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

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De mi consideración:

El presente trabajo de titulación: **"Ecuadorian public high school students´ errors in EFL writing skills"** realizado por Tinoco Carrión Priscila Verónica, ha sido orientado y revisado durante su ejecución, por cuanto se aprueba la presentación del mismo.

Loja, marzo de 2017

f)……

DECLARACIÓN DE AUTORÍA Y CESIÓN DE DERECHOS

“Yo, Tinoco Carrión Priscila Verónica declaro ser autora del presente trabajo de titulación: “Ecuadorian public high school students´ errors in EFL writing skills”, de la Titulación de Ciencias de la Educación mención Inglés, siendo la Mgs. Lisset Vanessa Toro Gallardo directora del presente trabajo; y eximio expresamente a la Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja y a sus representantes legales de posibles reclamos o acciones legales. Además certifico que las ideas, conceptos, procedimientos y resultados vertidos en el presente trabajo investigativo, son de mi exclusiva responsabilidad.

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f.....

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DEDICATION

I want to dedicate this thesis to God for the life and health that he gave me to study and obtain the Bachelor Degree. To my family for their unconditional support during all these years to fulfil this goal.

Priscila

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I would like to express my gratitude to the Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja for their academic support. Next, I would like to thank the valuable collaboration and participation of the teachers and students who answered the questionnaires and helped me in the way to gather some necessary information in order to be able to finish my thesis study.

Priscila

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ABSTRACT

This study is aimed to investigate the Ecuadorian public high school students´ errors in EFL writing skills; which purpose is to identify different types of writing errors, the most frequent errors, causes and reasons of those errors.

This research was done in the city of Zaruma, being the sample for the investigation 80 students and 5 teachers from second year senior public high school. The instruments for data collection were students and teachers questionnaires, as well as a written text. The information gathered was organized and analyzed using the quantitative and qualitative methods.

Findings from this study reveal that in the areas: grammar, mechanics, and content were found various errors that marked a high level of occurrence. The most frequent errors about grammar were incorrect literal translation, misuse of prepositions, and pluralization of adjectives; the mechanical errors were spelling mistakes and lack of punctuation; while among the content errors, the major problem lied on incorrect organization of ideas and omission of transition words.

Key words: writing errors, EFL students, public schools.

RESUMEN

Este estudio está enfocado a investigar los errores de escritura que presentan los estudiantes de colegios públicos en el Ecuador cuando escriben en Inglés, cuyo propósito es identificar los tipos de errores, los errores más frecuentes, y las razones que causan tales errores de escritura.

Esta investigación se hizo en la ciudad de Zaruma, siendo la muestra para este estudio 80 estudiantes de segundo año de bachillerato de un colegio público, y 5 profesores de inglés. Los instrumentos utilizados para recolectar los datos fueron cuestionarios para estudiantes y profesores, y una hoja para escritura. Toda la información fue analizada considerando los métodos cuantitativo y cualitativo.

Los resultados revelan que se encontró varios tipos de errores gramaticales, de contenido, y mecánicos. Entre los errores gramaticales se encontró traducción literal de ideas, incorrecto uso de preposiciones, y pluralización de adjetivos; errores de contenido tales como incorrecta organización de ideas y omisión de palabras de transición; y entre los errores mecánicos se encontró incorrecta puntuación y mala ortografía.

Palabras claves: escritura, errores, inglés como lengua extranjera.

INTRODUCTION

The writing skill plays a key role in the process of learning a foreign language, but mastering a good writing is a very hard task for English foreign language (EFL) learners. Most of EFL learners commit different types of errors in their writing texts. That is, this study tries to investigate the types of errors that students produce in their writings, the most frequent writing errors, and sources that cause those errors.

The errors found in the students' writings are analyzed under three variables: form of the language, content errors, and mechanical errors. Besides, the analysis is done based on three questions: which error has the highest percentage in each variable? Which is the most frequent error in the students´ written texts? and how do students and teachers perceive errors in EFL writing?

In order to give more details about the types of writing errors, previous studies were considered, which have been conducted to investigate errors in EFL writing, one of those studies was an investigation carried out by Watcharapunyawong and Usaha (2013), it was focused on analyzing writing errors caused by the interference of the first language (L1), regarding three writing genres: narration, description, and comparison/contrast. The findings showed 16 categories: verb tense, word choice, sentence structure, article, preposition, modal/auxiliary, singular/plural form, fragment, verb form, pronoun, run-on sentence, infinitive/gerund, transition, subject-verb agreement, parallel structure, and comparison structure, respectively.

Another study carried out by Ngangbam (2016), its objective was to examine the English syntactic errors that students commit in their EFL writings. Findings revealed that the grammatical structures were the major difficult area in writing activities. Various errors about subject- verb agreement, and several incomplete expressions and sentences were found within the students´ written passages. Moreover, regarding the use of prepositions, the most frequent errors committed by the learners were the omission or overuse of unnecessary prepositions or wrong preposition. Other errors were related to punctuation, being the most frequent errors the misuse or overuse of commas. According to Ngangbam, the students also made other mistakes, such as: overuse of coordinated clauses, difficulties in verbs tense, wrong use of phrasal verb, misuse of articles, poor vocabulary, and wrong organization of ideas in the texts.

The third previous study was carried out by Shitu (2015), it had as objective to identify the errors, analyze their structural compositions, and find out whether there are patterns to the EFL writing errors. The findings showed various types of errors produced by the students in their writing tasks. The first error found in this study was word choice errors; it means that the

choice of one word or both words are erroneous. For example, the students wrote the phrases: "*Doing inspection*" instead of "*Conduct inspection*", "*I am full happy*" instead of "*I am very happy*". The second error found was word forms errors, these errors occur when the form of the word use is incorrect. For example: "*eat three meals"* in place of "*take three meal"*; "*study deeply"* in place of "*study hard".* Moreover, the errors about the combined words were also very frequent, these are words compound by two words, which are sometimes joined by a hyphen. However, the students used hyphen when it is not required or vice versa, for example, "*every- day*" in place of "*everyday".* Finally, the author found that the subject–verb agreement mistakes also marked a high level of occurrence in EFL writings.

This case study will provide important information about the kind of problems that students face in EFL classrooms when they have to write texts in English. This investigation will serve as a reference for EFL teachers, in order to understand the different errors students make. Besides, this study is also focused on looking for the best strategies to overcome those problems, and help to the learners become better writers in English. Nonetheless, this study could be considered as a base for other studies about errors in EFL writing, especially for learners who are interested in this topic.

CHAPTER I.
LITERATURE REVIEW

This section includes supporting concepts and definitions taken from scientific information related to EFL writing skills. The subjects that will be studied in this paper are the following: writing (definition, importance and the process of writing), coherence, cohesion and unity in written texts, elements of writing (topic sentences, supporting sentences, transition words, punctuation, spelling, capitalization and grammar in EFL writings); errors in EFL writing (causes and types of errors).

Additionally, in this current study, six previous studies have been taken into account which show remarkable results based on EFL learners´ errors in the writing process.

Writing skill

Definition.

Writing is a powerful tool that allows the individuals express their thoughts, feelings, and knowledge through the written language, being its main objective to communicate an effective and efficient message. In this way, Caswel and Mahler (2004) state that writing is the vehicle for communication and a skill required in all aspects of life. In other words, writing can assist to communicate successfully in every facet of our life such as: education, work and society.

In addition, Strongman (2013) defines this skill as an art and a science, a learned behavior, a controlled response, an articulatory device, and a form of instruction. That is, the writing has been always regarded as an important element of communication useful in the educational process and social context.

Importance.

Writing has been considered as a very important element of communication because it can support not only a learning process, but also allows learners the opportunity to communicate in a written form with other people from different countries around the world. (Pachler and Redondo, 2014). Moreover, regarding the importance of writing in education and into the learning language process, the same author says that teaching writing provides opportunities for students to develop clear thinking skills. When students dedicate time to develop writing activities and process their ideas to be recorded in a piece of paper, they develop a way to analyze their thinking. Through writing, they discover the channels of logic and the pitfalls of fallacies.

