foreign language. This issue is evidenced in the following interview excerpt.

LG-3I

No, a uno de por si no le gusta escribir.

¿Por qué?

No sé. No me gusta.

The previous excerpts coincide in some extent to what Ferris & Roberts (2001) point out in their study that when L2 writers are not proficient to confront English academic writings, they usually get disappointed, anxious or even resentful to face writing activities. It should be clarified that some part of Ferris and Roberts' finding match with the evidence presented above because in this sample of an interview it can be inferred that the students feel apathetic towards writing when they are not proficient to write academically.

The questionnaire designed for the interview establishes how students perceive their evolution in their academic writing skills. Thus, data showed the existence of some challenges to be improved from students' perceptions such as punctuation and spelling. The subsequent interview data reveal their perceptions.

LG-3I

Los evaluó (sus escritos) como un término medio ya que tengo dificultades como ya les había dicho en la puntuación y en la ortografía...

In this sample the participant categorizes her writings at an intermediate level, she recognizes that it is due to some challenges in grammar and spelling that her writing cannot achieve a higher performance in this skill. In this sense Hyland (2007)

points out the importance of training the students in grammar structures and writing rules. Hyland's view reflects student's concerns regarding writing and views these challenges as normal reactions in the process of learning a second language.

On the other hand the act of writing academic papers as part of a course becomes stressful and frustrating. Thus, it is manifested by the students. A representation of this perception is evident in the next excerpt taken from a student's interview.

SD-21

Yo creo que es mejor que no tenga una nota o límite de tiempo (el escrito) porque se siente uno libre para escribir, que no se sienta uno estresado.

Words such as stress or frustration were commonly expressed by the participants in their interviews, according to the student in this sample, it is as a cause of the pressure exerted by the grades and timing limit for writing assessments. The student also added that it would be better for the process of writing whether it would not include a grade or timing. It is important to add that for the elaboration of the essay for this research launched poor results in terms of grammar and how an essay is structure, even though the participants neither had time limit nor a grade for this drill.

The level of awareness on the application of strategies in the writing process

In the process of analyzing data, the students' application of some writing strategies was perceived; however, they seem not to be aware of the used of these

strategies when an academic product is required. In the students' interviews, students replied as follows with regards to what strategies they used when they are asked to write academically.

ZC-4I

Mmm, yo utilizo mi propia estrategia, primero escribo todo lo que estoy pensando acerca del ensayo, lo reviso y miro que me hace falta, después en internet empiezo a buscar autores.

In the student's opinion, he does not use any common strategy, but we could notice that he actually made use of strategies but he seems not to be aware of this. In fact, he uses drafting and rereading, strategies that according to Harmer (2004) must be present at the moment of creating an academic paper in order to include or exclude information that allows the writer to be closer to the final product. The same perception is noticed in the following interview excerpt.

YS-3I

Si conozco métodos pero no me gusta usarlos, porque es una pérdida de tiempo, hacer una estructura ahí eso se convierte en otra cosa... a mí no (usar estrategias) pero sé que otros compañeros necesitan esas estrategias para escribir, personalmente a mí no me sirve, porque a mí me gusta tomar una hoja y escribir y escribir sobre el tema ya si necesito sobre los autores y eso dejo el espacio y después busco los autores, pongo mi opinión personal

In this excerpt the student highlights her wide knowledge about writing strategies, nevertheless she emphasizes about her dislike at the moment of applying other strategies, instead of this, she assumes that she implements its own strategy. As aforementioned, the evidence reveals the employment of academic writing strategies without being conscious of them, as it is in this case drafting. On the contrary O'Malley and Chamot (1990) suggest that effective second language learners are aware of the learning strategies they use and why they use them. Thereby this lack of awareness in the use of strategies at the moment of writing an academic paper could influence the students writing production.

The role of L1 in participants' writing assignments

Through the analysis of the artifacts collected during the study, it was noticed that participants' writing seemed to have a strong influence of L1 in their essays. Due to this influence, messages could not be conveyed in some of student's products. The interference of their mother tongue was evident in two levels that will be described, interpreted and discussed in this finding; first, in terms of the mechanics and grammatical aspects, and second in terms of conventions and text structure. Thus, the most common cases where students were influenced by the L1 will be presented.

