

THE CONTRIBUTION OF ICT-MEDIATED PEER FEEDBACK TO THE
IMPROVEMENT OF WRITING SKILLS AT THE TERTIARY LEVEL: A CASE
STUDY

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A Thesis Presented


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DEDICATION

To my family, my friends, and those who have believed in me, especially when I have not.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Firstly, I would like to thank my family, principally my mother, whose support was fundamental for the fulfillment of this professional adventure. I owe her all of who I am and words will never be enough to express that.

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ABSTRACT

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There is an interesting amount of research on the relation between ICT and writing in the English classroom. However, less research has been conducted on the role that ICT-mediated peer feedback can play in the development of this skill. Hence, an explanatory case study conducted at a private university intended to explore the contribution of peer feedback provided through *Google Docs*, and enriched with other technological resources (online dictionaries and grammar checkers) to the improvement of writing skills, using a process approach to writing. The participants were 13 students from a bachelor's degree on modern languages (English, French, and German) with an emphasis on administration and marketing. The data collected included two drafts of a text written by the participants, evaluated by two independent teachers; the interactions that took place among the students;

an interview with the second evaluator of the texts; two focus groups with the students who participated; and research diaries. The deductive analysis of the sources of information yielded quantitative and qualitative results that suggest a positive impact of ICT-mediated peer feedback for bettering writing skills, particularly concerning the use of vocabulary and verbal tenses, as well as in the creation of recounts according to the characteristics of this type of text. However, findings also made clear a high dependence of the students on the teacher, in spite of the efforts made to help them become more autonomous in their learning process through technological tools. These findings suggest three important issues for the EFL field, which I analyze in the discussion and conclusion of this document. These are a reflection about teaching practices that can fully place students at the center of their process; a clear framing of technology in the classroom that supports the teaching and learning process; and an approach to the task of writing as an ongoing process that requires scaffolding through feedback in order to make it more engaging for the students.

Key words: process writing, writing, peer feedback, ICT, *Google Docs*.

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Introduction

Feedback plays an unquestionable role in learning and teaching. According to Hattie and Temperley (2007), feedback's "main purpose is to reduce discrepancies between understandings and performance and a goal" (p. 86), meaning that the function of feedback is bringing students closer to an established objective. Additionally, authors such as Williams (2003), Turner (2004) and Carless (2006) emphasize on the relevance of feedback because it aids learning, and it is an important mediator for developing skills, particularly writing, which is the focus of interest in the research that this document reports on.

However, students may not take notice of feedback. Vardi (2009) postulates that reasons for this drawback can correspond to one or more of the following three main categories:

- Those that depend on the teacher, such as not giving useful feedback, making contradictory comments, focusing only on negative aspects of the text, not giving opportunities for improving after providing feedback, or making comments that do not make sense for students;
- Those that depend on the students, such as focusing on the grade and lacking interest in feedback, misunderstanding feedback, viewing written assignments as a senseless exercise imposed by the teacher, instead of viewing them as a means of establishing authentic communication;
- Those related to feedback itself such as the time that passes between the submission of the written assignment and the reception of feedback, or the manner of communicating it, for example.

This study addressed several of the issues listed above in order to enhance the use that university students made of feedback. In this research, students had opportunities for improving their writing skills after receiving feedback. They also had the possibility of interacting with the rest of the participants in the process of receiving feedback so that they could better understand the comments made and use them to enrich their production. Additionally, this research aimed at making feedback timely and providing it in a way that was appealing to students and that was familiar to them. The purpose was to increase the interest of the students in feedback as a resource, since disregarding feedback may cause difficulties in the students' learning process in at least two ways.

First, overlooking feedback affects students' progress because their process can be slower and less effective. Second, disregarding feedback may also lead to a fossilization of certain inadequate structures that students do not correct in subsequent texts. For Vigil & Oller, feedback in the affective and cognitive dimension is highly responsible for making students realize and correct their errors in the development of interlanguage (in Selinker & Lamendella, 1979, p. 366).

This research was born from observations that I conducted in my professional context between August and September 2017 using a rubric to analyze the behavior of students after receiving the corrections to their written assignments. I noticed that most students focused only on the grade. In fact, Crisp (2007) suggests that if the grade corresponds to the students' expectations, they may just not pay attention to the comments made by the teacher. Indeed, she reports that a third of the students spend less than five minutes reading the feedback provided, and reflecting on it to improve their future assignments. Because of this, feedback may fail to bring about learning since students' intrinsic motivation is not stimulated. This might relate to the approach used for writing as

a one-time activity; hence, students are not encouraged to use the feedback provided for their learning process or producing higher quality assignments. Therefore, it is important to let them know that they can improve by rewriting, using the writing-as-a-process approach, in which feedback becomes part of the task of writing. Consequently, students understand that the goal of feedback is to help them improve their mastery of the target language, and they see the possibility to do so by working more on their writing tasks.

To go deeper into these assumptions, I conducted a pilot study after these observations between September 14 and 29, 2017 in my workplace. I counted on the participation of fourteen students enrolled in an intermediate level general English course. This pilot study aimed at identifying students' practices and thoughts related to writing in English, to providing and receiving feedback, and their approach to written tasks. I collected data through rubric-guided observations of their actions while developing the task and their reactions after the provision of feedback, the analysis of their narrative texts before and after peer-provided and teacher-provided feedback, the online interactions that took place among the participants, and interviews. In the inductive analysis, categories emerged of what they did while writing, the quality of their texts before and after feedback, and their attitude upon receiving their texts back.

The students wrote an outline and a first draft of a recount, using tools such as online grammar checkers and dictionaries. Then peers received this text through *Google Docs*. They made comments and suggestions on it, which I reviewed. Afterwards, students based on these comments to rewrite their texts in order to make them clearer and integrate the corrections suggested by the readers.

In this pilot, the participants made use of technology in order to enhance the writing process from the composing stage to evaluation, highlighting the feedback process through

online interactions with the other participants involved in it (the peers and the teacher). The online interactions among the students showed that they communicated asking questions about the feedback received, and that this information was useful for them when rewriting, since their texts were clearer, better constructed and structured, and their grades were higher. Consequently, this pilot study pointed out the importance of process writing, and the significant role that technology can play in making feedback timely and accurate, as one student mentioned: “I corrected fast and the teacher validated the corrections that I made” (Alexa, interview, September 20, 2017. My translation).

What I perceived in this pilot study was that the participants were not accustomed to receiving feedback and to writing as a process. Instead, they viewed the act of writing as a product. The form of feedback that the students were familiar with was only the grade assigned to their texts, which they considered as finished upon submission, thus they did not review the corrections after receiving their mark. In addition, students found it difficult to do outlines and drafts because, as one of them expressed, “When I’m doing a written assignment, I just begin to write what comes to my mind” (Estefanía, interview, September 20, 2017. My translation).

The information collected from this pilot study paved the way for the particular interest that I report in this document. This study took place between February and June 2018. It aimed at exploring the contribution of ICT-mediated feedback in the writing process. The rationale for this was the belief that it was possible to enhance the understanding and use of feedback by handing it on a means that would allow interaction and that students could receive faster and more interactively than traditional on-paper comments. Hattie (1999), whose research concludes that video-, audio-, or computer-

assisted feedback is more effective than other forms, backs this stance (in Hattie & Temperley, 2007, p. 84).

This study has several important features. The first one is the role that technology plays in it. Technology can help students in many ways. First, it can help clarify the comments made by the teacher and peers, thus establishing a direct communication among the participants of the feedback process. The University of Westminster, for instance, implemented an e-Reflect system for providing feedback through technology that established evidence of the transformation of the act of receiving feedback from a passive one to an active one (University of Westminster, 2010).

Second, technology can provide an interactive setting for sharing students' reactions on the comments that they receive, and boost collaborative work by allowing students to interact by giving and receiving feedback throughout the process of text creation. De Guerrero & Villamil (2000) showed that collaborative peer feedback is beneficial for the participants because it provides the evaluators with an opportunity to analyze critically their peers' production in order to make suggestions, while the writers who receive feedback learn from their peers, thus providing scaffolding for learning.

Third, technology can make feedback timely for students and can help them solve specific problems and questions related to writing when they occur. Additionally, writing supported by applications and online tools can provide new possibilities for students, such as developing their autonomy and their sense of progress. Wang (2014) posits that learning is an active process and that the opportunity given to students to search for answers instead of receiving them from their teachers enhances it. Technology facilitates this process by giving students access to resources available all over the world.

The second important feature of this study is its focus on peer-originated feedback. Since the traditional view of feedback considers it as a teacher's responsibility, it is pertinent to analyze the impact of peer feedback on the improvement of writing skills. Falchikov (2007) indicates, "Peer assessment requires students to provide either feedback or grades (or both) to their peers on a product or a performance" (p. 132). This is useful for encouraging collaborative learning and scaffolding, as students have the chance to learn not only from their own texts, but also to enhance their current knowledge through the advice given to their partners (Quintero, 2008). In this study, peers provided feedback as comments, questions, and suggestions of modifications to each other's texts.

With this knowledge related to the benefits of technology in writing, I conducted a thorough literature review to learn about the research done in the EFL field in the area of the interactions between technology, writing, and peer feedback. Even though I found different studies concerning these issues, I concluded that there was a need for more research concerning the integration of ICT for providing feedback in the process of writing.

International journals have reported on studies on writing as a process integrating feedback through ICT in the last ten years. Nelson & Schunn (2009) studied the effect of different types of peer feedback on writing performance and found variable results according to the type of feedback provided. Shih (2011) used *Facebook* as a collaborative writing platform for providing peer feedback. According to his results, the use of this tool had a positive impact on students' production and on their development of cooperative skills. Zheng, Lawrence, Warschauer, & Lin (2015) used *Google Docs* to promote peer feedback with K-12 students and found it to be an engaging tool that promoted effective interaction. These studies support the benefits of technology when included in an interactive, cooperative environment.

An overview of articles in the main Colombian journals in the last ten years brought few studies conducted to analyze the role of feedback on process writing implementing ICT. Rogers (2008) studied the development of peer interaction through processing software, with results indicating a positive impact on language learning and the fostering of autonomy. Díaz (2010) worked with students from the public school system on the production of texts using the process approach to writing and peer feedback. In her opinion, peer feedback requires a sociocognitive approach (p. 96). Rivera (2011) focused on bettering the process of writing by providing teacher feedback, and showed that feedback and following stages for writing helped improve writing. Gómez & McDougald (2013) studied the relationship between peer feedback and coherence in non-fictional narrative blogs, and they found out that peer feedback and blogging were positive for maintaining coherence in a text. Herrera (2013) conducted a study using *Storybird* for collaborative writing and reported positive results on the use of this tool in terms of the improvement of writing skills and students' motivation to write. Ochoa Alpala & Medina Peña (2014) worked with high school students to understand the influence of a MOODLE-based virtual room on writing. Their results show a positive influence of virtual rooms on writing as a creative, communicative activity in which students interact to share knowledge and exchange information, thus promoting collaborative work, which is an essential aspect of my study. More recently, Alvira (2016) used *Screencasting* as a tool for providing feedback to improve writing at the paragraph level, and his results show that his students wrote better texts and that they were open to accepting the feedback provided through this tool.

These studies demonstrate the interest of Colombian EFL teachers and researchers in the relationship between feedback, technology, and writing process, but they also show that the field needs more research to explore in depth the interconnection between ICT-

mediated peer feedback and the development of writing skills. Few studies have centered on the use of technology and peer collaboration for improving the written production, considering writing as a process (Quintero, 2008). This study meant to address this issue. In order to increase the quality of the feedback provided and the students' willingness to accept it, the participants counted on online tools, and then I reviewed and validated their comments, thus increasing the reliability of feedback while enhancing the participants' autonomy and their trust in each other as providers of feedback.

This research aimed at exploring the following question: How can *Google Docs* and other online resources contribute to meaningful peer feedback for improving students' writing skills in an English course at the tertiary level? This question takes into account the features that characterize the study: The use of technology in the EFL classroom, the role of peer feedback in writing, and the use of the writing-as-a-process approach as a means for improving writing skills.

In order to gather information to examine this issue, this study took place at a private Colombian university with 13 students (11 women and 2 men) enrolled in an intermediate level general English course. Their ages ranged between 18 and 24 years old, they belonged to middle social class, and their purposes for learning English included traveling, developing skills for their future job, and boosting the learning of other languages.

The subsequent sections of this document report on the theoretical support that strengthens this study in relation to writing, feedback, and ICT. Then, I provide a more detailed description of the setting where the study took place and its participants. The research methodology that guided it and the data collection methods follow, including the

description of the data analysis that I implemented. After the presentation of the findings obtained in this study, the discussion and conclusions of the study close this report.

Theoretical Framework

Four central elements compose this section: a) The sociocognitive approach as theory of learning; b) Writing as a communicative skill; c) Feedback and peer feedback; and d) The component of Information and Communication Technologies of this research.