Additionally, Harmer (2012) clearly identifies that writing gives some advantages to the EFL learners because they frequently have more time to think than they do in oral activities. They can go through what they know in their minds, and even looking up meaning of words in dictionaries, review grammar books, or other reference material to help them. In other words,

writing encourages students to focus on accurate language usage because they think as they write, so it provokes language development due to they have time to resolve problems that the topic puts into their minds.

The writing process.

Most of writers follow their own writing process which is like a routine or certain steps that guide the writer to complete a written text. Thus, Gould and Gould (2015) determine that the writing process requires a simultaneous integration of many critical elements and establish that the writing process is a Multi-step procedure that a writer follows when he or she goes from original ideas to record them in a paper and then publishing a written work. But according to the author, it has a prescribed sequence of steps which vary in number and name. For example, some common terminology for the writing process steps follow: focusing (topic choice, brainstorming), ordering (organizing the storm), drafting (getting it on paper), revising (editing-making the writing better), proofreading (correcting the mistakes), and publishing (sharing it with others).

Acoording to Ghizan (2015), the writing process goes through stages that may start by writings ideas until the whole message is sent clearly to reach the ear or the eyes of the readers or listeners. He also argues that every writing process is a separated form of composing that deals with ideas, information, images, feelings and knowledge which are always transmited through a written message. However, this kind of compositions have to follow some basic steps such as planning, drafting, editing, and publishing. In planning, the writers consider the purpose of the writing, the audience they are writing for and the content structure of the piece. Drafting means the first version of a piece of writing. Editing is the revision of the draft which was focused on analysing grammatical, mechanical and content errors. And finally, publishing is the culminating stage of any writing project.

Coherence, Cohesion, and Unity

Coherence.

It is the effect of meaningful construction into a sentence, between sentences or paragraphs that contribute to transmit an efficient message, which means that the individual parts of an argument are working together proficiently to deliver a clear and logical message. In fact, coherence is defined as the quality of writing something logically integrated with consistencies to avoid that the reader misunderstand the message (Stirling, 2014).

Similarly, Kolby (2015) explains that all coherent writing has superstructure or blueprint, that is, the writers should organize their ideas and present them in a logical manner, which show a kind of internal logic in a written text. When a text is coherent, the reader can understand at least two things: understanding what the writer´s purpose is, and second, the reader should not have difficulty to follow the story and not get confused by time jumps, or too many characters.

Cohesion.

It is defined as the flow of sentences and paragraphs from one to another for trying together the ideas and construct a central argument. That is, it is important emphasize that every text has a structure which should not be only a random collection of sentences because they have to be related and explicitly connected to one another by using linking words and phrases known as transitions, connectors or conjunctions, (Colby, 2014). In concrete the same author concludes that cohesion is a measure of how well the individual sentences in a paragraph are linked together to convey an effective message, it helps to create a proper relationship between the ideas expressed in different sentences and the integration of those sentences in a same paragraph; however, if the writer does not make this relationship of ideas clearly, the paragraph becomes harder to comprehend.

In addition to this information, Wattie (2014) claims that the first step to improve cohesion is through the application of transition words, transition phrases, and conjunctions, which are used to connect the sentences and transmit a clear message.

Unity.

An important element of a good writing project is the unity of the content. When a paragraph has unity, it means that all the supporting sentences are related to the topic sentence, which makes possible to discuss more than one aspect of the same idea in one paragraph as long as they are closely related to each other. In other words, unity is produced when every supporting sentence are directly explained and gives support to the main idea showing cohesion and coherence, (Oshima and Hogue, 2007).

According to Shiyab and Halimi (2015), in writing every part of a paragraph need to be connected with another to create unity in the written text. Therefore the words, phrases and sentences have to be connected to each other taking into consideration cohesion and coherence, since without those both features, it is imposible that a writing passage gets unity. As a matter of fact, cohesion helps to accomplish grammatical unity into a text; while coherence takes care whether or not that unity makes sense. For example, the sentence “the dog sings a song” “the tigers fly” contain cohesion because their grammatical structure is correct, but they do not have coherence because they hold lack of sense.

Elements of writing

As can be noted in previous studies, in writing all the paragraphs have to complete with basic elements to create a complex text such as topic sentence, supporting sentences, transitions, punctuation, spelling, capitalization and grammar rules, which will be analyzed one by one in this section.

Topic sentence.

In writing passages “the topic sentence states the main idea of the paragraph. It not only names the topic of the paragraph, but it also limits the topic to one specific area that can be discussed completely in the space of a single paragraph” (Oshima and Hogue, 2006, p. 3). Moreover, they say that a topic sentence is the most essential sentence in a paragraph because it contains the main idea of the paragraph, which contain two parts: the topic and the controlling idea. The topic is the subject of the paragraph, it is what the writer is writing about; while the controlling idea limits the paragraph to discuss or explore into the paragraph only a single idea. Finally, Oshima and Hogue conclude that a topic sentence is the main statement that controls the content of the paragraph. This control helps the writer focuses on supporting ideas in the paragraph that are directly related to the topic sentence.

Supporting sentences.

In a paragraph, all the sentences that prove and develop the topic sentence are known as supporting sentences, which always must be related to the main idea. The supporting sentence are a basic component in the paragraph because they help the reader to understand the main idea by given more information about it. (Singleton, 2005).

According to Oshima and Hogue (2006), this kind of sentences are central to create a paragraph that contribute with extra ideas to describe the topic sentence. Besides, they explain or prove the topic sentence by given more information about it.

Transition words.

This type of words are really important to determine the logical connection between phrases, sentences and paragraphs in a writing discussion. According to Miller and Cohen (2009), transition words should not be omitted within a paragraph or between paragraphs because they are really necessary to advertise the reader about certain modification between positive and negative factors, so these words have been separated in some categories: addition, time, place, comparison, contrast, purpose, conclusion, and others. In fact, transition words are considered as a common type of linking words that help to connect sentences to one another. Moreover, these authors argue that when a transitional sentence connects the ideas from one body paragraph to other ideas from another body paragraph, it can be placed at the beginning of a paragraph or at the end of a paragraph.

Punctuation.

It is a system of marks used to support the clarity and comprehension of the written language. The most common punctuation marks consist of the following: period or full stop, colon, semicolon, comma, inverted commas or quotation marks, questions marks, exclamation mark, apostrophe, hyphen, brackets, and capital letters. On the other hand, according to earlier studies, incorrect puntuation and the lack of punctuation have been regarded as predominant writing errors produced by EFL learners. In this way, Harmer (2013) determines that the most of educated people judge the quality of writing passages not just on the content, vocabulary and handwriting, but also on their use of punctuation. Likewise, the author clarifies that if capital letters, punctuation conventions, sentence and paragraph boundaries are used incorrectly, this cannot only make a negative impression, but it can also make a text hard to comprehend.

In addition to this information, Harmer (2013) gives an advice to the EFL teachers and recommends that if teachers want their students to be successful in the writing skill, they need to teach them how to use punctuation conventions in the daily writing activities.

Spelling.

It is the ability to put the letters one by one to form words correctly. In definition, it is a process of writing words in a correct way using a proper structure or order of letters in the word. The learners should memorize the letters, then they must learn the sound and the order of them to form words. So, if learners have poor spelling skills, they will have difficulty to complete writing tasks, because spelling is the first requirement for developing an effective writing. (Gangal, 2011).

Capitalization.

This is the act of utilizing capital letters in the writing process. To complete with this process there is a general rule that determines the correct usage of capital letters in formal or informal writings, which states that the proper nouns, key words in titles, the pronoun *I*, the first word in a sentence, days and months, nationally words, names of people/ places, book titles (main words only), academic subjects, and names of organizations, must be always capitalized. (Bailey, 2014). In this respect, the same author argues that accurate punctuation and use of capital letters help the reader to understand exactly what the writer meant.

Grammar in EFL writing.

