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**Encouraging Learners' Writing Engagement: the Role of a Life Project Based on Students'
Interests.**

How to Encourage Learners' Writing Engagement Using a Life Project Based on the Students'
Interests in an EFL Eighth Grade Classroom in a Public School in Colombia?

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Abstract

This action research paper relates the experience of a teacher-researcher with an eighth-grade group in the public school Institución Educativa Lucrecio Jaramillo in Medellín. The purpose of this study was to encourage learners' writing engagement using a life project based on their interests. Actions included the implementation of a life project and design of activities according to the students' interests oriented by a teaching and learning cycle, scaffolding strategies and the genre-based approach. The data collection instruments were a questionnaire, teacher journals, students' artifacts, and focus group interviews. Findings showed that the design of activities according to the students' interests mediated through a teaching and learning cycle and scaffolding strategies could improve writing engagement as well as writing production.

Keywords: Engagement, writing, life project, students' interests, scaffolding, genre based, teaching and learning cycle

Título del proyecto en español: Fomentar el compromiso con la escritura en los estudiantes: el papel de un proyecto de vida basado en los intereses de los aprendices.

Degree Requirement

This action research project is submitted as a requirement of the Bachelor of Education in Teaching Foreign Languages (English-French) at the Escuela de Idiomas, Universidad de Antioquia, in Medellin, Colombia. The research was conducted at Institución Educativa Lucrecio Jaramillo Velez from October 2021 to June 2022. This research project relates my experience as a teacher-researcher in this institution in order to reflect on my teaching practices and enrich them.

Acknowledgments

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Preface

This action research is carried out to comply with the requirements of the Bachelor of Education in Teaching Foreign Languages (English-French) at the Escuela de Idiomas, Universidad de Antioquia, in Medellin, Colombia. The purpose of this study was to engage students in writing tasks according to their interests so they feel encouraged to complete the activities and communicate in English. The participants were 38 eighth-graders from the Institución Educativa Lucercio Jaramillo Vélez. This paper is mainly directed to educators, and pre-service teachers who endeavor to enhance and enrich their teaching practices and learning processes in the area of English language.

Description of the Context

The Institución Educativa Lucrecio Jaramillo is a public school with two headquarters: One is located in the neighborhood Florida Nueva, which offers kindergarten and elementary education. The second one is located in Laureles, in the central-western area of Medellín, and is the high school chosen for this action research project. The high school has two school hours, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, and it offers education from sixth grade until eleventh grade. Gathering the two headquarters, the institution has 31 groups of 40 students on average and a total population of approximately 1,250 students. Boys, girls, and young people come to the institution from different neighborhoods near the area, such as Florida Nueva, Lorena, Velódromo, La América, Belén, Laureles, Robledo, Calazans, San Javier, and from other sectors of the city.

According to the coexistence manual of the Institution, the students must commit first with their individuality as social agents, seeking to raise the standard of living of their community and Colombian society. Also, the coexistence manual states that the institution's mission is to offer an educational service to boys, girls, and young people so that they are competent in being, knowing, and knowing-how. All this is based on science, freedom, and responsibility, promoting coexistence, commitment, a sense of belonging, and harmony between the students and the surrounding environment. And the vision of the institution is to be a benchmark for the city for its results in comprehensive education processes, implementing relevant pedagogical practices oriented towards the development of civic, academic, and research skills.

Regarding the curriculum, it is essential to mention that the English and Spanish subjects belong to Humanities. The final grade of both subjects is an average: English has a value of 30% of the grade, and Spanish has a 70% due to the hourly intensity. The English subject has an intensity of 2 hours a week, and Spanish 6 hours a week.

The English syllabus focuses on developing the four thematic axes or language skills: orality, writing, speaking, and listening. It also includes a general objective per term. Besides, three competences are considered in the syllabus: the Pragmatic Competence, the Sociolinguistic Competence, and the Linguistic Competence. In addition, the Basic learning rights also make part of the English syllabus. And finally, there are also objectives based on the indicators of performance (being, knowing, know-how, and a flexible indicator). To illustrate, as it is stipulated in the syllabus, during the fourth scholar term students work on the 4 language skills (reading, listening, speaking, and writing), the general objective is to talk with classmates and the teacher about past experiences and future plans, the competences that are taken into account are the pragmatic and sociolinguistic ones, the eighth-grade basic learning rights considered for this scholar term are the number 1, 2, 3, and 6. And finally, the following performance indicators are also stipulated: -Being: being aware of the importance of projecting himself into the future. -Knowing: understanding the life projects of other people. And recognizing information about past experiences and plans for the future. -Know-how: having conversations with your peers about future plans and predictions. -Flexible Indicator: expressing ideas about subjects of interest and making projections towards the future.