The theory of learning that underpins this study bases on Atkinson (2002, 2013) to explain why the sociocognitive approach as proposed by this author is adequate to account for learning as it is understood in this study. Then, the conception of writing is presented according to Ong (1986). Different approaches acknowledged in the EFL field to develop this skill follow, as reported by Hasan & Akhand (2011), before focusing on the models of writing as a process described by Hyland (2003). The view of feedback adopted in this study draws mostly on Boud & Molloy (2013), while peer feedback is viewed from Lee's (2017) perspective. To close this section, Blurton's (1999) definition of ICT is presented, and enriched with other authors' view of the role of ICT in education, and more precisely, in language learning.

The theory of learning: The sociocognitive approach

Espitia & Cruz (2013) point out that collaboration is a process in which students communicate to construct knowledge actively (p. 134). This understanding of the process of knowledge construction is influenced by Vygotsky's seminal work on psychology, which introduces the concept of "zone of proximal development", in which learners move through subsequent periods of development thanks to collaborative work and tools (in this case, ICT). According to Alvarez (2016), this approach to learning, the sociocultural theory, influenced CALL/CMC during the early 2000 (p. 71). However, Chun (2016)

explains that the first decade of this century corresponds to Integrative CALL, characterized by a view of language as “developed in social interaction” in which resources such as computers, multimedia and Internet are used as providers of authentic documents in order to develop students’ sense of agency (p. 106).

The view of language proposed by Chun (2016) is compatible with Atkinson (2013)’s learning perspective: The sociocognitive approach. This proposal originated from a sense of dissatisfaction of this author with the views of learning that, as he considers, do not account completely for the entanglement behind second language acquisition because they isolate the cognitive process from the social context in which it takes place. This approach to learning considers language and its development as social phenomena, and it emphasizes the communicative function of language, along with the interaction that is necessary for developing it (Atkinson, 2002; 2013). According to this author, interaction is crucial for language learning because learning implies adapting to our environment, and we do so by communicating with peers in order to obtain a mutual benefit. In Atkinson’s view, learning is not only social, nor only cognitive either; both perspectives enrich this process; hence, it is a holistic approach to understanding second language acquisition.

This research focuses on the use of technological tools aiming at promoting peer interaction and feedback, since Atkinson (2013) explains that interaction does not need to happen only face to face, it can also occur through mediation, because “any social action or artifact that promotes interactive engagement with/in L2 environments potentially provides support for SLA”. (p. 8).

Atkinson (2002) proposes four principles that should be present in a sociocognitive-guided teaching practice. I present them below, along with a description of how they were included in this study.

Principle	Definition	Integration into this study
Interaction.	Learners should be active interlocutors in their process rather than passive recipients of knowledge from an external source. (p. 536)	The online tools favored the conditions for participants to be at the center of their learning while cooperating with others to make progress and to enrich communication. Interaction promoted the idea of learning cooperatively.
Language and its acquisition require “action” and “participation”.	“One acquires a language in order to act, and by acting, in a world where language is performative” (p.537).	The purpose of language was meaningful communication. Sharing experiences with classmates and then being able to integrate suggestions to one’s language performance is part of the process of language and its acquisition by creating authentic, purposeful communication.
Language and its acquisition should not be isolated from other practices.	“Language and its acquisition would be fully integrated into other activities, people, and things”. (p. 536).	This study opened the barriers of the classroom so that participants could live language beyond the traditional teaching area through authentic, productive communication among them.
Cognition and sociality should not be separate, but connected.	“As an approach to language, it is fundamentally cognitive <i>and</i> fundamentally social” (p. 537).	The role of interaction as a social builder was always borne in mind, even though one of the goals of such interaction was cognitive in nature because it intended to attract students’ attention to their difficulties in order to correct them, thus writing better stories that the readers could understand more easily.

Table 1 Principles of the sociocognitive approach (Atkinson 2002, pp. 536-537).

In conclusion, learning is a process in which the social component interweaves constantly with the social element in a specific setting where the learners have the opportunity to be producers of knowledge for themselves and for their peers.

After presenting the understanding of learning taken into consideration for building the pedagogical intervention of this study, the rest of this section develops the concepts of writing, feedback and ICT that were involved in exploring answers to the research question.

Writing

Definition and characteristics.

Ong's (1986) seminal work on literacy defined writing as a "technology" that contributes largely to shape our thoughts and ideas (p. 23). This view of writing is complementary to Quintero's (2008), for whom "the act of writing is far beyond the fact of only putting well organized words and structures on a white piece of paper; it is rather the act of giving meaning and substance to our thoughts" (p. 10). Writing implies not only the linguistic process that allows the transmission of ideas, but also the mental process of creating them, meaning that cognition plays an important role in writing. Additionally, Hyland (2013) acknowledges the paramount importance of writing in social activities such as education, commerce, and communication of ideas. These three views of writing permeate the perspective adopted in this study, which fits the sociocognitive approach informing my understanding of learning: writing as a social process that cannot be separated from the cognitive elements that structure it.

This understanding of writing is enriched by Brown's description of reading and writing as "culturally specific, learned behaviours" (2001, p.334). This outlook of writing reflects the relationship existing between writing and context, as well as the instruction needed for developing it, which this study achieved through interaction and cooperation.

Writing is one of the most difficult skills to learn. Nunan's definition of writing as a "complex, cognitive process that requires sustained intellectual effort over a period of time" (1999, p. 273) illustrates that writing should not be considered a one-time activity. The writer should be prepared to a constant endeavor of improvement, which is the reason why this study conceives the writing-as-a-process approach as the one that offers opportunities for making students aware of the nature of writing as a long-term task.

The approaches to writing.

According to Hasan & Akhand (2011), three approaches to writing can be distinguished in EFL/ESL: genre, product, and process. They state that the product and process approaches have led the field over the last 20 years, although the genre approach has been gaining more importance in the last ten years. They explain that there are several factors to take into consideration when choosing the proper approach for writing instruction, such as the students' mastery of the language, the type of text that is studied, and the curriculum (p. 78).

The genre approach to writing.

This approach is frequent in ESP (English for Specific Purposes), in which learners receive instruction in specific genres according to the setting of production of the text and

the conventions of its intended audience, for increasing its communicative potential (Hasan & Akhand, 2011).

Cope & Kalantzis (2012) state that a genre approach “means engaging students in the role of apprentice with the teacher in the role of expert on language system and function” (p. 1). They consider it an adequate approach for instruction when the focus is on the purpose of the text and on learning the kind of language chosen to fulfill this purpose. However, its critics posit that it focuses much more on the reader than on the expression of the learner (Swales, 2000 as quoted by Hasan & Akhand). In addition, students might not learn to react to authentic communication outside the academic world (Bhatia, 2008).

The product approach to writing.

The product-oriented approach to writing is very popular in EAP (English for Academic Purposes) because an important characteristic of this domain is the mastery of conventions (White, 1985). In this approach, the focus is on the correctness of language and on the organization of the text to be produced, for which students base on a model provided by the teacher or the textbook. Figure 1 represents the development of writing activities in this approach. It is based on White (1985, p.5).

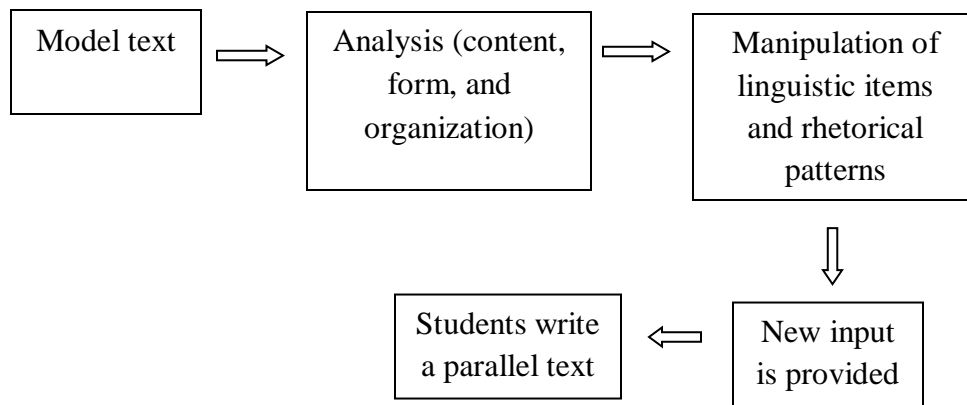


Figure 1. Writing as a product (based on White, 1985, p. 5)

Although different stages are present in this graphic, they aim at reinforcing language in terms of grammar and vocabulary (Tangpermpoon, 2008, p. 2) for getting students closer to the reproduction of patterns provided by the teacher, not the creation of a piece of work in which they can reflect and assess their process, by taking an active, creative role. This is not to say that the EFL/ESL teaching field should neglect the product approach to writing. Its focus on the construction of language can prove fruitful for beginner students who need to develop their mastery of language and their awareness of its use (Tangpermpoon, 2008).

However, Tuffs (1993) reports some criticism around this approach. This author establishes three main problematic situations. First, the advice given is so general that students have difficulties when trying to apply their knowledge to different kinds of texts. Second, he considers this prescriptive approach to writing as “too remote from the students’ writing problems” (p.702). Finally, the approach fails to consider context.

These objections show that as early as the 1990s, the EFL field was interested in promoting new approaches to the writing task. Since this concern is an issue for modern scholars, the conclusion is that this shift has not taken place yet. For instance, according to

Tangpermpoon (2008), critics to this approach to writing mention the fact that it does not pay much attention to purpose and audience but it centers on language construction. It is very demanding in terms of perfection of the text, which decreases students' motivation. In this context, the writing-as-a-process approach can be useful for addressing this criticism.

The process approach to writing.

Harmer (2004) explains that because of the different purposes that writing serves, it takes different forms. However, he asserts that writers execute the same process, which he defines as “the stages a writer goes through in order to produce something in its final written form” (p. 4). These stages are: planning, drafting, editing, and producing a final draft (p. 5).

Consequently, different models of writing as a process exist. For instance, Hedge (2005, p. 51) proposes a six-stage linear approach that begins with developing the motivation to write and finishes with the edition and preparation for publication (Figure 2).

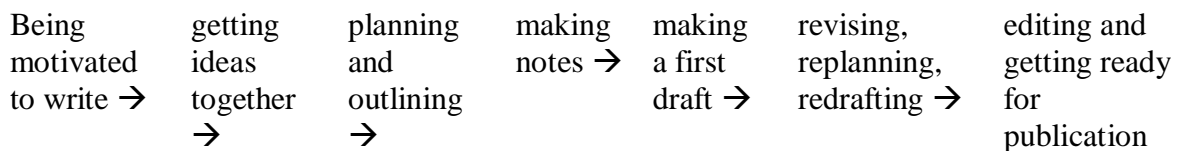


Figure 2. A model of process writing (Hedge, 2005, p. 51)

White & Arndt (1991, p. 43) suggest a non-linear six-stage model for writing that does not have a specific beginning because all the stages intertwine to generate ideas, organize them, then drafting, reviewing, focusing, and evaluating (Figure 3).

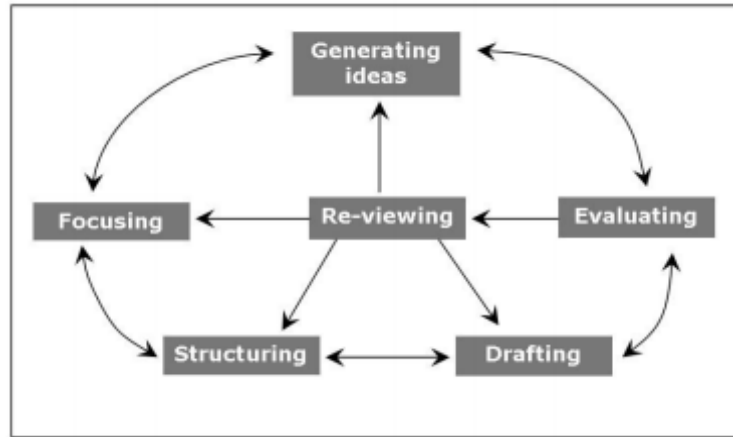


Figure 3. A model of process writing (White & Ardent, 1991, p. 43).

Hyland (2003, pp.11-12) recognizes three approaches to writing as a process: The first one, by Flower & Hayes (1981), views writing as a non-linear process in which writers explore and discover their ideas as they strive to construct meaning (Figure 4).

