UNIVERSIDAD TÉCNICA PARTICULAR DE LOJA
La Universidad Católica de Loja

ÁREA SOCIO HUMANÍSTICA

TÍTULO DE LICENCIADO EN CIENCIAS DE LA EDUCACIÓN MENCIÓN INGLÉS

Ecuadorian public high school students´ errors in EFL writing skill.

TRABAJO DE TITULACIÓN

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CENTRO UNIVERSITARIO QUITO

2017

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Dedication

This thesis is devoted to my beloved parents, who have always provided me with their absolute love, care, help and stimulus to continue on the path to reach all my goals. They have been my inspiration throughout this project. Thanks to all of you for being my best example and for standing beside me in all those important moments of my life. I really appreciate it.

Ronnie

Acknowledgment

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my advisor Mgr. Luz Mercedes Castillo Cuesta for the continuous support of my study and related research, for her patience, motivation, and immense knowledge. She has been the ideal thesis supervisor. Her sage advice, insightful criticisms, and patient encouragement aided the writing of this thesis in innumerable ways. Thank you so much.

Ronnie

CONTENTS

Abstract

This research was carried out with the purpose of evidencing the students' most common errors in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing in a public high school, the aspects analyzed included language content and mechanics.

The present study describes, analyzes and interprets the results of the research on the mistakes made by students in their EFL classes, and explains the perspective of both students and teachers in terms of writing.

This study was accomplished with a group of 120 students and 5 teachers in high school, where the teachers were required to complete a questionnaire about their experiences in teaching writing, and the students were required to complete a questionnaire about their experience in learning writing including a written sample about their favorite singer.

The method used to conduct this research was non-experimental, qualitative-quantitative. It is quantitative because it helped to quantify the problem by way of generating numerical data or statistics. It is qualitative because it revealed a target audience's range of behavior and the perceptions with reference to the topic dealt with in the present research. Finally, it cannot be considered experimental because the researcher relies on interpretation, observation, questionnaires or surveys to reach to conclusions.

The present study revealed as the most important conclusions that the students' most frequent mistakes are the omission of the subject, the exclusion of the topic sentence and spelling inaccuracy.

KEY WORDS: errors, EFL writing, teaching, learning, omission, spelling.

Resumen

Esta investigación se llevó a cabo con el propósito de evidenciar los errores más comunes cometidos por los estudiantes en inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL), en aspectos de contenido de lenguaje escrito y los aspectos mecánicos en una escuela secundaria pública ubicada en Quito.

El presente estudio describe, analiza e interpreta los resultados de la investigación sobre los errores cometidos por los estudiantes en sus clases de EFL, y explica la perspectiva tanto de los estudiantes como de los profesores en términos de escritura.

Este estudio se realizó con un grupo de 120 estudiantes y 5 maestros de la escuela secundaria, donde los maestros tuvieron que completar un cuestionario sobre sus experiencias en la enseñanza de la escritura, y los estudiantes tuvieron que completar un cuestionario sobre su experiencia en el aprendizaje de la escritura, incluyendo una muestra escrita sobre su cantante favorito.

El método utilizado para realizar esta investigación fue no-experimental, cualitativo-cuantitativo. Es cuantitativo porque ayudó a cuantificar el problema mediante la generación de datos numéricos o estadísticas. Es cualitativa porque reveló el rango de comportamiento de un público objetivo y las percepciones con referencia al tema tratado en la presente investigación. Por último, no puede considerarse experimental porque el investigador se basa en la interpretación, observación, cuestionarios o encuestas para llegar a conclusiones.

El presente estudio reveló como las conclusiones más importantes que los errores más frecuentes de los estudiantes son la omisión del sujeto, la exclusión de la oración principal y la inexactitud de la ortografía.

PALABRAS CLAVE: errores, EFL, escritura, enseñanza, aprendizaje, omisión, ortografía.

Introduction

Writing is a very important skill to be developed in any language since it is present in many everyday activities. "It is because writing is a way of communication that graphically reproduces human speech, ideas, and other aspects as a part or a whole" (Fischer, 2001, p.65).

The present research has been carried out in order to investigate and analyze the Ecuadorian students' errors in EFL writing skills in public high schools and also to provide an answer to these questions: Which error has the highest percentage in each variable?, Which is the most frequent error in the students´ written texts? In addition, how do students and teachers perceive errors in EFL writing?

Several studies have been carried out to show that EFL writing is one of the areas where learners have the most difficulties. For instance, Marin (2013) researched that students' errors with the purpose of determining their level of acquisition and use of English as a foreign language. According to his findings, students' errors in EFL writing are related to a criterion of superficial structure and lexical, grammar and discursive errors.

Regarding other author's opinions, the aforementioned errors are not only considered as a problem of language aspects but also they are associated with the students and teachers' attitude and viewpoint, as they play a very important role. Muros (2011) conducted a research in order to analyze the EFL students' spelling mistakes, and provided enough information to reach to the conclusion that writing errors are commonly committed because of the teacher's poor emphasis on adequate writing teaching strategies and procedures, and because of student's lack of motivation for writing in English.

In this context, it is necessary to look for a way to change this situation where the students' lack of interest is quite evident. Baralo (2012) conducted a research in order to provide some techniques and activities for the students' writing improvement through ludic activities in

the classroom. It showed that students would be willing to write if they were motivated and interested in writing.

It is important to mention that this research provided a lot of useful information about the difficulties students face in their writing skill. The research was done in order to understand and learn more about how students acquire writing knowledge and to look for several ways to avoid errors in the writing process. This research also provides an idea to other researchers about the studies that have already been done to face writing errors.

Chapter I: Literature Review

This chapter has topics and scientific studies that were investigated to provide a scientific support to this research. The investigated topics are writing (its definition, its importance and the writing process), coherence, cohesion and unity, elements of writing (topic sentence, supporting sentence, transition words, punctuation, spelling, capitalization, and grammar in EFL writing), and errors in EFL writing (causes and types).

Writing

Definition

For a long time, writing has been considered as a way that people use to communicate, share or convey information, but it has been difficult to define properly what writing is. Nonetheless, some authors have been able to interpret its definition in several ways. As it was mentioned by Fischer (2001): "The sequencing of standardized symbols (characters, signs or sign components) in order to graphically reproduce human speech, thought and other things in part or whole" (p.5).

As the above-mentioned author states: "Writing is a way that people use in order to reproduce their thoughts in a visual way, speech, among others" (Fischer, 2001, p.5).

A similar definition of writing is provided by Pope (2012) who mentions: "Writing can be briefly defined as the activity of making verbal marks on paper or some other substance (stone, wood, plastic, computer screen, etc.); also what results (i.e. a piece of writing)" (p. 271).

As a partial conclusion, both Fischer and Pope have stated that writing is the activity that makes communication readable by using standardized symbols or verbal marks in order to convey information.

Importance

Writing has a very important role on different aspects in our society. According to Black (2011): "(…) inappropriate writing limits the opportunities of getting a job and even it may affect the permanence of a person in his/her workplace" (p.65). As it was reported by some companies of the National Commission in Writing in 2004, they spend about three billion dollars a year on trying to correct their employees' writing errors.

