

Writing strategies through short texts. Research proposal

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Abstract

This qualitative and interpretive research study aimed to analyze how a group of tenth graders in a public school reflected on their realities through the construction of written texts which display the perception of these students facing a reality through the construction of a *self-image* in a local community. The main objective in this intervention was not only to teach these young people the basis to write in a foreign language, but also to see how is that they face the reality through writing. These written pieces allowed the researcher to go beyond the instructional field where words represent a series of thoughts and feelings; the understanding of belonging to a community and being heard. The main constructs that led this research are based on the writing process taking a look at its social perspective and the *creative writing*; I also took in mind the principles of learning strategies.

Key words: writing, reality, learning strategies,

Resumen

Este estudio de de investigación cualitativa e interpretativa se enfocaba en analizar cómo un grupo de estudiantes de décimo grado de una institución educativa pública reflexionaban acerca de sus realidades a través de la construcción de textos escritos los cuales demostraban la percepción de ellos enfrentando una realidad mediante la construcción de una *auto-imagen* en una comunidad local. El objetivo principal en esta intervención era no sólo enseñarle a estos jóvenes las bases para escribir en una lengua extranjera, sino también ver cómo ellos enfrentan la realidad a través de la escritura. Estos fragmentos le permitieron al investigador ir más allá del campo instruccional donde las palabras representan una serie de pensamientos y sentimientos; el entendimiento de pertenecer a una comunidad y ser escuchados. Los principales referentes teóricos que dirigieron esta investigación fueron el proceso de escritura desde una perspectiva social y la *escritura creativa*; también se tuvo en cuenta las estrategias de aprendizaje.

Palabras clave: escritura, realidad, estrategias de aprendizaje

Introduction

Learning a new language can be a very complicated route if we want to get deeper into it. We bear in mind the fact that this new learning engages not only one general process but many of them which, at the same time, divide into sub processes that need certain skills to be developed. In this research project, I tend to focus on one specific skill that claims most of our attention and, from my point of view, falls back on the other three main skills (reading, listening and speaking) involved when learning a new language. Reading a story, listening to a song or speaking to somebody can be clearly reported on a paper represented in one unique ability: writing. But writing in an appropriate way, where we specifically express the ideas for somebody without leaving the main point behind or giving mistaken interpretations to him/her is quite a difficult task.

That is the reason why, in this small-scale research, I will attempt to state some strategies for Tenth Grade students to improve their writing skill when writing about things that happen in their daily routines, homes, school, and anywhere they interact with people, this is what is called *creative writing* which means the process of writing without boundaries as an autonomous writing based on everyday experiences. The final outcome expected in this research will be that students are capable of giving a report to someone else but in a written form but not only focused on the specific rules that English language requires, but also coding and decoding meaning through the way they express their ideas. According to the previous statements, students will improve the instructional part of writing. Moreover,

they will try to communicate through the writing system.

In the course of the development of this research, I expect to set up strategies which allow enhancing the teaching and learning craft inside the classroom. This research will not only be a description of certain phases that students can do to improve their writing abilities, but also an action-research to show how students perform this phases through this skill inside the classrooms; and evidencing if the proposed strategies can act accordingly to what the EFL teacher thinks. Although this is a long path to get to see a complete effect on students' performance, it will be a good chance to put forward a change in students' thoughts regarding writing.

Justification

As an English teacher and as a learner of a foreign language, I have faced many issues when learning English as many mental processes take action in our brains. We have to perform different skills in the same proficiency level thus this implies our brain works in four different skills at the same time but not in the same amount, probably. I have seen in my EFL classes that students find writing difficult even when they are writing just a couple of short sentences. Once they have ideas about what to write they may ask for verbal tenses, subjects, adjectives and so on. And when they finally get to understand what these words are, they do not really know how to use them in real sentences; they do not know the grammar structure where each word can be placed.

As teachers, many times we ask for pages and more pages but no content or we just focus on grammar, spelling, punctuation or so but we do not stop to see what is behind those misspelled words our students have written for us. Teachers might ask for specific topics to write and they would not give freedom to students so they experience a boundless writing exercise or activity. I expect my students to write understandable short texts which tell something about them, their lives, about the meaning of being themselves as individuals in a community and represent these thoughts in a piece of white gridded paper.