Grammar has always occupied a central place in the teaching and learning writing process, which has been applied in EFL classrooms. (Hüttner, 2012). Additionally, Endley (2010) states that there is no doubt that English teachers often have put emphasis on teaching grammar through the writing skill using the grammar translation method, in spite of it has been considered as an ambiguous technique. However, according to the author the grammatical

structures should be understood as a collection of conventionalized linguistic patterns useful to improve the writing and speaking skills.

Errors in EFL writing

Most of errors in writing are viewed as normal situation into the language learning process, and when the proficiency increases, the errors decrease relatively. Therefore, performing an excellent writing is a challenging task for all EFL learners and even for English native speakers. (Cook and Bassetti, 2005).

Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that there are three common categories of writing errors that learners often commit in their writings: grammatical errors, lexical errors and mechanical errors. According to Williams (2003), grammatical errors occur when people use some words in ways that English does not accept. For example, some learners have problems in subject/verb agreement, misuse of prepositions, pluralization of adjectives, articles, and so on.

In addition to this information, a previous investigation done by Al-Mahrooqi, Takur and Roscoe (2015) show that the most frequent writing errors were related to the grammar area in which include omition or misuse of auxiliary verbs, such as “be” and “have”, word order, omition of subjects, verb tense, misuse of preposition, conjugation of verbs in person and number, misuse of articles, and wrong use of object pronouns and subject pronouns.

According to Kellcher (2001), EFL learners will be good writers in English if they learn how to use punctuation conventions in a correct way. Using punctuation is a vital element that helps to improve meaning as the vocabulary and other linguistic elements do. Moreover, the author argues that punctuation is a set of signs that contains commas, semicolons, colons, dashes, periods, quotation marks, and exclamation points. On the other hand, the same author states that EFL teachers should emphasize the correct use and the importance of punctuation convention, and encourage learners to practice a lot of to improve their ability for using correctly the use of punctuation marks in the writing.

On the other hand, Yagelski (2015) also defines other factor that interfere to accomplish a good writing. It is the lack of knowledge of the words or the problem to make a distinction between similar words, because a lot of words look and sound equal, but they have different meaning and purposes, they are called homonyms. For instance, the words “effect” and “affect” have similar sound and a similar spelling due to only change the vowels “a” and “e”, but the first one is a verb and the second a noun and the meaning is totally different.

Furthermore, Granger and Leech (2013), state another negative aspect that cause problems to EFL learner which is the interference of mother tongue. These authors claim that the learners often use their L1 knowledge in grammar, mechanics and structure of content to apply them in the target language. For that reason, the mother tongue interference has been

considered as a main factor that cause persistent problems with L2 acquisition which affect not only to the writing skill, but this also affect to the other skills such as reading, listening and speaking.

In order to support this current study and prove the causes and types of errors in EFL writing, the information and findings of six previous studies done around the world have been analyzed in this paper.

Wu and Garza (2014) conducted a study to indentify the factors that cause errors in EFL writing. For this purpose, the writing errors were analyzed by answering two questions: what types of grammatical errors are more frequent in the compositions written by Chinese EFL students? What factors cause these errors in EFL students' writing samples? Moreover, the errors were evaluated regarding three variables: grammar, lexis, and content.

The findings of this study showed that the majority of errors were related to grammar, being the most frequent mistake associated to the subject verb agreement with a range of 12%; the errors about construction of sentences and fragments also had a similar frequency of occurrence in the written passages, getting 11%. Finally, misuse of singular/plural and omission of verbs were very numerous too that recorded the 7%. However, there were other errors classified as mistakes of minor impact which include wrong use of prepositions, misuse of articles, and wrong use of pronouns.

According to Wu and Garza, the majority of writing problems were caused by the interference of the first language (Mandarin-Chinese) to the target language (English), because the outcomes of this study showed that the participants committed more mistakes on interlingual/transfer errors than on intralingual/developmental errors. And, as a final point, this authors suggest the teachers that writing tasks in classrooms must be performed in an environment to help students practice English in a real- life setting, where they have the opportunity to put into practice the knowledge acquired in the EFL classes. As well, teachers might design genuine activities in ways that align English language learning with learners' interest and learning styles. However, it is important to highlight that the material should have a good quality and proper for the teaching and learning process, such as: magazines, websites, newspapers, and published reading materials that offer new information to the EFL students to aid them become better writers.

The second study taken into consideration in this literature review was carried out by Musfata, Kirana and Bahri (2016) in Indonesia, which objective was to investigate the main types of writing errors that EFL students produce in their English writing. The instruments applied to collect the information was writing tests and surveys.

The findings showed that the most frequent error found out in the students' writing paragraphs was *miss-selection* that recorded the highest percentage, (70%). *Omissions* were the second most common type of error that took up 14%, so to make clear this statement, the authors explained that problems of omission are produced because the essential elements such as primary verbs, articles, prepositions, punctuations are not applied where it is necessary. And finally, the third error was *word order*, in which the most frequent problem was related to the adjective and adverbs position.

Additionally, the author determined that the students also presented problems to use articles, conjunctions and prepositions. For example, they add an article when it is not necessary or omit articles when they are required, or applied a definite article when an indefinite one is needed and vice versa.

The third study was conducted by Kaweera (2013) in Thailand. Its objective was to describe and evaluate the errors about interlingual interference of the mother tongue (Thai) to the target language (English). The types of errors were explored based on perspectives of interlingual interference: lexical, syntactic and discourse and intralingul factors suc as: hipercorrection analogy, misanalysis, restrictions, incomplete rules, redundancy, and overgeneralization.

The findings of this study defined that most common mistakes poduced by EFL learners is the use L1 syntactical structures which were aplied directly in the foreign language writning. Additionally to this information, the author stated that interlingual errors were the most numerous mistakes found in EFL learners´ written paragraphs, and explained that this was because when the learners write in the target language, they use openly their native language structures to write the texts. However, every language has its own grammatical structures, punctuation convention, that is why, it is not suitable to apply the same linguistic rules from the first language in the target language. For example, when learners use their cognitive language related to their L1 to write any kind of writing in English the grammatical mistakes, lexical errors, and syntactical errors appear instantly, it is because the whole languages contain their own structures that cannot be applied to another language.

Moreover, Kaweera advised the teachers to use the inductive method and encourage learners to read passages that help them to improve their language knowledge. Likewise, teachers should use short lessons, instead of long grammar presentations to avoid that students get confused, and those lessons have to be always based on the students' needs. Also, the students must work in pairs or in groups in which they get opportunities to notice their errors with the help of a partner.

The fourth study which was carried out by Shitu (2015) had as aim to identify the EFL writing errors, analyze their structural compositions, and examine the reasons that cause those errors in EFL writing.

Regarding the findings of this study, the first error that recorded the highest percentage was word choice, it was produced when the choice of one word or two words are incorrect. For example: "*I am full happy*" instead of "*I am very happy*". The second common error was word forms, these errors occur when the form of the word used is incorrect. For example: *eat three meals,* in place of "*take three meal"*.

Another error that the author detected was the overgeneralization of rules, it means the overuse or overextension of morphological and grammatical structures, which cause incorrect combination of words and phrases. Combination of words is made up by two words together, sometimes joined by a hyphen. For instance, one participant wrote the words: "*every- day*" in place of "*everyday".* Additionally, the mistakes related to subject–verb agreement were also found as a numerous writing error. For example: "*he work"* instead of "*he works".*

Besides, the students also presented problems of concordance. In English grammar the subject must agree with the adjectives in number and with verb in number, gender, and person, but the students have problems to manage these rules. For example: "*populars houses"* in place of "*popular houses"*, "*Katy is a doctor. He work at a public hospital* instead of "*Katy is a doctor. She works at a public hospital*". On the other hand, the author found that the wrong use of preposition was a predominant problem too. For example: "*a place you live at"* instead" of "*a place you live in*".

According to the author, the native language influence is the main source that causes some errors in EFL writing. It refers to mother tongue interference or direct translation of vocabulary, grammatical structures from the mother tongue to the target language. Finally, Shitu suggested the teachers encourage students to recognize what are their errors and work to correct them. Besides, the author recommends that the EFL students should use English dictionaries and not the L1/L2 dictionaries.

