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OF SANTIAGO DE GUAYAQUIL
FACULTY OF ARTS AND HUMANITIES
SCHOOL OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

TITLE OF PAPER

**THE IMPACT OF ENGLISH COMPOSITION CLASSES IN THE
DEVELOPMENT OF WRITING SKILLS OF SIXTH GRADERS SECTION
“A” AT FEMENINO ESPIRITU SANTO SCHOOL, FIRST QUINMESTER,
SCHOOL YEAR 2018-2019**

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CERTIFICATION

We certify that this research project was presented by **Navarro Holguin Michelle Elizabeth and Tandazo Palma Diana Andrea** as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the **Bachelor Degree in English Language with a Minor in Educational Management**.

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**We, Navarro Holguin Michelle Elizabeth and Tandazo Palma Diana
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I am thankful to God that I completed my studies and I am about to get my English degree.

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the possible contribution of English composition classes on the development of students' writing skills at Femenino Espiritu Santo School. When students finish 6th basic grade, they should be able to write descriptive essays. Nevertheless, this type of task is very difficult for them to perform. To conduct this study quantitative research was carried out. The data were collected through the analysis of descriptive paragraphs of a daily routine written by the sample population. In addition, surveys about the current teaching methods and students' learning preferences were applied to teachers and students respectively. The study proved that students' writing abilities are not fully developed; additionally, they do not use connectors and their inadequate grammar, usage, punctuation and spelling affect clarity. The results of the investigation can be used for further application in the school curriculum.

Keywords: English Composition classes, descriptive essays, teaching methods, learning preferences, paragraphs, school curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) is a challenge for teachers since they need to know how to work with the different approaches and how to apply the different techniques there are. Learning English is also a challenge for students because it demands learning its syntax, phonology, morphology, vocabulary, and so on. In addition, for students knowing this lingua franca represents taking the opportunity of having a better job, of travelling, of studying overseas, etc. EFL teachers must constantly adapt their methodology to their students' needs, and this implies dealing with students who have different proficiency levels in one classroom. All the language skills must be taught in an integrated approach, but somehow, and for some teachers, teaching writing seems to be not as relevant as teaching grammar, reading, listening and speaking. The written language is the representation of the spoken language; therefore, it is a well-structured process in which learners are directly involved in showing their competences in the second language as they need to think and organize their ideas before presenting them (Brown, 2015). Nation (2009) comments the importance of teaching writing with a *process approach*, where the teacher guides learners through the stages of brainstorming, outlining, drafting, editing and publishing. Within the *process approach*, learners learn how to move from writing simple sentences to writing more elaborated paragraphs. This approach contrasts with the *product approach* where students write and are evaluated only on the final product.

In this study, the need of including composition classes in the Elementary school curriculum is highlighted, for it is important children being able to communicate in writing.

Even beginning students should be taught how to write paragraphs to reinforce all the language learned in the other language skills. In addition, at some point in students' lives, they will have to write essays and be proficient in the writing skill.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The mission of Espiritu Santo School is to offer a high standard education based on Christianity. It focuses on training competitive, enterprising, well-educated, responsible, socially human beings and future professionals. The problem under analysis takes place at Femenino Espiritu Santo School, elementary section, where there are 300 female students and 5 English teachers. Students receive 12-weekly hours of classroom instruction of Language Arts and they are expected to develop the four language skills successfully. Teachers have problems with their classroom management skills, and they find it complicated distributing their teaching hours effectively to instruct the students in the four language skills. Writing seems to be one of the weakest skills for students to develop because they cannot write compositions or produce creative pieces of writing. This fact indicates writing instruction is probably poorly made.

JUSTIFICATION

Nowadays, human beings are part of a worldwide society in which they have to interact with people around the world to succeed both academically and professionally. English as a foreign language learners have to be proficient in the four language skills of listening, reading, speaking and writing, to communicate effectively among the members of a foreign community and to have access to updated information that is sometimes available only in English.

The beneficiaries of this study will be the students from 4th to 7th basic grade because the institution could examine, based on the obtained results, the need their students have of having a writing program included in the curriculum that could teach them how to write effectively and meet the demands of their future endeavors. Additionally, teachers will also benefit from this study because they will have access to the results of the investigation and reflect about the need of instructing their students properly. Furthermore, the institution can take the results from this study to make the necessary adjustments in the curriculum to instruct learners satisfactorily.

GENERAL OBJECTIVE

- Determine the impact of the absence of a writing program on the development of writing skills of sixth graders in the first quinmester in the school year 2018 by analyzing their written samples.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- Identify the possible implications of the absence of a writing program in the curriculum by surveying teachers and students.
- Diagnose the writing proficiency of the sample population by analyzing their written samples.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the required principles and strategies needed to develop writing skills?
- What are the essential writing skills students need to write effectively?

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Second language writing

Writing has been a controversial topic for all the parties involved in the educational field such as teachers, linguists and researchers since it involves not just a final product but also rather a repeated process that has to be followed to accomplish the goal of writing effectively (Kroll, 2003). Besides, learning how to write in a second language could be challenging for pupils, as they have to learn a new writing system including its regularities and irregularities as well as punctuation and the spelling rules in English. (Celce-Murcia, Brinton & Snow, 2014).

In the mid twentieth century, writing was omitted and not even considered relevant because of the influence of the Audio-lingual method which was intended to get learners to master oral skills through the practice of pronunciation, the learning of limited vocabulary in context and the production language free of errors (Brown, 2015). According to Nunan (2003), writing was a matter of form rather than function, and that was evident on students' pieces of writing following patterns rather than real production. Learners' written texts were graded based on their grammatical accuracy, adequate organization and content. "Writing was used to show that students had mastered a particular grammatical rule, rather than a good idea about the subject matter. In fact, correct spelling, grammar and overall organization were the most important evidence of second language proficiency" (Nunan, 2003, p. 89).

Writing during the twentieth century was not seen as a relevant subject. In fact, learners used writing just to show the mastery of a grammatical structure; whenever they were able to use it correctly in sentences, they were regarded as proficient in writing and even in English. Therefore, their individual construction of ideas was not seen as relevant production in the writing process. Nunan (ibid) also remarks that it was not until the 1960s that writing took its real importance in classrooms and was included in the

curriculum. This took place in response to the demands of the National Council of Teachers of English, which claimed that the American high school curriculum should address the students' need of learning about the writing process instead of just expecting a writing product.

Through the twenty first century, writing has become even more important than years ago since globalization and technological advances have driven on people to learn how to write in a second language in order to communicate across different languages and cultures for professional, educational and even social factors. According to Reid (2001) writing was considered a complementary skill to develop effectively the skills of grammar, reading and listening; but in recent years, it has turned into a central position due to its important contribution to the communication process. As a result, teachers feel concerned of students' lack of writing skills and they find themselves emerged in the problematic situation as they do not feel prepared enough to instruct learners.

Celce-Murcia, Brinton & Snow (2014) comment that the nature of L2 writing ability could be studied from two perspectives: a) as a cognitive ability that includes the skills and knowledge that an individual may have in their conscious mental process, and b) as a sociocultural phenomenon whose aim is communication in any setting. From the cognitive perspective, second language writing is considered a combination of abilities that has been mastered in the L1 and transferred to the L2 with a required level of proficiency. This means learners use the knowledge acquired in their mother tongue—the ideas, the opinions, the organization of the information, and their reactions to clear their minds—to write in the second language, taking into account that the transfer from L1 to L2 will make the writing process a bit simpler. Moreover, the sociocultural phenomenon is aimed at communicating in a specific setting with a specific group of people; therefore, considering the phenomenon mentioned above, learners will learn to write to be part of a community and their pieces of writing will always be a response to someone's input.

Nunan (2003) also comments on the process of writing seen from a cognitivist perspective, where higher order thinking skills should be developed and encouraged in students so they can think critically and write arguments in favor or against a certain point of view. Besides, the author highlights the importance that should be given to process writing, where students go from brainstorming, drafting, editing and publishing.

Furthermore, Brown (2015) states that written language requires a special competency, and that it is the result of thinking, drafting revising and publishing ideas. From Brown's perspective, writing skills need to be developed naturally, as learners have to express their ideas in a coherent, organized and accurate way, so that the message conveys specific and clear content with a good domain of grammar and mechanics, and it can be understood by anyone.

Social constructivism was a tendency in the 1990s, and writers were seen as "belonging to discourse communities". "For native speakers in formal educational settings, this often means direct instruction in academic discourse, which in turn integrates them into the academic community". (Nunan, 2003, p. 91). Lately, teachers analyzed everything that has been said and done in relation to the procedures applied to develop the writing skill, and chose the most appropriate approach to satisfy their students' needs in what is called *principled eclecticism* (Larsen-Freeman, 2000, as cited in Nunan, 2003)

1.2 The nature of proficiency in second language writing

When writers create a text, they also need to develop patterns of organization as they need to show readers a piece of writing that is as clear as possible (Richards, 2015). Readers expect to read a piece of writing organized into different paragraphs, including main ideas, details and all the possible details in order to have an understandable text conveying a message. Organizing a text involves presenting the piece of writing in different paragraphs but in a coherent way. Coherence includes the following features of a text:

- 1) Development: presentation of information should be orderly and convey a sense of direction.
- 2) Continuity: there should be a consistency of facts, opinions and writer perspective, as well as reference to previously mentioned ideas. Newly introduced information should be relevant.
- 3) *Balance*: there should be a relative emphasis (main idea or supportive information) for each idea or topic.
- 4) Completeness: the ideas presented should provide sufficient coverage of the idea or topic. (Richards, 2015, p.488 - 489)

In the 1990s, second language writing evolved from only being considered a product, to acknowledging the importance of the process. Researchers call this *process writing*; process writing is seen as 'a complex, recursive and creative procedure that is very similar in its general outlines for first and second language writers; learning to write requires the development of an efficient and effective composing process' (Silva and Matsuda, 2003, p. 261) (as cited in Richards 2015, p. 481)

One important aspect to consider in second language writing is the need of doing it effectively to convey an intended message. Richards (2015) proposes the following steps:

Before writing

Think about the task and how to approach it.

Use different ways of collecting necessary information, such as reading, the internet or taking notes.

During writing

Map out main points quickly.

Review and elaborate the points.

Take time to let the ideas develop.

Write and rewrite several times, reviewing to make sure the main points are covered.

Leave editing until later and concentrate on content.

After writing

Check to make sure the written paper is coherent.

Revise content if necessary.

Check that a suitable type of language has been used.

Make any necessary corrections. (p. 490)

Another important aspect in second language writing is the importance the genre approach has acquired in recent years. Genre provides learners with a clear perspective of how to structure their papers for the various contexts. Hyland (2004) defines the term genre as “a term for grouping texts together, representing how writers typically use language to respond to recurring situations” (p. 4). Additionally, Richards (2015) proposes, “genre represents the norms of different kinds of writing” (p. 365). Hyland (2004) defines genre-based teaching as a concept that “allows writing teachers to identify the kinds of texts that students will have to write in their target occupational, academic, or social contexts and to organize their courses to meet these needs” (p. 5). For Richards (2015), it is the role of teachers to instruct their learners to develop their writing skills concentrating on how to construct a variety of texts, and focusing on the conventions behind writing: the writer, the reader and the text involved. Richards (2015) advises giving primary importance to three features in the genre approach: a) making students aware of the need of having a clear understanding of the context; b) reminding writers to identify for whom they are writing a paper, and c) giving learners enough examples of the different types of genres.