Concerning the teacher's academic background, she graduated from the undergraduate foreign languages program at the University of Antioquia, she also studied two postgraduates at the Pontificia Bolivariana University: a specialization in literature and another specialization in English teaching. She also studied a specialization in Pedagogy of Virtuality at the Fundación Universitaria Católica del Norte. And finally, she has a master's degree in education that she studied at the Pontificia Bolivariana University. The teacher has worked in several private and public institutions as an English teacher for around 25 years. Nowadays, she is working as an English teacher at the Institución Educativa Lucrecio Jaramillo Vélez where she has been working for 6 years. The teacher believes that teaching is not the right word to choose when it comes to her profession, instead, she considers that she guides students, and students learn by themselves. The methodology or approach that she uses for her English classes is the Task Based Approach.

Regarding the chosen group to develop this action research, it is an eighth-grade group with 38 students that study in the morning with an intensity of 3 days per week, one hour a day. It is important to consider that the current situation due to the covid pandemic has caused the school to reduce the class time and design a new way to teach and learn. For this reason, the groups have been separated into subgroups B and A, and they alternate to go to school. This means that while group A is having a face-to-face class, group B is listening to the class from home because the teacher transmits the class via Google Meet. The students' ages are between thirteen and fifteen years old. Their socioeconomic status ranges from 2 to 4 (according to the interview, the teacher answered that the minority are in socioeconomic status 2). The teacher also mentioned that the students' attitudes towards English is not positive because they consider it

just as another subject to pass, and not a language to develop. During the class observations, this

attitude was evident, since many of them talked with their peers about not having to work on the

activities because they know that they will pass the subject. The students show themselves

talkative, but receptive and obedient when the teacher calls their attention and asks them to

participate in class. In terms of performance, there are students with the needed knowledge to

complete the tasks presented by the teacher, and some others show difficulty when they need to

write and use vocabulary.

Statement of the Problem

Students' engagement in English classes is an everyday issue in public schools in

Colombia and fostering engagement is crucial for learning a language. During my class

observations to the eighth-grade group from the Lucrecio Jaramillo Velez high school, I could

realize that one of the main class activities that students were working on was the

implementation of a life project. This was a task consisting of 9 stages in which students had to

answer questions about their lives, desires, objectives, and plans. This task had the purpose of

continuing learning and practicing some grammatical aspects of the future. Students were

allowed to work at their own pace. However, many of them did not commit enough to write and

do the life project activities, were unfocussed and did not complete the 9 stages of the task:

"Some Ss are working on stage 1 of the document. Some others are taking the notebook for the

teacher to grade a previous activity. Then, some Ss start to speak about different things from the

class". (Journal Before Implementation, Entry #3, October 19, 2021). Based on the observations

conducted in this context, I consider that the possible causes of this problem are 1) Lack of

engagement with the class activities, 2) Lack of writing preparatory activities, and 3) Lack of

exposure to authentic texts or real purpose for a life project.

Lack of engagement with writing class activities. Although there may be other

situations that cause students to disengage in tasks, during my observations I noticed that the

students' lack of engagement is because many of them already knew that the grade they had for

the "humanidades" subject was enough to pass. The final grade of the English subject is average

with the Spanish subject, and together they make one final grade for the "humanidades" area. For

this reason, the students were not engaged with the project because they did not need to try to

pass the subject. According to Oga-Baldwin (2019), engagement is the dedication or the energy

that learners devote towards the achievement of a task or goal. These students do not need to

commit when they do not need to get high grades for the English subject. This lack of

engagement can be evidenced in the following journal entry: "Some students do homework from

other subjects, others talk about different topics than the subject, and others carry out the activity

about their life project, describing themselves, writing down their skills". (Journal Before

Implementation, Entry #3, October 22, 2021). Furthermore, the students also got distracted in

class and did not show commitment to the task: "I notice that about 5 students are working on the

activity, the rest are talking or doing other tasks". (Journal Before Implementation, Entry #3,

October 22, 2021). This lack of engagement was present during the rest of the term and some

students did not finish their life projects completely.

