

Writing Center: An Aid to Students of Writing

Ana Sofía Mora Abarca
Universidad Nacional, Costa Rica
sofrix@hotmail.com

Diego Leonardo Garro Bustamante
Universidad Nacional, Costa Rica

Resumen

Cuando se estudia un idioma extranjero, la motivación no es el único factor para el desarrollo adecuado de todas las habilidades lingüísticas que se necesitan para comunicarse efectivamente. Aunado a esto, la universidad, o cualquier centro de aprendizaje, debe proveer a sus estudiantes con sistemas de apoyo para las habilidades donde estos presentan más dificultades o en los cursos donde existe mayor deserción. No obstante, el área de escritura es una en la cual los estudiantes presentan mayor problemática y esto fue demostrado en un estudio diagnóstico realizado en el año 2010 donde estudiantes de Turismo, quienes también toman cursos de inglés para su propósito específico, tenían mucha dificultad para escribir y hacerlo apropiadamente en contextos académicos. Además, el estudio reveló que la universidad debía promover algún proyecto que ayudara a la población llevando cursos de inglés en esta habilidad lingüística en particular. Es así como se propuso la creación del centro de escritura en la Universidad Nacional campus Pérez Zeledón. ¿Qué se entiende como centro de escritura? Para tener una idea clara de lo que es, Harris lo describió como “un lugar amigable con los estudiantes, no un salón de clase controlado estrictamente. El Centro de Escritura ideal no amenaza o intimida a los estudiantes por ser este un lugar silencioso, más bien los educandos hablan abiertamente sobre cómo se sienten en relación con la escritura” (1994, pp. 6-7). En esta presentación los investigadores explican como el diagnóstico y análisis de necesidad se llevó a cabo cuando el estudio se realizó. Finalmente y sin duda alguna, este proyecto no solo fortalece la habilidad de los estudiantes para escribir si no que empodera las redes de apoyo que la universidad ofrece a los estudiantes.

Palabras clave: centro de escritura, ayuda, dificultades, superar, progreso.

Abstract

When learning a foreign language, motivation is not the only aspect that may help the learner develop the linguistic skills appropriately and effectively. The university, or any academic institution, should also promote the creation of support systems to aid students in the linguistic areas in which they show more difficulty or in the courses where there are many dropouts. Writing is considered as one of the linguistic skills in which foreign language students strive to improve, and this was demonstrated in a diagnostic study conducted in the year 2010 where students of tourism taking English courses had lots of difficulties writing and doing it appropriately in the academic setting. Furthermore, the same study revealed the need for the university to provide extra help to aid this population. Then, the investigators suggested that a writing center would be the ideal project to satisfy the need not only of students of tourism but also of foreign language students of other majors at Universidad

Nacional, Pérez Zeledón campus. However, what is a writing center? To have a clear idea of what a writing center is Harris described it as “a friendly support place for students and not a tightly controlled classroom. The ideal writing labs do not threaten or intimidate students by being too quiet, instead students openly talk about how they feel about writing” (1994, pp. 6-7). In this presentation the investigators explain the needs analysis that was carried out when the study was conducted. Finally, there is no doubt that this project not only strengthens the ability of the students to express themselves through writing but also empowers the support system network that the university offers to its learners.

Key words: writing center, aid, difficulties, overcome, progress

1. Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative research is to investigate the writing classroom dynamics and point out what aspects are not working properly, for students majoring Tourism do poorly in developing writing tasks evidenced at higher levels. This research project is considered a good source for teaching reflection and a contribution to the field of Applied Linguistics. The following section will explain how this project was organized.

1.1. Macro View of the Research Project

The research project here developed was carried out by two researchers who played the role of insiders in all the process. They were the ones who posed the problem and proceeded to give a solution to it, taking into account the points of view from within the events. This research project provided an account of proceedings in the fundamentals of writing classrooms at Universidad Nacional, Brunca Campus located in the southern part of Costa Rica. The researchers observed four groups of integrated English courses for the Tourism major, part of the efforts to provide these students with English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses, which means that the English they learn is oriented to their future fields of work. The students' proficiency levels were varied. There were two groups that belonged to the first level. These pupils had a basic management of the language, while the ones in level II had a better command of the target language. Though students at higher levels had some knowledge about the language, they also showed serious difficulties when writing in English.

In order to carry out the collection of data, the researcher used three main tools. A questionnaire given to both students and professors involved in the process and classroom observations. In addition, the collection of artifacts, such as students' revised compositions and the syllabus of English courses of the major, were also important when analyzing data. Furthermore, two unstructured interviews also permitted the researcher to count on more evidence for these accounts.

2. Literature Review

Students at the university level are required to develop a great variety of types of writing tasks, not only in their mother but also in the foreign or target language, which in most cases, is English. As the world becomes smaller due to globalization, the mastery of the English language and even a third language, whether Cantonese, French or any other, is a prominent requirement. Writing is a language activity, an “act of the mind” (Berthoff 1981, p. 29) that is carried out not only to convey meaning or to be developed for academic purposes; it also comprises cultural aspects such as communication and the transmitting of history from generation to generation. For the foreign language learner, writing in another language opens doors to a set of fields such as the academic area, the job market, and other opportunities for professional development around the world.