1.3 Principles of writing

Nunan (2003) proposes the following four principles that every teacher should consider when teaching writing: 1) Understanding students’ writing reasons for writing: teachers should have a clear goal in mind, as well as a justification before teaching the different types of genre, so that, learners do not feel forced when expressing their ideas. 2) Providing many opportunities for learners to write: learners need to have different types of reading and writing experiences in class so they can write about any topic of their interest. It is important that teachers find useful pieces of writing to encourage learners to practice a lot in order to improve their writing skills. 3) Making feedback helpful and meaningful: teachers should be careful when correcting students; corrections need to be clear, meaningful and given to them in a

respectful manner. Suggestions on what to correct could be written on the margins of papers or given orally to the students. 4) Clarifying how writing will be evaluated: teachers should consider the idea of designing rubrics to evaluate students' pieces of writing. For Nunan (ibid) rubrics help students to understand and gain acquaintance of what elements are being assessed and how to improve the writing skill.

Furthermore, Nation (2009) mentions meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning and fluency development as the principles to teach writing. These principles, besides establishing clear and crucial aspects when writing, can be used to evaluate teaching and learning activities to make sure the best ones are chosen when instructing learners.

Nation (ibid) explains the notions of each principle. Meaning-focused input is based on the knowledge and experience learners should bring to their compositions. It has been proved that writing is most likely to be successful and meaningful for the learners if they know the topic they are going to write about. This could be gotten from previous readings or activities on the field. In meaning-focused output, Nation (2009) remarks the importance of the different kinds of writing practice, so that learners can master their skills and the emphasis of working on message focused purpose. Language-focused learning, the third principle, emphasizes the knowledge students should have about the parts of the writing process and the strategies they should get in order to deal with them; feedback should never be forgotten as it encourages and improves writing. Finally, Nation highlights the fluency development principle, because within it, students are encouraged to write at a reasonable speed once they are well trained in how to use the other principles.

Nation (2009) adds that the principles can also be used to evaluate a writing course or the writing section of a language course, to make sure that learners are getting a good range of opportunities for learning.

1.4 Product and process writing

1.4.1 Product writing

A half century ago, teachers were interested on a final writing product rather than on a process to develop writing skills. Pieces of writing were produced by following a pattern presented in a model which used to turn out in unreal production; within this process, learners did not have to make a great effort to develop their ideas; contrarily, they just had to change some words and they could get the desired product (Brown, 2015).

Steele (2004) agrees with Brown (2015), and comments that in the product approach students have to follow a model of a text to create a new piece of writing. Steele comments that the approach has four stages: 1) Learners follow a model of a text focusing their attention on writing on a specific genre; for example, if it is a formal letter, students may write using formal words, formal requests, etc. 2) Learners are in a controlled practice phase and they are to produce only the requested grammar point needed to deliver a paper in the specific genre compelled by the instructor. 3) Students organize ideas which for the author is of high importance; it is as significant as language production. 4) Students show their ability to write the chosen writing task with correct grammar and mechanics. On this step, learners demonstrate how fluent and competent they could be on the second language.

1.4.2 Process writing

Kroll (2001) (as cited in Al-Mahrooqi (Ed.), 2014) defines the process approach:

The “process approach” serves today as an umbrella term for many types of writing courses What the term captures is the fact that student writers engage in their writing tasks through a cyclical approach rather than a single-shot approach. They are not expected to produce and submit complete and polished responses to their writing assignments without going through stages of drafting and receiving feedback on their drafts, be it from peers and/or from the teacher, followed by revision of their evolving texts. (p. 220-221).

For Harmer (2006), the process approach could be seen as a wheel, as learners move around it to obtain a final product. In his view, the stages to get a final written paper require time and concentration so that ideas can be structured in an appropriate way.

Celce-Murcia, Brinton & Snow (2014), in relation to the complexity of the writing process quote: "Anyone who has ever stared for hours at a blank sheet of paper recognizes that one of the greatest challenges is getting started" (p. 230). Moreover, Langan (2009) comments that even professional writers take their time when composing texts; they do not sit down and write a paper automatically in one draft. Instead, they have to work on it a step at a time.

Steele (2004) defines eight stages in the process approach for completing a writing process: 1) Brainstorming: all the ideas produced by students through discussion and clarification are included. 2) Planning and structuring: students analyze all the thoughts and consider which area significant to be included on the writing. 3) Mind mapping: ideas are put into mind maps that make learners discern their importance. 4) Writing the first draft: this is usually done in class in either pairs or groups. 5) Peer feedback: students exchange their papers with their classmates so that they can read others work and suggest corrections; by doing this, writers are aware of the importance of writing as accurately as possible because someone else will be the reader of those ideas. 6) Editing: writers bear in mind the corrections done in the previous stage so they can make the necessary changes. 7) Final draft: students focus their attention on writing the final paper. 8) Evaluation and teacher's feedback: teachers receive students' pieces of writing, they evaluate what learners have produced, and they make comments about their writing.

From a similar but more condensed perspective, Langan (2009) summarizes the process approach in five stages: prewriting, drafting, revising editing and publishing.

Prewriting

During the prewriting process, once the topic has been stated, teachers need to have a variety of strategies to help students get over their initial anxiety and begin planning out their ideas to start writing. Langan (ibid) comments that there are some prewriting strategies such as freewriting, questioning, clustering and making a list.

First, Langan defines freewriting as a process where students sit down and write whatever comes into their minds for five minutes or so. Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Snow (2014) describe the process as a period of time where learners write without stopping for generating lists of ideas or thoughts associated with a topic.

Next, questioning is described by Langan (2009) as a process that implies people thinking about their topic by writing down a series of questions that they later answer.

Then clustering. This is the third prewriting strategy. Celce-Murcia, Brinton & Snow (2014) clarify that clustering begins with setting a keyword or a central idea placed in the center of a page around which the students quickly jot down all of the free-associations triggered by the subject matter using words or short phrases. Langan (2009) suggests this strategy is helpful for people who like to do their thinking in a visual way.

Finally, making a list is the last strategy in the pre-writing process. Nation (2009) manifest that listing ideas is useful when constructing an outline. After the ideas are listed, learners can then attempt to organize them and include some more if needed. Celce-Murcia, Brinton & Snow (2014) describe this strategy in a more detailed way by saying that it is a first step on finding an approach to a particular subject area; students are encouraged to produce a list of as many ideas as possible, and of subcategories that come to mind as they think about the topic at hand. The authors believe it is an especially useful activity for students who might be constrained by undue concern for expressing their thoughts in grammatically correct sentences.

In relation to the struggle writers face to start writing, the Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru Welsh Assembly Government Organization (2010) published some effective starters teachers can use to help students go through this process smoothly:

- Posing a question – ‘*Have you ever wondered ...?*’
- Giving a strong opinion – ‘The waste of good food in our society is a crime.’
- Offering an interesting fact or statistic – ‘*Children in Wales speak 98 different languages.*’
- Using a famous quotation – ‘I have a dream.’
- Stating an alarming fact – ‘In the next few weeks, hundreds of children will be injured on the roads.’
- Showing an action – ‘The bonfire blazed. Fireworks screamed through the air. The crowd gasped in amazement. It was November 5 and we were enjoying the spectacle.’
- Presenting a short retelling – ‘The boy slipped on the ice, went head over heels and ended up on the grass.’
- Addressing the reader directly – ‘Imagine standing at the edge of a high diving board.’
- Providing a vivid description – ‘He was red-faced, angry and shaking his fist violently.’
- Starting with direct speech – “You will do as I say,” he said, “or you will regret it.” (p. 62-63).

Drafting

Langan (2009) describes this process as the step where students have to be prepared to put in additional thoughts and details that did not emerge when prewriting. He advises learners not to worry if they hit a snag; they just have to leave a blank space or add a comment such as “do later” and press on to finish the paper. In addition, he recommends they should not worry yet about grammar, punctuation, or spelling for they might have sentences or ideas they may decide to remove later. He remarks the content development should be students’ goal.

Brown (2015) suggests that learners should keep in mind how showing and using facts and statistics makes writing powerful and convincing. He emphasizes that the task at this step is to discover how they can best express their ideas in the clearer manner possible, so that readers will receive the same message with the same impact that the writer intended. Some learners know what they want to write but may have difficulty in putting it into written form. That means they have problems in translating their ideas into text.

On the other hand, some learners can do this, but they are very slow. That is, they lack fluency in turning ideas to text. Nation (2009) suggests that the possible origin of this type of struggle is the difference between the writing systems of the learners' first language and the second language. Some learners have difficulty in expressing what they want to write because they probably lack practice in writing in any language. Either scenario requires teachers to use different techniques to tackle the problem and help students deal with it.

Revising

Nation (2009) defines it as the step where writers look back over to what has been written, to: a) check what ideas have already been included; b) keep the coherence and flow, c) stimulate further ideas, and d) look for errors. He mentions that poor writers do not review, or that they review only to find mistakes. On his book the author suggests working with checklists or scales to encourage learners to review their writing.

Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Snow (2014) remark feedback is essential on this step. They recommend commenting first on content before commenting on language issues for it may stifle students' process of ideas generation; the revision of the overall content and organization would have to be done, unless language errors impede communication to the extent that it is impossible to discern the meaning. Moreover, Brown (2015) advises writers to use the feedback received and comments about their paper to improve their work and to make it clearer and more convincing.

Langan (2009) adds some tips that can make the revision step easier:

- Set the first draft aside for ideally a couple of days, to come back with a fresh and more objective point of view.
- Work from typed or printed text to see the paper more impartially.
- Read your draft aloud to help writers pick up problems with meaning and style.
- As these tips are done, writers can write their thoughts and changes above the lines or in the margins of their paper, which later can serve as a guide when working on the next draft. (p.52)

Editing

Langan (2009) describes this stage as checking a paper for mistakes in grammar, punctuation, usage, and spelling. He remarks that students often find it hard to edit their writing carefully for they have put so much work and effort into it, or so little, that it is tiring for them to look at the paper one more time. He also mentions the importance of eliminating sentence-skills mistakes, which consequently will turn an average paper into a good paper. Besides, as writers get into the habit of editing, they will also get into the habit of using sentence skills consistently. Both activities are an integral part of clear, effective writing.