In addition, Canavor (2012) expressed that people are what they write. This happens because all the messages people write a day imply certain aspects related to them and their viewpoints. However, writing is not only about job or the people's perspective; it also involves everyday situations and circumstances.

Peacock, Ervin, Daly and Merrell (2010) explained that writing is present in all the activities; no matter if you are a student, a worker or even if you are retired. You will always need to write something.

The writing process

As in every skill of language, there is always a process to follow in order to become proficient. This process will help people write meaningfully and make writing coherent and organized.

Although many authors have different perspectives about this process, Murray (2012) classifies the process of writing in four stages: "Collecting the information, taking notes, planning and finally drafting, checking and revising the written text" (p.56).

The stage collecting information involves the different ways to gather information such as brainstorming about a particular topic and searching information on confident internet resources (i.e. e-books, journals, etc.) or libraries. Something very important to take into consideration is that it is necessary to check the searched

information, author's details and reliability, objective of the written text used for research, among other aspects (Murray, 2012).

At the taking notes stage, after having an idea about the topic to be written and the information to be used, the next step is to write down the notes (ideas) taken from brainstorming or the research (always taking into account a correct citation of the textual information avoiding plagiarism). Then, the writer will be able to develop the main ideas by using his/her own words (Murray, 2012).

The planning stage has to do with putting the ideas in order for the writer to have a good perspective and a clear idea about the topic that he/she is about to write. To do this, the writer may use diagrams to categorize and order the ideas (Murray, 2012).

In the stage draft and revision, the writer creates several attempts of writing (drafts) using the written ideas in the stage of planning in this final stage. He/she clarifies them and improves their presentation in the writing. To link these ideas, the writer uses transition words or linkers to create a paragraph. Finally, the writer must revise the final draft, he/she has to make sure that the information used in the text is properly cited in order to avoid plagiarism and correct all kind of mistakes, including spelling, punctuation, grammar, etc. (Murray, 2012).

Hyland & Hyland (2006) emphasized on the importance of developing students´ ability to plan, identify issues and analyze and implement possible solutions for writing. This author suggested writing stages are selection of topic, pre-writing, composing, response to draft, revising, response to revisions, proofreading and editing, evaluation, publishing and follow-up tasks.

Coherence, cohesion and unity

All writers should consider three basic aspects when writing any kind of text; these are coherence, cohesion and unity.

Coherence

Jacobs (2011) describes coherence as "the connection among the words of a text" (p.65).

Concerning coherence, Niño (2011) has mentioned that it is the textual basic property that is related with the selection of information, and the logic used for the organization and presentation of the text. That is to say, it is a quality that allows categorizing the information as significant or not important. Additionally, it is very necessary to remark that writers should know about the internal and external types of coherence. The internal coherence refers to the title-content or the paragraph-paragraph interrelationships. Otherwise, the external coherence describes the interaction between the writing and the existing situation.

It means to add a logical connection between ideas, words, sentences, and ideas, using different coherent devices such as similar grammatical structures, repetition, parallelism, etc.

Cohesion

When different parts of a text refer to each other (linking devices, pronouns, etc.), then, it is called cohesion. Understanding both processes coherence and cohesion includes determining how the ideas in a text are interrelated, and how the writer can express those links through the selected words (Martin, 1986).

Therefore, cohesion can be understood as the process of connecting sentences together through a variety of linguistic devices or techniques to show the relationship between two elements in a text.

Another concept to take into consideration is textual property, which Cisneros (2013) explained that it means that the texts are presented as tight units through various grammatical, lexical, phonetic and graphical mechanisms. The sender of the message establishes this

property, and then, the receiver recognizes it to follow the text comprehension process. Cohesion is not a necessary property of textuality; it depends on coherence, which is a pragmatic property that is established jointly by the writers, making use of the existing knowledge worldwide.

Unity

According to Hinkel (2012), "Unity of a text is the cohesion of paragraphs, ideas and the logical connectors" (p.86). In other words, unity may be defined as the relationship between the elements of the text (Hinkel, 2012, p.187). In relation to this topic, Reinking & Osten (2015) suggest that the writer should check and edit the ideas of his/her writing that are not related to the topic, and avoid information that is not important or relevant in order to ensure unity of the text.

Elements of writing

According to Conderman, Hedin, and Bresnahan (2013), a teacher considers the following as elements of writing: the topic sentence, supporting ideas (supporting sentences), and use of transition words, spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and grammar.

Topic sentence

As stated by English and English (2008), "the topic sentence is the result of the controlling idea added to the main idea that a writer uses to create an organized and well-written paragraph" (p.78).

Firstly, writers have to analyze a topic. Then, they should find a perspective concerning the topic choice. For example, the topic is "the internet" so the main idea could be "the internet is a global tool".

Secondly, the writer has to go deeper by getting a controlling idea. The controlling idea is the idea the writer wants to explain, describe or expand on the paragraph.

For example, as mentioned above, "The internet is a global tool" is the main idea. A controlling idea for this main idea could be that "it is useful to search information and keep in touch with people". As a conclusion, the topic sentences are established from the main idea and the controlling idea.

Supporting sentences

Supporting sentences are the sentences of a paragraph that are related to the topic sentence by giving extra information. This fact helps the readers understand the paragraph they are reading in a better way. For example, a topic sentence would be "learning another language is very useful". The supporting sentences could be "it helps you increase job opportunities"; "it breaks the walls of communication" and "it provides more openings to travel." (Singleton, 2008, p.67).

Transition words.

According to Rajczak (2014), they are words that help the writer to go from one idea to another or from an example to another. These words also help the writer have a well-organized and well-structured text. Some examples of transition words are however, moreover, before, for example, additionally, also, as well as, eventually, to illustrate, an example, for example, for instance, furthermore, besides that, in the same way, there, farther on, beyond, among others.

Punctuation

It is very important to use a correct punctuation in writing. The following signs of punctuation should be used when writing a text: periods, commas, semicolons, colons, quotation marks, parentheses, apostrophes, hyphens, ellipses, question marks, exclamation points. All of them play a very important role when writing a text. That is why it is necessary to learn how and when to use each one.

Periods are used at the end of a complete sentence, while the most common uses of commas are to separate words or group of words in a combination of three or more elements and to add extra information that helps you identify the subject or object in a sentence (Jane Straus, 2011).

Semicolons are used to separate elements of a group when one or more elements have commas and colons are used to introduce a group of elements from a list (Jane Straus, 2011).

The most common usage of quotation marks is to convey a textual message and title of books, songs, plays, etc., while parentheses are used to provide information that allows the reader to understand in a better and clearer way. On the other hand, apostrophes are used in contractions and possessions (Jane Straus, 2011).

The main use of hyphens is to join words to form compound adjectives, and ellipses is a set of three periods indicate an omission and/or hesitation. They can be used to represent a trailing off of thought, and/or allows for a pause in writing. We use question marks when making a question, and they are located at the end of it, while we use exclamation points to express emotions and surprise and to emphasize a message (Jane Straus, 2011).