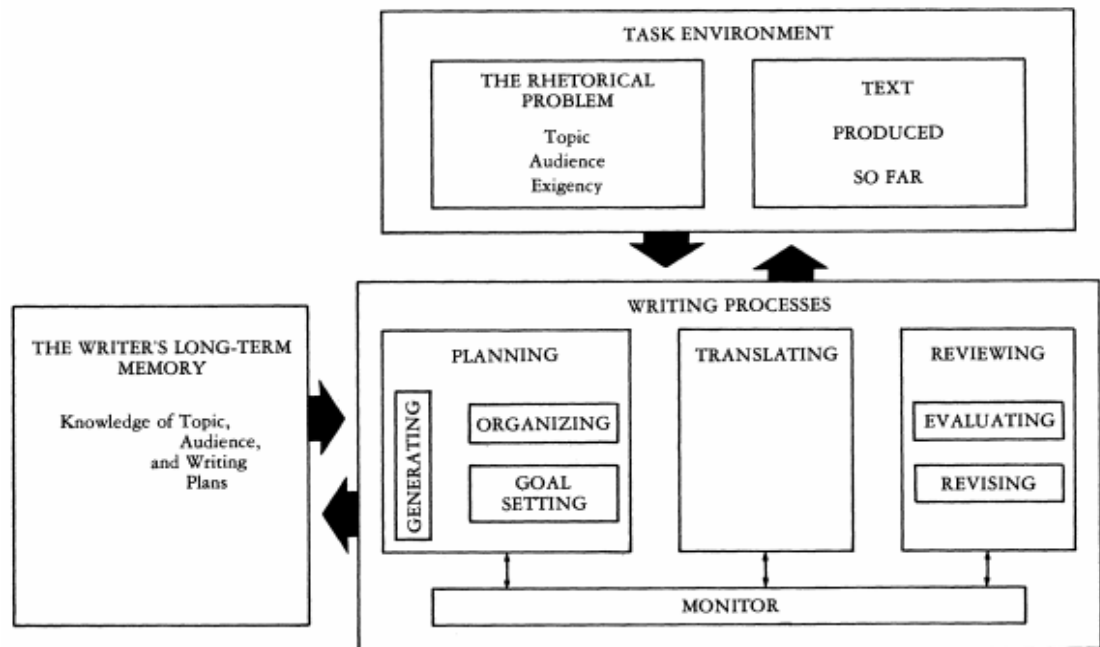


Figure 4. A model of process writing (Flower & Hayes, 1981, p. 370).

The second one, proposed by Bereiter & Scardamalia (1987) suggests a double model (knowledge - telling and knowledge - transforming), the former being directed to beginner writers and the latter to advanced writers, according to their focus when writing

and to the strategies they use. The knowledge-telling model considers writing as finished once the writer has been able to express their ideas through words; while the knowledge-transforming one sees writing as “a recursive process of knowledge development and knowledge expression” (Deane et al., 2008, p. 35). The writers use the tools available for them in the process of writing to produce texts that fulfill their communicative purposes more efficiently.

Finally, the third model in Hyland (2003) is his own, which is the one used in this research. This model posits learning to write as a simultaneous, on-going activity of discovering ideas and communicating them. Table 2 summarizes its principles (Hyland, 2008).

Principles of the Writing-as-a-Process Approach

- Writers have goals and plan extensively.
- Constant revision of writing, often even before the production of any text.
- Planning, drafting, revising, and editing are recursive and potentially simultaneous.
- Continual evaluation of the plans and texts by the writer in a feedback loop.

Table 2. Principles of writing as a process (Hyland, 2008, p. 100)

This model includes the following stages: beginning at the selection of the topic, then moving to prewriting, composing, and response to draft, revision, and response to revisions, proofreading and editing, evaluation, and publication (Figure 5). The final stage proposed by Hyland, follow-up tasks, is beyond the scope of this study, because of time constraints.

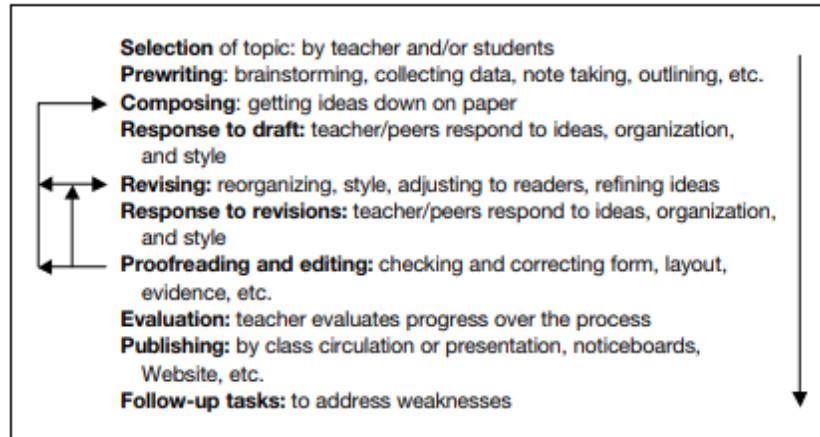


Figure 5. A model of process writing (Hyland, 2003, p. 11).

Hyland’s model of writing as a process was chosen for this study thanks to the opportunity that it offers to provide feedback (see: response to draft in figure 5), and to use tools that would act as mediators in the scaffolding process. It fits the sociocognitive approach that informs the pedagogical decisions made in this study, by allowing a full interaction between the cognitive processes of writing and its social components. Li Wai Shing (1992) asserts that the process approach to writing permits to provide feedback both on content and form, from the generation of ideas until the editing stage, which makes it a more holistic, purposeful approach to writing.

Table 3 compares the process and product approaches in order to clarify the ideas concerning them, since they have been the most used in the field for the last 20 years (Steele, 2004).

Process writing	Product writing
Text as a resource for comparison.	Imitate model text.
Ideas as starting point.	Organisation of ideas more important than ideas themselves.
More than one draft.	One draft.
More global, focus on purpose, theme, text type, i.e., reader is emphasized.	Features highlighted including controlled practice of those features.
Collaborative.	Individual.
Emphasis on creative process.	Emphasis on product.

Table 3. Product and process writing: A comparison (Steele, 2004, p. 1).

According to Hyland (2003), this approach focuses on creative writing, and its main advantage is that it allows opportunities for teaching by making writing a transparent process of formulating and linking ideas one to another, in which the act of writing is at the center, not necessarily the final product.

Feedback

Boud & Molloy (2013) define feedback as “a process whereby learners obtain information about their work in order to appreciate the similarities and differences between the appropriate standards for any given work, and the qualities of the work itself, in order to generate improved work” (p. 6). This view follows Hattie & Temperley (2007), who understand feedback as a means to close the gap between students’ current work and the goal to achieve. An essential issue about feedback is the action that students take in order to approach this goal, or self-regulated learning (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Table 4 introduces the principles that these authors suggest for feedback to be effective in promoting self-regulated learning.

Supporting and developing learner self-regulation

1. Clarify what good performance is.
2. Facilitate self-assessment.
3. Deliver high quality feedback information.
4. Encourage teacher and peer dialogue.
5. Encourage positive motivation and self-esteem.
6. Provide opportunities to close the gap.
7. Use feedback to improve teaching.

Table 4. Feedback principles that support and develop self-regulation in students. (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006, p. 204).

For Hyland (2003), the process approach to writing stresses “the importance of feedback and revision in the process of transforming both content and expression” (p. 12). This perspective shows that feedback can be given at two different levels of the writing process: content (ideas) and expression (language use, readability), while feedback is traditionally offered to correct mechanical and grammatical errors (Li Wai Shing, 1992). This is corrective feedback. There are several types of corrective feedback. Table 5 identifies six of these (Ellis, 2009).

Type of feedback	Description
Direct corrective feedback	The evaluator gives the correct form.
Indirect corrective feedback	The evaluator identifies an error but does not provide the correct answer.
Metalinguistic corrective feedback	The evaluator gives a metalinguistic explanation about the nature of the error.
The focus of the feedback	The evaluator can provide feedback on all the errors found in the text; or choose certain features as the focus of feedback.
Electronic feedback	The evaluator identifies an error and provides an electronic resource with examples of adequate use.
Reformulation	A native speaker of the target language adapts the text to make it native-like, respecting its content.

Table 5. Types of corrective feedback (Ellis, 2009, p.98)

In conclusion, feedback is important in language learning and teaching because of three main reasons:

a) It develops the students' control over their writing skills, especially in a writing-as-a process approach to writing (Hyland & Hyland, 2006),

b) It increases the learning opportunities available for students through scaffolding and collaboration (Wigglesworth & Storch, 2012), and

c) It opens the possibility for students to approach an established learning goal (Hattie & Temperley, 2007).

Taking into account the sociocognitive stance adopted in this study, feedback offers the possibility to boost interaction among the participants of the teaching and learning process. In the traditional view of feedback, the teachers transmit information for improving (Li Wai Shing, 1992), but students are recently taking a more active role. Providing feedback through technological resources is a useful way of assuring students' interest in participating thus increasing their motivation to perform the writing task, moreover it provides an easy-to-read format and promotes interaction (Hepplestone et al., 2010).

Peer feedback.

Lee (2017) defines peer feedback as

“the use of learners as sources of information and interactants for each other in such a way that learners assume roles and responsibilities ... in commenting on and critiquing each other's drafts in both written and oral formats in the process of writing” (p. 1).

Her definition contains important concepts such as the responsibilities assigned to students in their own learning process and as interlocutors in their peers', thus making them aware of their role as the center of learning, and of the possibilities that cooperation offers to them. The role that Lee (2017) acknowledges to peer feedback relates to the principles for using peer feedback proposed by Rollinson (2005): "a) properly setting up the group groups and establishing effective procedures, b) adequate training" (p. 27). According to this author, these conditions will create the setting in which peer feedback can show its benefits for learners.

The benefits of peer-feedback provision include the meaning-making negotiations that participants in the feedback process establish. This entails an improvement of the quality of the feedback provided, which is related to experience-based authentic learning in which students take on the role of contributing to develop their classmates' knowledge while building their own. Different studies have found several benefits to including peer feedback in the ESL writing class because it offers advantages at the social, cognitive, and emotional level (Rollinson, 2005). For instance, Hedin (2012) conducted a study on peer feedback through *Google Docs* in which the participants evaluated this tool positively for offering timely, useful feedback, and found it to be easy to use.

Bijami, Hosein, & Sharafi (2013) recognize the value of peer feedback as a social interaction that plays an essential function in the development of cognitive awareness, which connects to the role that Strijbos & Sluijsmans (2010) assign to peer feedback as an opportunity for reflection, collaboration, and discussion. Hence, peer feedback serves two main purposes: Collaborative work, and the development of awareness related to the proper use of language for authentic communication, thus sharing the principles of the

sociocognitive approach as proposed by Atkinson (2002), especially interaction and the active role adopted by the students.

Different studies have been conducted using ICT-mediated feedback. Lin & Yang (2011) report that peer feedback provides an opportunity for students to engage in the review of the drafts produced by their classmates, which aligns well with the principles of writing as a process that guide this study. Additionally, these researchers report that ELT practitioners have become more interested in peer feedback thanks to its multiple benefits, especially in computer-assisted language learning. Hattie (1999) found out that video-, audio-, or computer-assisted feedback yielded more effective results than other means of providing feedback.

Several technological tools have been studied both locally and internationally, and the results suggest that ICT-mediated feedback has an important impact in boosting the learning process, especially the development of writing skills (i.e. Shi, 2011; Rivera, 2011; Rogers, 2008; Gomez & McDougald, 2013; Ochoa Alpala & Medina Peña, 2014).

Furthermore, there is empiric evidence that feedback provided through technology contributes to the creation of a collaborative environment for students in which they play an active role instead of a passive one (De Guerrero & Villamil, 2010; University of Westminster, 2010).

After this review of the advantages of ICT for providing feedback, it is relevant to analyze the potential of these technologies both in education as a general field and more precisely in the area of languages learning and teaching.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)

Blurton (1991) defines ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) as “a diverse set of technological tools and resources used to communicate, and to create, disseminate, store, and manage information” (p.1). These include radio, television, films, telephones, and of course Internet. In 2007, a report published by the Educational Testing Service concluded, “ICT is being used increasingly by global industry, international media, and academics to reflect the convergence between computer and communication technologies” (p. 2).

This statement shows the ubiquity of these tools in everyday life. Zuppo (2012) establishes a hierarchy of ICT composed of four areas: Economic development, economic sector, education, and business/IT. For the interest of this study, I present below the role of ICT in education in general, and in languages learning in special.

ICT and education.

A report published by the Educational Testing Service (2007) indicates that the use of ICT in education “can be viewed as a set of activities and technologies that fall into the union of IT and telecommunications” (p. 2). This definition places ICT in a continuum between technology and communication, which gives it potential in several areas. A recent literature review reports five benefits of ICT in education. First, it enhances the teaching and learning process by increasing the development of competencies. Second, it increases the quality and accessibility of education because it eliminates the traditional constraints such as time and space barriers. Third, it enhances learning environments by creating more opportunities of access that modify the settings for the teaching and learning practices.

Fourth, it strengthens learner motivation because it can place students at the center of their learning process. Finally, it improves the scholastic performance by facilitating the communication between the participants in the teaching and learning process, which improves students' engagement (Noor-Ul-Amin, 2013).