Nation (2009) mentions some hints that can help writers edit the next-to-final draft of a paper for sentence-skills mistakes:

- To have a good dictionary and a grammar handbook at hand.
- To expose only one sentence at a time to look for errors in grammar, spelling, and typing.
- To read each sentence out loud, to make sure sentences sound clear and smooth.
- To pay special attention to the kinds of errors that are constantly repeated.
- To work on a typewritten or word-processed draft, where students will be able to see their writing more objectively than they can on a handwritten (p. 55)

Moreover, the author describes this step as going back over the writing and making changes to its organization, style, grammatical and lexical correctness, and appropriateness. In addition to Langan's notions, Nation (2009) suggests asking some questions to find out if the writer can systematically make corrections and improvements to the text:

- Are there signs of self-correction?
- Is the text free of spelling errors, including those that a spellchecker would not find?
- Is the text well formatted and consistently formatted? (p.125)

A low performance in this stage of the process is signaled by the failure to respond to feedback, repeated errors, careless errors and inconsistencies in the list of references.

The idea behind these questions is that writing teachers should be able to look at a piece of writing and make judgments about a writer's control of each of the parts of the writing process. The teacher should also be able to give useful feedback about the writer's strengths and weaknesses in relation to these parts, and provide useful suggestions for improvement. The feedback should involve strategy training, so that with practice learners could question themselves about each part of the process; thus, they could be prepared for monitoring and evaluating their own work and the work of others.

Publishing

Publishing is the last step of the writing process and consists on launching the students' final product. It could include publishing in social media, in the school newspaper or magazine, in a blog, etc. Sometimes students may want to publish a letter to an editor of a written media, or send a letter to an important authority hoping to get an answer, or to get some kind of improvement for their school or neighborhood. Publishing also includes preparing point-of-purchase (POP) merchandising materials that may advertise some kind of product or campaign (Langan, 2009). "Publishing and sharing. This is where students' writing is shared with an audience. Writing becomes real and alive at this point. Publishing can involve putting together class books, collections of writing, school or class newspapers, school or

class magazines, or displaying short samples of writing in the hall or out in the community. Writing experiences become even more powerful by having students read their work out loud in small groups to another classmate, or in a large group setting." (Johnson, 2008, p. 180)

To conclude, Richards (2015) compares the process and product approach and mentions that the former introduces a new dimension into the field of writing as it includes a series of steps that have to be followed in order to obtain a written paper, while the latter focuses directly on the final result of the written paper. Also, Silva and Matsuda (2002) (as mentioned in Richards, 2015), remark that process approach is more effective than the product approach because the latter is not effective when encouraging students to write by themselves. Nevertheless, in a study made to analyze the relation between product and process in students' writing performance, Hasan & Akhand (2010) discovered that the process and product approaches are complementary as one needs the other in order to complete a whole effective process.

1.5 Characteristics of effective writing

Welsh Assembly Government Organization (2010) comment about students' effective writing papers: "In order to make progress, teachers need to do modeling of writings, regular opportunities to develop their skills and effective assessment practice that leads them to understand how best to improve their work" (p.3). The effective writer will reach a stage when the mechanical aspects of writing, such as spelling and punctuation, become second nature to them and focusing on language and form to engage and inform their readers will become their priority. As learners develop as writers, they demonstrate that they can:

- Engage their readers
- Adapt their writing to suit the audience and purpose of the piece
- Use grammatical and stylistic features to ensure clarity, achieve the right tone and create particular effects
- Use a range of sentence structures

- Organize their writing, linking ideas coherently and using paragraphs effectively
- Choose and use appropriate vocabulary
- Use punctuation to clarify meaning
- Use a range of strategies to enable them to spell correctly
- Present their writing appropriately, either by hand or by using information and communication technology (ICT). (Welsh Assembly Government Organization, 2010, p. 3)

1.6 How to become effective writers

When teaching writing it is always important to give students an aim. Harmer (2015) mentions that effective writers usually have a purpose in their minds, and construct their writing in order to achieve that purpose. He remarks that the most effective learning of writing skills is more likely to take place when students write a real message for a real audience, or at least when they feel it will be useful in their real lives.

When communicating it is important to have all the ideas clear in order to transmit effective messages; punctuation, capitalization and the correct use of grammatical structures will lead learners to become competent writers. Langan (2009) reports that writing is a difficult skill to master because people believe that it is a natural gift which cannot be developed easily, which in fact is a fake assumption.

The author researched around the following people's assumptions about writing: a) "A good writer should be able to sit down and write a paper straight through without stopping" (p. 8). Langan explains that writing is a complex process that requires more than just one draft; in a few situations people can finish a writing text in one sitting; most of the times writing is a process that requires several drafts. b) "Writing is a skill that anyone can learn with practice" (p. 8). Just as any other skill that requires interest and disposition to learn it; writing demands practice in organizing ideas, in using the right punctuation, in writing as accurately as possible, etc.; therefore, whoever sets their minds into learning a skill can do it with training. c) "I'll never be good at writing because I make too many mistakes in spelling, grammar and

punctuation” (p. 8). Langan (2009) quotes that at the early stage of writing production, punctuation, spelling and grammar are factors that should not be a matter of worry since the most relevant aspect must be the content, which has to contain clear, precise and organized ideas as well as feelings in order to produce a successful piece of writing. Revision and practice will play an important role when writing because learners will develop the skill to write correctly through time. d) “Because I dislike writing, I always start a paper at the last possible minute” (p. 9). Langan (ibid) mentions that the lack of writers’ positive attitude may affect the piece of writing because when things are done at the last minute, they would probably be less effective than things organized with enough time; writing an effective paper requires concentration and preparation. e) “I’ve always done poorly in English, and I don’t expect that to change now”. (p. 9). Having the wrong idea that English will always be a difficult subject will lower students’ possibilities to become good writers.

To conclude, the attitude a person may present towards a situation will be crucial since it will define how successful or unsuccessful someone might become. Thinking positively will always guide learners to obtain good results.

1.7 Feedback on learners writing

According to Richards (2015), feedback is the intervention of the teacher to make comments on different aspects of a work with the purpose of obtaining an improvement. It is essential and it should be applied in the teaching of writing because it is important to know not just when to give it but how. Feedback varies depending on the writing steps; however, it will always lead to an enhancement on the students’ work.

On the same topic, Ur (2009) mentions four common concerns about the feedback process. First, teachers should decide what feedback would be mainly on: language, content, organization? Even though teachers know they should focus in content first, then in organization and presentation and finally in language form, they fall in the habit of correcting grammar, spelling, punctuation and vocabulary first. Ur states three main reasons teachers use to justify this procedure: first grammar and spelling mistakes easily catch the eye of the teacher and result very difficult to ignore. Next, students do not

want to have mistakes on their papers. Finally, correcting language mistakes is easier and faster than correcting organization and content.

Ur (2009) suggests teachers write corrections in the body of the text and then share comments related to content and organization. Moreover, Scrivener (2005) suggests using “correction codes” –that should be taught to students in advance—to use on the side of students’ compositions so they could try to identify and self-correct their mistakes. Some examples of codes are V= verb, WO=wrong order, WW= wrong word, Y= missing word and SP= spelling. (p. 203)

Next, teachers should evaluate if all mistakes should be corrected. For Ur (ibid), teachers sometimes fall in the uncertainty of knowing which language mistakes should be corrected and which ones not. For her, this arises a serious conflict between two of the teacher’s functions, language support and encouragement of learning; the former refers to the role of the teacher in assessing and correcting students whenever they use English as a second language; the latter encompasses the teacher’s attitude to motivate learning. The correction of mistakes is part of the language instruction, but too much attention on it will lead to discouragement and demoralization. Also, overemphasizing on language mistakes may mislead the teacher and students’ attention from the aspects of content and organization. Teachers should correct only the mistakes that may cause misunderstandings or confusions about the content of the text, otherwise it may frustrate learning rather than helping (Ur, 2009). Additionally, Scrivener (2005) mentions it is not recommendable to point out every single mistake students make, as it may result very disappointing for them to receive their work with a high amount of details to correct.

Then, teachers should estimate if they will let learners rewrite and incorporate corrections before giving a final grade. Ur (2009) mentions how tedious it is for students to rewrite their compositions incorporating corrections and suggestions; on the other hand, she remarks how helpful repetition can be to increase learning. The author suggests teachers to

consider students' final work as provisional and to regard their rewritten papers as the ones for final evaluation.

Finally, for Ur (ibid) teachers need to ask themselves if peer correction is an effective practice or not. Celce-Murcia, Brinton & Snow (2014) comment that the feedback process for teachers in charge of large classes is very demanding. The authors suggest it may be helpful to give students the opportunity to assist them on the feedback process. Ur (2009) also considers that taking the time to correct students' work is an absorbing process that can be alleviated by letting students give editing comments on their peers' papers. Nevertheless, the author insists on how important it is to consider students' attitude towards this activity, taking in consideration whether they feel comfortable checking their classmates' work, giving and receiving criticism being it positive or negative, and providing feedback. The author suggests it is a good idea to immerse students on this valuable exercise as it contributes with the students learning development and reinforces their knowledge. This practice does not release teachers from their work, but it can substitute teachers' first draft reading, leaving it ready for a final checking. In addition, Zakhareuski (2012) recommends that it is important to "encourage each person to look for any breakdown in meaning, confusion in organization, or topics that are not fully addressed in the composition" (p. 5).

In accordance, Nunan (2003) highlights the importance of the tone of the comments teachers make when giving feedback to students. There may arise situations where because of space limitation teachers may be forced to give quick and direct comments that might be perceived as unkind or rude. Moreover, Nation (2009) points out the value of addressing positive feedback on students' written work, whether it be oral or written, as it can result in a good attitude towards writing and increase their level of motivation. Examples of the kind are: "The part about the fire was really interesting. Can you tell me more about that?" "You wrote that the end of the movie surprised you. What were you expecting?" (p. 137)

The use of comments like the mentioned above will let the reader know the teacher took his/her time to read, to appreciate and to understand their work.

Nation also mentions that the publication of students' work is a good strategy to encourage their writing. Publication can be done in different ways as to share their work aloud with their classmates, to post their work on the classroom walls or to make it appear in a printed collection.

1.8 The role of the teacher in writing

Teachers play an important role in students' lives when instructing them in writing. Harmer (2015) suggests teachers perform some tasks related to the writing process: a) Demonstrating: teachers could make students identify the writing conventions and the genre constraints by focusing their attention on those issues. b) Motivating and provoking: teachers might guide students and constantly motivate them to express their ideas in the best possible way. This is something students find hard to do; by observing those behaviors, teacher could engage learners in entertaining situations to make them feel interested. c) Supporting: teachers need to make students feel they are supported; once learners are inspired to write, teachers should help them to keep composing their ideas and to be aware that some difficulties may occur when they are writing. d) Responding: teachers should respond to their students' pieces of writing, focusing their attention on the content of the paper rather than on the grammatical form. e) Evaluating: teachers ought to encourage their students to make corrections based on positive comments that will not affect their mood or disposition to write. It is also relevant to make suggestions and write notes at the end of the paper to give students the opportunity to realize what they have made wrong and how they can improve their written papers.