This study is an effort to investigate the origin of writing problems students from the major of Tourism at Universidad Nacional Brunca Campus (UNABC) are currently presenting, and also this research is an attempt to propose a solution to the current problems they are facing in the development of the skill. Some experts in linguistics such as Stephen Krashen (1984) stated that the area of foreign language writing has not been as deeply explored as the other areas of EFL. Even though the area is still in an emergent stage, more recent studies as Hedgcock’s (2005) show that second language writing has come into its own field of inquiry (p. 597). For the purpose of this study, there are various aspects of foreign language writing that are going to be explored.

2.1. The Second Language Writer

The L2 learner has come to be one of the central aspects in researching the area of L2 writing. The learner or the writer, in this case, is a complex subject because every person has unique ways to develop the ability to write; actually, some learners are not born to write, thus, they need plenty of training. Foreign language writers embody a very opposing representation from the monolingual writers (Hedgcock, 2005, p. 598). Raimes (1992) stated that the L1 writer does not have the same need that the L2 writer. The latter group “needs ‘more of everything’ in terms of heuristics, content, writing practice, and feedback than the mother tongue counterparts” (as cited in Hedgcock, 2005, p. 598). It is also important to reflect that the learning process of a second language is composed of a series of stages that lead the learner to the mastery of that target language. Writing is considered a productive skill and, therefore, a difficult task for many second language learners to master.

Some experts such as Barbara Kroll (1990) identified that “in the 1960’s, ESL composition teaching in North America was dominated by a controlled model. . .” She also asserted that the L2 “student’s writing was [not] genuine and the writing was meant to reinforce language rules and not for purposes like addressing a topic or communicating with an audience” (as cited in Celce-Murcia, 2001, p. 219). In this model, to reduce the possibility of errors, the writing was so controlled that the student could not properly deliver the message. Likewise, current L2 writing teaching has not escaped from that old-fashioned model. In some L2 writing classrooms, teachers still use that control model. In some other

cases, grammar has come to be the focus of writing instead of the communication of clear ideas. O' Malley and Valdez (1996) emphasized that writing requires the use and control of different types of knowledge (p. 136). David Ausubel also referred to the previous knowledge to make learning significant for learners. He criticized teaching methods that presented isolated items for students to repeat over and over until they could memorize them, preventing meaningful learning to occur. He called this systematic or "rote learning" (as cited in Brown, 2000, p. 79). Consequently, teachers and writers should really highlight on the use of new trends that are now governing pedagogical practices in the area of foreign language writing to make it noteworthy to pupils.

In order to reach competence in the writing skill, the students need training. Kroll (1990) also suggested that "to establish a writing curriculum . . . that can target specific principles, . . . it is essential that students be given a placement test that includes asking them to produce one or more writing samples" (as cited in Celce-Murcia, 2001, p. 221). The problem with this recommendation Kroll gave is that many writing courses are integrated, and there are no placement tests. In fact, a lot of Universities never place students according to their ability in the different areas. The learners have to be in a determined level according to his or her general performance in the foreign tongue. Kroll (1990) established that "without placement instruments that can sort out the levels of writing proficiency, it is not possible to establish curricular goals" (as cited in Celce-Murcia, 2001, p. 221). The principles Kroll evaluated distill some of the best practices in designing a curriculum that works for the learner, but these recommendations are still on the paper.

2.2. Error Correction and Writing

First of all, it is prominent to describe what an error is and to establish the difference from what a mistake is. According to Douglas Brown (2000), "an error . . . reflects the competence of the learner. While mistakes can be self-corrected, errors cannot" (p. 205). As it is widely known, language is composed of four skills that are listening, speaking, reading, and writing. All four are equally important, but the so-called productive ones, say speaking and writing, have been and still are subject of interest to numerous investigations.

Errors have long been a matter of obsession among many researchers and professors. In the past, errors were seen as problematic phenomena, but recently, teachers have started to see them as a source of evidence for having students learn from them. Instructors who work using errors as important tools may gain knowledge on why they occur, what their source is, and how frequent they tend to happen. Once sources of errors are identified, professors can establish remedial plans to try to eradicate them. Sources of errors are those caused by interference of the mother tongue into the learning of a foreign language process, influence of pedagogical procedures, L2 learner strategies and communication, faulty generalizations, and markedness among other factors that prevent EFL writers from becoming proficient in the target language.

In the area of writing, there are protocols that have been used for years to provide feedback as a way to treat errors. Some of these ways are comments on the margins of

compositions, focusing attention on forms and not on content. The latter really affects students' future performance. For example, Douglas Brown (2000) established that "error analysis can keep [teachers] too closely focused on specific forms of language rather than viewing universal aspects of language" (p. 207). It is noticeable how harmful this practice can turn into if teachers do not use different forms of giving feedback to reach the goal of second language learning, which is "the attainment of communicative fluency in the language" (Brown, 2000, p. 206).

As it was aforementioned, the writing skill was usually taught under much control to try to prevent students from committing mistakes. Nevertheless, this form to teach writing was against human nature, for individuals learn by trial and error. Douglas Brown pointed out that "human learning is fundamentally a process that involves the making of mistakes" (2000, p. 204). He also recommended that the process of foreign and second language learning be just as the process of first language acquisition in which children make countless mistakes from the adult perspectives. Careful feedback from other people shapes and surely provides humans with the pathways to learn what is "acceptable." This is the same process that adult EFL learners should face when learning a language.