ICT holds a central position in society, and being familiar with these tools is an important aspect of literacy (UNESCO, 2002). Additionally, Zuppo (2012) asserts that ICT in education has “become synonymous with productivity and enabled communication within a global context” (p. 20). This might explain why the use of ICT in pedagogy is linked to an easier access to education, and the transformation of the teaching and learning process into a more active, learner-centered one (Tinio, 2003).

The collaborative setting facilitated by ICT is equally important. New ways of communicating, teaching, and learning emerge by placing students at the center of the learning process and helping them develop their autonomy. ICT transforms current teaching practices by promoting collaboration and providing access to information, thanks to which learners can become more independent in their process (Hussain & Safdar, 2008).

Thus, technology has much potential to exploit when it comes to learning and teaching. According to a report published in 2011, technology can:

“a) Help diagnose and address individual needs; b) Equip students with skills essential for work and life in a 21st century global society (problem solving, creativity, collaboration, data management, and communication); and c) Provide an active experience for students (to independently organize their learning process)”. (Moeller & Reitzes, 2011, p.5-6).

These benefits apply to the use of ICT in education as a whole discipline. The next part of this section focuses on the benefits of ICT in language learning precisely.

ICT and language learning.

Besides the benefits reported for ICT in education in general, which can also be seen in language learning, there are other advantages that correspond precisely to language learning. In 2008, three main groups of benefits were drawn up: a) The opportunity for students to use the target language in authentic settings; b) The chances for students to collaborate and work cooperatively; c) The changes in the teaching methodologies with the creation of new teaching practices that permit to improve the follow up done to students, such as blended learning (Kumar & Tammelin, 2008). Some of these arguments are confirmed by other authors, as shows the literature review that I conducted.

Isisag (2012) argues that the benefits of ICT for language learning include the possibility of establishing contact with other speakers of the language around the world, creating and sharing their productions, the access to resources that learners can use to enhance their learning, and the knowledge of other cultures around the world.

Scholars posit that computer-mediated writing benefits from the existence of several resources such as grammar and spelling checkers, and dictionaries. These resources can help students become more autonomous in their learning process while helping each other to make progress (Rojas, 2007).

When it comes to interaction, technology provides supportive resources for peer collaboration outside the classroom (Leki, Cumming, and Silva, 2008), thus providing a real audience for the students' texts. This audience is composed not only of the teacher, but

also of the rest of the class and in some cases, a worldwide audience if the class decides to publish the texts. Reading the texts produced by the students and reacting to them in real time in order to improve them is an important advantage of using technology.

The ICT tools chosen for this study meant to fulfill different purposes such as: a) fostering students' autonomy and confidence, b) raising their awareness of the correct use of language by correcting their production before submitting it, and c) promoting peer interaction and editing. Studies conducted using *Google Docs* have shown the benefits that it has to offer. For instance, Hedin (2012) found it to be an engaging tool for students; Zhou, Simpson, & Domizi (2012) called it a "promising tool for collaborative learning" (p. 359); Kongchan (2013) used this tool to change traditional teaching practices and showed that it allowed for more flexibility, knowledge construction, and it eased the rhythm of teaching and learning. These benefits, added to the positive impact on writing that Suwantarathip and Wichadee (2014) report for this tool, and the lack of studies conducted in the Colombian EFL field with students in the tertiary level, make it appropriate for this study, along with the easy access that the students have through their institutional assigned e-mail accounts.

After this review of the learning perspective adopted in this study, writing, feedback, and ICT as the essential concepts around which this study is constructed, it is pertinent to introduce the context in which this research took place. The upcoming section is devoted to the presentation of the institution where I conducted this study, and the participants who were involved in it.

Setting

This research took place at a private institution founded in Bogota in 1977 that opened a branch in Medellin in 2012, and is recognized as a university since 2014 by the Ministry of Education, as reported by the establishment in its official website. The main administration of the university is located in Bogota and they make the decisions concerning the curriculum and policies to implement in the university. There is a main administrator in Medellin who runs the head office, and one curricular leader per department.

The undergraduate programs that this university offers constitute three departments, as indicates the official website of the institution. These are Engineering (professional in mechatronics and professional in industrial engineering), Economics and Administration (professional in international commerce), and Juridical, Social and Human Sciences (professional in modern languages).

In the study participated 13 students (two men and eleven women) majoring in modern languages. This major lasts 8 semesters and its goal is to educate multilingual professionals to perform in the fields of communication, administration and marketing. According to the descriptors of the Common European Framework of Reference, their level of English when they participated in this study could correspond to approaching B1 because they:

“Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can produce simple connected text on topics, which are familiar, or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 5).

However, the level of communication in English of some of them could correspond better to A2. The CEFR describes that these basic users:

“Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 5).

The curriculum of this program combines learning about administration, marketing, computer courses, and research, with Spanish, French, German, and English. The English courses comprehend a basic cycle that lasts three semesters, and an advanced one that corresponds to four semesters.

The course in which this research took place belonged to the basic cycle (second semester of the program). It was an intermediate (A2-B1, according to the CEFR) level, which had 8 hours of face-to-face classes per week. According to the description of the program, the university recommends to follow a communicative approach based on the functional descriptors of the CEFR. Additionally, in the presentation of the methodology and pedagogical strategies, it refers to the methodology as student-centered, following a task-based approach and mini projects work.

It also emphasizes on the students’ autonomous learning, the development of the four communicative skills (reading, listening, writing, and speaking), and the promotion of students’ critical thinking. There is no particular reference to the development of writing in the syllabus of the course. It used a British English textbook “designed to meet the everyday language requirements of people who need to learn English for work, travel and socialising”, as reported in the description of the book (Hollett & Whitby, 2014).

The 13 participants came from different socioeconomic backgrounds, although economic strata 2 and 3 were the most common, and their ages ranged between 18 and 24 years old. They had different motivations to enroll in this program: Some of them wished to become teachers or translators, some others would like to travel doing business with different foreign enterprises, while others dreamed of creating their own company in Colombia.

In the next section, I describe the methods for data collection along with the purposes for their use. Then, I present how I analyzed the data based on the categories reported in the findings.

Research Methodology

Type of Study

I conducted a case study enriched with qualitative and quantitative data, framed in the interpretivist paradigm to research. The focus of interest in the interpretivist paradigm, according to Richards (2003), is on understanding socially constructed situations from the viewpoint of the several participants involved (p.38). Other authors state that the characteristics of this approach include its aim at understanding “the world of human experience” (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p. 36); its focus on interpreting and understanding the meaning of a phenomenon for a particular group (Merriam, 2009); and its reliance on qualitative data mostly, although it is possible to include quantitative data too (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006).

Creswell (2003), defines a case study as “an exploration of a ‘bounded system’ or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (p.61). In this study, the case under scrutiny was a group of English learners using *Google Docs* and other technological resources to provide and react to feedback in order to enhance their ability to produce coherent, well-written recounts. The qualitative data of the research, composed of narratives from the participants (focus groups, an interview, and researcher diaries), allowed to collect the participants’ perceptions on the process. This information, along with quantitative data, demonstrated that the feedback process was effective for improving the quality and readability of the texts produced.

Yin (2003) explains that any strategy of doing research has particular benefits and inconvenients based on three issues: the nature of the research question, the control that the

researcher detains over events, and if the focus is on current or historical events (p. 1). Based on these conditions, he asserts that researchers should resort to case study when the research question is how or why, when there is not much control over the situations, and when the aim is to understand a contemporary event. Although this research strategy is very common in several areas of knowledge, this author qualifies it as “one of the most challenging of all social science endeavors” (2003, p. 1). However, its main advantage is that it “allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events” (Yin, 2003, p. 2).

Ethical Considerations

There are several codes of practice for conducting research in social sciences. Norton (2009) draws on those proposed by the British Educational Research Association (2004) and the American Educational Research Association (2000) to conclude on three fundamental ethical principles. They are listed below, along with the explanation of how I ensured their integration in this study.

Informed consent.

This refers to giving enough information to the participants of the study so that they know what they are agreeing to, and obtaining their permission to be part of the research. Before the onset of this study, I had a meeting with the students of the course I was teaching and in which I intended to conduct my research to invite them to participate in it. During this session, the participants asked questions and received all the information that they needed to know in order to decide about their participation in this study. All of the participants agreed to sign a consent form designed for this research (Appendix A).

Privacy and confidentiality.

This refers to protecting the participants' identity and explaining to them who will have access to the data produced in the research. In this study, I assigned a pseudonym to the participants, so that nobody would identify them. Additionally, even though other researchers had a certain access to data (the second evaluator read their texts, and my thesis director was familiar with data), I was the only one who had access to data as a whole.

Protection from harm.

Physical harm is unlikely to happen in pedagogical research, but there might be psychological harm, one example is the impact of a given intervention on students' self-esteem. In this study, for instance, it was possible that students compared their performance to their classmates' and felt bad about it. Even though I made sure to distribute the texts for peer feedback respecting their privacy, it was unavoidable that they discovered whose texts they were reading because of the comments function of *Google Docs*, which recorded the name of the user when they replied to their peers' feedback. However, it is important to mention that thanks to the good class environment and the friendly relationship that the participants had, this was not an issue for them, as they expressed in the focus groups.

Data Collection Methods

Yin (2003) acknowledges six main sources of data for case studies:

“Documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant-observation, and physical artifacts” (p.85). He also states, “A complete list of sources can be quite extensive” (p. 85), implying that other methods may be available as well.

Drawing on this viewpoint, this study counted on these sources of information: two focus groups with the participants, a double analysis of their two drafts, one interview with the second evaluator of the texts, the online interactions among peers to provide and react to feedback, and a diary on which I recorded my insights of the research process.

These methods intended to increase the validity of the results yielded, through member validation mostly, since they are useful for confirming and triangulating. Although these terms come from a positivist tradition, and Golafshani (2003) suggests that there is a lack of agreement in interpretive research for equivalents and definitions of these terms, scholars insist that the credibility of qualitative research is mostly related to the possibility of the findings to establish confidence.

I ensured triangulation, which is the process of comparing the information obtained from the different sources, through a thorough process of data collection from all the participants in the study, using different techniques that combined both oral reports from the participants and quantitative analysis of the evidence gathered in their texts. After analyzing the data, I carried on member checks to share my insights with the other participants and confirm their interpretations of my perspectives, which was meant to develop credibility of the results (Guba, 1981).

Interviews.

Glesne (2006) defines interviews as an interactive exercise in which the researcher gathers information from the participants of a study by asking questions (p. 79). She claims that interviews allow learning about “opinions, perceptions, and attitudes towards some topic” (p.80). This explains why interviews are particularly valuable in qualitative research

for the understanding of the phenomena and situations observed that they allow developing (p. 81).

I applied one interview the 1 May 2018 to the external evaluator who read the texts that the students produced and assessed them using the same rubric adapted for the study. She holds a B.A. in Foreign Languages Teaching from University of Antioquia and, when she participated in the study, she was a candidate for an M.A. in Teaching English as a Foreign Language. The purpose of the interview was to collect her insights about the texts, discuss her analysis of the texts, and the evolution that she noticed from one draft to the other.

Focus groups.

Another form of interviewing that I applied in this research was focus groups. Morgan (1998) defines them as group interviews guided by a moderator who raises questions or topics that the participants discuss (p. 1).

I conducted a focus group with the students at the end of the first cycle of the study (the production of the first text) in the interest of analyzing their practices related to writing, and collecting information about their viewpoint throughout this process, and a second one at the end of the study. With this information, I was able to learn about the participants' ideas and opinions regarding the role of technology and peer feedback in their writing.

Students' drafts.

According to Altrichter, Posch, & Somekh (2005), the work of pupils is useful for studying their development (p. 81), which serves well one of the purposes of this study: To

analyze the modifications that the students' productions showed after receiving feedback from other participants through ICT.

The participants of this study wrote two drafts of a recount. The writing of the first version took place during the week going from March 5 to March 9 2018, and the second one, between April 2 and 6 2018. I collected and hosted these texts on G-Suite. These data provided insights about the quality of the texts and the role that peer feedback and the technological applications played in the transformations that occurred in them. A rubric allowed evaluating the texts and the progress made between the two drafts (Appendix B).

It is important to mention that this research was process-oriented, therefore the interactions that took place among participants, and their reactions to feedback, were also relevant data. Thus, I conducted two analyses: The first one compared the two versions of the text (before and after feedback) for studying the changes made to the text (progression of writing skills from one draft to the other); and the second one's goal was to assess the impact that peer feedback handed through *Google Docs* comments had on the texts.

Diaries.

Diaries of the researcher are used in qualitative research to make them aware of their assumptions and values (Ortlipp, 2008), and they are important for the research process because they become a source of ideas, analysis, and hypotheses (Woodfield & Lazarus, 1998).

I made weekly records of the research process in order to analyze the behaviors and patterns that emerged, and to use these observations as a source of information that would

permit to triangulate my insights with the ones from the participants and the second evaluator.

