

Students' perception about the writing instruction in English classes

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Artículo Científico

Students' perception about the writing instruction in English classes

Percepción de los estudiantes acerca de la enseñanza de la escritura en las clases de inglés

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Abstract

The main aim of this quantitative research was to identify the tenth grade students' perceptions respect to the teaching of English writing skill. A survey of 14 question were applied to fifty eight tenth graders of Jorge Icaza Educative Unit, Latacunga- Ecuador in order to identify their perception regarding to writing skill and the methodology teachers use to teach it. Results of the survey show that students are not able to write simple pieces of writing like letters, stories and personal experiences. It was identified that there is not an appropriate process of writing practice in the classroom. Additionally, teachers do not teach strategies to help students to organize their ideas. Finally, writing practice is not regular in the classroom. Writing is given little attention by teachers and students. The research concludes that more attention should be given to the writing process that integrates steps such as prewriting, drafting, editing, proofreading, evaluating and publishing, allowing teachers to evaluate the development of writing skill in students. Finally, it is necessary to organize teaching training about different approaches to teach writing as a process.

Key words: Perceptions, writing instruction, writing process, writing skill

Resumen

El objetivo principal de esta investigación cuantitativa fue identificar las percepciones de los estudiantes del décimo grado respecto a la enseñanza de la habilidad de escritura en inglés. Una encuesta de 14 preguntas se aplicó a cincuenta y ocho alumnos de décimo grado de la Unidad Educativa Jorge Icaza, Latacunga-Ecuador, con el fin de identificar su percepción con respecto a la habilidad de escritura y la metodología que los docentes usan para enseñar esta habilidad. Los resultados de la encuesta muestran que los estudiantes no están en la capacidad de escribir simples escritos como cartas, historias y experiencias personales. Se identificó que no hay un proceso adecuado de práctica de escritura en el aula. Además, los maestros no enseñan estrategias para ayudar a los estudiantes a organizar sus ideas. Por último, la práctica de la escritura no es regular en el aula. Los profesores y estudiantes dan poca atención a esta habilidad. La investigación concluye que se debe prestar más atención al proceso de escritura que integra pasos como preescritura, redacción, edición, corrección de pruebas, evaluación y publicación, permitiendo a los docentes evaluar el desarrollo de las habilidades de escritura en los estudiantes. Por último, es necesario organizar cursos de capacitación sobre los diferentes enfoques para la enseñanza de la escritura como proceso.

Palabras claves: Percepciones, enseñanza de la escritura, proceso de escritura, habilidad escrita.

Introduction

Poor writing skill is considered one of the biggest problems in the teaching of English in Ecuador since it is a complex process that needs other sub-skills such as planning, organization, expressions, vocabulary, spelling, grammar and punctuation. In most of the educative institutions, there is not an appropriate teaching instruction since the beginning levels. It is believed that students must develop this skill in higher levels. Moreover, many teachers do not know teaching methods and approaches to teach this skill.

The literature review suggests that in English as foreign language classrooms, it is better to teach writing as a process that integrates several steps such as prewriting, drafting, editing, proofreading, evaluating and publishing because it helps to improve students' writing and facilitate their learning and comprehension. Camps (2005) defines the writing process as "a sequence of a series of cyclical, recursive, and progressive stages with the purpose of producing a final piece of written work" (p.130). The teaching of writing as a process helps students to improve the length and the quality of writing (Graham & Perin, 2007, p 11). The among of time that the writer spends on each stage of the process, will depend on the personality, experience, habits and maturity (Murray , 2009, p. 2), so teachers and students must be patient.

The writing process approach requires teachers to provide feedback. Feedback is an important element in developing writing. Hyland and Hyland (2006) mention that feedback is a key element to encourage, to consolidate learning and to grow control over learners' composing skills. Feedback means to give suggestions and some comments about learners writing, so the learner can know how to deal with those errors and edit their compositions. When providing feedback, teachers must not focus only on correcting linguistic forms such as grammar, vocabulary, spelling and

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punctuation, but they have to cover all aspects of the writing text: structure, organization, style, content, and presentation.

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Methology.

This was a quantitative research and it had a descriptive scope because it allowed describing the problem of teaching writing in English as a foreign language classrooms. The main aim was to identify the tenth grade students' perceptions respect to the teaching of English writing skill. A survey was applied to fifty-eight students of tenth year of basic education, whose ages range among 13- 15 years old, at Jorge Icaza Educative Unit in Latacunga city. They were 22 woman and 36 men participants. The questionnaire consisted of 14 closed questions; it was adapted from Tekle and Tefera's (2012) research titled "*A descriptive survey on teachers' perception of EFL writing and their practice of teaching writing: preparatory school in Jimma Zone in Focus*". The survey was addressed to know the students' perception about teaching writing and the teaching practice.

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Analysis and interpretation of the survey applied to tenth grade students of Jorge Icaza High School.