In regard to second language writing, feedback that the learner receives from others leads them to become successful. In addition, depending on how they learn, they will have preferences related to the way they want to be corrected. Research has not demonstrated yet the positive side of direct correction of errors. Rather than this, it has "suggested that a variety of indirect, self-discovery techniques can help students to monitor and self-correct themselves" (Hedge, 2001, p. 127). The use of strategies such as margin commentary, rule discussion, and rote practices does not help learners gain any more knowledge in the use of the language, especially for writing purposes. The following section explains in detail how different forms of feedback benefit students in developing good written products and in overcoming errors and mistakes easily.

2.3. Forms of Feedback, Assessment, and Evaluation in L2 Writing

L2 writing assessment plays a prominent role in the process of the learning writing in a foreign language. In prior instruction, corrections in the students' compositions showed that feedback was really straightforward and that teachers directly wrote their comments, commonly in red pen, on the margins of the students written assignments.

Currently, feedback and assessment have evolved in theory and practice. They comprise numerous forms of feedback but first, these two aspects will be distinguished one from the other in the following lines. Those aspects are summative writing assessment and formative feedback. The former complies with the requirements for administrative processes, placement, and exit screening (Hedgcock, 2005, p. 606). The latter is, in essence, a very positive way to motivate students and engage them in revision of their own drafts (McGarrel & Verbeem, 2007, p. 228). Moreover, formative feedback seeks to have the students refining the intended message of their pieces of writing instead of focusing on form. Formative feedback calls for the objective of "motivating for immediate and substantive revision"

(Knoblauch & Brannon, 1984, p. 260). These authors suggested that the revision is beneficial, and learners start respecting others' comments as well as taking this process more seriously (Knoblauch & Brannon, 1984, p. 260).

There is another more common type of feedback, which is called written commentary. This type of feedback has been used for years. One subcategory of written feedback is the so-called corrective feedback. The use of corrective feedback has been strongly criticized by Truscott (1996) who asserted that this practice, at the local level, is very harmful. She proposed that "grammar correction should be abandoned in the light of the putative absence of 'valid reasons' for continuing the practice" (p. 360). Truscott (1996) also considered the idea that "well-constructed teacher commentary" should be improved and matured [and may have a positive impact and results on students' writings] (as cited in Hedgcock, 2005, p. 606). Not only should teacher commentary be the way of giving students feedback, but self-assessment also plays important roles in L2 writing. In this regard, O'Malley and Valdez (1996) stated that "EFL students at the beginning levels of proficiency in English need time not only to acquire the language but also to be able to communicate their ideas and plans (p.38). This is not to say that students in beginning levels cannot evaluate their own progress. Clemmons et al. 1993; Sperling 1993 also asserted that "even little kids at the kindergarten level can learn how to identify essential aspects of good work" (as cited in O' Malley and Valdez, 1996, p. 38). In the same way, "self-assessment in writing encourages the type of reflection needed to gain increased control as a writer" (O'Malley & Valdez, 1996, p. 151). These same authors suggested that the use of four ways in which learners can encourage self-assessment are the use of dialogue journals, learning logs, assessment of interests, and checklists of writing skills. These new trends in assessment and feedback in the English classrooms are working properly; that is what Truscott (1996) proposed teachers to practice instead of using strict methods for checking students' work that do not allow them to be self-critical. He found that correction had little or no effect on students' writing ability... "It made no difference who the students were, how many mistakes were corrected, which mistakes were corrected, how detailed the comments were, or in what form they were presented. The grammar corrections had no effect, that type of correction is not helpful." (p. 330).

Literature on L2 writing suggests that teachers are no longer the only responsible characters for the improvement of students' written work. As an alternative, there are new procedures in which students and teachers talk about each student's progress. This procedure is called conferencing feedback. This technique is very useful because the students are the ones that criticize their own work and still reformulate ideas. Hedge (2001) suggested that the use of a checklist would be helpful for the learner to start engaging in such process (p. 313). In this way, learners start discovering their own ways of writing and revising.

2.4. Remedial Plans in the Writing Area: Writing Centers

English language learners need supporting elements in the different writing language programs. In writing centers, pupils learn the principle of collaborative pedagogy. With this, students are required to start with problems and solve them with applications or strategies to deal exactly with the problem. The use of "collaborative tasks build connections between

learners and ideas and between students and teachers. Listening to and acknowledging diverse perspectives, working in a cooperative spirit..." (as cited in Goodsell, Maher, Tinto, Leigh & Smith, 1996, p. 12). This is the vision of writing centers, having learners discuss along with the tutor about their concerns about writing and these learners, who may also have different proficiency levels, may create an atmosphere of learning and teaching cooperation.

One of the purposes of a writing center is to create a relaxing atmosphere for the learner to feel willing to compose any piece of writing. "A writing center is a friendly support place for students and not a tightly controlled classroom. The ideal writing labs do not threaten or intimidate students by being too quiet . . . instead [students] openly talk about how they feel about writing" (Harris, 1994, pp. 6-7). With this, the author proposed that writing centers are a very smart option, and numerous universities have provided students with great opportunities to learn how to write.