The fifth study was conducted by Watcharapunyawong and Usaha (2013), which was focused on analyzing writing errors caused by the interference of the first language (L1), considering three writing genres: narration, description, and comparison/contrast. Besides, the technique used to collect the data was note-taking and writing tests.

The results from this study showed that were found 16 types of errors that were caused by the first language interference such as verb tense, word choice, sentence structure, article, preposition, modal/auxiliary, singular/plural form, fragment, verb form, pronoun, run-on sentence, infinitive/gerund, transition, subject-verb agreement, parallel structure, and comparison structure, respectively. However regarding the writing errors by genres, in

narration, the most frequent errors found were verb tense, word choice, sentence structure, preposition, and modal/auxiliary, respectively; while the most frequent errors in the gender description and comparison/contrast were article, sentence structure, word choice, singular/plural form, and subject-verb agreement.

Finally, this author concluded that to improve the writing skills, the EFL teachers should be focused not only on teaching grammar rules and vocabulary.

Ngangbam (2016) conducted a study to identify the English syntactic errors that EFL students commit in their writing texts. The sample for this study were EFL students from an Arabic University.

The results of this investigation displayed that grammar was the major difficult area in which most students had writing troubles. For example, in the students´ writing tests were found incomplete expressions and irrelevant sentences, which according to the author could occur due to the lack of knowledge of grammatical structures. Similarly, the problems about the use of prepositions such as omission or overuse of were very numerous too. The students also had difficulty to use correctly verb tense, subject – verb agreement, and punctuation since the most frequent error was misuse or overuse of commas.

To finish, Ngangbam defines that there are other factor that also lead students to make mistakes, in which are included: mother-tongue interference, misuse sentence fragments, lack of vocabulary, lack of grammatical knowledge, and difficulty in organization of ideas.

CHAPTER II.

METHOD

Setting and participants

This research was conducted in the city of Zaruma, and the sample for this study was 80 students from 3 second year senior classrooms from a public high school, and 5 English teachers.

The students selected to participate in this study were seventy percent females and thirty percent males aged between 16 and 18.

Procedure

One of the stages for conducting this study was the collection of essential scientific information related to writing skills and different aspects involved in the writing process such as: writing skills (definition, importance, and the writing process); coherence, cohesion, and unity in the writing; elements of writing (topic sentences, supporting sentences, transition words, punctuation, spelling, capitalization, and grammar in English), and errors in EFL writing.

In addition, useful data about previous studies done around the world were collected as a source to support this current study. These studies were beneficial to determine factors that cause writing errors, and the difficulties that students have to face when they write passages, and determine the types of writing errors that learners commit when writing in English.

This study was carried out by using a mixed method approach that involves both quantitative and qualitative procedures. The qualitative method was used to describe and examine the information and the passages written by the students, as well as, analyze the teachers and students' perceptions about the errors in the process of EFL writing. The quantitative research was used for numerical data, which evaluated the number of errors that students committed in their written paragraphs and the frequency of each one.

The instruments applied in this study were students and teachers questionnaires, and a writing test.

The student's questionnaire was composed of 12 questions which were designed to obtain the students perception about their errors in English writing, the questions were based on grammar, content, and mechanics. The teacher´s questionnaire consisted of 12 questions designed to get the opinion of the teachers about grammar, content, and mechanical errors that they commonly find in their students writing tasks.

In the writing test, the students were asked to write a paragraph about their favorite singer, in which the students were given 20 to 25 minutes to write the passage with a minimum word limit of 100 words and a maximum of 150 words. The students written texts were analyzed line by line in order to detect errors related to grammar, content, and mechanic. After that, the whole types of errors found in the paragraphs were organized in excel tables to be described in a quantitative form. Moreover, graphs were created in order to facilitate the identification of

the most frequent EFL writing error found in the students´ writing passages, and verify the respective percentage of each one.

Furthermore, the errors were analyzed under three variables which were aimed to determine the type of error and the reasons that cause those writing errors in English. The first variable was “form of the language” in which are studied the types of error about grammar, the second one was about the “content” that is focused on evaluating the problems about cohesion, coherence and unity in a written text, and finally “mechanical” which aim is to explore problems of punctuation, spelling, and capitalization.

Besides, as this study was focused on identifying the factors that affect writing skills and their influence in the writing performance, the information was described and analyzed by answering the following three questions: 1) which error has the highest percentage in each variable?, 2) which is the most frequent error in the students´ written texts?, 3) how do students and teachers perceive errors in EFL writing?

CHAPTER III.

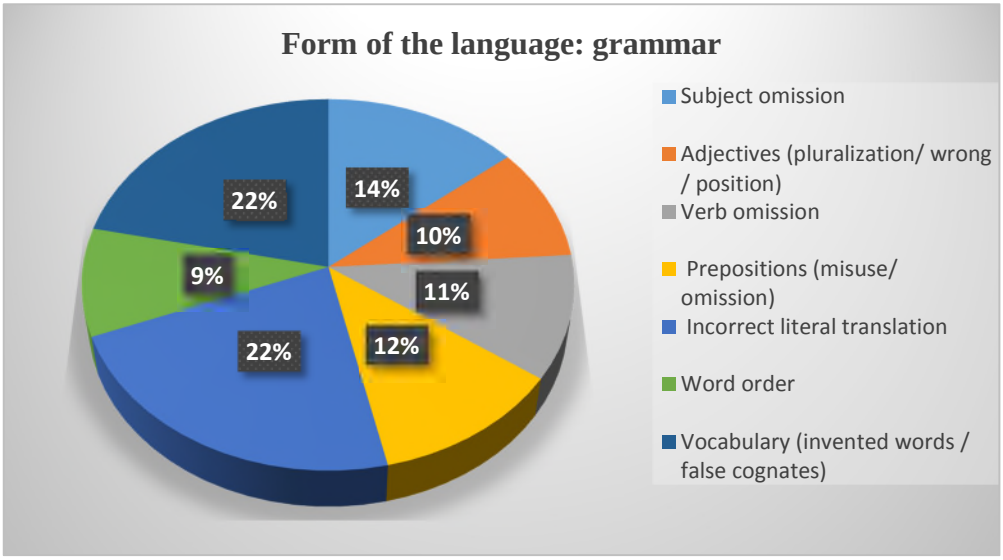
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

DESCRIPTION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

In this section, the results obtained from the field research are described, analyzed, interpreted, and displayed in fourth graphs corresponding to the variables: form of language: grammar, content and mechanical. The last graph displays the results about the most common error. The data were tabulated in graphs in order to simplify the description of results that were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively.

Form of the language: grammar

GRAPH 1



Author: Priscila Tinoco

Source: Students´ written texts

Grammar is a central element In a language which constitutes a set of rules that conducts the composition of words, phrases, clauses and sentences in the written and spoken language. The grammatical stuctures is a system that helps to combine graphemes, morphems, words, and all type of the linguistic components of a language to then transmit a message. Therefore, it is not possible to communicate ideas or thoughts proficiently without major the crucial rules of grammar. Thus, if somebody writes a text that contains grammatical errors it is difficult to read and comprehend the meaning. (Endley, 2010).

Regarding grammar errors, the results in graph 1 show that 22% of the participants revealed that *incorrect literal translation* and *vocabulary invented words* are the most common errors. Meanwhile, 14% of the participants indicated that *subject omission* is another frequent error committed in their writing.

These results were followed by 14% of participants who claim that *misuse and omission of prepositions* are the most common error they commit. In addition, the percentage of participants that assure to commit some other errors are as follows: 12%, *verb omission* 11%,

adjective pluralization 10%, and finally, the errors about *word order* marked the lowest percentage 9%.