Spelling

Saddleback Educational Publishing (2014) has acknowledged that spelling is essential for writing. This publishing offers some recommendations, strategies and procedures writers can use to improve spelling. These actions mainly refer to focusing on the reading content, concentrating on paying attention on key words, dividing words into syllables and repeating them clearly, recording key words, and, using a dictionary.

One of the most common errors found in writing is not paying attention to spelling. First, repeating difficult words may help writers memorize them. Secondly,

spelling a word benefits writers from understanding and keeping the word on their minds, by repeating key words several times. Additionally, writers should use the dictionary habitually. Finally, they should keep a record of the most difficult words (Saddleback, 2014).

Capitalization

According to Straus (2014), capitalizing a word means "to write only the first letter of a word using uppercase and the rest of them in lowercase"(p.9). This author also asseverates that there are some rules to take into consideration when capitalizing words. One of these rules guides writers to capitalize the first letter of the first word in a sentence when writing a document and after a period.

In accordance with this author, the first letter of a proper noun must be written with capital letter. In addition, she provides some conditions when capitalizing is a must. Firstly, writers should capitalize words when referring to proper nouns, days of the week, months of the year, governmental matters, historical episodes and eras, holidays, institutions, territories, natural and manmade landmarks, nicknames and epithets, organizations, planets, races, nationalities, tribes, religions, names of deities, special occasions, and names of streets and roads (Straus, 2014).

Grammar

When talking about learning a language, the first idea that crosses a person's mind is learning grammar. According to Endley (2010): "there is too much about grammar for any teacher or linguist to explain, it is because grammar has to do with the language itself" (p.76).

In the same way, Einsenmann & Summer (2013) have explained that: "It is very important to find a way to teach grammar to students, and that it is not exclusively referred to teaching structures or patterns" (p.46).

Gucker (2012) suggests that an EFL student should learn to master the essential topics about grammar to be able to communicate. These topics include kinds of sentences, subject and predicate, simple subject and verb, compound constructions, prepositional phrases, forms and properties of verbs, pronouns, adjectives, complements, parts of speech, nouns, modifiers, verbs tense and mood, appositives, adverbs, conjunctions, verb agreement, prepositions, clauses, and connectors.

Errors in EFL writing.

Flores (2011) categorizes writing errors in eight groups: "outright word errors, outright punctuation errors, capitalization errors, errors involving the use of Roman characters, errors as result of ingrained setting habits, spelling errors, errors that affect the content and meaning of the text, and spelling errors" (p.68).

About punctuation errors, Metcalfe and Astle (2013) explain the very important role of punctuation in a text: meaning and understanding. Punctuation marks delimit sentences and paragraphs and establish the syntactic hierarchy of propositions, and consequently structure of a text. With these marks, it is possible to order the ideas according to their importance. Thus, a correct use of punctuation can certainly help the reader to carry out a satisfactory reading, with ease to interpret the discourse from an organization that allows ideas to express themselves adequately.

Concerning punctuation errors, Lobeck & Denham (2013) consider the uses of commas and periods as the most common errors because the use and conventions of these punctuation marks in L1 may lead to misunderstandings. On the other hand, Seely (2013) states that "These errors might be committed because of the different perspectives the writer has in the moment of writing a text" (p.65).

According to Bigelow (2013), the most common errors in grammar are due to L1 transference. Some of these errors are the following: the use of the indefinite article

(a, an), the use and omission of the definite article (the), the use of present progressive, subject - auxiliary agreement, plural after a decimal number, 's possessives, noun – verb agreement, plural formation, among others.

There are several studies, which aim at EFL writing and the problems students face. The most relevant studies conducted on the writing field are the following:

Najwa, O. (2014) conducted a research in which the efficacy of feedback on EFL Libyan writing context was analyzed. Some students who faced writing problems were exposed to written feedback from their teacher on the submitted essays. The research suggested that as an important component of language, FL learners' writing skill can be greatly enhanced by teachers' comments particularly in the form of written feedback on students' written products. The findings of the research showed that students improved on their essay writing by committing less errors after receiving written feedback.

Zuhour Bani Younes & Fatima Salamh Albalawi (2015) has affirmed that academic writing requires conscious effort and much practice in organization, language use and writing mechanics, and that there are many factors affecting undergraduate academic writing performance in ESL, like content, vocabulary, composing, developing, and, analyzing ideas. Producing an organized, neat and error-free piece of writing has always been the life-long dream and the ambition of all ESL students. The purpose of their study was to explore the most common types of writing problems among English language and translation major sophomore female students at Tabuk University.

Normah, O. (2015) stated that writing is the most difficult skill in English, so most EFL students tend to make errors in writing. In assisting learners to acquire writing skill successfully, the analysis of errors and the understanding of their sources are necessary. The aim of his research was to explore the major sources of errors occurred in the writing of EFL students. It also focused on the types of errors and the linguistic

level presented in their writing. Results showed that the mostly frequent types of errors were direct translation, word choice, verb tense, preposition, and comma.

Sotoudehnama and Pilehvari (2016) conducted a research related to the impact of peer review on EFL learners' writing proficiency, where they compared two groups of participants to determine whether the most advantageous effects of peer review can be found in giving or receiving feedback. This study's aim was to investigate the impact of peer review on two groups of EFL learners' writing proficiency, the ones who only provided feedback and the ones who only received it.

Putri, Inayah, and Gani (2016) published an article in the First Reciprocal Graduate Research Symposium, related with students' writing errors in an EFL classroom. They stated that writing is one of language skills to be learned in English mastery. Their research was aimed at describing the errors made by Banda Aceh students in writing. The result of document analysis in their study showed that the highest percentage of writing error made by students was grammatical error and the lowest was in organization.

Bahri, Kirana and Mustafa (2017) carried out a research associated with errors in EFL writing by junior high students in Indonesia, where they highlighted that teachers need to pay attention to the most serious errors before addressing other errors. The errors were categorized into surface strategy taxonomy and linguistic category taxonomy errors. The data was analyzed by calculating the percentage of errors based on the total cumulative errors for surface strategy taxonomy, but based on the number of attempts in the same grammatical elements for linguistic category taxonomy.

These types of research have offered a wide range of perspectives when analyzing Ecuadorian public high school students´ errors in EFL writing skill. Through the results obtained from previous investigations, students can benefit from them by

applying some of the effective teaching strategies and procedures mentioned for improving EFL writing.

Chapter II: Method

Settings and Participants

The current research was done in a public high school located in the south of Quito, Ecuador. The population selected to do this research consisted of one hundred-twenty EFL students from fifteen to sixteen years old in classes A, B and C of junior years. In the same way, five English teachers were considered for this research. These teachers had two main characteristics: they worked in the high school where the research instruments were applied, and they were the teachers whose students answered the questionnaire and provided the written sample.