2.5. Pedagogy in Writing Centers

In the writing centers, collaborative pedagogy and learning follow educational principles like involvement of the students in the construction of their own learning. Also, teamwork is one of the endeavors that collaborative pedagogy focuses on to prepare students to work in groups and give them feedback to build leaning. In collaborative pedagogy, the exchange of ideas among the tutors and their students increases. In the area of writing, students "formulate ideas, clarify their positions, test an argument or focus a thesis statement before committing it to the paper" (Goodsell, Maher, Tinto, Leigh & Smith, 1992, p. 21). This way, students are the ones learning how to develop higher order thinking skills with the help of the tutor and other classmates. Additionally, collaborative pedagogy creates a collaborative classroom, which is considered an opportunity to solve problems and dilemmas related to learning processes. Actually, students in a single writing center do not come up with the same exact writing problems and needs. The flaw of one student is the strength of the other, and with the use of peer cooperation and the help of the tutor, writing problems can be treated and amended in the writing center.

On the other hand, tutoring at writing center is a task that demands a lot of content knowledge and patience on the part of the instructor to deal with the students' individualized needs. Writing centers as well as remedial plans focus on satisfying the needs of every learner because "each [pupil] arrives with a different motivation for learning English and with different plans of using it in the future" (Thonus, 1993, p. 15). However, Kroll (1990) asserted that "not even EFL instructors can come . . . and understand how to respond to students' writing in order to guide them in producing 'the ideal written product'" (p. 141). The tutors make a big effort to help students discover how they can please and satisfy their own needs by helping themselves build up their knowledge and abilities to produce good pieces of writing. Tutors at writing centers should be clear that they do not have to proofread students' compositions. On the contrary, students are the ones in charge of revising their writings and judging themselves. Tutors, in this case, help students notice their mistakes and

help pupils find the ways to solve the issue and edit what does not seem proper in a determined composition.

Finally, the problem with the conceptualization of the writing centers is that teachers perceive that these places are made up to help students study content that could not be covered in the classroom for a semester or the school year. According to Thonus (1993) some universities in the United States have experienced that misunderstanding in regard to the writing center because teachers send their students with the lists of topics that they are having problems with, and the tutors are expected to perform a miracle in a few weeks (p. 14). Due to the numerous students that are registered in a single integrated course, professors do not have the time to work with the new strategies to teach writing to foreign language learners as they should. In some cases, teachers still use the old methods of marking the student work and correcting everything at the sentence level directly in their compositions instead of practicing the different feedback techniques.

3. Statement of the Problem and its Importance

The issue analyzed here lies precisely in that students of the Tourism major, specifically at the second level, present low proficiency in the writing skill. According to the program of the course (Integrated English IV- level II), these students should be able to write resumes, letters, e-mails, educational reports, summaries, response papers and even short compositions like essays. (Ajustes en la Instrucción del Idioma Inglés Carrera de Gestión Empresarial del Turismo Sostenible, 2007, p.31). They cannot do this although they have been in contact with the language for 180 hours per course. According to that program and to the American Council on the Teaching of foreign languages (ACTFL) proficiency guidelines for writing, these students should be in the *Intermediate-high Level*. In this level, the student should be able to write . . . uncomplicated letters, simple summaries, and compositions related to work, school experiences, and topics of current and general interest. They should also be able to . . . connect sentences into paragraphs using a limited number of cohesive devices that tend to be repeated, and with some breakdown in one or more features of the *Advanced level* (ACTFL, 2012, p 7).

However, the compositions of these pupils show that they are not capable of meeting with the abilities and the exigencies of the intermediate- high level explained above. In addition to the ACTFL Proficiency guidelines, the European framework of Reference for Languages (2004) established that students at this level (A2 in Writing) “can write short, simple notes and messages about everyday matters and everyday needs. They can write very simple personal letters; for example thanking someone for something” (p. 236).

Even though the researcher is judging based on students compositions and not on students possible results in any standardized test like the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) or The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), it is evident that learners can be placed at a basic stage based on their written products. At this point of the major, learners should be positioned at a higher level at least at the B1 echelon.



3.1. Research Approach and Design

3.1.1. Main Research Questions

- What is the frequency in which writing tasks take place in and out the sessions as part of the Integrated English classes in the Tourism major?
- What are the teachers' methods to give corrective feedback in the different compositions?
- What are the emerging reasons why students are not meeting the expectations on the writing objectives?

3.1.2. Related Research Question

Do the types of feedback that teachers employ bring about significant improvements in students' writing?