Considering the results mentioned above, the errors about *incorrect literal translation* obtained the higher percentage. This indicates that the students create the ideas in their mother tongue (Spanish) and translate it directly without regarding the approach that it will give in the target language (English). This type of errors can be observed in the following sentences that were obtained from the students' written paragraphs:

"She has 35 years old"

"That is the reason of why"

In the first sample, the morphological analysis shows that the sentence is correctly structured, but, regarding the grammatical rules, it is not correct and did not transmit a clear message due to the student used "*has"* instead of the "*is".* This is clearly caused by the interference of the students' mother tongue because in Spanish the verb 'tener", in English "has/have", is used to say the age of a person, e.g. "*Ella tiene 35 años",* while in English the correct verb to talk about the length of time that a person has lived is the verb To be "is/are", so in English the correct sentence would be "*She is 35 years old".*

In the second example, it is evident a direct literal translation. The students has translated word by word the Spanish phrase "*Esa es la razón de porque*…." which is a common Spanish transition phrase used to show reason about something, meanwhile, a correct way to convey that idea in English is through the expressions "*that is why*" or "*for that reason*".

The possible explanation could be due to EFL students do not have enough knowledge about the target language (English) to form their own patterns of communication, and transmit their ideas effectively without using a translator program.

Concerning *vocabulary invented words, it* was another predominant error found in the students' written tasks. For example, one of the participants wrote the following expression:

"She is success in her life."

In this sample, it is evident that the student did not remember the word successful and wrote success to form a phrase which does not transmit a clear idea. Possibly, the student created this phrase based on the the English grammar rule that define that a noun can be used as adjective, and also influenced by the Spanish grammar. However in English, this could be written like the followed: "She is successful in her life*".*

According to the teachers' opinion, this writing error is also caused by the interference of the first language (Spanish) because the students have a lack knowledge of vocabulary and grammatical structures in English, which difficult them to form phrases and sentences without using the technique of "*presumption"* that lead them to invent words and phrases to use them in the target language.

For the variable *subject omission*, the results show that a great number of students omitted the pronouns when they have to be used as subjects, especially in the supporting sentences that gives more details to the first sentences. The following example was obtained from the students' written paragraphs:

"*In my opinion, Selena Gomez is an excellent singer, is beatiful, is very important to me".*

In this example, the transition phrase used to introduce the idea is absolutely correct; besides analyzing the first sentence, regarding the grammatical analysis, this contains cohesion, coherence and unity so it conveys a clear message. However, the second clause that is doing the funtion of supporting sentence does not follow the English grammar rules (Subject + verb + complemet) because the subject, in this case the personal pronoun "*she*", was left out. This error could occur due to the lack of knowledge of English grammar and also by the interference of the mother tongue, which is caused by the use of the tacit subject in Spanish, because the sentences in Spanish can sometimes use "a tacit subject". This means that the subject may sometime be omitted in the sentences when it is clearly understood in the context of the text or conversation. In this sense, it is not necessary to explicitly mention the subject. But considering the English grammar the whole sentences should contain subject.

Moreover, in regard to the teachers 'opinion, they agree with this perception and propose that this problem may be attributed to the lack of grammatical knowledge because the students do not know how to structure compound or complex sentences which are made by some clauses. In addition to this, another teacher claimed that this mistake may be caused due to students use a translator program where they translate word by word or phrase by phrase to then complete the sentence in the target language.

The fourth error stated into the grammar category was *misuse and omission of prepositions.* For example, in the following sentence "He studied in a school in Miami" it can be observed that the student erroneously selected the preposition "in" instead of "*at*" in the first case, although in the second part "in Miami" the preposition is correctly used.

It is important to describe that this error might be caused by the influence of the students' mother tongue, because according to Aristos dictionary, in Spanish "en", is the unique word used as a preposition of place to talk about someone or something inside any kind of place, small or large, e.g. *en la oficina*, *en la escuela, en Ecuador, en Europa,* and so on.

However, in English there are two preposition of place to express those ideas such as "in" and "at". According to Oxford dictionary, in English "at", as a preposition of place, is often used to talk about somebody or something inside small places such as schools, hospitals airport etc.; while "in", is utilized to determine the position of someone or something inside large places such as cities, countries and continents. That is why, the correct preposition in the first case is

"*at" (at the school*), and the preposition "in" with relation to the second fragment "in Miami" is correct because Miami is a city.

Verb omission was another predominant error. This type of error can be observed in the following example, it was taken from the students written paragraphs:

"He born in Italy"

Analyzing this sentence, it is possible identify the meaning of the sentence although it is not grammatically correct because the auxiliary verb "*was'* is left out. This error might be attributed to the interference of the mother tongue due to in Spanish the verb "*ser o estar"* is not used in this context, but according to the English grammar the verb '*to be'* is used as an auxiliary in this case. That is why, regarding the English grammar the correct form of this sentence would be "*He was born in Italy".*

Al-Mahrooqi, Takur and Roscoe (2015) explain that the verb is a basic element that gives sense to the sentences, but when it is left out the sentences lose their connotation and meaning. Moreover, they argue that the omition or misuse of auxiliary verbs were the most common grammatical error.

In this study, the results show that the omition or misuse of auxiliary verbs, such as "be" and "have" were found as very frequent grammatical errors in this context. The possible explanation to this problem, according to the students' report, is the lack of feedback that they receive in terms of how to use two verbs in a same sentence, and the use of auxiliary verbs in sentences.

Adjective pluralization also recorded a high level of occurrence, a significant number of students made this mistake. For instance, the following sample was taken from the students' written paragraph:

"Her songs are populars".

In this example, it is evident that the adjective is pluralized, which regarding the English grammar rules it is completely incorrect. This error may be caused by the inference of the mother tongue because according to the Spanish grammatical rules the adjectives are pluralized when the nouns are in plural form, for example, in singular "*esta canción es popular*" and in plural "*estas canciones son populares"*. According to the English grammar rules the adjectives are not pluralized, although the noun is in plural, for example, "*this song is popular"* and *"these songs are popular".*

Word order error was the writing problem that recorded the lowest level of occurrence. The collocation of adjectives was the major problem related to this error. The following sentence was gathered from the students' written paragraphs:

"He is a singer famous".

By analyzing this sentence, it could be seen that semantically the sentence transmit the right meaning. Additionally, the original sentence is morphologically correct. But applying the English grammatical rules to the original sentence, it is notable that something is not correct, because in English the adjective is placed before the noun that it modifies, for example, adjective + noun, "*famous singer*".

Regarding the teachers opinion, the wrong order of the words in a sentence may be produced because of two reasons: the influence of the first language, or due to the students are not aware about the grammatical rules to collocate articles, preposition, adjectives, and adverbs in sentences. That is, in the students' written tasks were found some sentence which were not easy to understand because the words were not ordered correctly, and as a result the message was not understood.

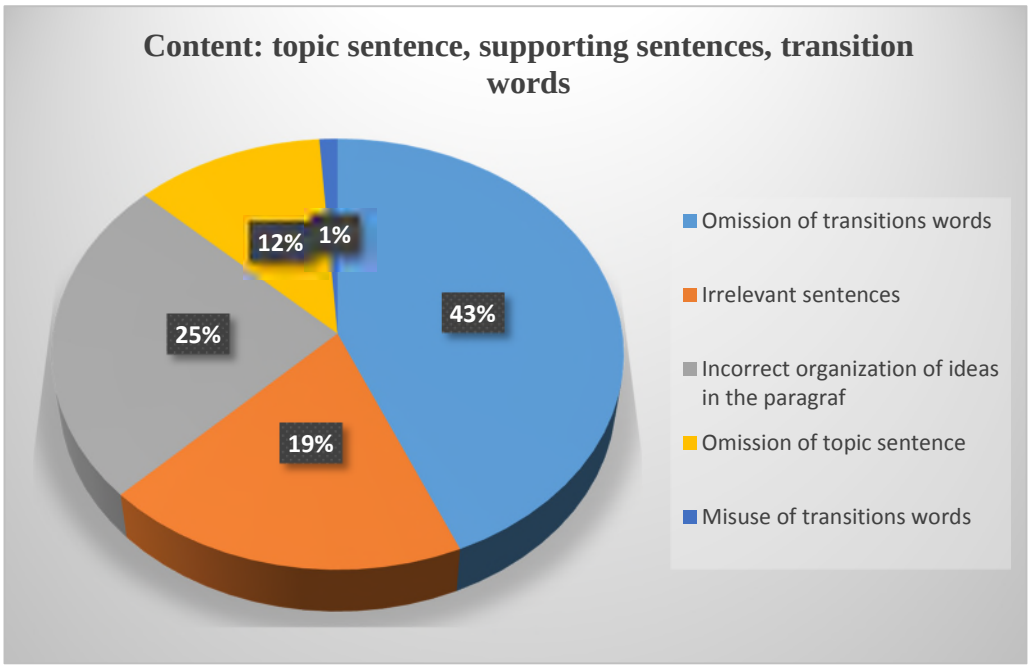
When the teachers were questioned about how often they find grammar errors in their students´ piece of writing, the most of the teachers responded that "always" their students commit grammatical errors when writing in English, such as: incorrect literal translation, pluralization or wrong position of adjectives, and misuse of prepositions. Besides, the teachers argued that learners produce grammatical errors due to they only learn the grammar as a set of rules, but do not put those memorized rules into practice when writing. And that in other cases, some teachers do not give feedback when their students make writing mistakes.