Procedures

The present study began with a bibliographic review that was carried out in order to have the scientific foundations related to students´ errors in EFL writing skill. The information was gathered from several important sources such as digital and printed books, encyclopedias, and the Internet.

The type of research approach applied was the qualitative-quantitative in order to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations, and to generate numerical data or statistics to quantify attitudes, opinions, behaviors, and the defined variables – and generalize results from the sample used.

Two different instruments were applied in order to collect the necessary information. The students had to answer a questionnaire made up of twelve questions about their motivation to write, the writing procedures used by the teacher, and the possible reasons that intend to explain why they do not develop this skill properly. They also had to provide a written sample of a paragraph about their favorite singer. On the other hand, the teachers had to answer a questionnaire made up of twelve questions about the reality of teaching writing.

The research was developed in a public high school located in the south of Quito. The purpose of this research was to know about students´ errors in EFL writing skill. To do this,

after gathering the data from the interviews, the next step was to tabulate the information in order to establish the results of the research. After having tabulated the information in charts and made the graphs in an Excel sheet for a better understanding, the next step was to analyze and interpret the results obtained from the interview.

In relation to the results analysis, the researcher considered the students' lack of vocabulary, misuse of grammar, and the lack of knowledge about punctuation rules. In this context, not all the students were able to write a long paragraph but they provided enough information about their favorite signer which helped the researcher identify the most common errors on writing and made the tabulation a real process.

Finally, the description, analysis and interpretation of results were made both qualitatively and quantitatively. The qualitative analysis consisted on trying to know the EFL writing facts, processes, structures and population in their entirety; and the quantitative analysis allows examining the data obtained numerically.

Chapter III: Results and Discussion
Description, Analysis, and Interpretation of Results

According to the central purpose of this study, the present chapter contains information resulted from the analysis, description and interpretation of writing errors made by EFL students from public schools. It includes the review of three specific aspects of writing errors: form of the language, content, and mechanical errors; therefore, these results show percentages in each variable, frequent errors in students' written samples, and the teachers and students' perceptions about these errors.

Form of the language: Grammar
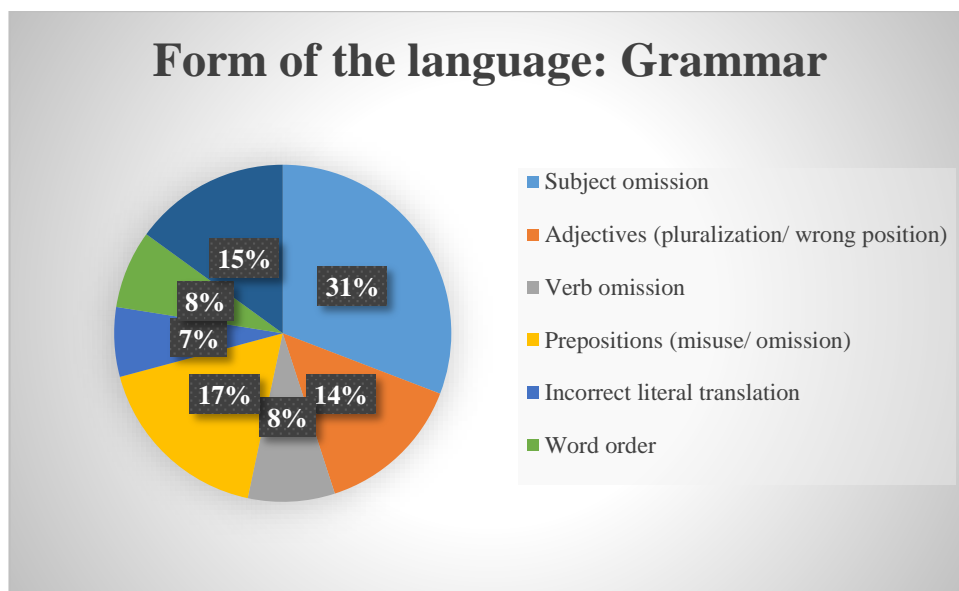
Graph 1
Author: Ronnie Quinteros.
Source: Written samples tabulation, 2017.

Writing is partially related to grammar because it has to do with patterns, correct use and order of words, etc. that is why this aspect was considered to study in this investigation. Errors to be considered in this variable were: subject omission, pluralization and wrong position of adjectives, verb omission, misuse or omission of prepositions, incorrect literal translation, word order, and vocabulary.

Subject omission is the most common and representative error that was found in the written samples, it reached 31% of the total number of errors in form of language. The following example was selected to illustrate this error:

"My favorite singer is Shakira because is a beautiful and a great artist."

This example is made of two clauses joined by a conjunction, the error is noticeable in the second clause "…is a beautiful and a great artist". As it can be seen, the sentence cited above does not have any subject in the second clause. The knowledge that the student is not considering is one of the simplest patterns to follow in order to write a sentence, which is: Subject + Verb + Complement, but the student considered a structure without any subject for the second clause. The pattern followed by the student was Verb + Complement. However, this error does not interfere in the understanding of the idea. The properly written sentence is: My favorite singer is Shakira because <u>she</u> is a beautiful and great artist.

Preposition (misuse/omission) errors reached 17% of the total errors committed by students in this variable, which is not as representative as the first error. The following example was selected to illustrate this error:

"She was born at Barranquilla, Colombia."

As it can be seen, the preposition used in the example is wrong because the student does not refer to a specific address, it mentioned a city located in Colombia. However, the error does not interfere in the understanding of the sentence. The correct form to write the sentence is: She was born <u>in </u>Barranquilla, Colombia.

Vocabulary reached 15% of the total errors considered in this variable, these types of errors are not representative in relation to the rest of aspects. Invented words and false cognates were analyzed as vocabulary errors. The following example was selected to illustrate this error:

"He has a very enorm house."

In this example, the student tried to describe a characteristic of size. As it can be seen, the word enorm is used as an adjective, but this word does not exist; it was invented by the student. In this situation, the error made by the student does interfere in the understanding of the sentence. The correct way to write this sentence is: He has a very big/enormous/huge house.

Adjective errors were not representative in relation to the rest of aspects in this variable. Only 15% of the analyzed writing samples presented this error. The following example was selected to illustrate this error:

"Ricardo Arjona writes many *beautifuls* songs."

As it can be seen, the student made the error on the adjective because he/she is pluralizing the adjective "beautiful". Despite the mistake mentioned above, it does not interfere in the understanding of the sentence. The knowledge that the student needs to take into consideration is that in English adjectives can never be pluralized which means that the correct form to write the sentence is: Ricardo Arjona writes beautiful songs.

Omission of verbs is the next error to be considered. It reached 8% of the errors that were found in the analyzed written samples. In relation to the rest of the aspects in this variable, omission of verbs is not representative. The following example was selected to illustrate this error:

"The best artist in the world Jonny Lexus"

The error that was found in the sentence does not interfere in the understanding of the sentence. As it can be noticeable, the example shows that the student did not use a form of the verb to be that was needed to have a total understanding of the sentence. The correct form to write the example is: The best artist in the world is Jonny Lexus.