Basically, I have decided to work on this issue because through the needs analysis applied, the students claimed that English is important for them, and the writing skill is even more relevant. They also said that English is important because of professional studies and standardized tests. Students react better when they write in a free way with topics they are familiar to and not when topics are established previously and maybe they do not even know what they are about, that keeps away students from writing. During the development of this research project I want to teach my students the steps used to write in a correct way and spending more time in creating than correcting mistakes; it will be a matter of concentrating on what they mean (bottom) and not the particular structures they use to express their ideas (form).

I consider this topic important to teach and reinforce within the classrooms not only for English classes or other areas, but also for their lives, their professional fields and their jobs. This research implies that students will be aware of their writing; they will take into consideration the audience, the

vocabulary, the aim of his/her paper. This must be the main purpose of this intervention.

Research Design

This research is based on a qualitative approach due to it is focused on describing and interpreting social and educative phenomena as the difficulties that students demonstrate when learning. I am interested in studying what it means, its causes, its consequences, possible intentions and solutions from my action perspective. Likewise, this is a qualitative research because the design and the execution of the proposal will be done rooted in the information gathered, which means, real data.

This research will be anchored in Action-Research because I try to look for information, explore the topic, plan it and act to improve the educative quality of the student.

Participants

The participants of this research are tenth grade students from the Institución Educativa Técnica Nacionalizada de Samacá. This is a public school located in Samacá, (Boyacá). In which we can find a variety of cultures from different places of the country, due to most of people work on carbon mining.

The total population in this school is above 1000 students. Per each classroom, we can find 40 students. The sample for this research is 38 tenth graders of 10-03 course. Students' ages are from 14 years until 18 years. These students are very active and

polite inside the classrooms and are ready to learn and work in English classes.

They like arts; music and dancing are very welcomed. They like to practice sports, even extreme ones. They are interested in getting to know different cultures and countries. They see themselves as part of a community and they want to make their parents feel proud and give them a better economical status. My students also like the idea of leaving their hometown because they think there are better chances to improve. The parents of these students work on several activities which are closely related. For instance, it is seen that fathers work on carbon mining, truck driving, agriculture or heavy machinery operators. On the other hand, most of the mothers are housewives.

Procedure:

1. Explore and reflect: In this early stage, the main aim is to make a diagnosis to evidence, identify and detect the real issues students face when writing in a foreign language. This will direct the research to a better point so that the results are specific for the problem.
2. Planning: once I finish the first part (explore and reflect) I will take part into the classroom craft. Here is where the theory, strategies and activities will strength the writing process. The idea here is to set the real issues that occur when students try to write in a foreign language.
3. Action: In this phase, students will use every piece of theory learned in class. The main purpose here is that students use certain strategies to enhance their

texts in a foreign language according to real language rules.

Theoretical Framework

Writing: this ability is quite related in both languages, for instance, Ammon (1985; Edelsky, 1981a, 1981b) argues *“second language writers make use of their budding knowledge of English as they create texts for different audiences and different purposes, just as first language learners do”* and this is exactly what happens when students write in Spanish. They bear in mind their purposes to fulfill with the activities.

Here the idea is that students write more in the target language taking into account the previous knowledge or experiences they have in their mother tongue. And when students get certain proficiency, this process is easier as when Hudelson (1986) put it this way *“as students develop control over the language, their writing gradually begins to approximate conventional written English.”*

Learning how to write in both languages should, in fact, be close to be equal since they use similar structures and conventions. This makes the writing process viable because there are commonalities between the two languages. Despite there are certain rules for writing in English, we use or implement features observed in both languages. This can be seen as Odlin (1989) mentions *“to the extent that their native language alphabet is similar to the English alphabet, first language letter formation and spelling strategies will transfer partially to English writing.”*

As English teachers, we get to know that writing is a continuous process that students need to acquire through the involvement of certain strategies as it is stated by Krapels and Silva (1990) *"process writing has been enthusiastically embraced by bilingual and ESL teachers and researchers have pointed out the importance of teaching English learners composing, revising, and editing processes"*

Learning strategies: the purpose so that my students can achieve the goals proposed, we (teacher and students) will have to implement some strategies to succeed when writing in a foreign language. For instance, O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Kupper, and Russo (1985, p.43) state that *"language learning strategies have the potential to be an extremely powerful learning tool"* If the teacher provides these students with clear steps to carry out a writing process, they can understand better the purpose of doing it inside or even outside the classroom.