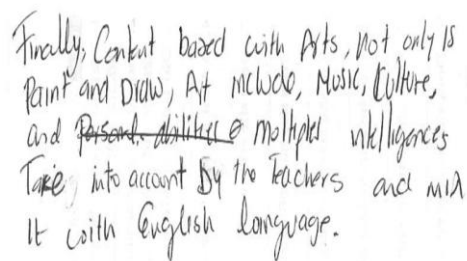
Mechanics and grammatical aspects

The analysis of participants' writing assignments showed that in certain fragments of their papers, the mother tongue interfered in the use of the L2. That is to say, that when students write in English, they use similar patterns or structures to those used in their first language (Spanish). As a result of this transfer, the ideas that they

intended to convey through their essays, sometimes were confusing and not very cohesive.

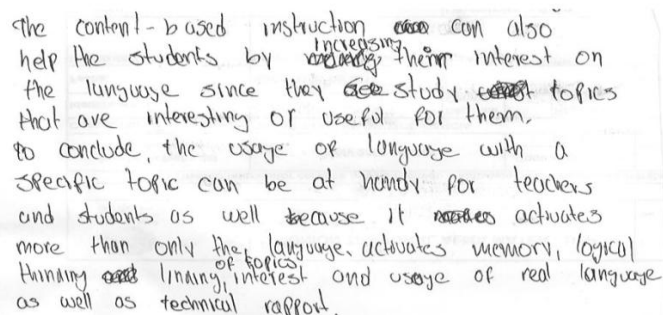
One of the most common L1 interference that could be detected was related with the flow of the paper, its mechanics and grammatical aspects. The below artifacts captures evidences of some errors in terms of punctuation a paragraphing.

YS-3A



Finally, Content based with Arts, not only is
Paint and Draw, Art include, Music, Culture,
and Personal. ~~abilities~~ Multiple intelligences
Take into account by the teachers and mix
it with English language.

IV-5A



The content-based instruction ~~can~~ can also
help the students by ^{increasing} ~~increasing~~ their interest on
the language since they ~~are~~ study ~~about~~ topics
that are interesting or useful for them.
to conclude, the usage of language with a
specific topic can be at handy for teachers
and students as well because it ~~more~~ activates
more than only the language, activates memory, logical
thinking ~~and~~ ^{of topics} linking, interest and usage of real language
as well as technical rapport.

In the previous artifacts, it is noticeable that the participants have difficulties in terms of punctuation, capitalization and grammar. These problems are evident in the following lines transcribed from the above first sample: "Finally, content based with

arts, not only is paint and draw, Art include, Music, Culture, and multiple intelligences take into account by the teachers and mix it with English language". In first place, we can notice the misuse of punctuation, since it is not clear when an idea finishes and another begins. For example, in these specific lines: "...not only is paint and draw, art include, music, culture and multiple intelligences take into account by the teacher and mix it with English language" the misuse of punctuation confuses the idea. Obviously there are other form of errors present in the lines of the example, but this first part of the analysis is only focused on punctuation. In second place, we can also notice the use of capital letters in words that do not require them: "Content, Art, Take, Teachers". This misapplication of capital letters are included in both samples and might lead to misunderstanding on spelling rules. And, finally, it can be noticed that the use of grammatical aspects such as the function of the words (noun, adjective, pronoun, prepositions...) within the sentence require attention. To illustrate, we can observe that in "not only is paint and draw", the verb "paint" was used instead of the noun "painting". In other words, a noun was the proper function for the word that was needed to convey the meaning of the another word along "draw", so in this case, the other mentioned word helps us deduce that this learner was writing about two subjects. We can thus assume that the participant did not have clarity in this respect when he was writing his composition. Therefore for the message to be conveyed in this artifact may become unclear for the reader given the quality of the grammar used at the moment of writing it. The second sample was more understandable than the first one, but the crossing outs used in the writing permit us to infer that the students were having difficulties for writing clearly.