Word order only reached 8% of the total errors made by students and it is not representative to the rest of aspects considered in this variable. The following example was selected to illustrate this error:

"I love her songs, I listen them always in the afternoons."

As it can be seen, the student does not put the words in the correct order, the student does not know how to order properly the words in a sentence. On the other hand, the student also forgot to use the preposition *to* after the word *listen*. The knowledge required to write the sentence in a proper way is that frequency adverbs have to be before a do verb and also that the verb *listen* must be written with the preposition *to* in this example. The error committed in this sentence does not interfere that much in the understanding of the sentence. The correct form to write this sentence is: I love her songs, I <u>always listen</u> to them in the afternoons

Incorrect literal translation errors reached 7% of the written samples. It is the least common errors of this category. As well as the word order errors, incorrect literal translation errors are not representative in this section. The following sentence is an example of this error made by a student:

"I love her dress color green"

The example written above shows the committed error caused by the interference with the L1, the student wrote the sentence based on a Spanish-sentence structure. In this case, the student is using the word color, which is not necessary. In the same way, the word green has to be placed before the noun dress. It means that the correct form to write the sentence is: I love her <u>green dress</u>.

The EFL students of the public school where this research was done, committed all types of errors mentioned in the section "form of language". In addition, the instruments applied to students and teachers (questionnaires) were analyzed, and the results supported the information written above. Most of the participants agreed that students usually have problems when dealing with aspects related to grammar. However, there are two perspectives to consider in this section.

One of the perspectives mentioned above is the teacher's perspective. Most of them agreed that the students make errors in writing when using all the elements of a sentence, ordering words, or even writing the correct words in a sentence, as students usually invent words.

Another reason, according to the teachers' responses, is that students do not consider grammar as an important element for writing; and the last reason provided by the teachers is that students consider grammar as a difficult thing to learn.

On the other hand, the questionnaires applied to students show that the main three reasons why students commit grammar errors on their writing activities are first, they think that grammar is something very difficult for them to learn. Secondly, the teacher does not provide the corrections to their pieces of writing so that students do not know where the mistake is or why their writing piece is wrong. Finally, they do not consider grammar as an important element to write.

As a conclusion, grammar in writing is a very important fact. As Endley (2010) states: "There is too much about grammar for any teacher or linguist to explain to students, it is because grammar has to do with the language itself" (p.91).

Content: topic sentence, supporting sentences, transition words
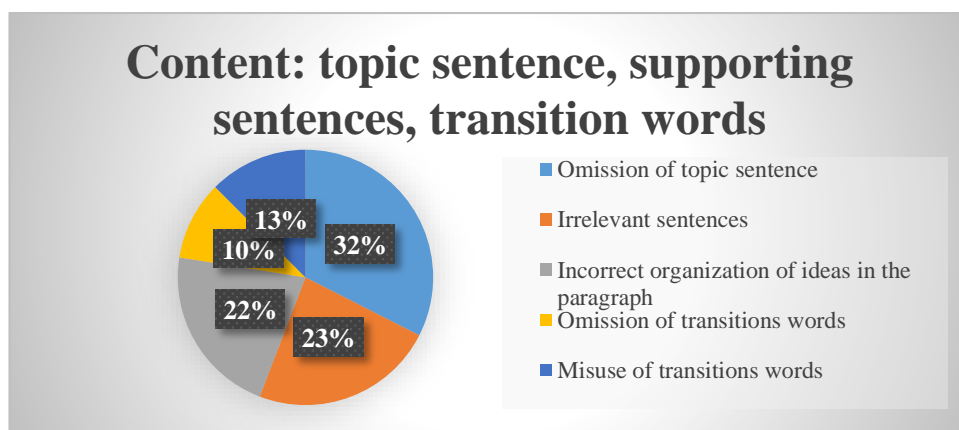
Graph 2
Author: Ronnie Quinteros.
Source: Written samples tabulation, 2017.

When creating a text, the writer has to be careful with some of these aspects: omission of transitions, incorrect organization of ideas in the paragraph, omission of topic sentence, irrelevant sentences, and misuse of transition words.

Omission of topic sentence is the aspect that reached the highest percentage of errors considered in this variable. The 32% of the total written samples presented this error, which is representative in relation to the variable. It clearly shows that English lessons planned for writing do not provide enough information about the writing procedures students need to follow. The student's missing knowledge is that the topic sentence has to be stated at the beginning of the paragraph, and has to provide an introduction for the paragraph. The following example shows the omission of the topic sentence:

"She's very famous. I love to listen to her in the TV; she is very popular in the songs. She is nice."

This example shows how the student does not write the topic sentence in the paragraph. The correct paragraph would be:

My favorite singer is Shakira because she is very famous and nice. Her songs are very popular and I love to watch her on TV.

Irrelevant sentences reached 23% of the total errors in this section. The analysis done in this section shows that students usually use irrelevant sentences without any sense because they want to express their ideas or just to complete the task. The following example shows how a student writes irrelevant information:

"My favorite singer is 1D, it is a beautiful band, they sing romantic songs. Zayn has 32 teeth, Harry has 31 teeth, Liam has 30 teeth, Louis has 29 teeth, Niall has 28 teeth."

The information this student provided is irrelevant, as people do not normally like singers for how many teeth they have, but for the singer's personality traits and the value or quality of their songs.

The structure of the sentences does interfere in the understanding of the idea. In addition, there is too much irrelevant information. The correct sentence would be: My favorite band is 1D, it is a beautiful band, and they sing romantic songs.

Incorrect organization of ideas reached 22% of the total written samples. This error has been seen throughout the study, which means that students do not have coherence when expressing their ideas. The following example expresses this error:

"My favorite band is One Direction, they sing Pop music. They speak English. My favorite song is "Over again" and they are from England."

The sample cited above shows how students make this error of organization and the omission of linkers. It is very important to mention that disorganization interferes in the understanding of the idea because a paragraph must have cohesion, coherence and unity. If there is not order, the sentences will not have coherence. The correct form to write it should be: My favorite band is One Direction. They sing Pop music and they have beautiful songs, but my favorite song is "Over again". Its members are form England <u>so</u> they speak English.

The item *Misuse of transition words* reached 13% of the written mistakes. The example analyzed is:

"I listen to One Direction however my sister listens to reggaeton."

In the example provided above, the student uses the transition word 'however', it has a punctuation mistake because this transition word has to be followed by a comma. The correct sentence would be:

I listen to One Direction. <u>However,</u> my sister listens to reggaeton.

Omission of transition words reached 10% of the total errors in this variable. The following is an example of this error:

"My favorite singer is Justin Bieber. I love him for many reasons. He is beautiful he sings beautiful he has muscles…he has beautiful songs."

The student did not use transition words to join ideas or even to go from one idea to another. The correct form to write this part of the paragraph should be:

My favorite singer is Justin Bieber. I love him for many reasons. <u>First,</u> he is beautiful. <u>Second,</u> he sings beautifully. <u>Finally</u>, he has beautiful songs and he is muscular.