Second evaluation.

This study also counted on the professional perspective of a fellow teacher who evaluated the texts written by the students. Her previous experience with rubrics included her work at different programs offered by the University of Antioquia, and at a well-known English institute.

The decision of inviting a second evaluator for the texts was consistent with other studies according to which this evaluator can provide a new perspective to the assessment of the work submitted by the students, while the researcher knows in detail the strategies taught to the students (i.e. Gomez & McDougald, 2013, p. 50).

The grades that she assigned to the participants' texts served as quantitative data that I compared to the ones that I assigned in order to evaluate our overall perception concerning the improvement of the texts, as reflected by the marks that we assigned and the comments that we made.

Intervention

This section of the report describes the stages of the intervention that took place as part of the teaching and researching processes involved in this study.

Pedagogical component.

The intervention that I conducted was the implementation of a unit for the writing of recounts, following the process approach to writing as described by Hyland (2003). Table 6 summarizes the phases of this intervention. Some of the phases proposed by Hyland occurred simultaneously.

Stage of the writing process	Activities and data collected
Selection of topic	Before beginning to write, students received instruction in the use of the technological tools included in the study. They had some practice in class and kept using them on their own in order to familiarize with their setting and use. Additionally, they read and analyzed an example of a recount that I adapted from the personal story of a well-known American entrepreneur. Then, the topic was chosen based on the syllabus of the course. After an instructional lesson named “Roads to success” (Lifestyle, Unit 3, Pearson, 2010). The students wrote a text called “Motivation stories” based on a prompt (see Appendix E).
Prewriting	Brainstorming, outlining.
Composing	Students wrote their first draft, collected as data.
Response to draft	Peers and I provided feedback. Simultaneously, the second evaluator and I assessed the draft using the rubric (Appendix B).
Revising, Proofreading and editing	The writers reviewed and interacted with the feedback made in order to produce a new draft, which was also collected as data and double-graded.
Response to revisions, and Evaluation	I read and graded the second draft.

Table 6. Summary of the pedagogical intervention

Research component.

The research component of the intervention aimed at familiarizing students with the technological tools used in the study.

After obtaining permission from the institution to conduct the study, and handling with the ethical concerns regarding the students, the participants wrote a recount in which they shared their experience practicing a hobby that a classmate recommended. This text served as a pre-test used to analyze their understanding of the structure of this kind of text before the onset of the study. Then, I introduced the technological tools chosen for this study, and the students had some opportunities of practice with them. In addition, the students analyzed examples of recounts and received instruction on the stages of the writing process adopted for this study. Afterwards, they received the prompt for writing a recount about an activity in which they engaged and their motivation to complete it, they created the outline, and wrote their first draft.

Next, students received a randomly assigned text from a peer that they read and assessed following the criteria in the rubric included in Appendix A. The data collected for this stage was the feedback provided. Simultaneously, another evaluation of the texts by the external evaluator and by myself took place.

Later, the authors of the text received their text back and reacted to the feedback given by interacting with their peers or by integrating the corrections proposed. These interactions constituted data for the research too. At the end of this first cycle, I conducted the first focus group with students, after which I made the final evaluation of their texts in order to assess the transformations that the ICT-mediated feedback promoted. At the same time, I interviewed the second evaluator of the texts in order to obtain her perspective on the process and especially her analysis of the pre-and post-tests. A second focus group with the students closed the intervention in order to collect their insights and opinions at the end of the process.

ICT tools.

An important feature of this study was providing students with different ICT tools to favor their writing process independently, namely:

- *Google Docs* is an online word processor. G –Suite hosts the official e-mail of the university; hence, every member of the institution has access to this app.

The purpose of its integration to the classroom was to promote students' collaboration and edition outside the classroom.

The following tools intended to increase students' autonomy when writing, and providing them with the resources necessary for editing their peers' and their own texts:

- *Virtual writing tutor* is a “free online grammar checker or proofreader [that] helps writers count words, check spelling, check grammar and punctuation” (Walker, 2015).
- *Merriam-Webster* only-English dictionary is “America's leading and most-trusted provider of language information”. It is “backed by the largest team of professional dictionary editors and writers in America, and one of the largest in the world” (Merriam-Webster, 2015).
- *Wordreference* is one of the most-used online bilingual dictionaries, according to its creator Michael Kellogg (Kellogg, 2018).
- *Grammarly* is an online checker that “makes sure everything you type is clear, effective, and mistake-free” (Grammarly, 2009).

Data Analysis

This is fundamentally a qualitative research nourished with quantitative data. The methodological proposal used was case study (Creswell, 2003) because its purpose is to understand a phenomenon, considered from different perspectives. According to Creswell (2003), case study requires data collection to be systematic and from multiple sources. Thus, I used several data collection tools to enrich the understanding of the phenomenon under study, which implied an adaptation of the analysis according to the source of information.

Qualitative analysis.

Bryman (2012) states that “clear-cut rules about how qualitative data analysis should be carried out have not been developed” (p. 565). However, he also recognizes that for research to be trustworthy, it should base on certain principles. Creswell (2012) backs this stance by stating that qualitative data analysis is an “eclectic process” for which there is not one single approach but several guidelines (p. 238).

For the analysis of qualitative data, Bryman (2012) and Creswell (2012) recognize two strategies, deductive and inductive. Inductive analysis means that the theory emerges from the data, the researcher does not establish previous categories for analysis. In this study, data were analyzed mostly deductively, since the categories were determined by the learning obtained from the pilot study and the literature review.

According to Creswell (2012), there are six moments of the analysis of qualitative data, which are not necessarily a linear process because “[i]n qualitative research, the data collection and analysis (...) are simultaneous activities” (p. 238). Following this scholar, I

began by collecting narrative data from all the participants involved in the research, the students, the second evaluator, and myself. These narratives were collected in Spanish for clarity purposes, so I translated them into English for research purposes. Then, I prepared and organized this information for analysis using PDF documents, cleaning the transcriptions and reviewing the translations, and organizing the files in my Google Drive folder. Next, I created an NVivo project, which was the support on which I reread all the sources of information. During this reading process, I identified the evidence corresponding to the categories that I had established based on the pilot study and the literature review, then I created chunks of information, and completed them with memos containing my preliminary interpretations about this evidence.

Along with this process, I drew on Guion, Diehl & McDonald (2002, p.2) to use data triangulation and methodological triangulation. The former refers to contrasting the results obtained from the interview, the focus groups, and my diaries in order to find the connections that they contained related to the categories established. The latter implies combining the qualitative analysis with the quantitative one, which allowed me ensuring that the improvement observed through the evaluation of the texts, and reported by the students, was backed with evidence from the quantitative analysis conducted on the texts produced by the students. To do so, these texts underwent a linguistic and structural analysis using a rubric adapted from Ramli (2013) (Appendix B). This analysis yielded quantitative data too, whose analysis follows.

Quantitative analysis.

Bryman (2012) indicates that “[m]easurement provides the basis for more precise estimates of the degree of relationship between concepts” (p. 164). This is useful for my study because I was interested in analyzing the impact of ICT-mediated feedback on the improvement of writing skills.

The analysis of quantitative data consisted of several stages following Creswell (2012). The first step in the analysis was preparing and organizing the data. I put together the results obtained in the analysis that I conducted, enriched by the perspectives of the participants and the second evaluator. Then, I decided on the unit of analysis of the study, which was the clause (defined as any utterance composed of a subject and a verb), I created a chart on Excel with several columns where I numbered the clauses found in each text, and two columns for linguistic errors (one for vocabulary and another one for verbal tenses), then I assigned a code to the errors found: 1 meant that there was an error, 0 indicated no error, and I coded all the clauses that the participants wrote. At the end, I counted the number of errors found in each category, and compared them to the second draft. I also conducted another analysis in which I compared the grades assigned by the second evaluator to the ones that I assigned in both drafts of the text in order to gather evidence for the improvement that the qualitative analysis reported in the texts.

In this analysis, data triangulation ensured trustworthiness: The information related to the number of errors identified in the texts originated in my analysis, and the one conducted by the second evaluator, and the peers. The grade resulted from an average between the ones assigned by the two evaluators.

The next section describes the categories considered in my analysis and provides evidence of the role that ICT-mediated peer feedback played in the bettering of the texts, based on the different sources of information that I implemented.

Findings

In order to explore the effectiveness of ICT-mediated feedback for the improvement of writing skills at the tertiary level, a case study took place at a private university with students enrolled in an intermediate general English course. This section comprises its results. It corresponds to three main axes: the effectiveness of feedback for improving writing, the role of ICT, and the writing process.

This study had two phases. The first one, or exploratory, served as a diagnostic of the students' writing skill. The second one, or interventional, was implemented after the participants received instruction in the writing-as-a-process approach and the provision of feedback, and the ICT tools used in the study.

Findings from the Exploratory Stage

The exploratory phase, carried out before the intervention (February 19-23, 2018), aimed at assessing the students' level of writing and the kind of linguistic errors found in their texts. This stage produced preliminary findings that guided the development of the research.

First, students did not outline their ideas nor did they create a plan of the text before writing. This finding was important because it centered the study towards the writing-as-a-process approach. The following entry of my research diary illustrates this observation:

“When they began to write, I noticed that they didn't reflect on the task nor the kind of information to communicate. They just started to answer the questions on the prompt, moving from one idea to another [...] I think that using outlines can help them to track the expression of their ideas” (research diary, February 22).

Second, most of the students turned to online translators as their preferred tool for completing this task because, according to them, they lacked vocabulary. This observation pointed out the importance of providing students with a repertoire of free options available on the Internet to give them more autonomy and to improve their level of English. This record from my diary serves as an example:

“I approached some of them and asked them why they were doing that. They mentioned that they didn’t know how to translate into English what they wanted to say in Spanish, then I proposed them to try while I was there to make sure that it was correct. Most of them were able to produce the sentences by themselves, and if they struggled with vocabulary, I suggested using the *wordreference* bilingual dictionary instead. I hoped to be able to convince them to take some risks in writing” (researcher journal, February 22).

Third, I noticed confusion between the use of present and past tense in the same idea. This linguistic issue reflected on the accomplishment of the communicative function of the texts, thus it made me realize the need for more instruction in this matter.

This excerpt from Noelia’s text shows this difficulty: “*I practiced swimming and really I like that*”. Another text, Declan’s, illustrates this situation too. While he was telling a past story, he included a sentence with a mistake in conjugation: “*The teacher choose four students*”. Another difficulty concerned the use of the auxiliary for negative sentences in past tense. Adina, for example, wrote, “*I don’t accept*” in a past anecdote, while Noelia wrote, “*I didn’t met her*”.

Additionally, certain linguistic features were influenced by Spanish, for example: a) the use of prepositions i.e “*for do*”, “*I’m good _ writing*”; b) vocabulary, with expressions such as “*I finished sad*”, “*this practice searches*”, and c) punctuation (interview with second evaluator, May 1).

As previously stated, the exploratory stage provided important information about the study, and the categories to analyze during the interventional stage emerged in this phase too. I present these findings in the next part of this section.

Findings from the Interventional Stage

The effectiveness of feedback.

Feedback on linguistic structure.

It is necessary to establish two important definitions in this study: A clause is any utterance composed of a subject and a verb, no difference is established based on types of clauses; and an error is “any clear deviation from the norms of standard written English” (Epes, 1985, p. 6).

The two drafts of the texts about motivation that students produced constituted an important data collection instrument whose linguistic analysis based on the clause in order to identify and track the errors related to vocabulary and the use of verbal tenses. Then, I compared the number of errors, and analyzed the decisions that students made in that sense.

I evaluated the effectiveness of feedback in terms of uptake, since Sheen (2004) reports that uptake and learner repair is one of the methods to measure the effectiveness of corrective feedback. In their seminal study about corrective feedback and uptake, Lyster & Ranta (1997) define uptake as the decisions that the students make when they receive feedback. These authors state that when the students notice an error, there are two possibilities: either the error is corrected (repair), or the students produce an utterance that still needs repair (1997, p. 49). Santos, López, & Manchón pose a different perspective,

explaining that uptake is “the type and the amount of accurate revisions incorporated in the participants’ revised versions of their original texts” (2010:139). For Lyster and Ranta (1997), uptake does not necessarily relate to accuracy, but to the choices made for improving the text as a reaction to the feedback provided, although the possibility of errors persists. This approach is consistent with other studies that have found that uptake represents a movement towards learning, meaning that at least noticing an error is important for learning, even though there is no correction. According to Lightbown, “a reformulated utterance from the learner gives some reason to believe that the mismatch between learner utterance and target utterance has been noticed, a step at least toward acquisition” (1998, p.193).

In this study, feedback is effective when the participants corrected in the second draft an error identified by the researcher or by peers in the first version, following the definition of uptake by Santos et al. (2010). These examples illustrate successful uptake.

David’s first draft: I would like to share a *history*.