Chart 1: English skills in which teachers focus more

OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	PORCENTAJE
Reading	12	21
Speaking	29	50
Writing	10	17
Listening	7	12
Total	58	100%

In this question, 12 students that represent the 21% of the population state that their English teachers focus more in reading skill. 29 students that represent the 50% of the population state that their English teachers focus more in speaking skill. 10 students who represent the 17% said writing skill, and 7 students that represent the 12% selected the option *listening*. The majority of the students mention that their English teachers focus more in speaking skill. That means that teachers do not emphasize the development of the writing skill in their students.

Chart 2: Time for the teaching of writing

OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	PORCENTAJE
5h-4h	2	3
3h-2h	10	17
1h-30min.	30	52
Any	16	28

In this question, 2 students that represent the 3% of the population state that among 4 hours and 5 hours are dedicated to English writing per week. 10 students that represent the 17% of the population state among 2 hours and 3 hours are dedicated to English writing per week. 30 students who represent the 52% said among 30 minutes to 1 hour and 16 students that represent the 28% state *any*. Most of the students mentioned that that time dedicated to English writing is around 30 minutes to 1 hour. This time is not enough because writing needs regular practice. According to Bollinger (2012) “writing instruction and practice should occur every day and in all school subjects (totaling up to 1 hr. each day for most grades) to help students gain confidence and competence with writing for varied purposes and audiences”. (p.9)

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Chart 3: Writing paragraphs

OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	PORCENTAJE
Always	4	7
Usually	4	7
Sometimes	14	24
Never	36	62
Total	58	100%

In this question, 4 students that represent the 7% of the population state that their teachers *always* teach them to write paragraphs in English. 4 students that represent the 7% of the population state that that their teachers *usually* teach them to write paragraphs in English. 14 students who represent the 24% said *sometimes*. 36 students that represent the 62% said *never*. According to this data, more than half of students said that their teachers do not teach them to write paragraphs in English.

Chart 4: Students' ability to writing paragraphs

OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	PORCENTAJE
Much	5	9
Sufficient	5	9
Little	10	17
None	38	65
Total	58	100%

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In this question, 5 students that represent the 9% of the population state that they able to write paragraphs, join sentences with logical sequence and use punctuation appropriately. 5 students that represent the 9% of the population state that they are able to write paragraphs, join sentences with logical sequence and use punctuation and connectors appropriately. 10 students who represent the 17% said *little*. 38 students that represent the 65% said *none*. The majority of the students stated that they are not able to write paragraphs, join sentences with logical sequence and appropriated use of punctuation and connectors. This could be because their teachers do not focus more in writing skill.

Chart 5: School year in which students started practicing English.

OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	PORCENTAJE
4th-5th	2	3
6th- 7th	5	9
8th-9th	8	14
10th	43	74
Total	58	100%

In this question, 2 students that represent the 3% of the population state that they started practicing English writing in 4th and 5th year of basic education. 5 students that represent the 9% of the population state that they started practicing English writing in 6th and 7th year of basic education. 8 students who represent the 14% said in 8th and 9th year of basic educational and 43 students that represent the 74% said in 10th year of basic education. The majority of students mentioned that they

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started practicing English writing in 10th year of basic education. It is because the curriculum of Basic Education 2012 included the teaching of English since the eighth grade.

Chart 6: Aspect of writing that the teachers put more emphasis

OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	PORCENTAJE
Grammar and vocabulary	46	79
Writing strategies	0	0,00
Content	0	0,00
Punctuation and connector	12	21
Total	58	100%

In this question, 46 students that represent the 79% of the population state that their English teachers put more emphasis on grammar and vocabulary when they teach them to write in English. 12 students that represent the 21% of the population state that their English teachers give more emphasis to grammar and vocabulary when they teach them to write in English. None of the participants said that teachers focus on writing strategies and content. A high percentage of students said that when their teachers teach them to write, more emphasis put on grammar and vocabulary.

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Chart 7: Teachers help to organize ideas.

OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	PORCENTAJE
Always	5	9
Usually	10	17
Sometimes	12	21
Never	31	53
Total	58	100%

In this question, 5 students that represent the 9% of the population mention that their teachers always help them to organize ideas before writing paragraphs. 10 students that represent the 17% of the population mention that their teachers usually help them to organize ideas before writing paragraphs. 12 students who represent the 21% said *sometimes* and 31 students representing the 5% mention *never*. The majority of students mentioned that their teachers do not help them to organize ideas before writing. Teachers have to consider that organizing ideas is the first step to a good writing composition.

Chart 8: Encourage to writing letters.

OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	PORCENTAJE
Always	0	0
Usually	2	3
Sometimes	4	7
Never	52	90
Total	58	100%

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In this question, 2 students that represent the 3% of the population mention that their teachers *usually* encourage them to write letters in English into the class. 4 students that represent the 7% of the population mention that their teachers *sometimes* encourage them to write letters in English into the class. 52 students who represent the 90% said *never* and any student mentions *always*. According to this date, the majority of students mentioned that their teachers never encourage them to write letters in English into class. Help and motivation is always necessary before any writing task.

Chart 9: Writing of stories or personal experiences.

OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	PORCENTAJE
Yes, usually	7	12
Yes, sometimes	9	15
Yes, rarely	15	26
Not at all	27	47
Total	58	100%

In this question, 7 students that represent the 12% of the population mention that their teachers *usually* encourage them to write stories and personal experiences in English. 9 students that represent the 15% of the population mention state that their teachers *sometimes* encourage them to write stories and personal experiences in English. 15 students who represent the 26% said *yes, rarely* and 27 students representing the 47% mention *not at all*. Most of the students stated that their teachers do not encourage them to write stories or personal experiences.

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Chart 10: Comments and corrections.

OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	PORCENTAJE
Always	10	17
Usually	10	17
Sometimes	18	31
Never	20	35
Total	58	100%

In this question, 10 students that represent the 17% of the population mention that their teachers *always* make comments and correction on their English writing. 10 students that represent the 17% of the population mention that their teachers *usually* make comments and correction on their English writing. 18 students who represent the 31% said *sometimes* and 20 students representing the 35% mention *never*. The majority of the students said that English teachers never make comments and correction of their English writing. Correction and feedback is part of the learning process. This allows students to identify their mistakes and learn better.

Chart 11: Usefulness of comments and corrections.

OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	PORCENTAJE
Much	24	41
Suffient	8	14
Little	20	35
None	6	10
Total	58	100%

In this question, 24 students that represent the 41% of the population state that their teachers' comments and corrections help *a lot* to improve their English writing. 8 students that represent the 14% of the population mention that their teachers' comments and corrections help *sufficiently* to improve their English writing. 20 students who represent the 35% said *little* and 6 students representing the 10% mention *none*. Most students said that their teachers' comments and corrections are very useful for them. Comments and correction is part of the feedback. It increases student knowledge, skills, and understanding.

Chart 12: Self- correction

OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	PORCENTAJE
Yes, usually	10	17
Yes,sometimes	14	24
Yes, rarely	20	35
Not at all	14	24
Total	58	100%

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In this question, 10 students that represent the 17% of the population mention that their English teachers *usually* make them to correct their own writing. 14 students that represent the 24% of the population mention state that their English teachers *sometimes* make them to correct their own writing. 20 students who represent the 35% said *yes, rarely* and 14 students representing the 24% mention *not at all*. The majority of the students said that English teachers never make them to comment and correct their English writing. Kavaliauskiene (2003) "the contemporary emphasis on learner-centeredness and autonomy suggests that learner's self-correction of mistakes might be more beneficial for language learning than teacher's correction". (p.2)

Chart 13: Comment on classmates' written work.

OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	PORCENTAJE
Yes, usually	0	0
Yes, sometimes	4	7
Yes, rarely	4	7
Not at all	50	86
Total	58	100%

In this question, 4 students that represent the 7% of the population mention that their English teachers *sometimes* encourage them to comment their classmate's written work (paragraphs, letters, stories and experiences). 4 students that represent the 7% of the population state that their English teachers *rarely* encourage them to comment their classmates' written work (paragraphs, letters, stories and experiences). 50 students who represent the 86% said *not at all* and nobody said *usually*.

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The majority of the students said that their English teachers do not encourage them to comment on their classmates' written work (paragraphs, letters, stories and experiences).

Chart 14: Publishing.

OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	PORCENTAJE
Exhibition on billboards	6	10
Magazine editing course	0	0
Publication in social networks	0	0
Presentation at the institutional platform	0	0
All of the above	0	0
Any	52	90
Total	58	100%

In this question, 6 students that represent the 10% of the population mention that their English teachers present their written work on billboards. 52 students that represent the 90% of the population state that their English teachers do not use any strategy to publish their written work. Any student selected the options: *Magazine editing course*, *publication in social networks* and *presentation at the institutional platform*. A very high percentage of students said that teachers do not use any strategy to publish their written work. In order to make writing tasks more meaningful, the process of writing must end in publishing. Teachers must find different strategies to this purpose.

Conclusions.

These research shows that teachers give less attention to writing skill; only 30 minutes-time per week are used to writing practice, which is not enough to develop this skill; it requires regular

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practice. Students consider that they are not able to write short paragraphs, letters, stories or personal experiences. Teachers do not teach students strategies to write.

Teaching writing as process allows students to make good writing composition because it includes several steps that allow students identifying their own mistakes and learn from them. The writing process should include steps such as prewriting, drafting, editing, proofreading, evaluating and publishing. During this process, it is necessary to include feedback and correction.

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