3.2. Research Methodology and Findings

3.2.1. Participants

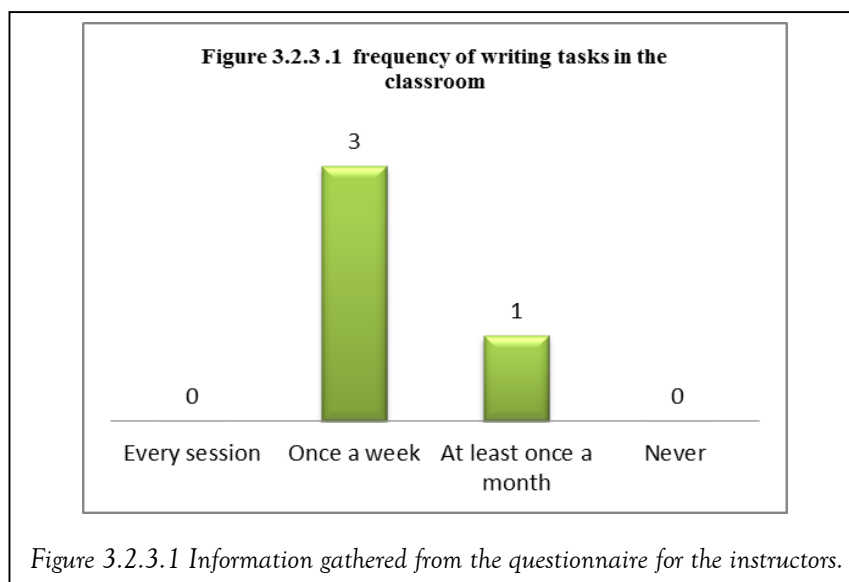
The Students Placed in Level II and IV of Tourism. The students of Tourism taking integrated courses of English at Universidad Nacional Brunca Campus (UNABC) are the main sources of investigation. The investigator chose four groups of Tourism to identify the writing problems that students show in their compositions. The number of students who participated in this study was a total of 67, and their ages ranged from 17 to 28 years old. In addition, the four professors teaching the different groups were also under study. Their ages ranged from 24 to 30 years old. The professors had a minimum of two years teaching compositions courses at the university level.

3.2.2. Instruments

The instruments that were used to collect data were questionnaires that were used for the purpose of collecting data from the professors and students to gain knowledge on how the writing courses were both perceived by the students and on the opposite side, how the courses were developed by instructors. One of the most useful instruments used was the Structured Classroom Non-Participant Observations. These observations took place in every single writing class in order to see the methodology that instructors employed as well as the treatment of the students' errors and mistakes in their compositions. Moreover, the researchers conducted some unstructured interviews to have open opinions from learners and also professors about the process they were all involved in. Finally, the researchers also collected some artifacts like the students' revised compositions to see how corrective feedback was being treated.

3.2.3. Analysis and Results

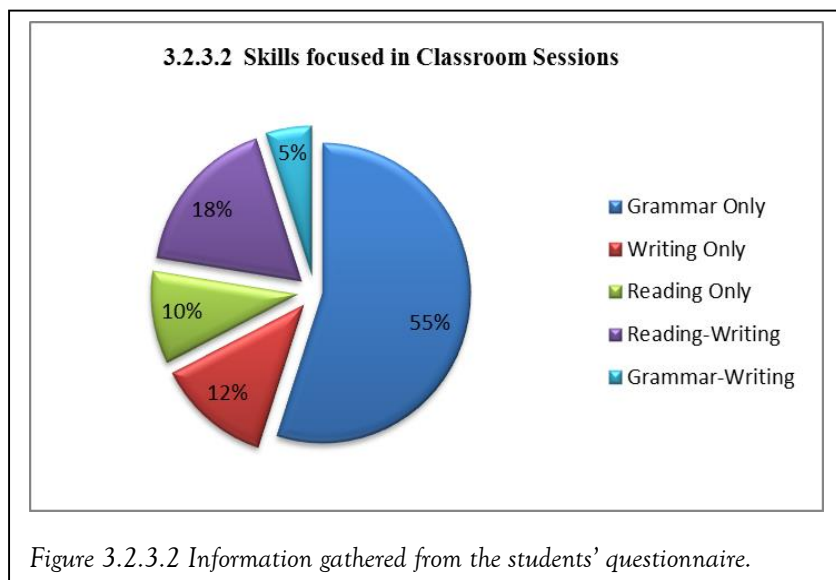
One of the issues that the researchers wanted to discover was how much writing was actually taking place in the classroom. For this, the investigators asked the professors and the students, and they also observed every single class session to see if writing was really being implemented into their integrated English courses. The following graph shows that at least three out of the four instructors had students write in the target language at least once a week.



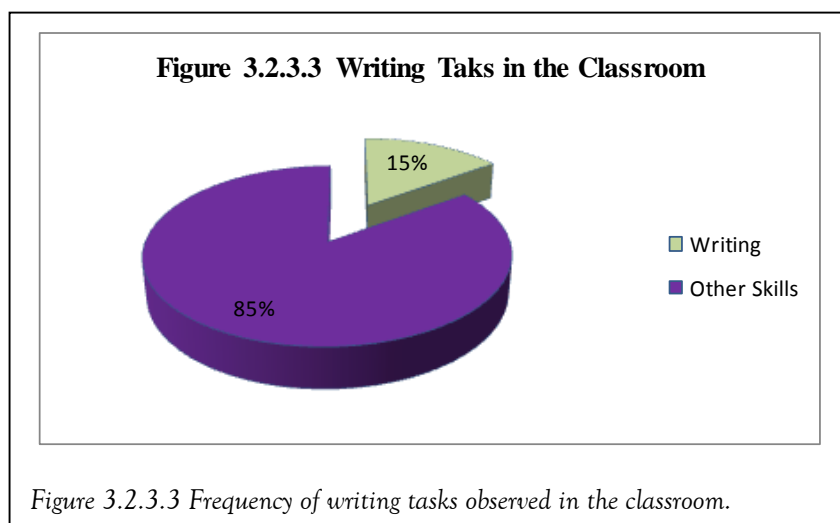
Despite the answers that the instructors gave on the frequency of writing in the classroom, which is ambitious (once a week), the students exposed to “that writing” answered a similar question. Their responses showed that the skill that is emphasized the most in class is grammar. The following figure demonstrates that 12% of the time had been devoted to writing ONLY. The rest of the lessons is dedicated to grammar, which takes vast part of their English class.