Feedback: The researcher provided two links to the definitions of “history” and “story”

Result: I would like to share a *story*.

Example 1: ICT-mediated feedback on vocabulary.

Sol’s first draft: My personality *change* so much.

Feedback: Her peer wrote “this should be in past ” *Changed*”.

Result: My personality *changed* so much.

Example 2: ICT-mediated feedback on conjugation.

David’s first draft: that *motive* me

Feedback: The researcher wrote, “Check spelling and tense”.

Result: that *inspired* me.

Example 3: ICT-mediated feedback on lexicon.

David's first draft: you are *in* your knees.

Feedback: The researcher wrote "on".

Result: you are *on* your knees.

Example 4: ICT-mediated feedback on prepositions.

Lyster & Ranta (1997) acknowledge six kinds of feedback. In the examples above, feedback takes two forms. In the examples one and three of students' work above, the attention of the participants was called towards an error and the evaluator provided a clue so that they could reflect on how to correct it. Following Lyster and Ranta's classification, this is known as metalinguistic feedback, in which "Metalinguistic information generally provides either some grammatical metalanguage that refers to the nature of the error or a word definition in the case of lexical errors" (1997, p. 47).

For the examples two and four of students' work, the correction was explicit by giving the correct answer. The participants did not reply to any of these corrections. They either noticed the error and corrected it, or integrated the correction proposed. Therefore, in this study feedback was effective regardless of its type because it helped the participants to recognize their writing difficulties with their peers' and teacher's help.

An important result is that the participants found value to the feedback received. Jazmin referred during the first focus group that "the corrections were really useful for me" (Focus group 1, March 23. My translation), Sol agreed and she explained that her text was much better after feedback (Focus group 1, March 23. My translation).

Another aspect related to feedback that the participants appreciated was the possibility to use more resources to find the answers by themselves. According to Leyda,

“It was nice because you [the teacher] wrote the word or the search engine, for me to go and find more information”. Noelia and Adina agreed with this comment because they appreciated the examples and the suggestions made by these resources and tools in terms of vocabulary and linguistic correction, especially prepositions. (Focus group 1, March 23. My translation).

Equally valuable is the possibility to provide timely feedback, so that students did not need to wait until the next course to have a correction and an answer to their questions, as seen in figure 6 taken from Liset’s text, which shows how feedback became part of the writing exercise.

We as a group played many genres like torbellino, jazz, blues, gypsy and we combine **it**, we **receive** a lot of attention for it and we were acquiring power with the years **what make** us able to start new projects, that's how the encounter began. A lot of musicians took part of it and they came from our city and other parts of Colombia, they came to show what **They** were doing and teach some of what they know.

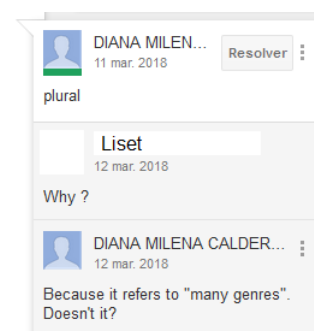


Figure 6. Timely feedback.

Out of sixty vocabulary-related errors towards which the attention of the participants was called in their first version, there was evidence of correction for 31 of them, as illustrates figure 7. This means that successful uptake represented 51.6% for vocabulary.

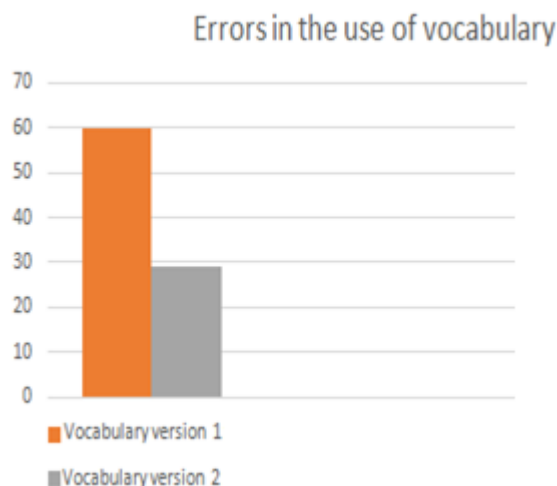


Figure 7. Uptake for vocabulary-related errors.

As for the cases in which feedback was not successful, I found that the students made new errors in 26.8% of the cases, and they did not correct in 21.5%. Below are some examples of this.

Valeria's first draft: I always *have loosen* math.

Feedback: The researcher wrote, "I don't understand".

Result: I had always lost math.

Example 5: Ineffective feedback for vocabulary. New error.

In this particular case, it may be productive to assess the usefulness and clarity of the feedback provided, since no clue was given, nor an explanation of the error made by the participant, hence Valeria had no reference to know what she needed to correct.

Concerning the use of verbal tenses, there were 29 errors in the first version, while in the second one this number decreased to seven, meaning that successful uptake is equal to 75.8%, as shows figure 8.

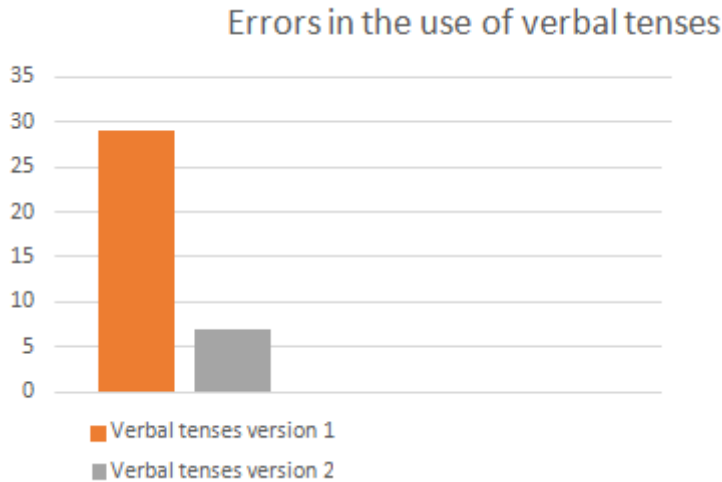


Figure 8. Uptake for errors related to verbal tenses.

I found that these seven repeated errors were made noticeable to the participants but they did not correct them, they just rewrote the original sentence, as shows example 8.

Adina's first draft: I *am* shy.

Feedback: The researcher wrote, “Why do you conjugate in present?”

Result: I *am* shy.

Example 8: Ineffective feedback for verbal tense. Unrepaired error.

This question meant to lead her to reflect on her choice, but she did not. A possible explanation for this is that shyness is a trait that is still present in her character, and she did not think the correction was necessary. However, she did not ask any questions or explanations about this.

These results show that feedback had a positive impact on linguistic correction, both for the use of vocabulary and the adequate conjugation of verbs, since the number of errors decreased between the first draft and the final version. Besides, the participants proved this information in the second focus group. They explained that this study was positive for them because they reported an improvement in their writing skills and an enhancement of their

vocabulary: “I did improve my writing skills. I no longer think that much about the structure, but it is more natural, and my vocabulary increased” (Karen, focus group 2, June 1. My translation). The second evaluator of the texts confirmed this perception of the students during the interview. According to her, the first draft of the texts contained many errors in vocabulary and the use of prepositions, but the second version “was much better” (Second evaluator, interview, May 1. My translation).

A positive attitude towards feedback was highly related to the opportunity that the students had to better their texts in a second version, as Declan explained in the second focus group: “For me, having several submissions is better because I learn from my mistakes and don’t make them again” (Focus group 2, June 1. My translation). Leyla added that been given the option to write a second version allowed her to appropriate knowledge, while feedback might go unnoticed if it was received for only one version of the text. This finding provides evidence of the usefulness of the writing-as-a-process approach, since the literature review had indicated that one of the reasons for disregarding feedback was the lack of motivation that students had to use it in their writing.

Feedback on text structure.

A second element of the analysis was to assess the ability of the participants to reproduce the adequate structure of recounts: orientation or setting, events, and conclusion.

After the analysis of the first draft, I noticed that most of the students included the necessary information to each section, announcing the context for their story, unfolding the events that took place in their story, and giving a closure to the text. However, they struggled with the visual differentiation of these parts.

The second evaluator and I made a comment similar to the following one in 83.3% of the rubrics used to evaluate the texts, in the item corresponding to organization: “You need to visually separate the ideas”. This made clear the need to pay attention to punctuation, and a better structure of the paragraph. In the period between the provision of feedback and its revision for rewriting, the participants attended a short workshop on punctuation. This was the opportunity for discussing the adequate use of punctuation in English and doing some exercises meant to help students correct their drafts.

Considering that for the second draft the second evaluator made a positive assessment of the texts, I can conclude that this pedagogical intervention was successful in this matter. In fact, she reported in the interview “(in the second version) the punctuation and the paragraphs were correct”. (Second evaluator, Interview, May 1. My translation).

Only in one case did she find no improvement, and wrote, “There are isolated sentences that are left as paragraphs”. For the evaluation that I made, 41.6% of the texts needed more improvement, as show the comments that I made in some of them:

“One section of the third paragraph doesn’t show reflection on the corrections suggested”.

“Some sections of the text are only a sentence. Put together the sentences that make sense. Your text will be more coherent and well organized”.

In my analysis, feedback was effective in 58.4% of the texts. All the texts were easier to follow and more understandable because the second draft followed better the structure of the recount.

In conclusion, ICT-mediated feedback in this study was useful in three main areas: Correction of most linguistic mistakes related to vocabulary and the use of verbal tenses; raise of awareness of the structure of recounts and their characteristics; enhanced interaction, motivation and interest of the participants in giving and reacting to feedback.

The role of ICT.

Most participants did not question or interact with the corrections proposed, although the purposes of using ICT included the possibility to facilitate asynchronous communication; the creation of a new dynamics in and outside the course in which the interactions would boost the writing process; and the development of students' autonomy when writing.

My perception of their use of the tools, based on the texts and the interactions that occurred during the implementation, was that participants did not make the most of them because they could have avoided some errors. However, they stated in the focus group that the online resources were useful both for writing their texts and for providing feedback to their classmates. For instance, Sol's and David's text showed some errors that suggest a misuse of the dictionary:

1. Sol:

I felt boring, sad and stressed.

I strange my town.

2. David:

I would like to share a history that happened to me.

Example 9. Vocabulary-related errors that suggest misuse or lack of use of the dictionary.

Out of the four recommended tools, every student used at least one of them, with the bilingual dictionary (*Wordreference*) being the most praised by all the participants.

“...I still think much in Spanish, so it [the dictionary] helped me to rearrange [the idea]. Sometimes you want to say a word and you think you can say it in a way, but it's not like that” (Jazmín, focus group 1. My translation).

They reported that these tools were useful for different reasons (Focus group 2, June 1), such as the possibility of getting examples and suggestions; having an answer to their questions about the use of certain linguistic features, especially prepositions; and receiving not only corrections but also links to websites to find explanations. The participants qualified these tools as efficient and terrific. Karen for example, stated that Wordreference:

“... Was useful because I think much in Spanish and the examples that the dictionary provides helped me to choose the adequate words for the text”.

During the second focus group (June 1), all the participants stated that they had continued using most of the resources suggested in this study because of their accuracy and the possibility of immediate correction that they offer, especially the bilingual dictionary.

Google Docs was the application used as a word processor and through which the interactions outside the classroom took place. It was useful for some students who interacted through this application in order to:

a. Ask questions about the corrections suggested. This interaction allowed timely feedback while working at their own pace outside the classroom (Figure 9).

We as a group played many genres like torbellino, jazz, blues, gypsy and we combine **it**; we

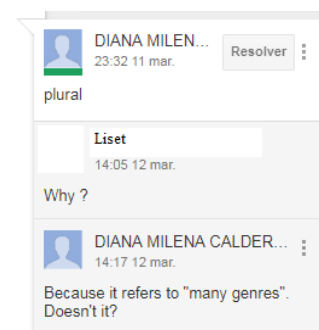


Figure 9. Timely feedback.

In this case, she repaired the final version of the text as follows: “*We as a group played many genres like torbellino, jazz, blues, gypsy and we combined them*”. Meaning that the online interaction was helpful for this participant to understand her error and

correct it. This is something that on-paper feedback could not have done because of time constraints, since the time allocated for this course was not enough for individualizing comments and feedback. Equally important was the possibility to integrate ICT throughout the different stages of the writing process, which allowed students to develop their autonomy while writing, thus making them more aware of the writing exercise.

b. Explain their use of language. As shown by figure 10 below.

and many recovery of subjects I finally graduated.

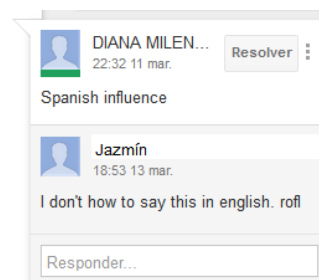


Figure 10. Use of language.