The compartments described above let us assume that there is a remarkable influence of L1 in the students' way of thinking in English, since the syntax, the order and the misinterpretation of functions are likely to result due to lack of commanding in English grammar.

Although the writing products of students revealed that students had good ideas for writing using academic topics related to the English Language Programs such as content-based instructions and local errors and global errors. They used these ideas randomly and sometimes disconnected. Some of the ideas that the participants conveyed in their papers were characterized by the lack of cohesion which affected the sequence of the paper.

Our findings are aligned to what Thep-ackrapong (2005) found in his study in which he concluded that grammar errors in written English are influenced by Thai sentence structures, especially regarding subject-verb agreement and passive voice. We found grammatical problems in the student writing, however, the students were aware of these grammatical problems. Most of them recognized in the interviews that they have grammatical challenges.

SD-21

La puntuación como ya les había dicho. Soy muy malo para la puntuación y algunas preposiciones.

On the other hand, the teacher who participated of this study expressed in the interview the following assertion according to the instruction given only in punctuation.

FG-7I

Al principio sí se notaba que había problemas de puntuación, en el ensayo que yo les comente el narrativo. Después a través de los ejercicios que hacíamos que eran de repetir puntuación, de analizar el tipo de oraciones cuando es que debe de ir una coma, cuando es que debe ir el punto, el punto es el que yo he notado que hay que mejorar...

The teacher said that he gave the students a lot of instructions about the correct use of English punctuation marks. Nevertheless, students did not demonstrate a good domain in the use of the English punctuation marks in their texts. Additionally, with regard to word choice and conventions, students expressed that they needed to practice more about word choice and grammar in academic writing. Finally, the students expressed that they did not have a habit to write in English as the following excerpt of an interview says:

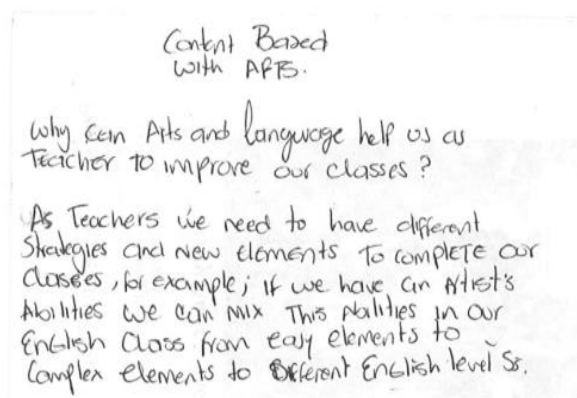
ZC-4I

De verdad solo escribo cuando me ponen trabajos en la universidad pero por lo general no escribo en inglés.

According to Draper (2000), pre-service teachers should be good readers and good writers. As stated by the previous author, a good writer should be a good reader and therefore a good habit in reading entails to develop good writing skills. On the contrary, students informed us that they did not have reading and writing habits. They only wrote and read when the teacher tells them. Lack of reading and writing habits may be one of the reasons for which students did not have good grammatical skills.

Conventions and text structure

In the process of analyzing data, some challenges were found in terms of conventions and text structure. These difficulties generated a disconnection between the reader and the writer since what the writer intended to express in the product might not be understood by the reader due to some problems related to the mechanics of the text. In this subcategory, we will analyze samples of these difficulties, starting with the following sample.



Content Based
with ARTS.

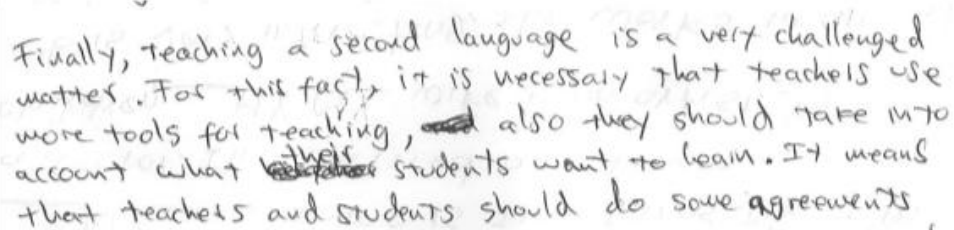
Why can Arts and language help us as
Teacher to improve our classes?