Another author, Rubin (1975, p.43) provides another concept of learning strategies as *"the techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge"*. Not every student will create knowledge in the same way. Everybody puts into practice steps that allow her/him to get what is wanted. These steps will grant my students understand the writing process but in different ways. Learners try to do the same activity but in complete distinctive approaches despite they get to the same exact point.

Rubin also states (1981, pp.124-126) that there are *"two kinds of learning strategies: those which contribute directly to learning, and those which contribute indirectly to*

learning. The direct learning strategies she divided into six types (clarification/verification, monitoring, memorization, guessing/inductive inferencing, deductive reasoning, practice), and the indirect learning strategies she divided into two types (creating opportunities for practice, production tricks"). These ones show how big this process can be. Writing can be perceived through very particular purposes and points of view. The purpose of these workshops will be, not only to establish steps to write in a foreign language, but also to see a perception they have as members of a community, as part of a society.

According to the theoretical framework, the next activities will be proposed to see how the writing process is carried out by students.

Activities:

1. **Who am I?:** the objective will be to find out the level of expertise and the English proficiency level of tenth graders when writing. The teacher will get to know *"who you are"* - their personal descriptions, through a short text written in ten lines. They may feel free to write their ideas in a boundless way and without bearing in mind perfect structures.
2. **Who is the most important person in your life?:** here, the objective will be to see who influences my students' lives in a society. It will be interesting to see the perception they have through the eyes of somebody else. In this way, I will be able to relate students' behaviors according to a social perspective. As the teacher, I will not be interested in the way they write (structures), but the

bottom of what is said. The idea is to overview the social aspects where my students are involved.

Findings

Through the written papers presented by the students, they express many ideas about themselves, for example, particular likes which are not mentioned inside the classroom. They want to be part of a society, to be recognized by a local community and their families. They want to be professionals, and give their families a better economical status. Besides, many of them practice extreme sports, play musical instruments and practice dancing. They want to go abroad, and some of them want to be apart from their families.

They are very sensitive human beings; they feel bad when talking about poverty, animals' protection, importance of their families, caring of the nature.

From a perspective as a teacher, I feel that when writing, my students can express freely and with communicative purposes without too many complications. Through the review of the written paper, I see there is no pressure of the teacher, even though in the classroom, the students were asking about how to do a sentence in a good way or how to say certain words.

Despite their statements are not based on "well structured sentences" they have something to say, they have purposes and these ones can be perceived when you make an analogy with their mother tongue.

Conclusions

Writing is a complex process where we involve not only an instructional part, but an ideological way of thinking. This is the reflex of who we are in a society. It clearly shows the way we perceive the world. As a teacher, I try to focus more on what they tend to tell me and not the way they use to tell it. Meaning now becomes more important than structures because the latter is the essence of the practices inside the room. I have learnt more about my students' thoughts in regards to the class. My perspective had to be changed because it is not a matter of giving knowledge, but sharing feelings around a context. A subject does not necessarily need to be isolated since languages are everywhere and these ones work along with identities construction and that is what happens inside the classrooms, they construct or re-shape ideologies.

There must be a commitment that goes beyond thinking of language only as a tool or a means that has certain rules to work out. Languages create power; these construct or destroy identities.

Through my students' writings, I enhance my teaching craft widely, because I do not see their words in the strict sense of grammar but a built-up of strategies or activities that can be applied inside the classrooms. This is a big chance for teachers to be involved in right practices within the class to create meaningful experiences. Languages classes now have to do with individuals' needs and not just a part of the human beings conditioned to merely isolated terms.

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INSTITUCIÓN EDUCATIVA TÉCNICA NACIONALIZADA DE SAMACÁ

SAMACÁ – BOYACÁ

2018

OBJECTIVE: to find out the level of expertise and the English proficiency level of tenth graders when writing.

INSTRUCTION: let the teacher know who you are - your personal description, through a short text written in ten lines. Feel free to write your ideas in a boundless way and without bearing in mind perfect structures.

WHO AM I?



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SAMACÁ – BOYACÁ

2018

OBJECTIVE: to find out who influences your life in your local community.