This is Jazmin's second version: "*I could **maked** up for the missing work*". Even though her utterance contained a new error and feedback was not successful according to the definition adopted in this study, this participant was able to notice an error in her utterance thanks to the ICT-mediated feedback that she received and that made her reflect and try to correct it, using the appropriate lexical construction.

c. Agree on the corrections suggested. As shown by figure 11 below.

which I end in 2016,

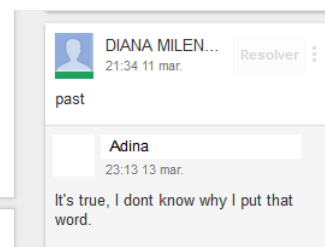


Figure 11. Agreement on corrections.

This comment invited Adina to reflect on her use of language and she realized that her sentence contained an error that she could not even explain to herself. Traditional on-

paper feedback can do this, but the interactivity allowed by online feedback increases the possibility for the student to reflect on this deviation of standard language, thus making it easier for them to remember the correct form in the future and avoid the same mistake. In fact, Noelia mentioned in the second focus group: “For example I understand *perfectly* my errors”. (Focus group 2, June 1. My translation)

d. Answer the evaluator’s questions. As shown by figure 12 below.

dancing and it was hard to recover that **trust** in **me**.

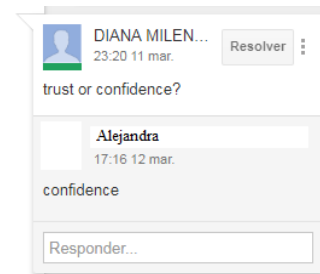


Figure 12. Answer questions.

This comment in Alejandra’s text intended to guide her to reassess her use of language, and she discovered the difference in meaning between these two words for which Spanish has only one word.

All the interactions included above took place outside the classroom thanks to the support used for writing and the asynchronous communication that it permits. This is something that traditional on-paper feedback does not allow, and that enabled the participants to work on their texts while receiving comments from their peers and the teacher that helped them build their learning process collaboratively, and counting on the support provided by the ICT component of this study.

Even though some participants did not take advantage of this interaction, they accepted most of the corrections that their classmates or the researcher made. Those who did not take the corrections explained that they were confident that their text was fine. For example, Águeda stated that even though her peer’s corrections made sense, she did not

accept them because she considered that her text was of high quality. Sol explained that she trusted more the corrections coming from the teacher than from her peers. This attitude reflects a lack of ownership because even though the participants had access to online resources suggested to help them develop their autonomy, their risk-taking and their ability to make decisions in terms of language, their answers show that they still relied much on what the teacher had to say before making corrections recommended by their peers. The reasons behind this attitude are beyond the scope of this study, but future research can help better understand this issue.

To conclude, ICT played an important role in this study in two main areas. On the one side, for linguistic improvement, it allowed the participants to self and peer correct, to find examples of use of precise linguistic features, and to deal with their questions when they occurred (cognitive role). On the other side, it favored the creation of a more dynamic process outside of the classroom for students to participate, by allowing participants to be in contact with English beyond the limits of the classroom, by giving participants more resources for writing, hence modifying the dynamics of traditional instruction, and their approach to writing (social role).

Writing as a process.

In the Colombian education system, students are used to writing as a product. This approach views writing as a task to do once, while this study exposed the participants to a perspective of writing as an on-going task, where they received feedback in order to improve their texts and boost their learning.

Although not focused on ESL practices, Camargo-Martínez, Uribe-Álvarez, & Zambrano-Valencia (2013) showed that Colombian university students' reading and writing practices relate mostly to assessment purposes, that mediation is rare because professors tend to assume that students know how to read and write, and that professors focus mostly on the content of the texts submitted by students. This suggests an approach to writing in which it is viewed as a single task in educative contexts.

The model used in this study, Hyland's (2003), views writing as an on-going process opened for improvement. It goes from the selection of the topic to prewriting, composing, response to draft, revisions, response to revisions, proofreading and editing, evaluation and publication. In this study, the topic was adapted from the syllabus of the course. The prompt used for writing the recount was built around questions whose purpose was to ease the writing process by suggesting ideas to include in the text, but only four of the participants reported doing a plan for writing previous texts, which they did not do in this study. This finding demonstrated that students were not used to planning and preparing for writing. Noelia explained that she wrote directly instead of doing a plan because "I need to take the idea and organize it. Otherwise, I forget" (Focus group 2, June 1. My translation). Even though she did not explicitly construct a plan, this quote shows a certain awareness when preparing for writing because Noelia evoked a need for organization that would ease her approach to the task.

When I distributed the texts for providing feedback, students hesitated for several reasons. For instance, Sol was worried about making mistakes when correcting her peers, while Declan was concerned about his peers making errors when correcting him. I explained that I would review the comments to make sure that they were correct, so that both learners could benefit from this process. Before the correction of the texts, I had read

them to have a general idea of their content and some general impressions of what they did, and for examining the feedback provided so that it was helpful for improving. If that was not the case, I provided an explanation making comments or pasting links for students to look for information that would allow them understanding.

Most of the participants did not reply to the comments, but they integrated the corrections proposed in their texts. I found out that some students did not reflect on the suggestions because they simply integrated the correction without considering its usefulness for the text. For instance, Karen's opening sentence was "my dream come truth". Her peers indicated that "truth" should be modified to "true", and I added a comment to "come" in which I wrote "tense". Karen's second version opened with this sentence: "My dream tense true". This new error in her text showed me that she did not understand the correction and included it in her text, maybe because I made it. This finding indicates that when providing feedback on a written format, it should be as clear as possible. One useful strategy may consist on developing a set of symbols shared with the students to help them navigate through the corrections and comments more properly so that the integration of feedback into the writing process fulfills its goal of allowing writing to take a new dimension in the EFL field.

I obtained another piece of evidence by comparing the outlines to the drafts. I noticed that sometimes there were incongruences between the outline and the draft. I consider that this makes sense because the purpose of drafting is precisely for students to test their preliminary ideas and analyze how they fit in the draft to submit.

I assessed the second draft of the text as well, which students appreciated since it gave them more opportunities for learning. Declan reported "I think it's good to have

several submissions because (...) that's how you learn, making mistakes" (Focus group 2, June 1. My translation). Cristina added that when she has only one submission of a text, she does not pay attention to the corrections made and rather focuses on her grade: "I check my error but don't correct it" (Focus group 2, June 1. My translation). Jazmin agreed and Leyla built on this: "When there are options to rewrite, you appropriate [the corrections]" (focus group 2, June 1. My translation).

A big transformation in the students' writing practices was the change in their approach to writing. At the beginning of the study, they were not familiar with the writing-as-a-process approach in which drafting is an essential part, and at the end of the first cycle, they were getting used to this practice and were able to see the benefits that it brought about to their texts.

These findings support the use of the writing-as-a-process approach widely. The students reported its advantages, they were able to work in different stages and focus on a single task at once, while putting into practice what they learned in English. This helped them to provide useful feedback and to improve their own texts, hence raising their awareness about writing as an on-going process, not a task that is done once just for the sake of complying with an institutional requirement. For instance, I noticed that students sometimes used the anecdotes that they had shared in their texts as an icebreaker with their peers in class, or for making small talk.

Additionally, evidence showed that technology and interaction opened possibilities for improvement that created a new classroom environment that was stimulating for the students because even though they could have taken the corrections as senseless extra work, they engaged in using them with the purpose of producing higher quality

assignments, thus exhibiting more interest in using feedback. This is something that the product approach to writing does not permit because students do not have opportunities for improving their work through subsequent submissions.

This section of the report presented the findings that the implementation of ICT-mediated feedback in a unit about writing recounts using the writing-as-a-process approach produced in a group of students at the tertiary level. In the following section, I discuss these findings in terms of what they have to offer to the EFL field.

Discussion

The findings of this study suggest three main issues for reflection in the Colombian EFL field: a) the need of moving to an actual student-centered practice; b) the relevance of ICT in facilitating this process and in language learning in general; and c) the benefits that the writing-as-a-process approach can offer to the development of students' skills.

Findings show that even though ICT in education has contributed by offering new possibilities and opportunities not only for learning, but also for teaching (Noor-Ul-Amin, 2013; Tinio, 2003; Rojas, 2007), we can still notice the prevalence of teacher-centered classrooms, which is basically the same classroom disposition that has been predominant in education for decades. The purpose of ICT tools is to improve education, but classrooms are not changing as expected, life is changing, the way we communicate is changing, but we still have the same arrangements for teaching 21st century students. Withers (2017) acknowledges a shift in education in which “technology and its practices will permeate everything from teaching strategies, to student interaction, to distraction levels, to disciplinary methods” (par. 1). This seems to be a progressive change for students to truly appropriate their process, which emerged in this study as well. For instance, students sometimes required the teacher to confirm the feedback proposed by a peer before deciding on how to use it, even though the purpose of peer feedback as implemented in this study was to build collaboration and develop a sense of cooperation. This might happen because students doubt the accuracy of the feedback received from their peers, which Rollinson (2005) mentioned as a challenge that peer feedback needs to overcome. Students learn to believe the teachers' corrections only since those are the only ones related to a good grade, the purpose of students is to pass their courses, so they need good grades and teachers are

the ones in charge of providing grades. A traditional teacher-centered classroom favors students' need for teacher confirmation, and there are not enough chances for students to gain ownership of their learning process. Different attempts to change students' beliefs are worth trying and need the imagination and commitment from teachers in order to promote a different classroom situation. For intervening this situation, ICT can play a pivotal role because the possibilities that it offers permit access to good quality materials all over the world, which can help students to raise their awareness about the resources available for them.

It is important to bear in mind that the possibilities for learning with ICT do not concern only the materials used; it is mainly about choices for transforming the language learning experience. These are examples of how the language classroom can change: Learning can be more authentic because learners can actually communicate with people around the world; thus finding a real motivation for language learning, and making it more relevant by using the foreign language for communication in issues of their interest. The goal of this process is to help students rely less on the teacher as the first resource for help, making the most of the resources that technology provides. ICT offers students the possibility to be more independent from the teacher, they can look for the information they need instead of passively accepting the one the teacher presents. Students may decide on the relevance of material for their learning, so they decide whether to use it or not. ICT provides students with this idea of ownership that can make a difference for learning.

Nonetheless, ICT is not the only resource available for doing this. Kenney (2018) tested seven contribution strategies to promote engagement in university students: a) Summarizing, b) Making observations connected to course content and/or outside sources,

c) Making personal connections, d) Agreeing or benching off of peer or content, e) Asking questions leading to further thinking of self or others, f) Playing devil's advocate, and g) Respectfully disagreeing with peer, instructor or content. She reported that these strategies were useful for fostering engagement in the students, but an important conclusion of her study is that teachers must promote a class dynamics in which contributions from the students are accepted and encouraged. Completing this conclusion, Oliver (2002) asserts that "[t]he growing use of ICT as an instructional medium is changing and will likely continue to change many of the strategies employed by both teachers and students in the learning process" (p. 3). He suggests two main transformations noticeable on the development of a more student-centered approach and the support of context-situated knowledge construction with the participation of peers and teachers.

This conclusion might explain why, even though technology provides an opportunity for education to move towards a more learner-centered approach, students do not make full use of these resources, as was the case for some participants in this study. This is possible only if teachers integrate ICT to the learning process with a purpose, if there is a real reason for students to learn through ICT. Otherwise, it is just a fancy tool used in the classroom with no particular goal. It is important to remember that students' ownership of the use of ICT and other resources/strategies for learning may only be possible when they can truly perceive a sense of relevance for its use in their task. ICT is not a panacea. According to a report published by UNESCO (2002), the real contribution of ICT to education depends on three aspects: adequate access to technology and Internet, material that is meaningful and sensitive to culture and particular teaching contexts, and ICT-literate teachers who can provide a framework in which students are willing to

collaboratively integrate ICT to their learning (Beatty, 2010). We live in a society in which access to technology is easier than in the past, but that is not the case for all the countries, thus counting on the adequate resources is paramount for ICT to make a change in education.

Although ICT may be seen just as materials included in the classroom, it is essential remembering that teacher planning plays a role in fully integrating these resources into the EFL classroom. This explains why the teachers need to know well the materials available and be able to use them with ease: They are responsible for creating motivating learning opportunities for students, and they can do so only if they are familiar with the tools that they suggest students to use. Once these conditions are met, it is more feasible to have student-centered classrooms.