As Teachers we need to have different
Strategies and new elements to complete our
Classes, for example; if we have an Artist's
Abilities we can mix This abilities in our
English Class from easy elements to
Complex elements to Different English level Sr.

FG-7A

In the previous excerpt taken from one of the participant's artifact, the product does not display a correct text structure, because the student started his essay without an introductory paragraph. According to Browker (2007), an introduction should begin with a broad opening statement that establishes the context of the essay. Browker (2007) also said that it is also really important that introductory lines tell the reader the aim of the text, hence it is important to mention what the author wants to convey. In most of the written samples, the students did not introduce their intentions and the purpose about what they were going to write. McDaniel (1994) found similar results in a study conducted with Thai writers who did not produce topic sentences or thesis statement in opening paragraphs. Likewise, this study reveals that students did not grab the reader's attention because they did not include an opening statement. In this sense, the initial part of the text did not meet the requirements of an essay. As stated by Browker (2007), general declarations are not appropriate for the beginning of introductory paragraphs. Something that is observable in the following artifact is the difficulty for composing a conclusion in accordance with the rules of structure for writing.

ZC-4A



Finally, teaching a second language is a very challenged matter. For this fact, it is necessary that teachers use more tools for teaching, ~~and~~ also they should take into account what ~~the~~ students want to learn. It means that teachers and students should do some agreements,

Similar to Browker's (2007) research, McDaniel (1994) also found in his study that Thai writers had problems with the concluding paragraphs in an essay since they

did not include a brief summary of the main points of the essay as it is required in academic essays. Results from this study also show that the participants had challenges with the concluding paragraphs because they tended to end their essays abruptly without concluding ideas or letting the reader realize the essay is finished. The subsequent artifacts samples exemplify the concluding lines that participants included in their essays which make evident what is being discussed in this finding.

ZC-4A

“Finally teaching a second language is a very challenged matter.”

YS-3A

“Finally, content based with art, not only is paint and draw, art include music, culture and multiple intelligence.”

In brief, the analysis of the presented data suggests that one of the challenges for writers is the way in which they elaborate their ideas referring to the structure of the essay that might affect readers' comprehension.

It is important to mention that when the teacher was interviewed, he mentioned that students were instructed in these topics in the Composition class. However, data show that even though students were instructed in these aspects, they seemed to have struggled with their writing processes.

FG-11

Yo les diseño con base a una narración que he leído, pero que se vea una estructura es decir por ejemplo, en el narrativo que haya una introducción, que haya un cuerpo y que haya una conclusión que es como la estructura básica en textos académicos, introducción, cuerpo y conclusión.

In conclusion, students have some difficulties when they apply writing strategies to their assignments due to factors such as L1 influence and lack of practising. Therefore, students have challenges at the moment of writing an essay since the students did not include introductory paragraphs. Also, the students have issues at the moment of creating concluding paragraphs because they exclude a brief summary of the main points. This demonstrated that the students have difficulties with the text structures.

RESEARCH AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The project has shed lights on some implications in terms of research and instruction because the findings reveal certain aspects to consider in the preparation of language teachers and in the field of second language research.

Firstly, facilitators should ask the students not only to write aiming at their thesis projects, but also for magazines, newspapers, and journals (maybe taking advantage of the bachelor newspaper and blog), or creating a writing contest and similar ones. Also, it will be important that students could suggest what topics are going to be carried out, however those topics must be academic topics with the purpose of counteracting apathy for academic writing. Villas (2011) suggests that “student-centered teaching that makes learning relevant to students and their social realities results in greater interest, involvement, and confidence in language learning” (p. 26). In addition Reid (2001) notes the importance of structuring a writing curriculum in which students use English communicatively. Therefore, writing with topics that writers prefer and with communicative intentions turns out to be an activity that can be involving, interesting for the learners who in this case could write with more confidence.