INSTRUCTION: let the teacher know who is the most important person for you. Make a description of him or her through a short text written in ten lines. Feel free to write your ideas in a boundless way and without bearing in mind perfect structures.

WHO IS THE MOST IMPORTANT PERSON IN YOUR LIFE?

INSTITUCIÓN EDUCATIVA TÉCNICA NACIONALIZADA DE
SAMACÁ

SAMACÁ – BOYACÁ

NEEDS ANALYSIS

2018



OBJECTIVE: to find out the perception of ten graders in regards with their English class.

INSTRUCCIÓN: responda a la siguiente encuesta de forma honesta y clara. Tome su tiempo para reflexionar en cada pregunta y responder de manera individual. La información será tratada totalmente de forma anónima y confidencial.

1. ¿Le gusta escribir en inglés? Sí, no, ¿Por qué? No porque aun se me dificulta escribir en este idioma y aun no tengo mucho conocimiento de los tiempos y los verbos.
2. En caso de que su respuesta anterior sea si, ¿sobre qué prefiere escribir?
3. ¿Cuál es su percepción cuando el profesor de la clase de inglés le pide que escriba un texto breve en este idioma? Pues no me incomoda por que tengo la ayuda de mi profesor lo que puede ayudarme a orientar.
4. ¿Le gustaría poder escribir en inglés de forma apropiada? Sí, no, ¿Por qué? Si me encantaria por que seria algo nuevo para mi por que en estos tiempos es muy necesario el ingles.
5. ¿Está usted de acuerdo con la forma en que la clase de inglés se enseña? Sí, no, ¿Sugeriría alguna forma personal en especial? Si para mi la clase esta bien a veces hay dinamicas interesantes con lo cual estoy satisfecho y por mi no agregaria nada mas.
6. ¿Cree usted que es difícil escribir en inglés? Sí, no, ¿Por qué? No, la dificultad esta en uno mismo porque uno no se impone a aprender y no le ocupamos demasiado tiempo.
7. Si escribe en la clase de inglés, ¿le interesa que el profesor se enfoque en lo que escribe o en la forma en que lo escribe? Me gustaria que mirara la forma en que escribi por que talvez el me daria una forma mas sencilla de escribir.

8. Cuando escribe en clase de inglés, le gusta hacerlo:

- a. De forma libre
- ☒ b. Con temas impuestos por el docente
- c. Ninguna de las anteriores

9. ¿Le es familiar la idea de escribir en medios digitales a través de la web? Sí, no,

¿Por qué? *Sí porque la tecnología es un frente que toma sacarle el provecho y mas como el ingles una lengua muy competitiva*

10. ¿Le gustaría poder escribir en inglés a través de medios tecnológicos? Sí, no, ¿Por

qué? *Sí me gustaría porque podría dar mis opiniones en casos de otros países y estas me podrían entender mejor.*

11. En caso de que su respuesta anterior sea si, ¿En qué lugares de la web le gustaría poder escribir? Por ejemplo: Facebook, blogs, plataformas dedicadas, entre otros.

Me gustaría escribir en un periodico Estadounidense como el New York Times.

12. ¿Qué estrategia(s) utiliza cuando debe escribir en la clase de inglés?

Estrategia no tengo pero me baso demasiado en mis conocimientos

13. ¿Hay algo más que le gustaría contarme acerca de la clase de inglés?

Que es una lengua impresionante que me gustaria aprender muy rapido.

Muchas gracias por su colaboración.

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OBJECTIVE: to find out who influences your life in your local community.

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WHO IS THE MOST IMPORTANT PERSON IN YOUR LIFE?

My mom is the person most important in your life. Is the only one that is there for me in moments hard and good me to accompany at each step that and I me to formed as a good person full of values but with imperfections in fifteen years old learned that is a person very unconditional for my always preoccupation goals and challenges to grow always being better not talking bonds in my mind many thanks to that person unconditional. She always be for me and I for her. I love most a my mom.

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WHO AM I?

My name is Sebastian Guio Vargas. I like the music
I like the Art. I would like to be an artist.
I would like to study and specialize in arts
travel the world showing my paintings also paint
other landscapes of the world. I would like to
have a family, a house, a car. I would also
like to advance in literature and be a great
writer. my favorite book is essay on Jose
Saramago blindness.