Apparently and based on the results that were obtained from the questionnaires given to both students and professors, their answers showed a very opposing result. The assumption that the researchers drew here was that professors knew the investigation was intended to know how much writing was taking place in the development of the lessons. Thus, they could not risk themselves onto say that they rarely carried out writing if the classes and objectives in the programs demanded professors to have students develop some writing tasks in the classroom or at least guide them to develop writing as homework.

In regard to the students’ answers in the questionnaire, the researcher could notice that students admitted that writing was overlooked at times. The investigators also relied on their 40 observations that they conducted because they portrayed the true processes that were taking place in the classroom. In fact, the classroom accounts totally unveil this issue, and writing alone took place in just 6 sessions out of 40 sessions observed.



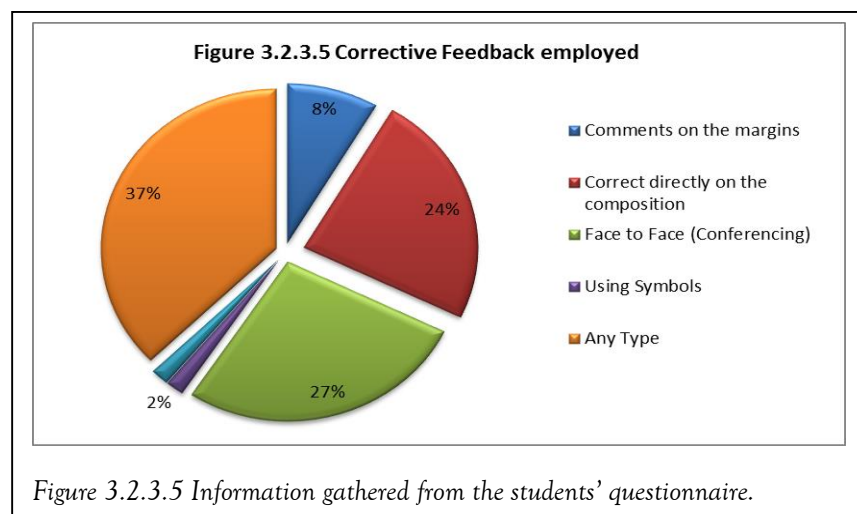
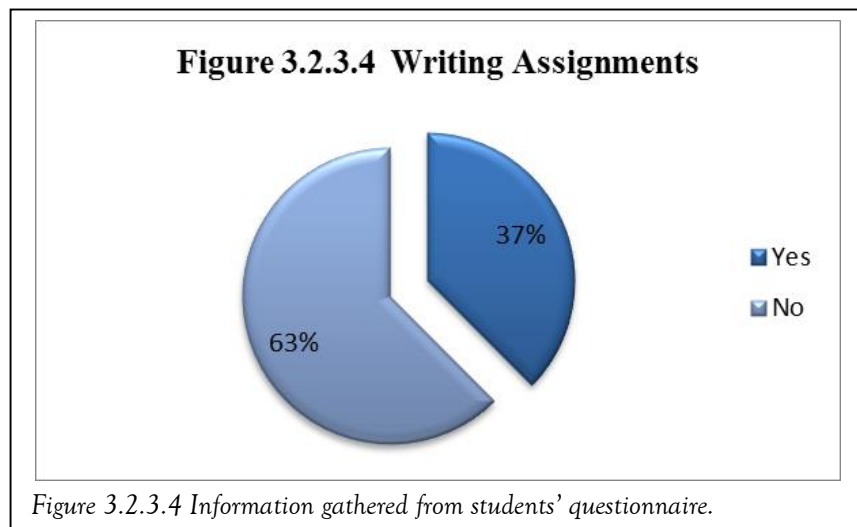
The following figure shows how much writing the investigators could really see taking place out of the 40 class sessions witnessed.



In addition, it was difficult for the investigator to collect some artifacts like students' compositions revised by their mentors because they had just a few, especially those in the beginning levels. Again, the researcher could demonstrate that writing was not being implemented along with other skills inasmuch as the collection of artifacts was not significant. The following figure shows that writing was occupying little of their time, even outside the classroom (extra class assignment).