Then when the students were asked about how frequent they face trouble to utilize grammar structures when they write in English, they responded that they always have difficulty to write paragraphs applying the grammar rules correctly. In terms of grammar errors, the participants provided four possible reasons for their mistakes: they do not manage complex grammatical structures, poor vocabulary, influence of their first language, and lack of practice.

According to Williams (2003), grammatical errors occur when people use some words in ways that English does not accept. For example, some learners have problems in subject/verb agreement, misuse of prepositions, pluralization of adjectives, articles, and so on. In order to improve the writing and speaking skills, it is necessary that students learn enough vocabulary and basic foreign language grammar rules to create their ideas in the foreign language and not only be focused in translating their ideas from the L1 on L2. (Grace and Seok-Dong, 2014).

Content: topic sentences, supporting sentences, and transition words

GRAPH 2



Author: Priscila Tinoco

Source: Students´ written texts

To write a passage, it is important to take into consideration grammar, syntax, and vocabulary, as well as content because it plays an important role to build a written text. That is, to convey a clear message through a written text, only one main idea should be discussed from beginning to end into the paragraph which should supported by topic sentences, supporting sentences, and concluding sentences. (Oshima and Hogue, 2006).

Regarding the results shown in Graph 2, 43% of the participants *do not use transition words,* and 25% of them *do not organize their ideas in their paragraph.* These results were followed by other errors such as *irrelevant sentences* with 19%, *omission of topic sentences* with 12%; and finally, a minimum number of students (1%) of them who have difficulty to use *transition words* in a proper way.

Concerning the above-mentioned results, *omission of transition words* shows the highest percentage, which determine that most of the EFL students do not use the transitions words to connect sentences and create paragraphs. For example, one of the students wrote the following sentence:

"*My favorite singer is Selena Gomez. She lives in USA. She is twenty years old. She lives with her parents. She has two brothers and lives with them too. The new song is "Magic".*

In the sample above, the student does not convey a clear message due to he only made a list of sentences and did not use any transition word to connect the sentences and build a paragraph correctly. These ideas could have been written in this way:

"*My favorite singer is Selena Gomez. She is twenty years old and lives in USA. Moreover, she lives with her parents and her brothers. Nowadays, she has a new song "Magic".*

Additionally to this information, one of the teachers argue that this problem may be attributed to the lack of vocabulary related to transition words and transition phrases, and how to use them to connect sentences into a paragraph.

According to Miller and Cohen (2009), transition words should not be omitted in a paragraph or between paragraphs because they are really necessary to advertise the reader about certain modification between positive and negative factors, so these words have been separated in some categories: addition, time, place, comparison, contrast, purpose, conclusion, and others. In fact, transition words are considered as a common type of linking words that help to connect sentences to one another.

The *incorrect organization of ideas in the paragraph* was the second most frequent error in this category. In order to explain this aspect, a sample was obtained from the students' writing tasks where is possible to identify this type of error:

"*Romeo Santos is my favorite singer. He sing bachatas. I like bachatas. Also, I love their songs. If, he come Ecuador. I will go to concert".*

In this piece of paragraph, it is evident the lack of coherence, cohesion and unity because the ideas are not organized and obviously they do no convey an effective message; moreover, in this example, there is another problem which is omission of transition words. For example, these ideas could have been structured in the following way:

Romeo Santos is my favorite singers. He sings bachatas. And, as I like that kind of music and love his songs, I will go to his concert if he come to Ecuador.

The possible reason that causes this problem is the interference of the mother tongue because the some students expressed that they organize the ideas in their first language and then translate those ideas literally to the target language. On the other hand, it also was found that most students are not aware of the process they have to follow in order to write a paragraph and they face difficulty to organize their ideas into the paragraph.

The third error with a high level of occurrence found in this study was *irrelevant sentences.* The following is an example that was gathered from the students' written texts:

"My favorite singer is Martin Garrix, he sings electronic music. He lives in Fererypad- Holand. He is 17 years old. I love I love his songs and photos. In 2013 started the first festival of electronic music in".

In this example, the sentence "*In 2013 started the first festival of electronic music*" is out of place because the student is talking about a festival and not about her favorite singer. That irrelevant sentence interferes with the flow of the message, and it does not support the main idea of the paragraph. Additionally, the other sentences do not show cohesion and unity due to there is an irrelevant sentence among them, and the ideas are disorganized because transition words were omitted.

According to Shiyab and Halimi (2015), in writing every part of a paragraph need to be connected with another to create unity in the written text. Therefore the whole words, phrases and sentences have to be connected to each other taking into consideration cohesion and coherence, since without those both features, it is imposible that a writing passage gets unity.

Omission of topic sentences was an error that marked a significant level of occurrence in the written tests in which a considerable number of students committed this mistake. For example, the next piece of paragraph was obtained from the students' written tests, which shows the interference of this error:

"My favorite singer is tall and handsome. He lives in United States. He has one boys. His parents are Rommel Smith and mother Patricia Mars".

By analyzing this fragment, the whole sentences follow the English grammar rules, however, this piece of writing looks as a riddle and not as a paragraph. The grammatical analysis determine that all sentences are structured correctly, but the content of the passage is deficient because the topic sentence is left out, and no one knows who the writer is talking about.

Oshima and Hogue (2007) state that when in a paragraph the topic sentence is omitted, it does not transmit a clear message due to the arguments of the writer do not have a line or a main idea to follow which cause misunderstandings to the readers, and sometimes, it is impossible to understand the passage.

According to the teachers´ opinion, the students struggle to state the topic sentence because of their poor vocabulary and lack of knowledge of English grammar rules that cause difficulty to organize the ideas within a paragraph.

For the variable m*isuse of transition words,* one of the examples found was the expression:

"He spent a lot of money to organize an event but he wanted international acknowledge.

In the example above, the content of the fragment is affected by the wrong use of the transition word "but" instead of "because". "But" is defined in the Oxford dictionary as a conjunction used to join two statements that show difference between them, meanwhile "because" is defined as a conjunction used to give reason.

According to Miller and Cohen (2009), misuse or overuse of transitions words distract to the reader and cause interference with the comprehension because it produce difficulty to achieve coherence, cohesion and unity into a paragraph.