Additionally, Brown (2015) exposes that teachers play the role of facilitators and coaches. As facilitators, teachers help students to engage themselves into the process of thinking creatively to express their ideas, but without interfering on their opinions. As coaches, teachers provide students with the adequate feedback so they can improve their writing.

1.9 The writing environment

According to Brown (2015) the classroom environment is of vast importance to reach a higher level of accomplishment of the students writing skills. He

suggests taking in consideration the following aspects: a) Sight, sound and comfort: students are influenced for what they perceive from the classroom, from what they see, hear and feel. Brown recommends teachers to check the following aspects before students get into the classroom: clean boards, organized chairs, displayed visuals, functioning heating and cooling systems, and clean and ordered classrooms isolated from external noise. There might be situations where teachers are not in the possibility of controlling certain aspects, but they should take any opportunity they find to make it as comfortable as possible. b) Sitting arrangements: Brown mentions the best way chairs should be arranged is definitely not where chairs are lined up in columns from the front wall to the back. "Students are members of a team and should be able to see one another, to talk one another (in English), and not be made to feel like they just walked into a military formation" (Brown, 2015). Teachers should position the chairs in semi circles, u shapes, concentric circles or, in the case of having a small size class, have students in a circle so that they can all observe the teacher. In classrooms where there are two-student desks, it is advisable to plan how to make interaction easy and possible. Additionally, if disruptive behavior is not an issue, teachers could let students decide where to sit. c) The chalkboard use: As it is a recyclable resource and it is always there, teachers could take advantage and post visual material as words, pictures or charts to facilitate learning and comprehension. Boards should also be as organized and neat as possible to avoid stress and confusion. d) Equipment: It is recommendable to check if equipment is working properly to avoid a detriment to the objective of the lesson.

1.10 Choosing writing task activities

Harmer (2015) talks about the importance of choosing activities that result attractive to students. Teachers should have an idea of not only what kind of topics students have preference on, but also about what topics result entertaining to them. He mentions that an engaging writing task is the one that involves learners not just intellectually, but emotionally as well, and the one that delights them, intrigues them or makes them feel great. What makes students feel engaged may differ, but clearly, the stimulus teachers provide

will make the difference. It all lays on the type of input teachers want to work on; for example, music works well if the purpose is visual stimulation that can be used to encourage students' creativity. Pictures can promote imagination for students who are stimulated by visual input. Working on activities that involve physical movement as writing jointly on the board or swapping papers around carter, work positively for students who respond to kinesthetic stimulations. There are many strategies to conduct writing tasks; teachers just need to be aware of the different tastes and interests their students have.

1.11 Tasks that promote fluent writing

According to Ur (2009), there is a marked difference between convenient writing tasks and fluent writing tasks. The former refers to activities students engage in to practice a grammar point or answering some questions to test comprehension; the latter is aimed at developing students' writing skills for communicative purposes. Ur (ibid) mentions some criteria teachers should consider in order to select what tasks are more appropriate in a writing class:

- Interest: The task should be motivating and stimulating.
- Level: The language required should be appropriate to the level of the class.
- Relevance: At least some of the tasks should be similar to the kinds of things students might need to write themselves, now or in the future.
- Simplicity: The tasks should be easy to explain. Often the provision of a model text can help to clarify.
- Personal appropriateness: The task should be one that the teacher feels comfortable with and that fits their teaching style, goals and preferences. (p. 157)

Ur provides a list of writing tasks that can be used to practice the skill: 1) Creative writing: it demands students' creativity and imagination; e.g. stories, personal anecdotes and poems. 2) Instructions: these types of tasks are appropriate for students to describe processes or places with which they are familiar; e.g. instruction sheets and directions. 3) Interpersonal communication: this kind of activity is more suitable for adults as it demands formal English; e.g. a letter or email to apply for a job, a letter of complaint, a

reply or comments on a blog. 4) Description: it is aimed at students of basic level of proficiency; simple phrases or words are required; e.g. description of places, views, people or processes. 5) Responses to literature: it has the purpose of analyzing or criticizing pieces of writing; e.g. synopsis and reviews. 6) Persuasion; this task is aimed at students with a higher level of proficiency as it requires careful planning of content and organization; e.g. recommendations, advertisement and leaflets. 7) Information; it is a great field to work on if the topic is of the students' interest; e.g. newspaper report or short paper.

1.12 Writing lesson sequences

It is relevant to specify the kind of task in which students will be involved, as well as its particular focus when designing writing activities (Harmer, 2015). "Some of the activities are about the nuts and bolts, some are designed to build the writing habit, and others are designed to give students practice in the skill of writing" (p.370). Harmer (ibid) suggests a sequence of activities that may be used to develop student's writing skills.

First, when teachers teach learners how to use the appropriate punctuation, they should motivate them to make a connection to the way they speak so they realize the pauses that need to be done when writing. Giving students the opportunity to punctuate different texts is a good idea when teaching that convention, as they will read the information aloud and use the most adequate pause (Harmer, 2015).

Then, Harmer (ibid) comments that learners become aware of the logical connection between words, sentences and paragraphs (coherence) when they are involved in story construction. Students can put different stories in order by using sequence words or by identifying key structures that are used to make it easier for a reader to follow a story. Students can also discuss their answers with their classmates and notice if they have conveyed the message from the story correctly. The teacher can ask students to write their own stories when they already have clear ideas of story construction.

Additionally, in the author's perspective, students can be asked to write a simple and short review about a piece of reading with which they have been involved: a play, a concert or a film they have seen. Another way of involving students in writing is to ask them to write a letter for an acquaintance and later on give it to a classmate so he/she recognizes the recipient and purpose of the letter. The aim of working on this type of activity is to give writing a meaningful purpose; the results will be projected in engaged students wishing to communicate with someone else.

Moreover, Harmer (2015) mentions the importance of dictation because in this activity students need to be concentrated to write down correctly what the teacher or classmate is dictating. Students can also be immersed into writing poems as it is a way to make students write creatively.

In addition, there is another strategy than can be used with students. They can be asked to sit in circles to create a story. The teacher postulates the first sentence and then students create the story by providing coherent sentences that will connect and give sense to the story. When using this strategy, learners express their thoughts in a practical and spontaneous way and at the same time develop their cooperative skills.

Finally, for real communication purposes, students can be asked to write in blogs, or in any type of social media groups about topics of their interest; this will give them exposure to different audiences.

1.13 Paragraph organization

Zemach & Rumisek (2003) define a paragraph as a group of sentences about a topic consisting of three essential parts: a topic sentence, supporting sentences and a concluding sentence.

a) First, the topic sentence introduces the main idea of the paragraph. Its structure consists of a topic and a controlling idea, which guides the reader to understand what the text will be about; it is usually placed at the beginning of the paragraph. Savage and Shafiei (2007) add that a topic sentence may project what the author feels or his/her point of view about a certain topic.

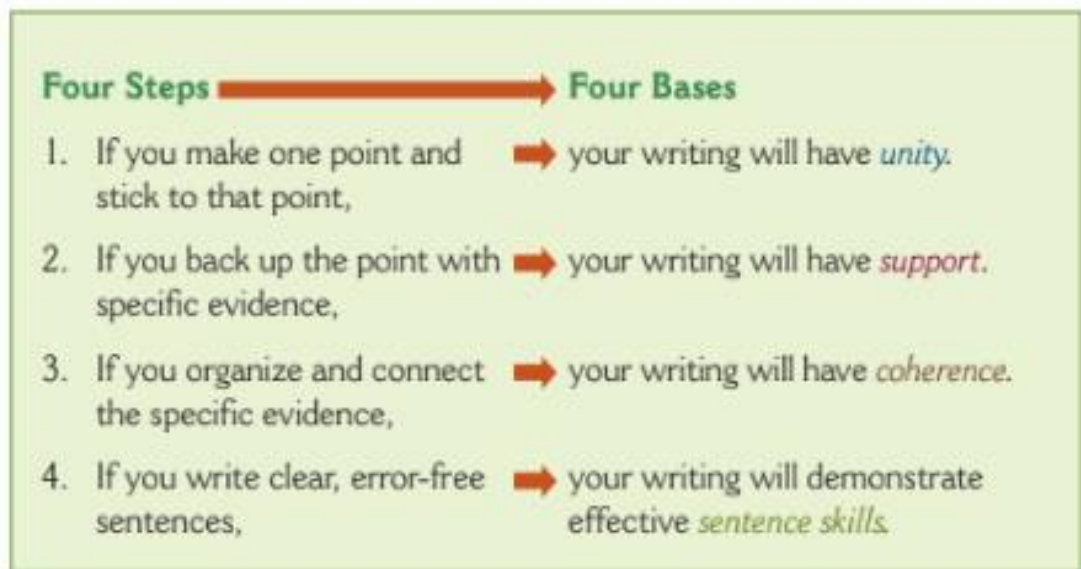


Figure 1: Steps for effective writing - Taken from Langan (2009, p. 73)

b) Next, supporting sentences provide detailed ideas, explanations or examples about the topic sentence. Langan (2009) mentions there are four basic steps for writing an effective paragraph.

Langan (ibid) mentions that unity in a paragraph refers to the relation of all the supporting details to the main idea, or a single point. He suggests teachers should encourage students to determine what ideas are related to the topic and which ones are not –to leave them out. Next, Langan explains that support means to provide specific details about the main idea. Savage and Shafiei (2007) quote: “A paragraph must also have coherence. This means that the supporting details are organized so that information that goes together appears together” (p. 16). Finally, Langan (2009) refers to sentence skills as the last base for effective writing. He defines this concept as the revision and edition of the paragraph to get a clearer and more effective communication. To achieve this goal, the author highlights the importance of

good grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, and mechanics that will result in error-free sentences. In Langan’s words, “error-free sentences allow readers to focus on the content of a paragraph as a whole. Poor grammar and sentence skills can be merely distracting, or they can change the meaning of a sentence entirely; they also lessen a writer’s credibility.” (p. 77).

A summary of the four bases of effective writing are reflected in the following figure:

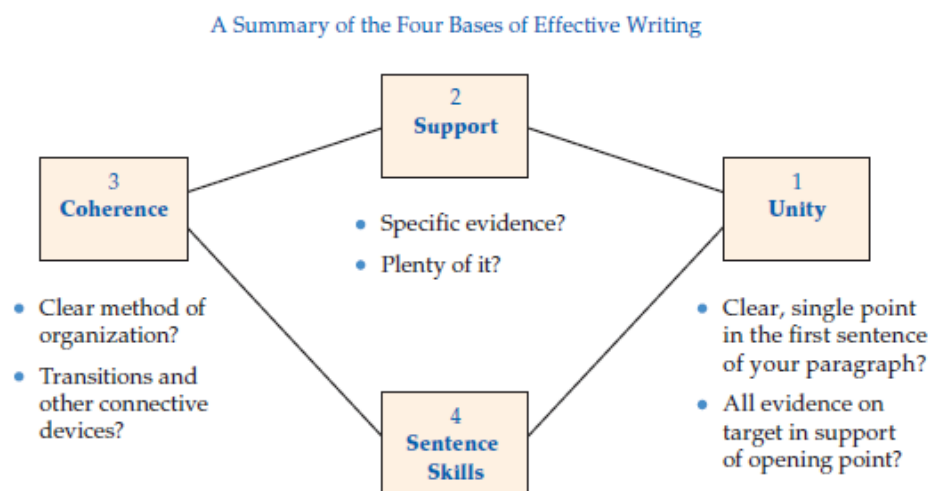


Figure 2: Taken from Langan (2009, p.78)

To Langan’s perspective on the steps for writing an effective paragraph, Hinkel (2003) includes cohesion as another important characteristic for a text to be effective. “It refers to the connectivity of ideas in discourse and sentences to one another in a text, thus creating the flow of information in a unified way.” (p. 279).