The results of the questionnaires applied to the teachers showed the main reasons for students to commit errors in this variable: the first reason is that it is difficult for students to identify and include the elements in a paragraph. The second reason for teachers is that these elements are not important for students neither in Spanish nor in English.

On the other hand, the questionnaire applied to the students showed that they often make content errors, but it is because the elements are difficult to apply at the moment of writing, and also that they are elements that are not used when writing neither in Spanish or English.

Mechanical aspects: punctuation, spelling, capitalization

The mechanical aspects of writing are the third variable to be considered in this study. It refers to the form of the writing rather than the content and uses the different rules existing in the language or written code.

Graph 1 Mechanical aspects: Punctuation, spelling, Capitalization
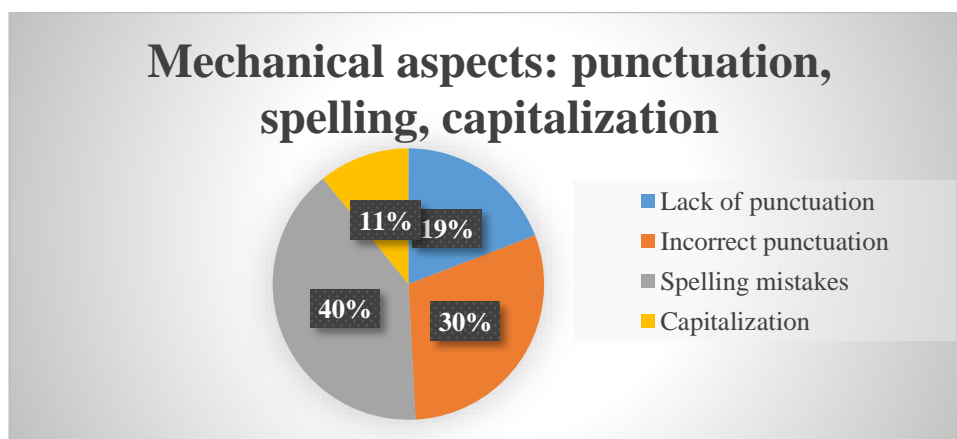
Graph 3
Author: Ronnie Quinteros.
Source: Written samples tabulation, 2017.

Spelling mistakes are the most common errors in this variable; it reached 40% of the total of written samples, which makes this error very representative in relation to the rest of aspects in this variable. Spelling mistakes have to do with orthography and when a mistake of spelling is found in a sentence, it actually does interfere in the meaning of the sentence. This type of errors are very usual in EFL writing, an example of this error is:

"I am very exited when I listen to music of Justin"

As it can be noticeable, the error of spelling is seen in the word <u>exited</u>. The possible reasons for students to have this type of errors is the lack of reading or writing activities inside or outside the class. The correct form to write the sentence is: I am very <u>excited</u> when I listen to Justin's music.

Incorrect punctuation reached 30% of the written samples. This is an error commonly presented when EFL writers do not have an accurate knowledge about the elements or rules of punctuation. The following example illustrates the incorrect punctuation errors:

"My favorite singer is Daniel Betancourt. He is 36 years old. He is Ecuadorian. He has beautiful songs. My favorite song is "Seductora".

The example shows a paragraph without the correct use of the period. The correct punctuation to be used in the example described above is a comma (,). It allows writers to separate the ideas in a paragraph. The correct paragraph would be: My favorite singer is Daniel Betancourt. He is 36 years old<u>, he</u> is Ecuadorian<u>, and</u> he has beautiful songs. My favorite song is "Seductora".

Lack of punctuation reached 19% of the total errors found in the written samples. It is not representative in relation to the rest of aspects in this variable. The following is an example of error caused by the lack of punctuation:

"My favorite singer is Ed Sheeran he is 25 years old and he is from England"

The sentence written above does not have appropriate punctuation marks, as they should take into consideration the use of the period to finish an idea and the comma to join ideas. The correct form to write the sentence is:

My favorite singer is Ed Sheeran. He is 25 years old and he is from England.

Capitalization is the less common error found in the written samples, it reaches 13% of the considered errors in this variable. Capitalization in English usually gets students confused because of the interference with L1. Students, most of the time, use L1 capitalization rules when writing in English. The following example shows the capitalization error:

"I don't like music very much, but my favorite singer is katty perry, i listen to her music on fridays because i don't have much free time"

The sentences written above are clear examples of errors of capitalization because of the transference of L1 rules as students did not capitalize the personal pronoun I, the day of the week and the name of the singer, which is a proper noun. The correct sentence would be:
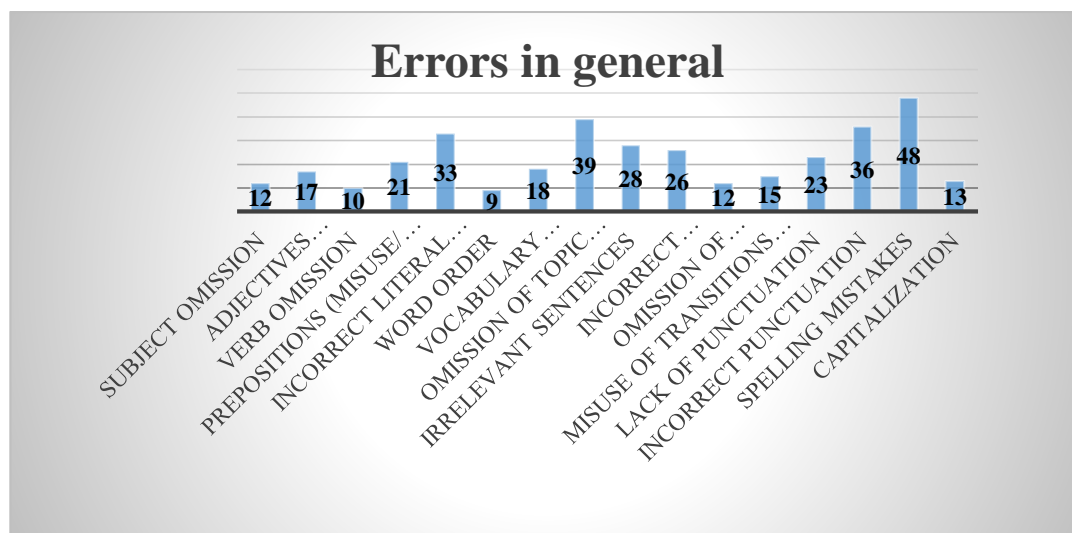
I don't like music very much, but my favorite singer is Katty Perry. I listen to her music on Fridays because I don't have much free time.

The questionnaire applied to teachers offers, as a result, their reasons for students making the type of errors mentioned above. The first reason is that the importance of elements in writing such as capitalization, punctuation, and spelling is not properly explained in class because it is not part of the syllabus. The second reason is that the use of these elements is not important for students when they write since teachers assess students' vocabulary and grammar usage.

In the same way, the students agreed with their teachers in those aspects, it means that students are not taught about the significance of these elements in writing. The second reason is that they do not consider the elements described above as important in writing.