Lack of writing preparatory activities. Another factor that is related to the students'

disengagement in class is the lack of writing preparatory activities. In an informal interview

conducted with the cooperating teacher, she mentioned that before working on the life project,

she included some preparatory activities in class such as reading and performing a conversation

of people talking about the future, and giving examples of affirmative, interrogative, and

negative sentences that were proposed to explain the future tense. Besides, the cooperating

teacher stated that the students did not produce sentences, ideas, texts, or any other output

authentically and spontaneously. And I consider that this may occur because there were no

preparatory activities focused on developing the writing skill.

Lack of exposure to authentic texts. Besides the few preparatory activities that students

were exposed to, the students did not have the opportunity to explore, read and analyze authentic

texts that allow them to recognize the outcomes they were expected to produce.

Consequently, this leads me to wonder if the students needed more preparatory activities,

clearer explanations, or model texts that enabled them to have more tools to express authentic

and elaborated ideas in a written way. That is the reason why I decided to explore the role that a

life project can play inside an English classroom and how it can encourage students to write.

After implementing a questionnaire to the students, many of them claimed that they would like to

learn English through games, videos, and conversations about topics of interest. Therefore, this

life project will be designed with tasks according to the students' interests and the

implementation of scaffolding strategies that offer learners more meaningful input and

preparation. In this way, they can feel that they have the tools to engage in writing authentically.

Theoretical Framework

Engaging students in writing is an issue that many English teachers face in their

classrooms. This is the case of eighth graders at a public school in Colombia who have

difficulties with the completion and commitment to tasks. With the use of Genre Based tools

such as a Teaching and Learning Cycle (TLC), students can be guided through preparation,

modeling, joint construction, and independent construction stages that along with scaffolding

strategies will provide them with the necessary elements and input to improve their engagement

in writing tasks and classroom activities. In addition, the students' interests is another important

concept that will be explored during this action research study to analyze the effects and the

impact this may have on the engagement and writing practices of the public mentioned above.

Halliday's work (as cited in Hyland, 2003) states that genre views writing as a social

practice that intends to communicate ideas with different purposes and audiences, thus there can

be different texts and different uses of language. (p. 19).

According to Quint Oga-Baldwin, W.L (2019), engagement is a combination of time and

repetition. He says that if you engage with a task, it means that you are dedicating quality time

and practice, and this leads to the development of a skill and the completion of a task or goal.

In addition, Lo, J., & Hyland, F. (2007) mention that "incorporating writing topics based

on these young students' life experiences into their classes and for giving them a stronger sense

of purpose and engagement by providing a wider and more genuine audience than just their

teacher" is important to encourage students to engage them in writing activities. Hyland, K.

(2007) also mentions that writing is a social activity, and he adds that when you communicate, it

always has a purpose, a context and an audience you direct to, and to engage students, they need

to be exposed to various writing experiences that follow these three aspects of communication.

According to Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) cited in Wang, M and Eccles, J

(2012), engagement is composed of three components: behavior, emotions and cognition. In this

same study, these three components are defined as follows:

"Behavioral engagement refers to participation in learning activities, including

attentiveness, positive conduct, and school attendance. Emotional engagement refers to

affective attitudes toward and identification with school and a sense of school belonging.

Cognitive engagement refers to self-regulated approach to learning and use of meta

cognitive strategies". (p. 31)

In this order of ideas, engagement is not only thought of as the dedication of energy

because a task is designed according to the students' interests and experiences, and the level or

quality of engagement, it is also linked to how students behave inside the classroom, how they

identify with the activities, and their intellectual strategies to develop a specific task.

Hence, considering the previous aspects accompanied by the inclusion of the students'

interests, to design tasks that call their attention and engage them to complete a class activity

may be a powerful tool to solve the issue that is being investigated through this action research

study. This can be reflected in Lo & Hyland (2007), who state that when students write about

topics they perceive as interesting and have a specific audience, they show themselves

enthusiastic and engaged in the task they are developing.

Another positive outcome of planning class activities based on students' interest can be demonstrated by Jiménez (2014): "the participants reacted through different positive attitudes and feelings such as satisfaction, enthusiasm, awareness, gratitude, and identification, in front of the use of didactic material designed according to their interests." (p. 210)

Also, including ludic activities in the classroom is usually an engaging and interesting way to learn. According to Oga-Baldwin (2019), "Engaging classrooms focused on games, enjoyment, and communication can have a positive impact on younger students' motivation and learning" (p.8). In this way, the students' personal interests such as topics they feel interested in, the music they like to listen to, or cultures they are intrigued by can be considered to plan classroom activities.