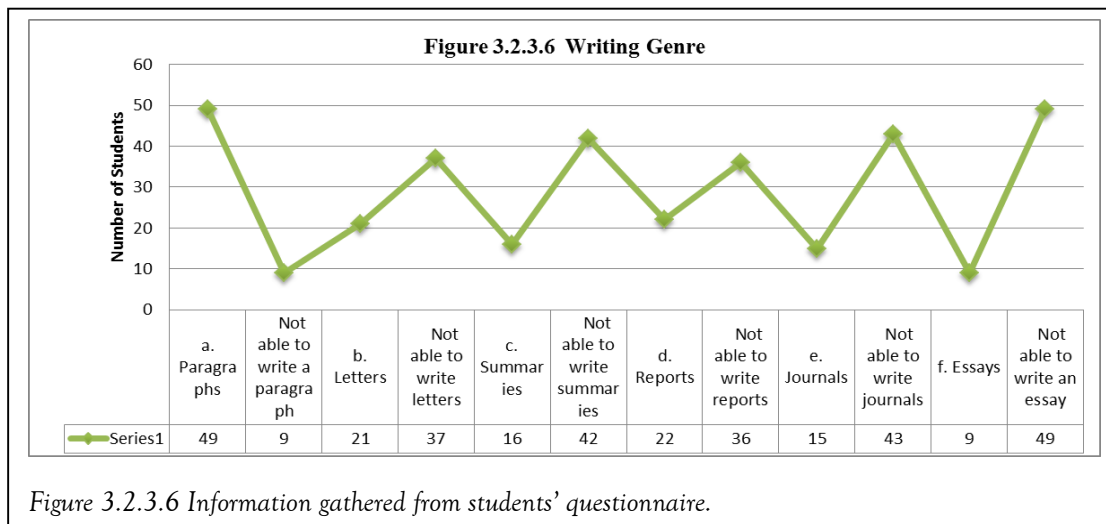
Another important aspect that researchers wanted to learn about by conducting this investigation was the kind of corrective feedback students were having in their compositions, whether done in class or as assignment. Based on the students' answers in the questionnaire, they expressed that professors used any type of feedback that was basically comments on the

margins of the students' pieces of writing. Corrections also were highlighted directly on the mistakes that were spotted. In addition, it was good to see that face-to-face conferencing also took place. Apparently, professors did not have a fixed way to treat errors in the students' compositions. What observers could notice was that the more common kind of feedback was that the professors took compositions to revise at home and returned them with the paragraph full of red marks all over the margins. (See appendix 4)



Additionally, an important concern that the investigators wanted to discover in this study was the type of writing genres students could develop. It was evident that many students know how to write paragraphs. Nonetheless, the other genres, such as letters, summaries, reports, journals and even essays, were not part of their “can do” abilities in the area of writing in the academic setting. This is alarming; students at this level, and according to their programs, have to be prepared to write all sorts of letters, summaries, journals and even short compositions as part of the demands of their future fields of work. The graph below shows

a very worrying result. The only writing type they could do and knew how to do was a paragraph.



Based on the results shown in this paper, it is necessary for students to have a more balanced coverage of the language skills in each session they have in the Integrated English courses. It was evidenced that the points of view from the teachers and learners about the amount of writing they did in class were not congruent. There is not enough time devoted to the accomplishment of the objectives (in writing) of the program for each course observed. This is the reason why students are not meeting the expectations for the level and are not writing more types of genres. These results show that there should be more commitment from the protagonists of this study (professors and students) to end up the courses with at least a minimum knowledge and acceptable writing abilities to be competent and to cope with the demands of their future fields of work.

4. Conclusions

One very important aspect that authorities may do if they consider the prominence of this diagnostic part is to implement a project for academic success, such as a learning or writing center. As it was mentioned in the theoretical framework, students need atmospheres or support places where they can go and discuss their assignments and even concerns with experts in the area. Writing centers provide learners with a relaxing environment to obtain feedback on their texts. It is known that professors can provide students with individual assistance in their writing matters. Writing centers are, consequently, very useful resources in many universities of developed countries, and they have served to help learners cope with their written assignments and surmount their writing problems little by little.

Higher education institutions should adopt the good practices that have been successfully implemented in other institutions around the world, even more now that Universidad Nacional offers English courses for specific purposes. It means that the

population that is in the process of learning a foreign language has grown considerably. Because not all students have equal abilities for learning languages, places like writing centers should be implemented in every public university of this country in order to aid students that have difficulties dealing with writing aspects. Such aspects include guiding learners on the use of manuals like the APA (American psychological Association) and MLA (Modern Language Association), which in many cases cannot be covered in class and that the student has to study him or herself. The type of feedback would also be according to the student preferences. The writing centers work with timed appointments those students make beforehand through e mail to the writing center's address or personally with the tutor of the place. This remedial plan is now being implemented at Universidad Nacional Pérez Zeledón Campus. This administration has concentrated efforts to provide students with support places like the one proposed more than six years ago, because it has been demonstrated that time in the English classroom has not been sufficient for them and for professors to provide appropriate feedback to learners. Now that the project is running, there is a more exhaustive road to go: to create a culture in the learning community to really consider the writing center a place to improve in an area that, for some, is hard to develop.

In addition, professors who formally assign students writing tasks would appreciate someone else to guide students into the right process of revision and self-revision as well. Universidad Nacional should not run more risks graduating students with low proficiency in writing skills.

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Appendix 1. OBSERVATION PROTOCOL SAMPLE SHEET

The main objective of this data collection instrument is to observe how the writing classes are being developed in every single reading/writing class for the levels II AND IV of the Tourism Major at Universidad Nacional Brunca Campus.

In addition, the observer needs to identify the different teaching practices in the writing area. These are methodology, materials, order in which the processes are presented to students, feedback as well as work assigned in every class.

Observation Class

Reading and Writing Class

Observation # _____

Date: _____

Integrated English II and IV

Objectives of the observations

- To observe if the writing task is being incorporated as a fundamental part of the classroom activities.
- To identify and analyze the procedures employed by the professor in order to teach writing.
- To determine the type of feedback provided by the teacher for the writing activity.
- To observe how the writing skill is being evaluated.

Class Started at _____

Skill being developed

a. READING

b. WRITING

c. GRAMMAR

Was there a warm up activity or transition from last class topic?

What was the pre-task activity about?