The terms cohesion and coherence are usually associated together; however, they do not refer to the same characteristics of a paragraph. “Cohesion refers to the connection between sentences and paragraphs, and coherence refers to the organization of discourse with all elements present and fitting together logically” (Langan, 2009, p.280).

c) Finally, Langan (ibid) mentions that concluding sentences give a summary of the information given in the paragraph, by paraphrasing the ideas stated in the topic sentence; they are placed at the last part of the paragraph. Savage

& Shafiei (2007) mention that when writing a concluding sentence the writer can give a warning, some advice, a prediction or use a quotation that applies to the content of the paragraph.

1.14 Capitalization and punctuation

Capitalization refers to the use of capital letters where they are needed.

Langan (2009) details a list of cases where capitalization is required:

- First word in a sentence or direct quotation.
- Names of persons and the word I.
- Names of particular places.
- Names of days of the week, months and holidays.
- Names of commercial products.
- Titles of books, magazines, articles, films, television shows, songs, poems, stories, paper that you write and like.
- Names of companies, associations, unions, clubs, religious and political groups, and other organizations (p. 325).

Punctuation refers to the use of marks in writings to separate sentences and their elements, and to clarify meaning. The absence of punctuation can lead writings to run-ons. Langan (2009) defines run-ons as two developed ideas without signs that limit the break between them. Consequently, the reader may feel confused and unsure of where one idea ends and the other begins. Punctuation is very important as it helps the reader to own a clearer plan of what the text is concerning. Whenever there are punctuation mistakes on a paragraph, the content is also misunderstood. Within the following chart some punctuation marks are mentioned, their purpose and an example of how to use them properly.

Punctuation	Purpose	Examples
period [.]	End a sentence	Most sentences end in a period.
question mark [?]	Indicate a question	"What time is it?" she asked. "How much longer?" he asked.
Exclamation point [!]	Express emotion	"I hate you!" he shouted. "I love you!" she shouted.
semicolon [;] or comma [,] + conjunction [and, or, nor, for, so, but, yet]	Connect complete sentences (two independent clauses)	It is raining; the dog is wet. or It is raining, and the dog is wet.
comma [,] but if one or more items in that list already have a comma, use a semicolon [;]	Connect items in a list	My lunch is a sandwich, an apple, and a bag of pretzels. <i>but</i> My dinner is a salad of spinach, carrots, and tomatoes; a bowl of pasta; and two breadsticks.
quotation marks [" "]	Indicate a quotation	"To be or not to be" is one of the most famous lines from <i>Hamlet</i> .
comma [,] or, less commonly, colon [:]	Introduce a quotation (words directly spoken)	She yelled, "Let's get out of here!" The president declared: "We will prevail."
apostrophe [']	Show possession or contraction	Why is Lisa's wallet in Ben's backpack?
colon [:] if what precedes the colon is a complete sentence	Introduce a list of three or more items	There are three things I want to do before I die: go on a cruise, go skydiving, and learn to surf.
commas [,]	Separate a word or phrase that is relevant but not essential information	Elaine, my roommate, is from Chicago. Her nickname as a child, her mother told me, was "Boo-boo."
parentheses [()]	Separate a word or phrase that is relevant but secondary information	There is an exception to every rule (including this one).
colon [:]	Introduce an explanation (what follows "explains" or "answers" what precedes)	You know what they say about real estate: Location is everything.
ellipsis [...]	To show information is omitted	"... was really good at public speaking."
brackets [()]	To show information was added	"[Winston Churchill] was really good at public speaking."
hyphen [-] unless the first word is an adjective ending in -ly	Connect two words that work together as one object or modifier	Mother-in-law, five-year-old son, highly rated
en dash [-]	Show the span between two numbers or the scores of a game	The score is 14–21. He lived from 1953–2016.
em dash [—]	Separate a word or phrase for emphasis	Never steal from that store — never. It's not just a bad idea — it's illegal.

Figure 3: Punctuation chart

Retrieved from Teaching and Learning Center, University of Washington Tacoma.

https://www.tacoma.uw.edu/sites/default/files/sections/TeachingandLearningCenter/accs_Punctuation%20Chart_rev2016.pdf

1.15 Future trends

Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Snow (2014) comment that the way in which writing was taught has changed rapidly in the recent years by the influence of technology. They mention how social media networks have had a great impact on learners as those are tools that can be utilize in classrooms to engage them in writing to interact with others apart from the teacher and classmates.

Warschauer (2007) (as mentioned in Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Snow, 2014) comments that for second language writers, technology is of vast significance as it involves learners in authentic communication and gives them the opportunity to use a variety of language structures when transmitting a message.

Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Snow (ibid) also mention that new generations have never known a world without internet and social media channels; teachers can take advantage of this technology-driven world and make students use the technological tools they have at their disposal to communicate as they develop their writing skill. Additionally, automatic systems can be used to score and provide feedback as they are used to save time.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Context of the study

This research project aims to analyze how the lack of English composition classes influence in the development of the writing skills of the students from 6th basic “A” at Femenino Espiritu Santo School, which is located on Juan Tanca Marengo Avenue, Las Aguas Avenue; it has been instructing students since June 21st, 1984. The method applied in this study is the quantitative approach. Quantitative research “involves the processes of collecting, analyzing, interpreting and writing the results of a study” (Creswell, 2014, p. 23). In addition, when quantitative research is conducted, it addresses a problem on the field, and obtains information through the application of research instruments. Creswell mentions that in quantitative research, the most commonly used instruments to collect information are surveys. Surveys contain a variety of questions that are mostly close-ended. The responses are codified as numeric data, and are shown usually in pie charts that expose the situation under analysis.

2.2 Participants of the study

The participants of the study were 20 students from 6th basic “A” from Femenino Espiritu Santo School. All the students are girls and their age goes from 9 to 10 years old. They come from middle–social class. Their English proficiency level is A1, which according to the Common European Framework (2001) corresponds to students who understand basic and everyday expressions, can produce simple sentences and can ask and answer questions to interact among them.

Eight English teachers from 4th to 7th basic grade who are in their middle–thirties also participated in this study. Four out of the eight educators are English language teachers; the rest of the instructors do not have a degree in teaching. All the teachers have a B2 English proficiency level, which according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001) is the required level to be an English teacher.

2.3 Research instruments

A teachers' survey with questions about how students learn and how writing contributes their learning was applied to teachers (appendix 1). The survey included ten questions; five of them had a Likert scale to measure their opinions. The interviewees were asked to rate questions on a level of strongly agree, agree or disagree. The results were displayed in pie charts. The other five questions were of multiple choice; teachers could select more than one answer. These other results were not presented in graphs but in texts. The survey was adapted from Brigitte Milhinhos de Assis from the University of Lisbon (2012) who wrote a research paper about self-assessment of writing skills: a reliable and valid tool in an EFL classroom from The University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations.

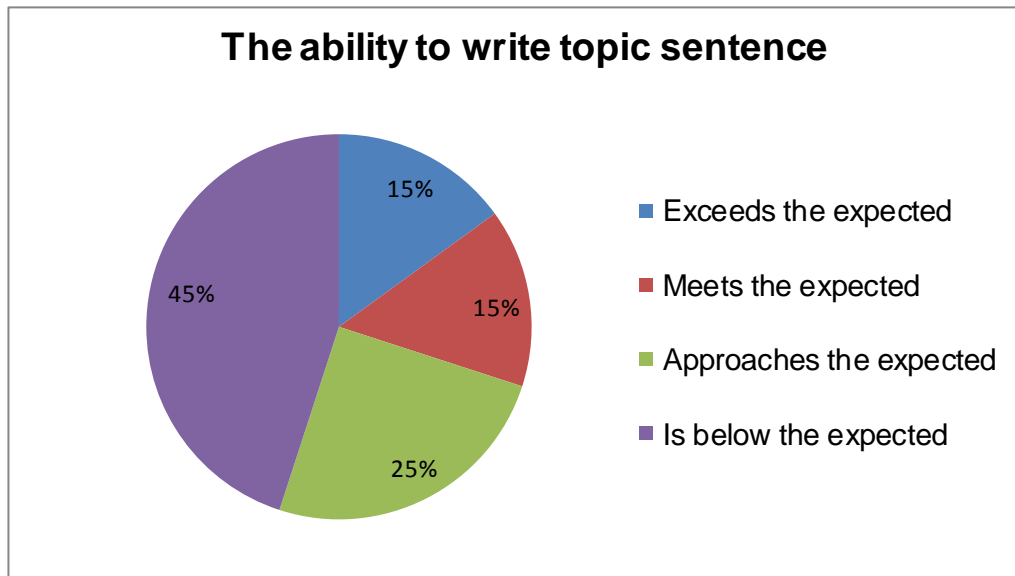
Another survey was given to students to analyze how important writing was for them and what was their perspective towards the skill (appendix 2). They had to answer yes/no questions. The survey was adapted from two studies. One of the studies was the one written by Brigitte Milhinhos and the other study was conducted by Lisa Frase (2014) about students' feelings towards writing

Finally, the students were asked to write a paragraph from a set of pictures related to people's daily routines (appendix 3). They were instructed to be as descriptive as possible to structure the paragraph. To assess the students' writing performance, a writing-based-assessment rubric, adapted from Printertest was used (appendix 4). A rubrics result chart collected the outcomes from the analysis of the students' paragraphs (appendix 5) and a chart of number of students who reached the different levels of achievement was also used (appendix 6).