Furthermore, Bandura's work (as cited in Rafiee & Abbasian-Naghneh, 2020) mentions that "Language learners' interests and competence determine the degree they attend and the time they devote to any writing tasks [...]". Then, Rafiee & Abbasian-Naghneh (2020) state that "Therefore, their interest and competence might eventually determine whether L2 learners would engage in writing at all or which writing task they decide to perform." (p. 2)

However, taking into consideration the factors of engagement and students' interests, these are not enough to promote successful writing practices in the classroom. The implementation of scaffolding strategies to solve the issues of both lack of writing preparatory activities and lack of exposure to authentic texts for real purposes is fundamental to facilitate writing practices. Widiana & As Sabiq (2021) states that "Scaffolding is derived from a sociocultural theory developed by Vygotsky (1978) who suggested that in the process of learning

and development, students need the help of a "more knowledgeable other" adult or peer besides

what they can do by themselves.

Additionally, Hyland, K. (2007) explains Genre as a social practice with a specific

communicative purpose that in order to be learned, a teaching-learning cycle and scaffolding

strategies should be planned:

> scaffolding has been elaborated into an explicit methodological model, represented by the
>
> teaching-learning cycle[...] The cycle informs the planning of classroom activities by
>
> showing the process of learning a genre as a series of linked stages. Here, the teacher
>
> provides initial explicit knowledge and guided practice, moves to sharing responsibility
>
> for developing texts, and gradually withdraws support until the learner can work alone.
>
> The key stages of the cycle are
>
> - setting the context—revealing genre purposes and the settings in which it is
>   commonly used;
> - modeling—analyzing representative samples of the genre to identify its stages and
>   key features and the variations which are possible;
> - joint construction—guided, teacher-supported practice in the genre through tasks
>   which focus on particular stages or functions of the text;
> - independent construction—independent writing by students monitored by the
>   teacher. (p. 159).

Hyland, K. (2007) also states that this cycle can be used in a flexible way, which means that the teacher may get back to a previous stage if he or she considers it necessary for the students' learning process.

In this way, besides the input provided through the preparation stage, the implementation of modeling texts will allow students to be exposed to authentic texts with real-life purposes. As it is proposed in this study, a life project will be the main task, and this will include texts that students not only use for other subjects such as ethics or religion, but they could also be involved in conversations, chats, or emails with their friends when they talk about their personal lives, ask for advice or look for a friend who listens to their anecdotes, aspirations, and dreams. Additionally, with the joint construction strategy students will be guided by the teacher and other students to create a similar text and in this way, prepare for the next writing task in which students will construct their texts independently.

Furthermore, in this action research study, I also seek to include the students' interests in the planification of the activities. Lo & Hyland (2007) point out that bringing tasks that interest students or that are planned according to their interests is an important factor to engage them:

> One way of enhancing students' motivation and engagement to write is to provide opportunities for them to engage at a more meaningful level with the language through refocusing their writing classes to make them relevant to their social and cultural context as well as designing writing tasks which have meaning and interest to them and offer opportunities for social interaction and self-expression. (p. 221).

In conclusion, the elaboration of the life project will include writing tasks designed according to the students' interests to engage them in the writing process. Besides, these writing

tasks will have a target audience, following the Genre Based theory of writing as a social

practice. Furthermore, the writing process will be supported by the scaffolding strategies to guide

students towards a better engagement in writing. And finally, the Teaching and Learning Cycle

implemented during this teaching practice will provide students with an input/

preparation/knowledge of the field stage to give students the tools and basis to write; text models

will serve as accurate examples of what students are expected to produce and will also allow

them to get more familiar with the genre, and with writing; a joint construction process facilitates

all participants (teacher and students) work together and guide each other to create a text; and

finally, an independent construction stage gives students the opportunity to write, putting into

practice all the knowledge they acquired during the whole process.

Research Question

How to promote learners' writing engagement using a life project based on the students'

interests in an EFL eighth-grade classroom in a public school in Colombia?

General Objective

To evaluate how the use of a Life Project based on the students' interests promotes writing

engagement and encourages learners to complete tasks.

Specific objectives

- To motivate students to write their life project using their interests and preferences that allow
  them to express their identities.

- To provide students with writing preparatory activities that allow them to produce situated
  and contextualized texts for their life project.