Some institutions had had good experiences applying this kind of assignments. Bellow, there are some examples:

Project	Author	Institution
Process Writing and the	Isabela Villas Boas	Casa Thomas Jefferson

Internet: Blogs and Ning Networks in the Classroom.		(Brazil)
Reading Logs: Integrating Extensive Reading with Writing Tasks	Tatiana Lyutaya	Nizhnevartovsk University (Russia)
Writing for the World: Wikipedia as an Introduction to Academic Writing	Christine M. Tardy	Paul University (United States)
Classroom Techniques: Non Stop Writing	Amarilis Montero	University of Panama (Panama)
English Magazines equal motivation plus Improve ESL Writing Skills	Yuewu Wang	Shanghai Maritime University
Two Writing Activities for Extensive reading	Richard Day	University of Hawaii (United States)

Secondly, teachers of the bachelor program can use this research to get insights about pre-service teachers needs in terms of teaching academic writing, in order prepare lessons according to students' necessities. In this sense Harmer (2009) explains that in order to have a successful session in a second language class it is transcendent to be conscious of students' necessities.

As it is say in the last paragraph, this research gives some insights about the academic writing in pre-service teachers. Taking into account those insights, it will be significant to explore how to use motivation in academic writing. How helpful can be implementing academic writing in different topics. How to improve academic writing in pre-service teachers.

The facts presented in the findings show how important would be the implementation of cooperative learning as an alternative in the classroom. The students could be benefited by the interaction with students skilled in academic writing, thus the not so well skilled students will receive extra feedback. It would be

done through the implementation of the figure of a monitor, or also the organisation of team works in which students that face some challenges in their writing could be benefited by the others who are more proficient. There by Hourcade & Bauwens (2001) highlight cooperative learning as a good alternative, in which students have a second facilitator closer to them, with the opportunity of expressing their doubts freely. In this way, the students would feel more confident and motivated to face challenges and develop their writing abilities.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The biggest limitation during the research was concerned with the issue that in Colombia there are few studies related to academic writing in either English or Spanish. Besides the majority of the studies are focused on listening and speaking. The researchers searched for Colombian sources about academic writing that sustain the investigation and the researchers found few sources of information.

In addition, another limitation was the apathy students displayed towards the writing activities. When the researchers asked the students to participate in the project, most of the students showed lack of interest, others were afraid because they thought that writing activities were very complicated. Consequently, most students did not devote time to writing activities. Students declared that the writing activities were time consuming and the writing activities were very difficult. The apathy of students affect the investigation because only a minority group of students wanted to participate in the study.

To conclude, the quality of the data drawn from the interviews had some limitations that could been avoided if more strategies at the moment of eliciting information had been used during the interviews. As a consequence, it was quite complex to select and incorporate evidences that could serve to fulfil the purposes this study had.

CONCLUSIONS

This study evidences that the English composition course is primordial in the students' academic writing development. It provides the methods that according to some author are appropriate for developing writing. In addition it was observable a good amount in variable feedback, an important fact in learning a second language. On the other hand students some issues as a strong influence of their L1 are present in students writing. First in terms of the mechanics and grammatical aspects and second in terms of conventions and text structure. These facts affect students' writing products in relation to cohesion between sentences and express clear ideas, disconnecting the reader with the writing producing a lack of comprehension, since what the writer intends to express in the product is not understood by the reader. Talking about comprehension the organization inside of the body and concluding paragraph requires to be emphasized in their internal structures.

Another important fact is the implementation of strategies especially brainstorming, drafting and outlining. Other strategies as rehearsing, repeating and reasoning are implemented by the students when academic writing is needed, however they are not conscious about what of these strategies they are applying.

The findings of this research show how the students experiment stress at the moment of facing a task that involves academic writing when this kind of tasks have as aim a grade and conditioned by a time limit. However the grade helped as

motivation for a better writing product as it was evidenced in the drill where the participants did not received a grade for it.