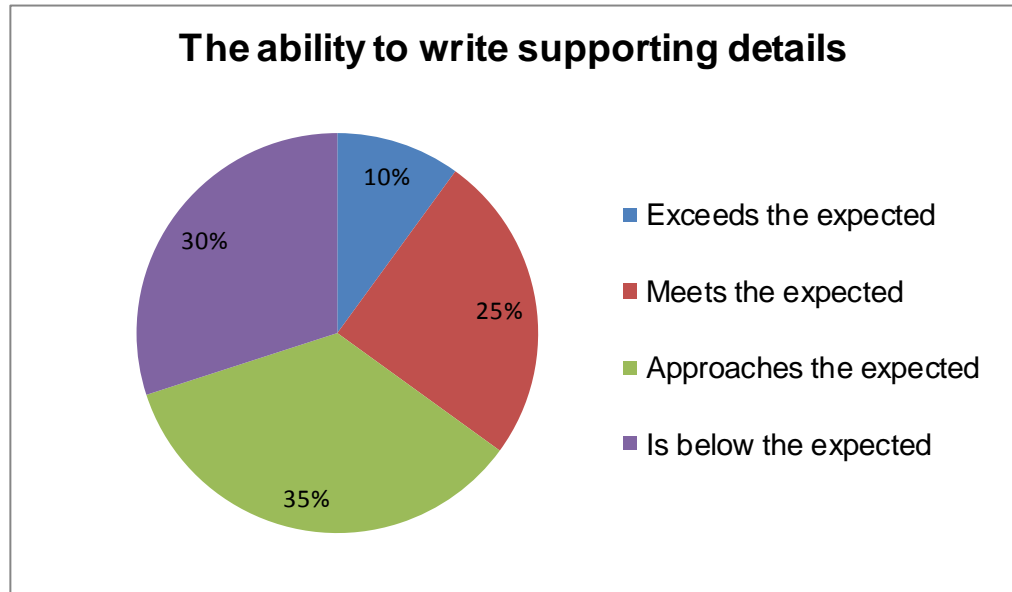
3. FINDINGS

3.1 Writing- based – assessment test

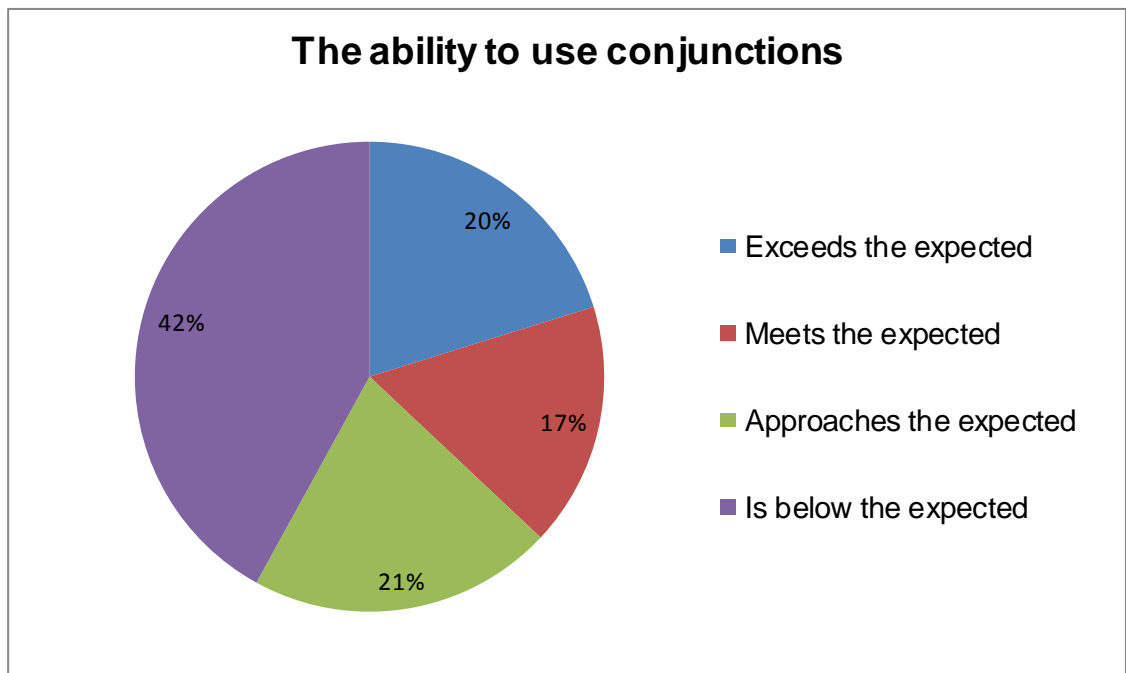
The following charts represent students' responses from a paragraph they were asked to write using a series of pictures to write about a routine. Students were evaluated in their ability to structure a paragraph.



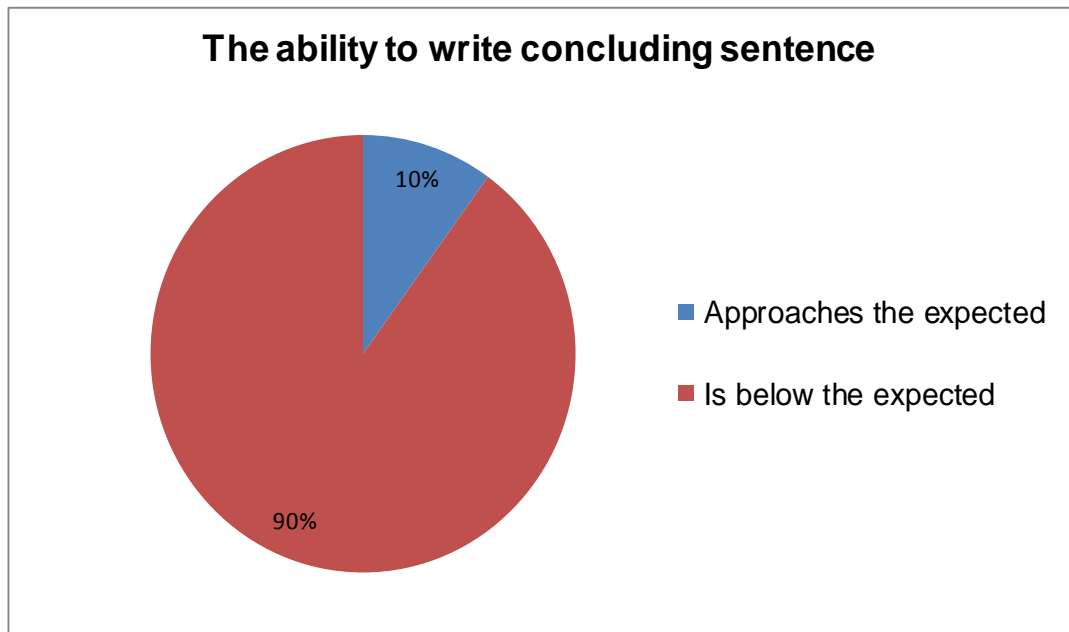
45% of the students do not know how to write a topic sentence. According to Savage & Safiel (2007), compositions should include a topic sentence that is typically placed at the beginning of a paragraph. Although many students did not meet the expected outcomes, some of them do know how to write topic sentences. This could represent two different scenarios. First, some of these students come from other schools where they did receive instruction of how to write paragraphs; second, they have been instructed in the school where they are currently studying, but the process was not successfully developed in the whole sample population. Possibly, working on how to write topic sentences needs more practice.



Even though students were given some sequence pictures of a daily routine to write a paragraph, and were asked to be very specific and descriptive, only 10 % of them exceed the expected outcomes. This means that most of them barely included supporting details on their paragraphs, resulting on texts with incomplete or not well developed ideas. Zemach & Rumisek (2003) mention that all paragraphs should have sentences that explain the main idea in a detailed way -definitions, explanations or examples. Not performing as expected when writing supporting sentences may be attributed to the absence of activities in class that promote students' ability to communicate and justify their different ideas or perspectives.

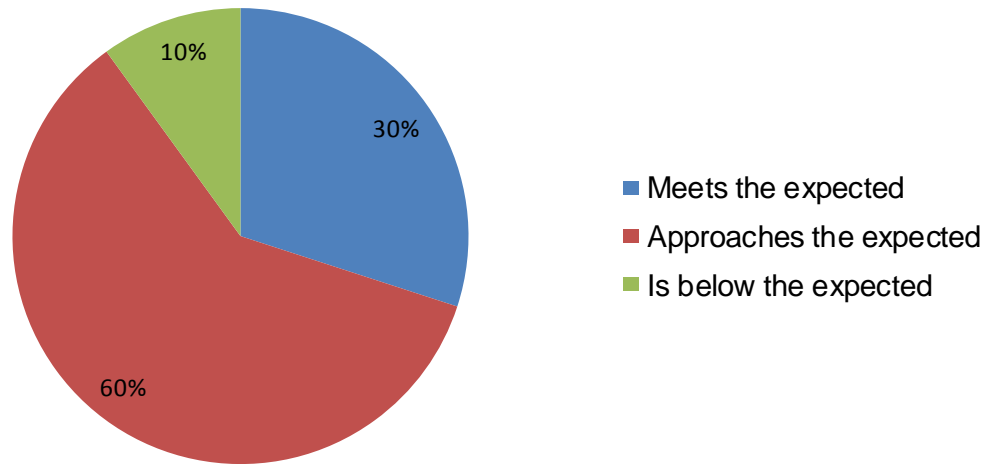


More than 40% of the students did not include conjunctions to connect ideas; therefore, their compositions results were below the expected outcomes. Cleary (2012) mentions that conjunctions are important connecting words that build a bridge from one phrase to another. Since a high percentage of students' sentences are not connected with conjunctions, their papers do not flow naturally and it is difficult to understand their ideas. Some of the students wrote exactly what they saw on the pictures and limited their writing to the use of simple sentences. On the other hand, only 20% of the learners included basic connectors as *so*, *but*, *because* and *then* on their paragraphs. This issue may be attributed to the limited instruction and inclusion of activities in class to improve students' writing skills.



The results show that only 10% of the students under analysis used a concluding sentence at the end of the paragraph. Savage & Shafiei (2007) mention concluding sentences are important as they remind the reader the direction of ideas towards a certain topic. The absence of concluding sentences in the students' writings may be credited to the lack of instruction in how to write a paragraph as well.

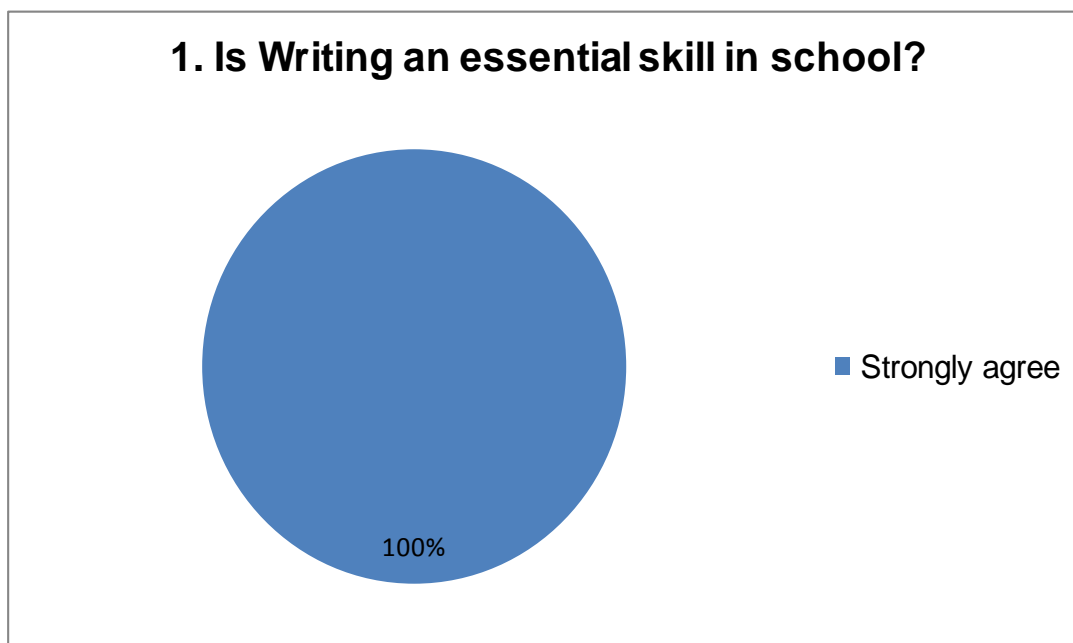
The use of grammar and mechanics



The results showed that 60% of the students had a noticeable difficulty with correct grammar and mechanics when developing their ideas. Although the content of the paragraphs was intelligible, several errors were present. In Thurman's words "The most damaging mistakes a writer can make are probably, misspelling or misusing words. Just a few of these errors will make a reader lose confidence in what you are trying to say" (2003, p. 1). Unfortunately, the most common mistakes on the students' writings were related to word order, plural of nouns, simple present third person singular, and prepositions, which may be attributed to the lack of reinforcement on writing production skills.