- To provide students with authentic texts and models that facilitate their comprehension about the purpose of their own texts in real-life situations.

- To identify the relation between students' writing engagement and the development of their writing practices.

Action Plan

Following the theories mentioned above, and with the purpose of encouraging students' writing engagement using a life project based on the learners' interests in an EFL eighth-grade classroom in a public school in Colombia, a set of actions will be put into practice, each one with an objective, a suggested date, and a data collection instrument.

The research actions implemented to collect data in this study are a questionnaire about students' interests, two writing diagnoses, before and after receiving instruction, and the analysis of students' artifacts of their writing products. The objective of the questionnaire is to identify the students' interests and preferences to learn English. In this way, I will include these in the design of activities and lesson plans to analyze the impact this may have in students' engagement. This will be done on February 10, 2022, through a Questionnaire. Also, four students' artifacts will be collected. Since the Life Project will have two parts (this means two teaching and learning cycles), in each part a diagnosis text will be collected, one before the TLC, with the objective of identifying the students` writing practices without being instructed on scaffolding strategies; and another one after the TLC, in order to analyze students' achievements and engagement after having received instruction.

The first teaching action would be a Life Project Introduction to explain to students the purpose of a life project and discuss the function of each stage of both, the Life Project and the TLC. This will be carried out in February, and the data collection instrument will be journal entries in which all the information related to students' engagement in writing and in-class activities will be documented.

The teaching and learning cycle will guide the implementation of the teaching actions for the two types of texts students will write for their life project: for the first project task, a descriptive text. For the second project task, a personal recount. The TLC cycle will support the writing process of the two tasks in four stages: preparation, modeling, joint construction and independent construction. The *preparation stage* has the following objectives: to think of what the purpose of writing the descriptive text is, and to plan activities to familiarize students with the topic and genre (watch videos, listen to podcasts, read reports, use vocabulary games). The purpose of the *modeling stage* is to introduce sample texts to the class, discuss the purpose for which we use that type of text in our society, identify how the text is structured, and become familiar with the grammar and textual features of the selected genres (vocabulary, verb tenses, connectors, nouns, adjectives, parts of a sentence). The *Joint construction* stage has as objectives to help students during the writing process, writing texts with them and reviewing their structure. The final stage, the *independent construction* aims to put all the knowledge acquired into practice to write a text independently and to give students feedback on how they wrote the text to achieve its purpose.

The Life project part 1 will develop the topic of personal information: description, physical qualities, personality, personal interests, hobbies, and the environment. The latter was

considered because the topic of environmental practices was included in the indicators of the

performance of the first school term. This action will be developed in February and March.

The Life project part 2 will be about "the best day of my life". This will be done in March

and April. The focus of this part is to write a personal recount of an experience that students

consider as the best day of their lives.

As a last research action to complement and triangulate data, a focus group interview will

be carried out with students with high and low achievements, and possibly students who did not

work on the project. The purpose of this is to know the students' perceptions about their own

engagement in writing. This will be done at the end of March, through focus group interviews.

Development of Actions

Before starting with my teaching practice, I designed a questionnaire to get to know the

students' preferences for learning English, the activities they enjoy the most, the topics they

would like to have during the English classes, and also to look over the students' expectations

about the course.

The very same day (on February 10), once the students handed in their questionnaires, I

explained to them that in order to gather information for my research paper, I was going to ask

them to write a diagnostic text about a description of the environment. Their texts needed to

include their opinion about the environment, and a description of an environmental problem, and

they had to mention environmental practices to contribute to this problem. In this way, I intended

to examine not only how they engaged in writing, but also how their writing practices and

knowledge about the language before receiving instruction and guidance through the Life Project

developed with the TLC and scaffolding strategies.

For the next actions, I developed the Life Project introduction and the Life Project Part 1.