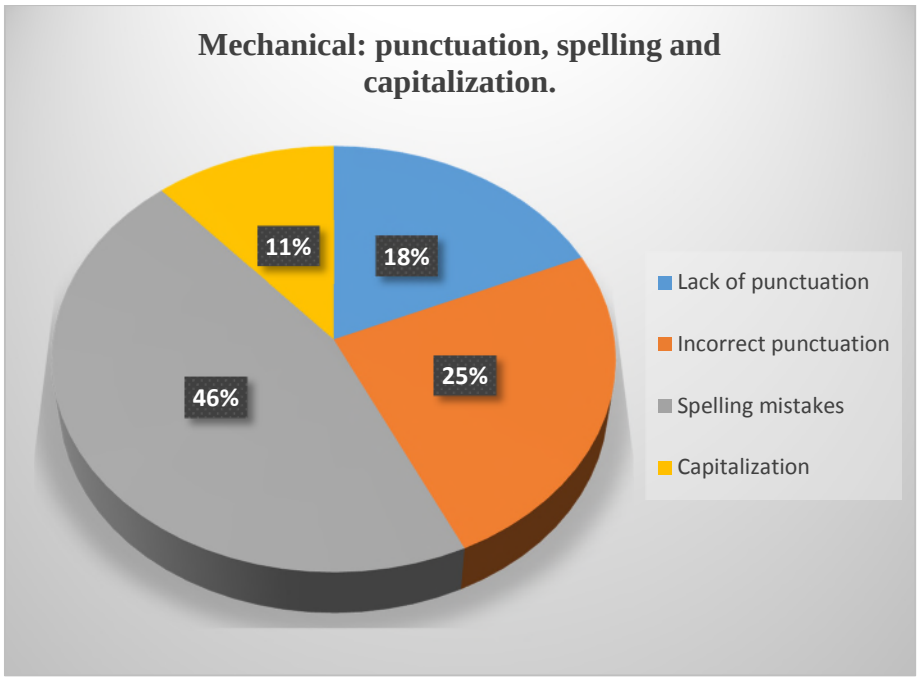
Thus, the possible explanation to this problem may be because of two reasons: lack of vocabulary, and lack of practice to use the transition words in real writings. Based on the students' estimation, some participants explained that the unique activities where they use transitions are only to fulfil activities in their workbooks, and they never are encouraged to write stories, essays or article using transitions, in the classroom.

Regarding the teachers´ opinion, when teachers were asked about how often they find content errors in their student's piece of writing, they answered that the students "*always"* find difficulty to structure a paragraph correctly, which should contain main idea, topic sentences, supporting sentences, and transition words to connect sentences. According to the teachers, the most frequent errors committed by their EFL students concerning the content errors, are the *incorrect organization of ideas in the paragraph*, and *omission of transition words*.

Lepionka (2008) states that all type of formal writing, for any type of audience at any educational level, must content the same basic elements of quality, which are clarity, cohesion, unity, coherence, and emphasis. And, he says that a very useful strategy to improve writing is through the writing-for- learning strategy, in which students have the opportunity to practice grammar rules, and process to write texts. In addition, Wattie (2014) claims that the first step to convey an effective message is through the application of transition words, transition phrases, and conjunctions, which are used to connect different sentences and transmit a clear message.

Mechanical: Punctuation, spelling, and capitalization

GRAPH 3



Author: Priscila Tinoco

Source: Students´ written texts

Mechanics is a set of conventional rules that determine the mechanical elements in the writings, which involves spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. These three elements are essential to structure sentences and paragraphs correctly, which help to make a written text more readable to avoid misunderstandings. (Harmer, 2012).

Regarding mechanical errors, the results in graph 3 show that 46% of participants have problem to *spell correctly the words, and 25% of them applied incorrect punctuation in their writings* which were considered as the most common errors. Meanwhile, 18% of the participants do *not used punctuation conventions* when writing, and finally, the problems about *capitalization* mistakes were the least relevant and reached 11% respectively.

As regards the above-mentioned outcomes, *spelling mistakes* was found as the most frequent mechanical error, it determines that a great number of EFL learners often omit or use wrong graphemes to form words. For example, the students wrote the words,

“Cofe”

“United Estates of America”

In the first example above, it is evident that the student omitted the consonant “f” and also the vowel “e”. It could be due to the influence of the student’s mother tongue because in Spanish is it is written using a single “*f*” and a single “e”, e.g. *Café.* Meanwhile, in English it is spelled with double “*f”* and double *“e”* e.g. “*coffee*”.

In the second sample, regarding the second word, the vowel “e” was added unnecessarily; it may be produced be due to the L1 interference, because in Spanish it starts with the vowel “E”, e.g. “Estados”, while in English the spelling of this word starts with “S”, e.g. “*States”.*

Sometimes, the spelling mistakes do not interfere with comprehension, but it affects the quality of the writing, especially whether this is an academic or formal writing such as essay, project, journal, letter, thesis, and others.

Incorrect punctuation was the second most frequent mechanical error. It determines that most of the students are not aware about the correct usage of punctuation conventions. Thus, to specify and explain this problem, the following sentence was taken from the students’ writing tasks, which include this type of mistake:

“She has two children: who are Katy and Valesca”

In this example the student used the punctuation signs incorrectly due to he used a colon instead of a comma. According to the mechanical rules, colon is used to introduce a series of items. However, in this sample the writer does not have to make a list of items, he just must clarify the names of both children. That is why, only a comma was required, e. g. *“She has two children, Katy and Valesca”.*

The possible explanation to this problem may be attributed to the lack of practice because a great number of students responded that they never complete writing activities in classrooms to put into practice the elements of punctuation. In addition to this information, other participants reported that they are not aware of the use of punctuation marks neither in the L1 nor in L2.

Lack of punctuation was found as the third most common error regarded in this category. For example, exploring the texts wrote by the students, a sample was taken, in which the punctuation was left out:

“*Katy Perry is funny and nice and always is friendly with her fans, she sings very good songs. Road, is my favorite”.*

By analyzing this sample, the whole words have been spelled correctly, but this group of words does not transmit a clear message due to the lack of punctuation marks. As can be seen, this does not display neither cohesion nor coherence because that looks only as a line of words. Therefore, to convey an effective message, this sentence could be written like this: *“Katy Perry is funny and nice. She is always friendly with her fans. What is more, she sings very good songs such as “Road”, which is my favorite song”.*

This problem could occur due to the students do not know complex grammar and mechanical rules to make formal writings. For example, most of the teachers do not make emphasis on teaching punctuation conventions to build paragraphs because they are always focused on teaching vocabulary and simple sentences.

Regarding the mechanical errors analyzed in this section, *capitalization* was found as the least frequent error. Only a minimum number of students commit this error, and in the cases where they produced this mistake was at the beginning of the supporting sentences and to write names of things, for example: *"Avicii is my favorite singer. he has very nice songs such as "waiting for love" and "brother". in my opinion, he is one of the best singers".*

In this example, the student did not used capital letter neither to start the second sentence and the third sentence nor the songs´ names. According to the mechanical rules, capital letters should be used after a period or to start a sentence and to write names of people, places, and things. For example*: "Avicii is my favorite singer. He has very nice songs such as "Waiting for love" and "Brother". In my opinion, he is one of the best singers".*

Considering the collected information, the capitalization mistakes may be produced due to the lack of practice or lack of concentration at the moment of writing because when students were asked about the use of capital letters, they demonstrated to have knowledge about capitalization rules.

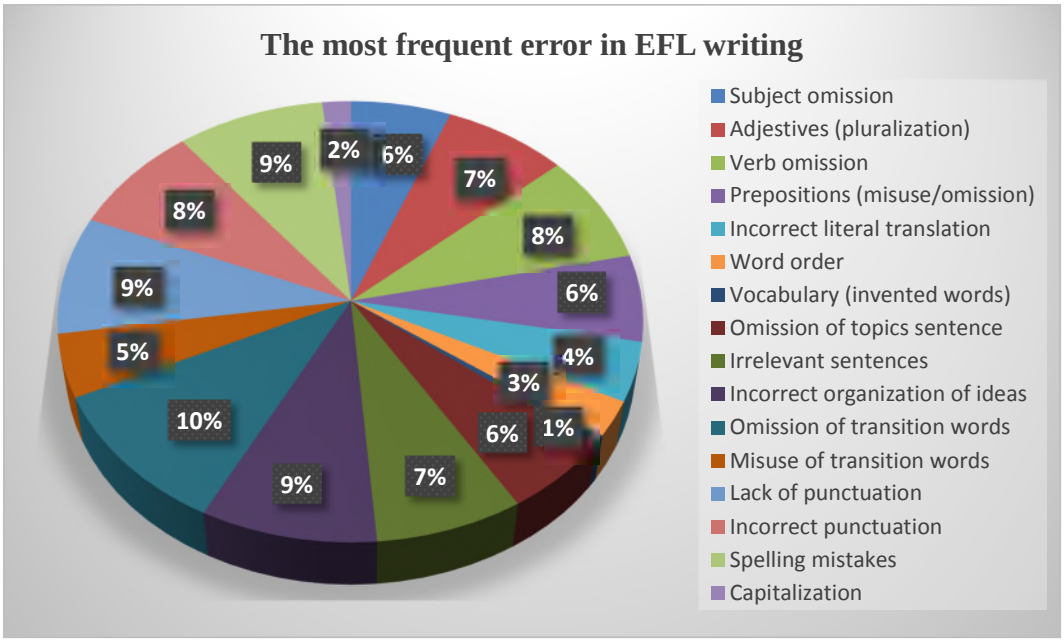
When the English teachers were questioned about how frequent they found mechanical errors in their student´s piece of writings, they stated that "always and often" their students produce those errors; specially, lack of punctuation and spelling mistakes. Moreover, a teacher argued that this type of error may be produced due to the mechanical rules are not explained in the English classes because those items are not taken into consideration as a subject into the Teaching English curricula.