The most frequent error in EFL writing

Graph 2 Errors in general

Errors in general

Category	Value
SUBJECT OMISSION	12
ADJECTIVES...	17
VERB OMISSION	10
PREPOSITIONS (MISUSE/...	21
INCORRECT LITERAL...	33
WORD ORDER	9
VOCABULARY...	18
OMISSION OF TOPIC...	39
IRRELEVANT SENTENCES	28
INCORRECT...	26
OMISSION OF...	12
MISUSE OF TRANSITIONS...	15
LACK OF PUNCTUATION	23
INCORRECT PUNCTUATION	36
SPELLING MISTAKES	48
CAPITALIZATION	13

Graph 4

Author: Ronnie Quinteros.

Source: Written samples tabulation, 2017.

As the Graph 4 shows, the most frequent error found according to the tabulation of the surveys is "spelling", which represents 48% of the total. The results show that the errors made by EFL students are due to the fragile memory they have to assimilate the information provided by the teacher, especially if the teacher does not give the respective academic feedback of the content; it is because if the student does not internalize a new knowledge, it is lost or forgotten. This fact creates knowledge gaps in students. The more they try to learn new things without any feedback, the more difficult to understand it is because they do not have basic knowledge that allows them to continue the progress in the educational field.

It was also possible to notice that the errors of "spelling" in the students go hand in hand with the problems of "listening", because if the student cannot identify the word only by listening to it, he/she will probably fail at the moment of trying to project it in his/her mind. Therefore, it will be impossible to spell it correctly, especially if the student is not able to recognize the basic pronunciation of the vowels and consonants of the alphabet.

CONCLUSIONS

The highest incidence of students' grammar errors has to do with the omission of the subject. An explanation for this issue is that in Spanish, people do not need to mention the subject all the time in speaking or writing; that is why students get confused and omit the subject when writing.

The uppermost frequency of content errors is related to the omission of the topic sentence. Most of the time, students do not write the topic sentence because they do not know the way to determine whether it is a topic or a supporting sentence. The most important reason for this is the lack of teachers' explanations about topic and supporting sentences, about their correct use of them in a paragraph, the teaching procedures, and their adequate practice.

The most common errors related to the mechanical aspects of writing have to do with spelling. In this case, there are several factors influencing on this aspect; one of them is the lack of sufficient feedback to students from the teacher concerning EFL writing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Teachers should plan activities through which students can develop all the aspects (or most of them) considered in this study such as a correct punctuation, capitalization, spelling, grammar, among others in order to decrease the percentage of errors incidence in each variable.

For students to decrease their incidence in spelling mistakes, teachers should develop reading activities and connect them to writing activities. It is also important for teachers to encourage students to work harder with the words if they have any difficulty. To provide a solution to the problem dealt with in the present research: the students´ errors in EFL writing skill, both teachers and students have to do their best to overcome the difficulties presented concerning writing. Teachers should plan activities that engage students and take them into an active learning. On the other hand, students should do their best, change their attitude and get willing to learn.

Finally, it is advisable that teachers give feedback after students deliver any written assignment. Sometimes finding the proper time to do that is difficult. Therefore, they should schedule revision time and/or discuss this issue with the academic supervisor to avoid this difficulty. They should also find the best teaching training available. It could either be traditional or online training, or they may discuss this aspect with the school principal for the possibility of a local training, specifically for writing in EFL.

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   COMMON-TYPES-OF-WRITING-

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Annexes

Annex N° 1: teacher's questionnaire

UNIVERSIDAD TÉCNICA PARTICULAR DE LOJA

La Universidad Católica de Loja

MODALIDAD ABIERTA Y A DISTANCIA

TITULACIÓN DE INGLES

TEACHER'S QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear teacher,

The aim of this brief questionnaire is to obtain information concerning your opinion about your students' errors in EFL writing skill. The following information will only be used for academic/research purposes. Please answer the following questions as honestly as possible based on the following questions:

Gender: Male (   )   Female(   )

1. In your opinion, do your students like to write in English?

   Yes (   )   No (   )

Why?

_____

_____

2. According to your opinion, is it important for your students to write in English accurately?

Yes ( ) No ( )

Why?

_____

_____

3. How often do you ask your students to do writing activities in class?

Always ( )   Often ( )   Sometimes ( )   Rarely ( )   Never ( )

4. Which is your students' writing level?

Advanced ( )   Intermediate ( )   Beginner ( )

Why?

_____

_____

5. Do your students write a piece of writing based on the feedback that you have included

in their previous writing tasks?

Yes ( )   No ( )

Why?

_____

_____

6. Do you give feedback to your students when they make writing errors?

Yes ( )   No ( )

Why?

_____

_____

7. How often do you find grammar errors in your students' piece of writing?

TYPE OF ERROR	ALWAYS	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	RARELY	NEVER

GRAMMAR ERRORS (subject omission, adjectives: pluralization/ wrong position, verb omission, prepositions: misuse/ omission, incorrect literal translation, word order, vocabulary: invented words / false cognates, etc.)					

8. Number from 1 to 6 the causes why your students make grammar errors when they write in English. (1= the least important, 6= the most important).

Grammar contents are not explained in writing activities ( )

You do not highlight your students' grammar errors in their piece of writing ( )

You do not include feedback in your students' writing activities ( )

Grammar is not considered by your students as an important element to write accurately ( )

Learning grammar is difficult for your students ( )

Your students do not understand your grammar explanation ( )

Others (Which one?):_____

9. How often do you find content errors in your students' piece of writing

TYPE OF ERROR	ALWAYS	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	RARELY	NEVER
CONTENT ERRORS: Omission of topic sentence, irrelevant sentences, incorrect organization of ideas in the paragraph, omission of transitions words, misuse of transitions words					

10. Number from 1 to 7 the causes why your students make content errors when they write in English. (1= the least important, 7= the most important).

The concept and role of **elements** in writing such as **topic sentence, supporting sentences, organization of ideas, and use of transition words** are not explained in class. ( )

There is not any writing activity, related to the practice of the **aforementioned elements**, to do in class. ( )

It is difficult for your students to identify and include **these elements** in a paragraph. ( )

Your students forget to include these elements when they write. ( )

These **elements** are not important for your students neither in Spanish nor in English ( )

The correct use of these elements do not have any impact on the development of their writing skill. ( )

You do not highlight or correct these type of errors in your students' piece of writing. ( )

Others (Which one?):_____

11. How often do you find mechanical errors in your students' piece of writing?

TYPE OF ERROR	ALWAYS	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	RARELY	NEVER
MECHANICAL ERRORS: Lack of punctuation, Incorrect punctuation, Spelling mistakes, Capitalization					

12. Number from 1 to 7 the causes why your students make mechanical errors when they write in English 1= the least important, 7= the most important).

The importance of **elements** in writing such as **punctuation, capital letters, and spelling** is not explained in class.   ( )

There is not any writing activity related to the practice of the aforementioned elements in class.