These two took place during the same class. For the introduction, I asked students what they

thought a life project was and why people have one. Their answers were what I expected, "a plan

for the future" and other similar responses. Since the grammar topic they had to learn during the

first term was simple present tense, I thought about the importance of defining themselves in the

present so they know who they are, and this could enable them to establish a plan or project and

to be aware of what they need to become in order to accomplish that goal. In short terms, I

explained to them through a PowerPoint slide what a Life Project is and how we were going to

develop the first part, which meant the implementation of the TLC which includes the stages of

preparation, modeling, joint construction and independent construction. Therefore, for the

preparation stage, I provided students with vocabulary about physical description, personality,

personal interests, and hobbies. I also included the topics of simple present tense and

environmental practices through a PowerPoint Presentation, a printed sheet, the hangman game,

a video, brainstorming vocabulary on the board, and writing questions on the board to answer

them together with words and complete answers. Then, for the modeling stage, I showed

students a text on the TV with underlined and highlighted words in different colors (verbs,

simple present, conjugation, vocabulary about the environment). We read the text together. I

asked them if they understood the text and the meaning of certain words. I explained the simple

present tense through the sentences in the text. We deconstructed the text, and I did a dictation

exercise with exactly the same text as a closure to the modeling stage. Thereupon, I continued

with the joint construction stage in which we described Greta Thunberg, we watched a video

about her, and I shared with students a picture of her to brainstorm keywords about Greta's

description according to her physical description, the environment and her personality. These

were aspects that could be taken from or deducted based on the video. During this stage, we also

wrote a text together on the board, so I wrote the sentences and ideas that the students

mentioned. We adapted those ideas to write the text accurately on the board, and this was a great

opportunity I used to explain to students the organization of the text and its structure. To finish

with the Life project Part 1, for the independent construction stage, I asked students to write a

text individually about all the topics we saw and practiced during the TLC. This text, at the same

time, was the final text after the first Teaching and Learning Cycle I conducted.

To start the Life Project Part 2, I carried out a diagnostic text. For this diagnostic

exercise, I asked students to write a short text (100 words) in which they mention an experience:

the best day of their life, or a day in which they had a great time. They had to describe the events

of that experience in a sequence, the places, how they felt, and the people involved.

Afterwards, I continued with the second TLC activities for the Life Project Part 2. This

part of the project took place during the second term of the school year. The main grammar

aspect that had to be developed in this term was the simple past tense. For this term, I was

allowed by the coordinator of the school to create the didactic unit for the group, so I was able to

change the indicators of performance according to the main idea of the Life Project 2, which was

writing a personal recount about the best day of the students' lives. I was also able to design the

evaluative activities and to establish the dates and percentages for each. According to the TLC

stages, during the preparation and modeling stages (I mentioned them together because I moved

back and forth throughout these two stages), I conducted activities such as explaining what a

recount is through slides with texts and images, explaining and giving students a list of verbs.

There was also a group activity with a worksheet about a personal recount. I gave students

feedback and socialized the worksheet. We reviewed the parts and structure of a personal

recount, as well as the verbs in the past that were in the recount, and explained to students the

structure of a sentence (Subject - Verb - Complement). We played a game in groups in which

they had to take a verb from a bag and write a sentence on the board to win points for their team.

We also checked the time linking words on the recount to understand them. I brought a sample

text of a recount written in disorder and asked them to form groups to glue it in order on a paper

sheet. I also explained to them the simple past tense, regular and irregular verbs, and how to

structure affirmative, negative sentences, and questions through different videos and images.

Moreover, for the Joint Construction stage, I played a video about the movie Brother Bear and

gave students a printed recount format for them to write in groups a recount about the story of

the video. And finally, for the independent construction, I asked students to write a personal

recount about the best day of their life in which they had to include the title, people involved,

location, date, description of events, events in time order, description of the place(s), feelings and

emotions, and an ending or conclusion. The recounts resulting from this independent

construction stage were the students' artifacts of the second part of the Life Project.

Data Analysis

In order to analyze the four data collection instruments (questionnaire, journals, students'
artifacts, and focus group interviews), I made use of a recurrence chart to triangulate, compare
and analyze data. Three main categories with their respective subcategories emerged after the
analysis: 1) Students' interests and their relation to writing engagement, 2) Students' writing
performance, and 3) Effectiveness of Teacher's instruction.

When it comes to the questionnaire, for the first question, students had to choose from a
list of activities the ones they liked to include in the English classroom, so each activity was
given a total score according to the students' choice. The second was an open question in which
students were allowed to include other activities different from the ones listed in the first
question. Again, each activity included here was given a score. And finally, the third one was an
open question in which students were asked to write topics of interest they would like to include
during the course. The results of this questionnaire were analyzed, and the categories that
emerged were related to students' interests for further triangulation of data and analysis of the
influence of personal interests in writing engagement.

Furthermore, Journals were carefully read and analyzed by establishing a set of
categories linked to the theoretical framework and the objectives related to this research study.