Description _____

Materials used

What was the main activity about?

Description _____

Materials used

What was the post- task activity about?

Description _____

Materials used

What other skills were used during this class? How were they implemented?

What kind of feedback did the teacher give to students to improve their ability to carry out the determined skill?

How did the teacher assess and evaluate the activities during the class?

Was any writing exercise assigned as homework? If affirmative, what did the homework consist of?

COMMENTS



Appendix 2. STUDENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE SAMPLE

1. Do you like to write in English?
2. How important is it to write in English in your major?
3. Do you think you have the ability to write in English?
4. How often do you write in the writing class?

- a. Always
- b. Often
- c. Sometimes
- d. Rarely

Why? _____

5. Where do you prefer to write (in English)?
 - a. Home
 - b. Classroom
 - c. Library
 - d. Other

Why?

6. What of the following writing genres can you develop?
 - A. Paragraphs
 - B. Letters (Business, friendly, apology, complaint etc)
 - C. Summaries
 - D. Reports
 - E. Journals
 - F. Essays



7. Who do you usually ask to help you with your writing work?
 - a. Teacher
 - b. Classmates
 - c. Friends
 - d. Other

8. How would you like the teacher to correct your written works?
 - a. Comments on the margins
 - b. Correcting directly on the composition
 - c. Face to face (type of conferencing)
 - d. Using symbols

9. What type of methodology does the professor use to teach writing?
 - a. Theory-practice
 - b. Example-practice
 - c. Instruction-practice
 - d. Practice (alone)

10. Which of the following manuals do know or do you use?
 - a. APA (American psychological Association)
 - b. MLA (Modern Language Association)?
 - c. Other
 - d. I do not use any manual



11. Which ones of the following techniques do you use?
 - a. Paraphrasing
 - b. Summarizing
 - c. Quoting other's work in your work
 - d. Other

12. What do you think is your level of proficiency in writing?
 - a. Outstanding
 - b. Very good
 - c. Average
 - d. Poor

13. If your level is b, c, or d. How can you solve the problem?

Appendix 3. QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PROFESSORS OF READING AND WRITING COURSES

Universidad Nacional

Maestría en Segunda Lenguas y Culturas

Investigación en Segundas Lenguas y Culturas

Researchers: Sofia Mora Abarca and Diego Garro Bustamante

SAMPLE

Dear Professor: Your cooperation in responding to the different questions is prominent. Please try to answer the different questions as fully and honest as possible.

I. Background Information

Name of the course: _____

- 1) How many times have you taught this course previously, including the present course?
- 2) In regard to teaching of the English language, what do you think is your area of specialization?

II PART. Based on the course, please answer the following questions.

1. What skill do you focus the most in the current course you are teaching?
 - a. Grammar
 - b. Reading
 - c. Writing

Why? _____

2. How often do you ask your students to develop writing exercises?
 - a. Every Session
 - b. Once a Week
 - c. At least once a month
 - d. Never



3. How often do you assign writing as homework to your students?
 - a. After every Session
 - b. Once a Week
 - c. At least once a month
 - d. Never
4. What teaching methodology do you use to teach writing?
5. What of the following genres do you think your students master at this level? (Choose more than one option if necessary)
 - a. Paragraphs
 - b. Letters (Business, friendly, apology, complaint etc)
 - c. Summaries
 - d. Reports
 - e. Journals
 - f. Essays
6. How do you usually correct students' compositions?

7. What of the following methods do you use assess your students' writing?
 - a. Conferencing
 - b. Peer assessment
 - c. Formative feedback
 - d. Teacher's corrections directly on students' mistakes using or red-pen and comments on the margins
 - e. Collaborative Writing projects

- f. I do not know any of the above but I use....

8. Why do you use that or those assessment techniques?
9. What have been the students' reactions towards the kind of feedback that you provide?
10. What kind of materials do you use to teach writing?
- a. Copies
 - b. A textbook
 - c. The internet
 - d. Magazines
 - e. Songs
 - f. Lectures
 - g. Other. Specify
-
11. What material do you consider as the most appropriate to teach writing to English language learners? Why?
12. What aspect(s) aspect of the current program of this course specifically the area you are teaching would you change? Justify your answer.

Thank you for your cooperation!

Appendix 4. Sample composition from one of the students and corrected by her instructor.

Safety in Costa Rica

Nowadays, Costa Rica is a frightening country. ^{Why?}
The ^{unclear} main ~~to~~ street, since many people like tourists
are vulnerable to any crime that ~~came from the~~
Costarricans.

IF I ^{were} ~~will be~~ the president in the National
Tourism Chamber, I ^{would} ~~will~~ do some things to
clean to country of all crime. ^{these} things like ~~all~~
to ask ^{the} ~~at~~ authorities highest of the country that ~~to~~
^{give more} ~~increase~~ the budget to Department of Security, so
that ^{they} ~~now~~ ^{more} currency ~~for~~ vigilance. Also, put
vigilance ^{???} better ^{???} in most visited st places like tourist
attractions, hotels, restaurants, airports. ^{and} Besides
^{the} best police ^{man or officers} on the street. I will ^{carry out} ~~create~~
^{strict laws} ~~law~~ more ^{stiff} ^{??} so that ~~to~~ make ^{justice}.
All this, so that ~~to~~ ^{be} safe in Costa Rica.