This goal reflects the importance of promoting teaching practices that favor interaction, which is the case of the approach to writing as an on-going process that this study put in place. Learning does not happen in a vacuum. It requires a social environment in which the cognitive competences of learners can be developed (Atkinson, 2013). It is important not to neglect the opportunities for scaffolding through feedback from peers and from the teacher, and even from external technological resources. This allows the creation of a completely different classroom dynamic that is worth recognizing. Students move from receiving guidelines and writing to receive a grade from the teacher, towards becoming active participants in the process of writing. This challenges the fact that students are used to receiving information in the classroom and then replicating this information according to guidelines established by the teacher. This perspective views learning simply as a product where there are not previous stages that prepare to accomplish a goal, because all that

matters is the product, the one that the teacher grades in order to inform students about their success or failure. The approach to writing as a process has the potential to combine the three issues mentioned at the beginning of this section: It is collaborative in its conception, and it can create opportunities for students to be at the center of their process by adequately framing technology in teaching practices. This approach provides the possibility to use technology as an aid that goes beyond the teacher as unique provider of answers, thus promoting students' autonomy and engagement in their process, while creating a collaborative setting in which peer feedback and collaboration play a central role in the understanding and construction of knowledge. Another result of the use of ICT in the process approach to writing is that students see more easily their responsibilities with their learning process. For instance, during the second focus group, Karen stated that she improved her writing skills and she became more confident when writing thanks to the use of the writing-as-a-process approach. Declan agreed and stated that making mistakes and having the opportunity to correct them made him more aware of his learning process.

In the next section of this report, I present the conclusions, implications, limitations of this study, and further research that the findings obtained in this research can help to emerge.

Conclusions

The objective of this case study was to explore the contribution of ICT-mediated peer feedback embedded in an approach to writing in which the development of this communicative skill is seen as a process, to the improvement of writing in an English course at the tertiary level. According to Quintero (2008), this issue needs more study in the EFL field. To collect data, I used different sources in order to favor data triangulation and methodological triangulation. The quantitative component of this study showed that this intervention had positive results in terms of the decrease of number of errors in vocabulary and verbal tenses in the recounts written by the students. Additionally, the key point of this conclusion is that the qualitative analysis of data demonstrated that the insights of the participants in this process backed this interpretation: the students, a second evaluator of their texts, and myself in the role of teacher-researcher. Hence, these results point out the need for favoring language-learning processes in which feedback, scaffolding, and collaborative learning are encouraged. The purpose of this is to foster students' language development while raising their awareness of the importance of the co-construction of knowledge in a globalized society in which there is "a great deal of students' freedom" (Shaw, 2013), yet collaboration is essential for accomplishing goals.

Nevertheless, my perspective of the use of technological resources and peer feedback suggests that the students did not benefit enough from the possibilities for ICT, and that they did not exploit enough the potential of these tools in fostering students' autonomy. This situation provides an opportunity for further research that would evaluate the contribution of each tool separately in order to learn in-depth the use that students make of it and its role in the writing process. It is important to bear in mind that ICT

accomplishes different functions and offers several benefits to education in general and to language learning particularly. These include: the possibility to be part of the global society by interacting with other speakers of the target language and their cultures, the access to tools that can favor the development of autonomy; interaction and peer collaboration in settings other than the brick and mortar classroom (Isisag, 2012; Rojasm 2007; Leki, Cumming, & Silva, 2008). The intervention of these tools in a sound pedagogical framework can favor a more learner-centered classroom.

Part of the pedagogical framing mentioned above comes from the use of technological resources to promote collaboration. In this study, the participants developed a good environment for correction and evaluation, which Rollinson (2008) mentions as one factor to consider in the process of integrating peer feedback in the teaching practices. However, it is important to mention that the participants in this study did not receive thorough training in the provision of feedback, which they did based on the rubric in Appendix A after it was presented and discussed in class. Although the lack of training does not account alone for the results obtained, further research might focus on assessing the role that this instruction can play in giving adequate, productive, and meaningful feedback, and how this feedback relates to the students' learning process.

In some cases of this study, the feedback provided did not facilitate the task of correction because it did not explain the error that the participant made, the comment focused on calling the student's attention to the error with no further clue. It would be important to analyze the effectiveness of feedback according to the type of corrective feedback provided (see table 4) because in this case, the feedback provided entailed the

production of a new error or the absence of correction, in spite of the opportunity that the writing-as-a-process approach offers for improving.

It is also necessary to mention that a major motivation of the students to rewrite was the possibility of improving their texts, hence obtaining a better grade. As part of further research concerning this issue, it can be enlightening for the EFL field to inquire about the relation between this external motivation, the willingness to correct, and the quality of the texts produced as a result.

Finally, it is essential to mention that this study pointed out an effective contribution of ICT-mediated peer feedback to the improvement of the writing skills and use of language in a group of students at the tertiary level. In spite of the limitations of this study, it opened new areas of research in the field that can prove fruitful when it comes to understanding and improving the teaching and learning processes in the 21st century.

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Appendix A

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

UNIVERSIDAD DE ANTIOQUIA ESCUELA DE IDIOMAS

Maestría en Enseñanza y Aprendizaje de Lenguas Extranjeras

Título del estudio: La contribución de las Tecnologías de Información y Comunicación a la retroalimentación significativa en un curso de inglés de nivel universitario: Un estudio de caso

Investigadora Principal: Diana Calderón.

DESCRIPCIÓN DE LA INVESTIGACIÓN:

La retroalimentación tiene un rol central en la enseñanza y el aprendizaje puesto que permite que los estudiantes desarrollen sus habilidades comunicativas, particularmente la producción escrita, en la cual se centra la investigación que a continuación se presenta:

* Propósito: Hacer seguimiento al proceso de retroalimentación entre compañeros y con el profesor por medio de herramientas tecnológicas, que permitan evidenciar el rol de este proceso en el desarrollo de la producción escrita en inglés.

* Duración: 16 semanas, siendo la duración máxima de recolección de datos 10 semanas.

* Utilización de la información: La información obtenida, a la que solo tendremos acceso mi asesor y yo, será analizada, y luego publicada como proyecto de investigación dentro de mi plan de estudios de maestría, y más adelante puede ser publicada en revistas especializadas.

Nos complace invitarlo(a) a participar de este estudio ya que consideramos que, al ser estudiante de un curso de inglés de nivel intermedio, la información que usted nos puede brindar es muy relevante para el mismo.

IMPLICACIONES

Si usted acepta la invitación a participar en este estudio, se le harán dos entrevistas de máximo 30 minutos que serán grabadas y luego transcritas para el análisis de los datos. Lo que se espera con estas entrevistas es conocer sus prácticas y opiniones con respecto a la escritura, la retroalimentación entre pares, y el rol de las herramientas tecnológicas que se usarán. Su participación es totalmente voluntaria, si decide no participar o retirarse de este estudio más adelante, no habrá ninguna consecuencia.

También se recolectarán los textos escritos en el marco del curso Intermediate English skills, y las interacciones escritas entre los participantes, que serán documentadas a través de la aplicación *Google Docs*. Igualmente se le invitará a suministrar retroalimentación a otro participante asignado al azar, con unos criterios previamente establecidos.

CONFIDENCIALIDAD

Toda la información obtenida será guardada confidencialmente. En ningún caso se revelará su nombre, ya que se usarán seudónimos en el tratamiento y análisis de la información.

RIESGOS Y BENEFICIOS

No tendrá ningún riesgo al participar en este proyecto. Los resultados de este estudio serán difundidos por medios académicos especializados, pero en ningún momento será revelado su nombre ni ninguna información que permita identificarlo(a).

No se le solicitará desplazarse a ningún lugar ni hacer ninguna actividad distinta a las mencionadas en las implicaciones, que corresponden a las actividades pedagógicas habituales del curso en el que usted está matriculado(a).

El beneficio que se espera obtener para los participantes es el mejoramiento de sus habilidades de producción escrita en inglés. No recibirá ningún pago en dinero o en especie por su participación.

PREGUNTAS

Lo(a) invito a que me haga preguntas sobre el estudio al cual usted ha sido invitado(a), si así lo requiere, antes de aceptar su participación en el mismo y de dar consentimiento sobre el manejo de la información que nos brindaría. En caso de tener preguntas, puede contactar a la investigadora principal: Diana Calderón a su correo electrónico diana.calderon@udea.edu.co.

Si después de haber leído este documento y haber recibido respuestas a sus preguntas, usted está de acuerdo con participar en este estudio de manera voluntaria, lo invitamos a firmar este formato de consentimiento. Recibirá una copia del mismo para que lo conserve en sus registros.

Nombre del participante:

Firma: _____ Documento de identidad: _____

Fecha: _____

¡Muchas gracias!

Appendix B

RUBRIC FOR EVALUATING MOTIVATION STORIES

2018-1

Instructor: Diana Calderón

In assessing the recounts produced by the students, the participants will be guided by the criteria below.

Criteria	Description and Score			Comments
	Rarely (1-2)	Frequently (3-4)	Always 5	
<p>Organization The content of the text corresponds to the instruction given.</p>				
The sections of the text are easily identifiable and according to their function (orientation – events – personal comment).				
Enough detail is provided in each section.				
The format and presentation of the text are clear and facilitating.				
<p>Vocabulary There is evidence of lexical richness, and the use of vocabulary is appropriate according to the idea.</p>				
<p>Grammar The paragraph is made up of complete sentences.</p>				
<p>Correct use of: - Verbal tenses</p>				
- Subject verb-agreement (-s)				

- Articles (a/an – the)				
- Prepositions				
- Use of singular and plural				
- Pronouns				
- Linking words				
Mechanics Spelling, punctuation and capitalization are appropriate. Attention has been paid to typos and misspellings.				

Adapted from Ramli, D. (2013). *An analysis on students' errors in writing recount text*.
 Tanjungpura: Neliti. Indonesia's Research Repository.

Appendix C

QUESTIONS INCLUDED IN THE FOCUS GROUPS WITH THE STUDENTS

Focus group 1

Pregunta para romper el hielo: Cuéntenme cómo les fue con el texto sobre “Motivation stories”

1. Desde el momento en que recibieron las instrucciones para escribirlo, ¿cómo procedieron?
- 2.a ¿Cuáles de las herramientas tecnológicas recomendadas usaron? ¿Por qué? ¿En qué etapa del proceso de escritura? (plan del texto, versión 1, versión 2). ¿Cómo las usaron?

Wordreference

Merriam-Webster

Grammarly

Virtual Writing Tutor

- 2b. ¿Cómo creen que las herramientas que usaron influyeron en el texto que escribieron?
3. ¿Cómo hicieron la retroalimentación a los compañeros asignados? ¿Qué herramientas usaron?
4. ¿Cuál es su opinión sobre la retroalimentación que recibieron
 - a. del compañero?
 - b. de la profesora?
5. ¿La retroalimentación que recibió fue oportuna? ¿Fue a tiempo? ¿Le ayudó a mejorar su texto? ¿Cómo?
6. ¿Qué sugerencias harían para el segundo ciclo de escritura?

Focus group 2

1. ¿Qué tipo de correcciones prefieren recibir? ¿Que se les indique la respuesta correcta o solo que se les diga que hay un error?
¿Qué tipo de correcciones prefieren hacer?
2. Analizando las rúbricas, noté que había muchas correcciones sobre vocabulario y conjugación, ¿en qué aspectos de la rúbrica se concentraron más y por qué?
3. ¿Cuál fue su reacción inicial ante los comentarios recibidos? De manera general, ¿aceptaron o rechazaron las correcciones propuestas por sus compañeros? ¿y por la profesora?
4. De manera general, ¿qué rol jugó la retroalimentación brindada por los compañeros y la profesora en las correcciones que hicieron a las segundas versiones? ¿Por qué?
5. ¿Cómo califican la retroalimentación recibida, de 1 a 5? (1 = inútil, 5 = muy útil)
6. ¿Consideran que la retroalimentación recibida fue efectiva para identificar errores en su escritura y en la de los compañeros?
7. ¿Qué dificultades encontraron al dar y recibir retroalimentación? ¿Qué estrategias usaron para superarlas?

Appendix D

QUESTIONS INCLUDED IN THE INTERVIEW WITH THE SECOND EVALUATOR

1. General demographic information and professional background.
2. Overall opinion about the texts, taking into account that you have previously worked in the same institution.
3. The use that you made of the rubric. How you classified the errors.
4. Suggestions for the study.

Appendix E

PROMPT FOR THE MOTIVATION STORY

Think of a project you worked on in the past. That can be an academic or job-related project, or something you did in your free time. Write a text in which you recount this experience, and what motivated you to finish it.

Include the following information:

A description of the project and its goals.

What or who motivated you to accomplish this project and why.

The events that led to the accomplishment of this project.

What the result of the project was.

Write between 190 and 200 words.

To help you in the process of writing, you can use any of the following suggested tools:

“Virtual writing tutor” is an online grammar checker. Use it to check grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Click [here](#)

If you need a dictionary, I recommend Merriam-Webster. This monolingual dictionary provides not only the definition of a word, but also synonyms, antonyms, and examples of using the word in a sentence. Click [here](#).

In case you prefer a bilingual dictionary, Wordreference is the one for you. You can translate from more than ten languages to English. Besides, it also includes, in the English monolingual section, definitions, synonyms, usage, and collocations. Click [here](#).

Grammarly “makes sure everything you type is clear, effective, and mistake-free.” Click [here](#).