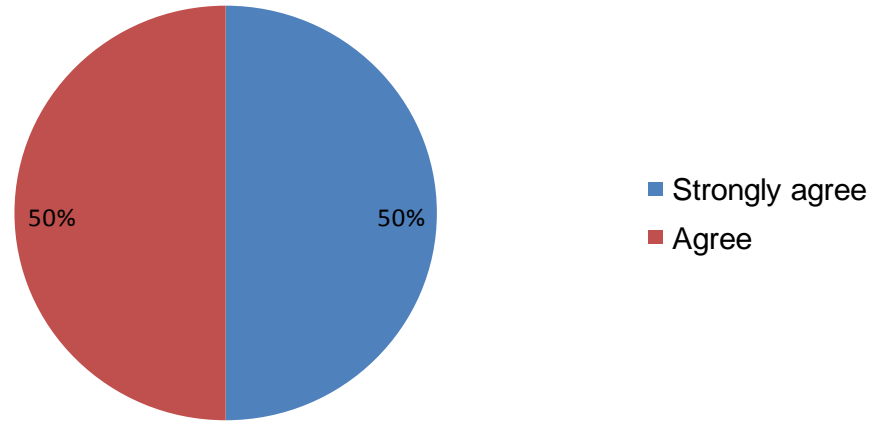
3.2 Teachers' survey

Teachers were given a survey which included 10 questions to analyze how their students learn and how the writing skill contributes to students' learning.



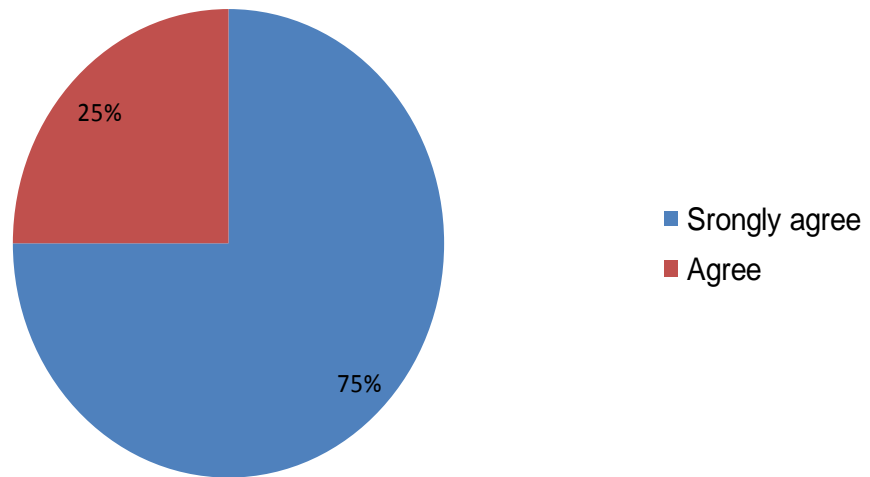
100% of teachers who were surveyed agreed that writing is an important skill in school. According to Nunan (2003) writing is essential because it is a physical and mental act. On one hand it is a physical act because ideas are put into words, and on the other hand it is a mental act of coming up with ideas, thinking how to convey and arrange them into sentences and paragraphs. It is positive that the staff recognized the importance of writing so young learners can develop academically and have the skills to succeed in their future endeavors. Moreover, Harmer (2006) states that writing is a vital skill for second language learners as it is a way of communication in the society.

2. Would the ability to write effectively in English contribute towards the future professional success of learners?



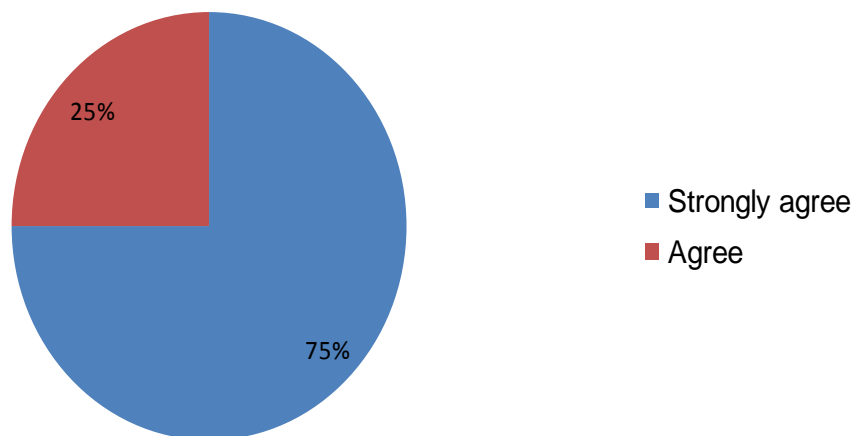
50% of the teachers strongly agreed that the ability to write effectively in English contributes to the future professional success of learners, while the other 50% agree with that idea. According to Langan (2009) students need to have the ability to write correctly to communicate with others effectively and to transmit messages without misinterpretations. The authors also mention the importance of mastering the traditional rules of grammar and punctuation to achieve the goal of communication in the second language. If teachers help students to build strong writing bases, they will be able to transmit their thoughts in an appropriate way and they will succeed in the future.

3. Can the writing skill be learned?



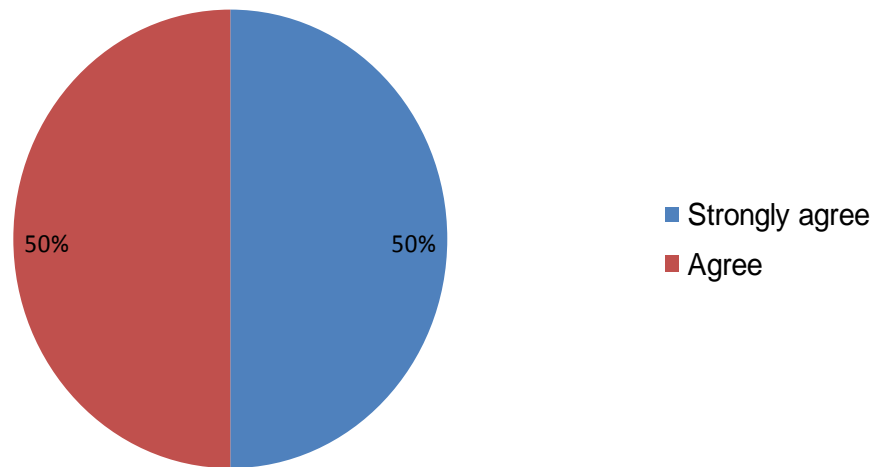
All the teachers recognize that the writing skill can be learned. Harmer (2006) indicates that writing is a habit that can be developed. Some second language writers find difficult to write in English because they have not been involved in writing activities on their own language. Teachers need to support students and guide them to give their best when writing. Additionally, the author comments that students can participate in different types of tasks to learn how to write. Harmer also believes that students have the capacity to learn how to write effectively, but they need correct instruction. The author adds teachers believe that writing is as any other skill that needs to be practiced for students to become efficient writers.

4. Does your school provide enough support to help learners develop their writing skills?



Most teachers manifest that the institution provides enough support to help learners develop their writing skills. They consider that their students have the chance to improve the skill by using two friendly academic platforms the school has. Although the platforms have a variety of writing tasks, some of them are difficult to be handled by students because of their complexity. Moreover, the platforms are designed to involve students in reading activities because of the connection between the two skills. About the importance of reading for language acquisition and writing, Krashen (2004) mentions that students who are not involved in reading activities will have a difficult time when writing.

5. Is it difficult for students to write in English?



All the teachers agree or strongly agree that writing is difficult for students. Kress (2005) states that writing is difficult for students since it requires concentration, the correct use of letters and an efficient spelling ability. Students find problematic to write in English because they do not have enough writing practice in class. According to Bartholomae (1995), it is necessary teachers provide to students enough teaching support and guide them through the process. Accordingly, it could be said that for 6th "A" grade students is complicated to write in English because they have not been instructed properly in how to write paragraphs.

6. In what type of writing are your students involved?

Half of the teachers answered that their students are involved in writing essays. The other half selected the option indicating that their students write short notes and letter to friends. According to the Ministry of Education (2013) students have the chance to participate in an IB (International Baccalaureate) program in order to acquire an advanced level of English and be able to communicate globally. Learners have the necessity of developing their writing skills effectively for the benefits they could get academically and professionally.

7. Which is students' main difficulty when writing?

Teachers answered that students' main difficulties when writing are connected to organizing ideas and writing with correct grammar and punctuation. Nation (2009) states it is a good idea to organize thoughts because learners have the opportunity to produce by their own and they can make a unique piece of paper. Additionally, from the survey it is clear that teachers believe coherence and cohesiveness are complicated issues their students deal with when structuring their paragraphs. According to Savage & Shafiei (2007) to maintain coherence within a writing paper, it is relevant to present the information in time, space and order of importance.

8. What kind of sources can learners use when they are writing?

The vast majority of teachers responded that the students search information on Internet when they want to write about certain topics. Some others answered that students prefer to consult other sources such as teachers or parents, or to find information in books.

9. What ideas do you consider make writing more stimulating and effective?

Most of the teachers consider brainstorming ideas and vocabulary related to the text type and topics are more stimulating and effective than reading story books, providing writing samples when writing. According to Nation (2009), brainstorming should be preceded by relaxing activities that encourage

students to think carefully and express their ideas about a certain topic. Moreover, Langan (2009) adds how important brainstorming is when writing because students can come up with all their ideas and list them to get enough details to support the information they are writing about. A minority of teachers answered that reading storybooks stimulates creativity. Langan also remarks that teachers should encourage their students to be creative by employing different strategies according to their learning preferences.

10. What is important for having a good piece of writing?

The vast majority of teachers considered it is important to structure ideas for having a good piece of writing. They also believe it is relevant to have enough vocabulary and to use connectors.