In this regard, the students were asked to give their perception about how often they commit mechanical errors in their writing, they said that often they face difficulty to use the punctuation rules correctly. Moreover, they responded that they never make writing activities in their classrooms on practice the mechanical elements such as punctuation, capitalization and spelling. Thus, when they have to write a formal writing project, they find difficulty to apply those elements which cause them frustration and demotivation.

Along this line of thinking, Harmer (2013) explains that the quality of writing passages not just depend on the content, the language, and the writer´s handwriting, but also on their use of punctuation. The author expressed that if capital letters, commas, full stops, sentence and paragraph boundaries, etc. are not used correctly, this cannot only make a negative impression, but it can also make a text difficult to understand. Moreover, Harmer gives an advice to the EFL teachers and recommends that to help students being successful in their writing tasks, teachers must put emphasis on teaching mechanical rules and encourage their students to use properly those rules in the daily writing activities.

The most frequent error in the students´ written texts

GRAPH 4



Author: Priscila Tinoco

Source: Students´ written texts

Based on the collected data, 16 categories of errors were analyzed. The participants had the greatest difficulty in using transitions, being *omission of transition words* the error that recorded the highest percentage. The possible explanation could be due to there is not often writing activities related to the practice of these elements in classroom. Furthermore, students are not aware of the process they have to follow in order to write a paragraph because they are only used to writing sentences.

Regarding the students´ perception, this problem may be caused due to they are not aware of the use of transition words neither in their mother tongue (Spanish) nor in the target language (English). In other words, students usually commit this type of mistakes in Spanish which affects to English because they use to translate their ideas literally.

After analyzing the causes and the consequences about wrong use or omission of transitions words, the outcomes showed that it is not an isolated problem. It is an error that guide to the writer to commit other errors because when the sentences are not linked correctly, they produce incorrect organization of ideas in the paragraph and irrelevant sentences.

On the subject of transition words or transition phrases, a previous research carried out by Bonk (2015) declares that the transition words (e.g., however, but, although, then, also, etc.) and transition phrases (e.g., on the other hand, in addition, in other words, etc.) are the tools that aid to the readers go from sentence to sentence and paragraph to paragraph without

losing the main idea exposed by the writer in a text. What is more, this kind of linkages are required and utilized to foster cohesion, coherence and unity into a written text.

To conclude this analysis, it is important to emphasize that the quality of a writing not only depend on the content. In the paragraphs written by the participant were identified other errors which affect greatly to get a good writing. Those errors were related to grammar such as*, incorrect literal translation, verb omission, misuse of preposition, adjective pluralization;* and the mechanical errors such as s*pelling mistakes,* and lack *of punctuation.* The possible explanation to the production of these errors is the influence of the first language because the most students usually translate the words literally and apply the Spanish grammatical rules to English, without taking into consideration that the grammar of both language are different and cannot be applied in the same context.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings from this study demonstrated that most EFL writing errors produced by the students were caused by the interference of the first language (Spanish), and the areas that were affected by the most interference of the L1 are content and grammar.

Concerning the content errors, the results showed that the students struggle to use transition words and organize their ideas in a paragraph properly. Most of the students left out transition words which cause problem to connect some supporting ideas in a same paragraph.

The grammar analysis pointed out that the most frequent errors were incorrect literal translation, misuse of preposition and adjective pluralization, which were probably caused by the interference of the L1 because students depend heavily on the Spanish grammar structures and take it as a base to write in English.

Regarding the mechanical errors, spelling mistakes and misuse of punctuation were the most frequent in this area, which affected the quality of the writing passages causing a negative influence to convey a good message.

Despite the teachers were aware about the negative interference that cause the mother tongue (Spanish) on the target language (English), they did not apply effective strategies to help their students to overcome this problem. That is why, the main strategy that EFL students use when writing in English is to organize the ideas in Spanish and then translating into English, using a translator program or sometimes translating word by word.

According to the results, most of the errors are based in the lack of motivation. Learners feel anxious when writing about any topic in their foreign language since error correction in behalf of teachers discourage them in taking risks.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Teachers should prioritize the teaching and learning process based on varied strategies such as reading-to-write and listening-to-write, which help the students to improve their listening and reading skills; as well as, these lead the EFL learners to create and write their own ideas utilizing the target language.

Teachers should apply the writing-for-learning strategy, in which the students have the opportunity to write not only isolated sentences but also create formal writings regarding grammar structures, rules of content, and punctuation. In this kind of activities the writer should include varied and formal vocabulary, correct organization of ideas, a good style and effectiveness.

Another recommendation to improve the writing skills is motivating learners to be involved in writing-for-writing activities. These are activities where the EFL students are free to write any type of writing as in the real life. For example, e-mails, messages through social media, letters, etc.

Although the punctuation signs have not been considered as a teaching subject in the EFL teaching books, it is highly recommended to make writing activities to practice punctuation conventions that helps the learners to improve their writing and reading skills. A writer and a reader should take in mind that only a sing can change the meaning of a written message.

Teacher should give positive feedback and create interactive teaching and learning activities inside and outside class, where students feel supported by their teacher and free to produce their own writing arguments.

Motivate student's participation and engagement in activities is necessary in the EFL writing. Then it is important for teachers to produce and maintain an environment that encourages learners to take chances for writing.

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ANNEXES

ANNEX 1

UNIVERSIDAD TÉCNICA PARTICULAR DE LOJA

La Universidad Católica de Loja

OPEN AND DISTANCE MODALITY

ENGLISH DEGREE

WRITING TEST

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 2

UNIVERSIDAD TÉCNICA PARTICULAR DE LOJA

La Universidad Católica de Loja

OPEN AND DISTANCE MODALITY

ENGLISH DEGREE

STUDENT'S QUESTIONNAIRE

Género: ( ) Masculino ( ) Femenino ( )

1. **¿Le gusta escribir en inglés?**

   Sí ( ) No ( )

   ¿Por qué?

   _____

   _____

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

   Sí ( ) No ( )

   ¿Por qué?

   _____

   _____

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?

_____

_____

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?

   _____

   _____

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

   Sí ( ) No ( )

   ¿Por qué?

   _____

   _____

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

TIPO DE ERROR	SIEMPRE	FRECUENTE	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					

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 este 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	FRECUENTE	A VECES	RARA VEZ	NUNCA
ERRORES MECÁNICOS (relacionados con: el incorrecto uso u omisión de signos de puntuación, uso					

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 ( )

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 3

UNIVERSIDAD TÉCNICA PARTICULAR DE LOJA

La Universidad Católica de Loja

OPEN AND DISTANCE MODALITY

ENGLISH DEGREE

TEACHER'S QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear teacher,

The following information will only be used for academic/research purposes. Please answer the following questions as honestly as possible based on the following criteria.

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 uses 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?): _____

THANK YOU!