On the other hand, four students' artifacts were considered for the analysis. Two texts
before receiving the TLC instruction. Another two texts after the teaching and learning cycle.
Each pair of artifacts was analyzed through a rubric that was designed to give the texts a score
and obtain an average to compare each pair of texts. In this way, the students' writing production

could be compared before and after receiving instruction. The criteria considered to analyze the

descriptive texts of the Life Project Part 1 were: 1) Content of the text, which included the

following characteristics: give an opinion about the environment. Describe an environmental

problem. And Mention the environmental practices that contribute to this problem. And 2)

Linguistic features, which included: Use of simple present. Use of adjectives to describe the

environment. Use of vocabulary connected to environmental practices. And use of complete

ideas, and sentence structure. Each criteria was given a score from 0 to 10 according to the level

of accomplishment, for a maximum score of 70 points.

To analyze the personal recount texts of the Life Project Part 2, two main aspects were

taken into account: 1) Text features, which included the following criteria: Title/People

involved/location/date. Description of events/details. Events in time order. Description of the

place(s). Feelings and emotions. And Ending or conclusion. And the second main aspect

considered 2) Linguistic features, which included: Use of simple past to recount the events of the

story. Use of adjectives to describe the places/feelings/emotions. And Complete ideas/sentence

structure/spelling/word choice criteria was given a score from 0 to 10 according to the level of

accomplishment, for a maximum score of 100 points.

And finally, the focus group interviews were transcribed including the exact minute in

which each question and answer took place to facilitate analysis and to compare how the

students' perceptions about their engagement during the English course may coincide with the

results shown in the different data collection instruments.

Findings and Interpretations

After categorizing, comparing and validating data, it was found that the activities related to the students' interests and developed through the TLC and scaffolding strategies had a positive impact on the encouragement of students' writing engagement and writing practices. Therefore, three main categories emerged: students' interests and their relation to writing engagement, students' writing performance, and the effectiveness of the teacher's instruction.

Students' interests and their relation with writing engagement

One of the aspects found during this research was that including the types of activities that were voted as the most favorite, according to the questionnaire of interests, had a positive impact on students' participation in the different stages of the Life Project. Before the implementation of actions, students did not commit enough to do the class activities. As it was stated in the description of this problem, one of the main causes could be because the students did not have to focus on getting good grades in English since they had already passed Spanish, thus failing the English subject did not have a negative impact on their humanities grade (as it was mentioned in the context, humanities is composed of the Spanish and English subjects, in which Spanish is a 70% of the humanities grade). In an informal interview with the Cooperating Teacher, she mentioned that the students calculated what was the grade they needed in English in order to get the minimum average along with the Spanish subject and pass humanities, and for this reason, they did not participate during the English classes and did not show much interest. The following is evidence of the students' lack of interest in doing the class activity presented by the cooperating teacher, instead they unfocused speaking with other classmates: "Again, I can tell

that the Ss start talking and some of them stop working on the task" (Journal Before

Implementation, Entry #4, October 25, 2021).

This lack of engagement was not completely solved, but improvements could be noticed

and demonstrated. After carrying out activities that were designed according to the students'

interest, they paid more attention to the class and followed the teacher's instructions. Besides,

they developed different class activities and showed interest in doing the tasks and working with

the texts. The following is an example of how students engaged in a task about a worksheet with

exercises related to a text, which was one of the most voted classroom activities in the

questionnaire of interest:

"Ss were paying attention to the text and analyzing the highlighted words, 5 of them were

participating actively and correctly guessed the part of speech that was highlighted with

the same colors. They were following the reading with me, and I asked some of them to

read some lines aloud." (Journal 1, entry #4, March 1, 2022).

According to the students' answers to the questionnaire, they would really like to include

games in the English class. And after the implementation of games, students started to engage

more in the classroom activities, participate in the different tasks, and dare to use the language:

"After that, I played hangman with the vocabulary that was on the sheet I gave them.

Each team received 5 points for each word guessed. They were very engaged in this

activity, I noticed that they are very competitive and that they liked playing in class.

Using games in class was the most voted activity on the questionnaire I asked them to do

in the previous class, so this is a great tool to familiarize and learn new vocabulary and

spelling of words." (Journal 1, entry #2, February 15, 2022).