3.3 Students' survey

1. Do you consider writing is an important skill to be learned?

Nineteen out of twenty students consider that writing is an important skill to be learned and developed at school. Zemach & Rumisek (2003) remark the importance of learning how to write in English since it is not just putting all the ideas together to make sentences, but it is a series of steps that need to be followed in order to convey a message in a correct way.

2. Do you ponder writing is a difficult skill to learn?

Four students think writing is difficult, while the other sixteen students believe it is not a difficult skill. Langan (2009) comments that students mostly find writing difficult because teachers usually make negative comments on students' papers and make them believe they are not good at writing. Langan (ibid) suggests teachers help students to succeed in writing by writing friendly comments and by providing them with a clear explanation of what they are expected to write.

3. Do you know the parts of a paragraph?

Fifteen students answered they know the parts of the paragraph and the other five students answered they did not.

4. Do you consider dictionaries are important when writing?

Eighteen students selected that dictionaries are important when writing in English and the other two students answered dictionaries are not a relevant tool when writing in the foreign language.

5. Do you believe online resources (online dictionaries, books, and videos) are important when writing?

Fifteen students answered that online resources are helpful whereas five students considered they are not.

6. Do you think writing paragraphs and essays is more important than writing stories and letters?

Twelve students answered that paragraphs and essays are more important than stories and letters; eight students thought they are not. Zemach & Rumisek (2003) believe that paragraphs are important because they explain the writer's main impression from a topic and they provide several ideas to support it.

7. Do you consider correct English grammar, correct punctuation and spelling are important when writing?

All the students consider that grammar, punctuation and spelling are important when writing.

8. Are connectors (and, but, so, therefore, because) important to make paragraphs flow smoothly?

Nineteen students answered that to use connectors is important to make paragraphs flow smoothly.

9. Does writing effectively contribute to your academic performance?

All the students answered that by writing effectively they will succeed academically.

10. Would you like to have more time dedicated to the teaching of the writing skill?

Thirteen students answered they would like to have more time to learn how to write correctly; seven students do not want to spend more time learning how to write.

CONCLUSIONS

- Teachers and students consider writing is an essential skill that contributes towards the future professional success of learners who have to write correctly to communicate with others effectively and to transmit messages without misinterpretations.
- An important strategy to connect sentences and paragraphs as well as to have a natural flow of ideas is to work on a variety of tasks that promote the use of conjunctions.
- Another essential strategy in a writing class is the practice of activities focused on improving sentence structure, grammar and mechanics to favor the sense of sentences and paragraphs.
- Teachers and students acknowledge using online resources as a helpful strategy to find information about topics of interest and meaning of new words to improve the writing skill.
- Correct grammar and punctuation as well as accurate coherence and cohesiveness are essential writing skills that students struggle in and need to improve.
- Teaching vocabulary and working in groups to brainstorm ideas about the topics of study are efficient strategies to improve the writing skill.
- Students recognize the use of monolingual and bilingual dictionaries as a practical strategy to find new words and communicate successfully.
- Teachers consider that the institution provides enough support to help learners develop their writing skills, but students consider more time should be dedicated to the teaching of the writing skill.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is recommended the school organize workshops to train teachers on how to guide students through the process of writing paragraphs. Effective learning skills such as how to use conjunctions, how to improve sentence structure, grammar, and mechanics; in addition, including coherence and cohesion as part of the instruction in the seminar is advisable because of the importance these two aspects of academic writing have when aiding readability and idea communication to a piece of writing.
- It is suggested the institution provide the teachers with instruction on how to use online resources. The internet will benefit the students in having access to authentic tools and materials, learning about culture, communicating in real time with native speakers, etc.
- It is in the interest of the students that the school provide classes with monolingual and bilingual dictionaries that can be used to find the meaning of new words.
- It is important the school implement a writing program in the curriculum so students are given the opportunity to focus on writing for a determined period of time weekly. This way, the teaching of writing can be taken seriously and teachers can ensure that there is a specific time in the schedule for the students to improve their writing skills.

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APPENDIX # 1

Teachers' surveys



UNIVERSIDAD CATÓLICA DE SANTIAGO DE GUAYAQUIL
FACULTY OF ARTS AND HUMANITIES
SCHOOL OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Read carefully the questions and choose the appropriate answer.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree
1. Is English an essential skill in school?			
2. Would the ability to write effectively in English contribute towards the future professional success of learners?			
3. Can the writing skill be learned?			
4. Does your school provide enough support to help learners develop their writing skills?			
5. Is it difficult for students to write in English?			

Choose all the answers that apply

6. In what types of writing are your students involved?

1. short notes
2. essays
3. letters to friends
4. emails

7. Which is students' main difficulty when writing?

1. organizing ideas
2. correct grammar and punctuation
3. coherence and cohesion
4. parallelism

8. What kind of sources can learners use when they are writing?

1. books
2. ask someone
3. search on Internet
4. interview people

9. What ideas do you consider make writing more stimulating and effective?

1. Reading story books to stimulate creativity
2. Brainstorming ideas and vocabulary related to the text type and topic
3. Being provided with good writing samples
4. Writing the pieces of writing on a computer

10. What is important for having a good piece of writing?

- a. to have enough vocabulary
- b. to have good grammar and punctuation
- c. to use of connectors
- d. to structure ideas

APPENDIX # 2

Students'survey

Please complete the following questionnaire:

Name: _____

Age: _____

Grade: _____

Read the questions and circle the most appropriate answer.

1. Do you consider writing is an important skill to learn?

- a. yes
- b. no

2. Do you consider writing is a difficult skill to learn?

- a. yes
- b. no

3. Do you know the parts of a paragraph?

- a. yes
- b. no

4. Do you consider dictionaries are important when writing?

- a. yes
- b. no

5. Do you consider online resources (online dictionaries - books - videos) are important when writing?

- a. yes
- b. no

6. Do you consider writing paragraphs and essays is more important than writing stories and letters?

- a. yes
- b. no

7. Do you consider correct English grammar, correct punctuation and spelling are important when writing?

- a. yes
- b. no

8. Are connectors (and, but, so, therefore, because) important to make paragraphs flow smoothly?

- a. yes
- b. no

9. Does writing effectively contribute to your academic performance?

- a. yes
- b. no

10. Would you like to have more time dedicated to the teaching of the writing skills?

- a. yes
- b. no

APPENDIX # 3

Writing- based- assessment test

Write a paragraph using the pictures given below. Be as descriptive as possible. Use connectors (but, and, because, so..). Include the time in which the activities were performed.



APPENDIX # 4

Writing – based- assessment rubric

	4 POINTS	3 POINTS	2 POINTS	1 POINT
Main/ topic sentence	Main / Topic sentence is clear and correctly placed.	Main / Topic sentence is either unclear or incorrectly placed.	Main / Topic sentence is unclear and incorrectly placed.	Main /Topic sentence is absent
Supporting detail sentences	Paragraph(s) has/ have 3 or more supporting sentences that relate to the main idea.	Paragraph(s) has/have 2 supporting sentences that relate to the main idea.	Paragraph(s) has/have 1 supporting sentence that relates to the main idea.	No supporting sentences.
Conjunctions	Uses several conjunctions to connect ideas	Uses some conjunctions to connect ideas	Uses few conjunctions to connect ideas	There are no conjunctions to connect ideas
Concluding sentence	The concluding sentence summarizes the main idea in a concise and effective manner.	The concluding sentence summarizes the main idea in a sufficient and controlled manner.	The concluding sentence is somehow summarized. Some meaning is lost.	There is no concluding sentence.
Mechanics and Grammar	Paragraph has no errors	Paragraph has a few errors	Paragraph has several errors	Errors impede understanding.

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APPENDIX # 5

Rubrics Results

Student #	Main/ Topic sentence	Supporting details	Conjunctions	Concluding sentences	Mechanics & Grammar	TOTAL 20	Average 10
1	3	1	1	1	2	8	4
2	4	4	3	1	3	15	7.5
3	1	2	2	2	2	9	4.5
4	4	3	2	1	3	13	6.5
5	3	2	2	1	2	10	5
6	2	2	1	1	2	8	4
7	2	2	1	1	2	8	4
8	2	3	1	1	3	10	5
9	1	3	2	1	2	9	4.5
10	1	2	3	1	2	9	4.5
11	1	2	1	1	2	7	3.5
12	4	4	2	1	3	14	7
13	2	3	3	2	2	12	6
14	3	3	4	1	3	14	7
15	1	1	1	1	2	6	3
16	2	2	3	1	3	10	5
17	1	1	1	1	1	5	2.5
18	1	1	1	1	1	5	2.5
19	1	1	1	1	2	6	3
20	1	1	1	1	2	6	3
Percent age of area domain	15%	10%	5%	0%	0%		

APPENDIX # 6

Chart of number of students who reached the different levels of achievement

Criteria	Number of students	Percentage
Exceeds the expected outcomes (9-10)	0	0%
Meets the expected outcomes 7-8.99	3	15%
Approaches the expected outcomes 4-6.99	11	55%
Is below the expected outcomes <4	6	30%

DECLARACIÓN Y AUTORIZACIÓN

Nosotras, Navarro Holguín Michelle Elizabeth y Tandazo Palma Diana Andrea , con C.C: # 0951946938 y # 2400221681 autoras del trabajo de titulación: THE IMPACT OF ENGLISH COMPOSITION CLASSES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF WRITING SKILLS OF SIXTH GRADERS SECTION “A” AT FEMENINO ESPIRITU SANTO SCHOOL, FIRST QUINMESTER, SCHOOL YEAR 2018-2019, previo a la obtención del título de Licenciatura en Lengua Inglesa con mención en Educacion de Gestión Bilingüe en la Universidad Católica de Santiago de Guayaquil.

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REPOSITORIO NACIONAL EN CIENCIA Y TECNOLOGÍA

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TÍTULO Y SUBTÍTULO:	THE IMPACT OF ENGLISH COMPOSITION CLASSES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF WRITING SKILLS OF SIXTH GRADERS SECTION "A" AT FEMENINO ESPIRITU SANTO SCHOOL, FIRST QUINMESTER, SCHOOL YEAR 2018-2019		
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PALABRAS CLAVES/ KEYWORDS:	English Composition clases, descriptive essays, teaching methods, learning preferences, paragraphs, school curriculum.		
RESUMEN/ABSTRACT (150-250 palabras):	<p>This paper explores the possible contribution of English composition classes on the development of six graders' writing skills at Femenino Espiritu Santo School. When students finish 6th basic grade, they should be able to write descriptive essays. Nevertheless, this type of task is very difficult for them to perform. To conduct this study quantitative research was carried out. The data were collected through the analysis of descriptive paragraphs of a daily routine written by the sample population. In addition, surveys about the current teaching methods and students' learning preferences were applied to teachers and students respectively. The study proved that students' writing abilities are not fully developed; additionally, they do not use connectors and their inadequate grammar, usage, punctuation and spelling affect clarity. The results of the investigation can be used for further application in the school curriculum.</p>		
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