APPENDIXES

Appendix 1. Consent letter for the students.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

✦ INTRODUCTION

Carlos Restrepo and Oscar Orozco, pre service teachers who are attending at the licenciatura Program at the Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira, request your approval and support in conducting our research project with some students and one teacher from the licenciatura program. This research study will contribute to our thesis which is one of the graduation requirements. The English Composition Course had been selected because our research concerns students and the teacher at the Foreign Languages University and their development in the academic writing skill. We request your approval in support in order to be able to reserve classroom space.

- ✦ **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:** *Pre-service teacher's perceptions towards academic writing process.*

✦ PROCEDURES

- + The pre service teachers whom participate in this research study at the Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira will ask for permission to the teacher of English Composition Course, to be able to observe and analyze his or her class.
- ± There are no risk processes or procedures.

3 The observations are designed to last eight weeks; 2 hours per week for a total of 16 hours of English Composition Course.

4 There is no payment incentive to participate in this study.

• **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

± There is no foreseeable risk involved in participating in this teacher study research.

• **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information obtained in connection with this study or any personal information which may identify the institute or any of the participants will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission.

± Pseudonyms will be used in all documentation related to this research project. All the data, and information gathered will be used solely for this research project and for no other purpose. The data and information (with pseudonyms) will only be furnished to the Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira as the thesis (research) component required for graduation.

± If there are audio- or videotaped involved, only the candidates (Carlos Mario Restrepo and Oscar Stallyn Orozco) will have access to them. They will only be used or shown to meet the research requirement and for no other purpose. Once, the research is complete and the thesis project has been accepted and the candidates graduate any recordings will be erased.

• **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

The participants may choose whether to participate in this study or not. They may also refuse to answer any questions they do not want to answer and still remain in the study. “By signing this consent form, you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your approval or support in this research study”.

• **IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS AND REVIEW BOARD**

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact:

Carlos Mario Restrepo

Oscar Stallyn Orozco

Tel: 3137345307

Tel: 3218467645

karloxm@hotmail.com

stallynorozco@hotmail.com

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been provided a copy of this form.

Name of English Composition Course Student

Appendix 2. Consent letter for the teacher.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

• INTRODUCTION

Carlos Restrepo and Oscar Orozco pre service teachers, who are attending at the licenciatura Program at the Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira, request your approval and support in conducting our research project with some students and one teacher from the licenciatura program. This research study will contribute to our thesis which is one of the graduation requirements. The English Composition Course had been selected because our research concerns students and the teacher at the Foreign Languages University and their development in the academic writing skill. We request your approval in support in order to be able to reserve classroom space.

- **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:** *Pre-service teacher's perceptions towards academic writing process.*

• PROCEDURES

- The pre service teachers whom participate in this research study at the Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira will ask for permission to the teacher of English Composition Course, to be able to observe and analyze his or her class.
- There are no risk processes or procedures.
- The observations are designed to last eight weeks; 2 hours per week for a total of 16 hours of English Composition Course.
- There is no payment incentive to participate in this study.

✦ **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

- ✦ There is no foreseeable risk involved in participating in this teacher study research.

✦ **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information obtained in connection with this study or any personal information which may identify the institute or any of the participants will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission.

- ✦ Pseudonyms will be used in all documentation related to this research project. All the data, and information gathered will be used solely for this research project and for no other purpose. The data and information (with pseudonyms) will only be furnished to the Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira as the thesis (research) component required for graduation.
- ✦ If there are audio- or videotaped involved, only the candidates (Carlos Mario Restrepo and Oscar Stallyn Orozco) will have access to them. They will only be used or shown to meet the research requirement and for no other purpose. Once, the research is complete and the thesis project has been accepted and the candidates graduate any recordings will be erased.

✦ **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

The participants may choose whether to participate in this study or not. They may also refuse to answer any questions they do not want to answer and still remain in the study. “By signing this consent form, you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your approval or support in this research study”.

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SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been provided a copy of this form.

Name of English Composition Course Teacher

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