( )

The use of these elements is not important for your students when they write.   ( )

These elements are not important for your students neither in Spanish nor in English   ( )

It is difficult for your students to include these elements in a paragraph.   ( )

Your students forget to include these elements when they write.   ( )

You do not highlight or correct this type of error in your students' piece of writing.   ( )

Others (Which one?):_____

Annex N° 2: written work

UNIVERSIDAD TÉCNICA PARTICULAR DE LOJA

La Universidad Católica de Loja

MODALIDAD ABIERTA Y A DISTANCIA

TITULACIÓN DE INGLÉS

TRABAJO ESCRITO

Género: Femenino () Masculino ()

OBJETIVO: Obtener información sobre el tipo de errores que se cometen en la escritura en inglés de un párrafo.

INSTRUCCIÓN: Escriba un párrafo sobre el tema: "My favorite singer"

ESTRATEGIA: El párrafo debe contener un mínimo de 100 a 150 palabras en un tiempo de 20 a 25 minutos. Incluya la información necesaria para dar a conocer cuál es su cantante favorito, las razones, y las características de este/esta.

My favorite singer

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

GRACIAS POR SU COLABORACIÓN

Annex N° 3: student´s questionnaire

UNIVERSIDAD TÉCNICA PARTICULAR DE LOJA

La Universidad Católica de Loja

MODALIDAD ABIERTA Y A DISTANCIA

TITULACIÓN DE INGLÉS

STUDENT'S QUESTIONNAIRE

Género: Masculino (   ) Femenino (   )

1. ¿Le gusta escribir en inglés?

Sí (   ) No (   )

¿Por qué?

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_____

2. ¿Considera importante aprender a escribir correctamente en inglés?

Sí (   ) No (   )

¿Por qué?

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3. ¿Con qué frecuencia desarrolla Ud. actividades de escritura en inglés en el aula?

Siempre (   ) Frecuentemente (   ) A veces (   ) Rara vez (   ) Nunca (   )

4. ¿Considera que su nivel de escribir en inglés es…?

Muy bueno (   ) Bueno (   ) Regular (   ) Malo (   )

¿Por qué?

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_____

_____

5. ¿Cree que los errores que se cometen al escribir inciden para que los demás comprendan el mensaje de su texto escrito?

Sí (   ) No (   )

¿Por qué?

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_____

6. Cuando Ud. escribe sobre un tema nuevo ¿Aplica las correcciones que hizo su profesor en sus escritos anteriores?

Sí (   ) No (   )

¿Por qué?

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7. Marque con una X la frecuencia con la que Ud. comete errores gramaticales cuando escribe en inglés:

TIPO DE ERROR	SIEMPRE	FRECUENTEMENTE	A VECES	RARA VEZ	NUNCA
GRAMATICALES (omisión de sujeto,					

pluralización de adjetivos, incorrecto uso u omisión de preposiciones, traducción incorrecta, palabras inventadas, etc.)					

8. Enumere del 1 al 6 las razones por las que Ud. comete errores de gramática cuando escribe en inglés? Siendo 1 la menos importante y 6 la más importante.

No se presentan actividades de escritura para aplicar los temas gramaticales del inglés aprendidos en clase. ( )

Su profesor no señala los errores gramaticales que Ud. ha comete cuando escribe en inglés. ( )

Su profesor no explica los errores gramaticales cometidos en su escrito. ( )

Considera que la gramática no es importante para escribir correctamente en inglés ( )

Le resulta difícil aplicar la gramática inglesa cuando escribe sobre un tema. ( )

Las explicaciones gramaticales de su profesor no son fáciles de comprender. ( )

Otra (especifique): _____

9. Marque con una X la frecuencia con la que Ud. comete errores de contenido cuando escribe en inglés:

TIPO DE ERROR	SIEMPRE	FRECUENTEMENTE	A VECES	RARA VEZ	NUNCA

ERRORES DE CONTENIDO (Relacionados con: omisión de la oración principal, oración principal mal planteada, oraciones secundarias que no se relacionan con la oración principal, oraciones mal ordenadas, oraciones mal conectadas, oraciones sin conexión entre sí.)					

10. Enumere del 1 al 7 las razones por las que Ud. comete errores de contenido cuando escribe en inglés? Siendo 1 la menos importante y 7 la más importante.

Su profesor de inglés no explica sobre la función de la oración principal, oraciones secundarias, organización de ideas, conexión y secuencia de ideas en el proceso de escritura   ( )

No hay práctica sobre el uso de los elementos mencionados durante las actividades de escritura en la clase de inglés.   ( )

Son difíciles de aplicar los elementos de contenido al momento de escribir.   ( )

Olvida aplicarlos cuando escribe sobre un tema.   ( )

Son elementos que tampoco los aplica cuando escribe en español   ( )

Usted considera que los errores de contenido (pregunta anterior) NO influyen para que su escrito esté correctamente redactado. ( )

Su profesor no corrige este tipo de errores en su escrito. ( )

Otra (especifique): _____

11. Marque con una X la frecuencia con la que Ud. comete errores mecánicos cuando escribe en inglés:

TIPO DE ERROR	SIEMPRE	FRECUENTEMENTE	A VECES	RARA VEZ	NUNCA
ERRORES MECÁNICOS (relacionados con: el incorrecto uso u omisión de signos de puntuación, uso incorrecto de mayúsculas, palabras mal escritas)					

12. Enumere del 1 al 7 las razones por las que Ud. comete errores mecánicos cuando escribe en inglés? Siendo 1 la menos importante y 7 la más importante.

Su profesor no explica la importancia del uso de signos de puntuación, mayúsculas, palabras bien escritas, etc. en la redacción de un texto en inglés.

        ( )

No hay práctica sobre el uso de los elementos antes mencionados en la escritura de un texto en inglés.   ( )

Le resulta indiferente el uso o no de los elementos mencionados anteriormente.   ( )

Son elementos que Ud. tampoco los aplica cuando escribe en español   ( )

Son difíciles de aplicar estos elementos al momento de escribir en inglés.   ( )

Olvida aplicarlos cuando escribe sobre un tema en inglés.   ( )

Su profesor no corrige este tipo de errores en su escrito.   ( )

Otra (especifique): _____

¡Gracias por su colaboración!

Annex N° 4: Authorization

Quito, 21 de diciembre de 2016

Dr. Dino Molina
RECTOR DEL COLEGIO NACIONAL AMAZONAS
Presente.-

Yo, RONNIE ANDRÉ QUINTEROS MEZA, ecuatoriano con cédula de ciudadanía 1723026355, solicito de la forma más comedida y respetuosa se me permita realizar las encuestas necesarias para la culminación de mi trabajo de titulación de la carrera CIENCIAS DE LA EDUCACIÓN, MENCIÓN INGLÉS en la institución que usted bien dirige. Dicha encuesta tiene una duración de 25 minutos y es dirigida a los estudiantes de segundos años de bachillerato general unificado; como a su vez a los docentes que imparten la materia de inglés.

Seguro de contar con su ayuda, anticipo mis agradecimientos.

Atentamente,

Ronnie Quinteros