Finally, during an interview with student 15, he mentioned that the activity he liked the

most was one related to a video with which they had to write a recount of the story that was told

in it (watching videos was another preferred activity by students according to the questionnaire

carried out before my teaching practice). This means that using activities preferred by students is

a good way to improve their engagement in writing: "I would say that what I liked the most was

the last activity we did where we used a story from a movie so you could explain something to us

about a personal recount" (Focus Group Interview, May 11, 2022). The fact that he remembers

this activity and the writing task about a personal recount means that since this activity was of

interest to him, it was easier to remember and learn: "Students seemed to be curious about the

video. Watching videos to do activities with them was one of the most voted activities on the

questionnaire I made before my practicum. They seemed to be engaged and focused." (Journal 2,
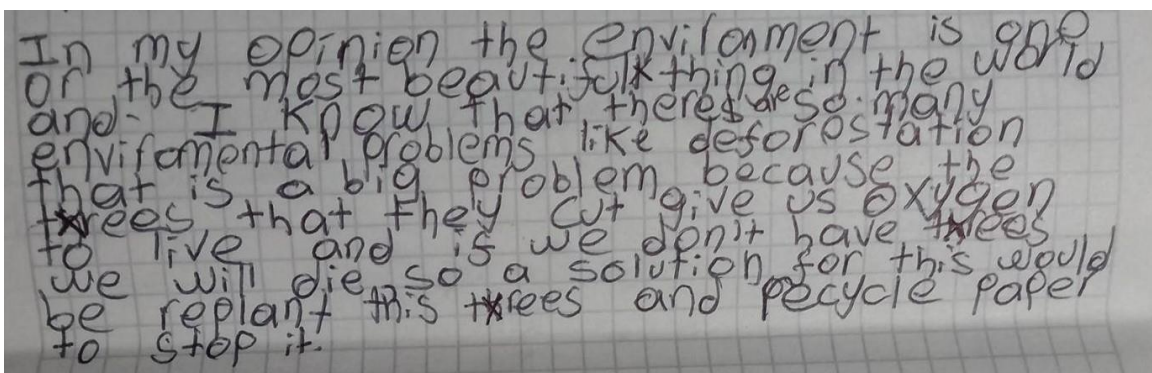
entry #8, May 12, 2022).

Students' writing performance

Students' texts from the Life Project Part 1 (the first TLC), and the Life Project Part 2

(the second TLC) were analyzed to explore the learners' improvement in their writing

performance. The diagnostic text of the Life Project Part 1 was written in groups. There were 6

teams formed by 4 - 5 students. And the final text after this first part of the life project was

written individually. For this reason, the average scores will be taken into consideration to

compare and contrast the students' performance and engagement. Each criterion was scored from

1 to 10.

The diagnosis texts before the Life Project Part 1, considering that the total score of each criteria

was 10, show that not even one student got an average score of 5. This led me to consider that

students needed to receive instruction and guidance on particular aspects of descriptive texts

such as giving descriptions, using the simple present tense, writing coherent sentences, giving

opinions, and reviewing the vocabulary about the environment that they had previously seen with

the CT. These writing needs can be evidenced by the analysis of text 1. According to the rubric,

teams 1 and 2 wrote the text in Spanish; team 3 had a score of 3 in both "Use of simple present"

and "Use of vocabulary connected to environmental practices"; and team 5 had a score of 1 in

both "Opinion about the environment" and "Describe an environmental problem".

Another important aspect to highlight from text 1 is that nobody used adjectives to

describe the environment in the diagnostic text. According to the rubric designed to analyze the

students' diagnostic texts, the 6 teams got a score of zero in the criteria of "Use of adjectives to

describe the environment", but this changed after the cycle since students started to include

descriptions in their texts. The following text was written by Student 15 after the cycle carried

out in the Life Project Part 1:

Student 15 got a score of 65, and he did not get a 0 on any of the statements considered to analyze the text. This was one of the most complete texts. He used adjectives to describe the environmental problems, explain the causes of these problems, and state possible solutions. The sentences he used were clear, coherent, and well-organized. After receiving instruction and guidance through Genre-Based Instruction and the Teaching Learning Cycle, a notorious improvement can be noticed. Based on the analysis of the diagnostic text, although students could share knowledge and ideas about the environment, their outcomes were not as good as in the second text after receiving instruction, scaffolding and guidance. After the TLC students were able to use the simple present more accurately, include more descriptions when referring to the environment, using more vocabulary related to the topic, and building clear and organized sentences to express their ideas. The following text was written by Student 20 after receiving instruction.
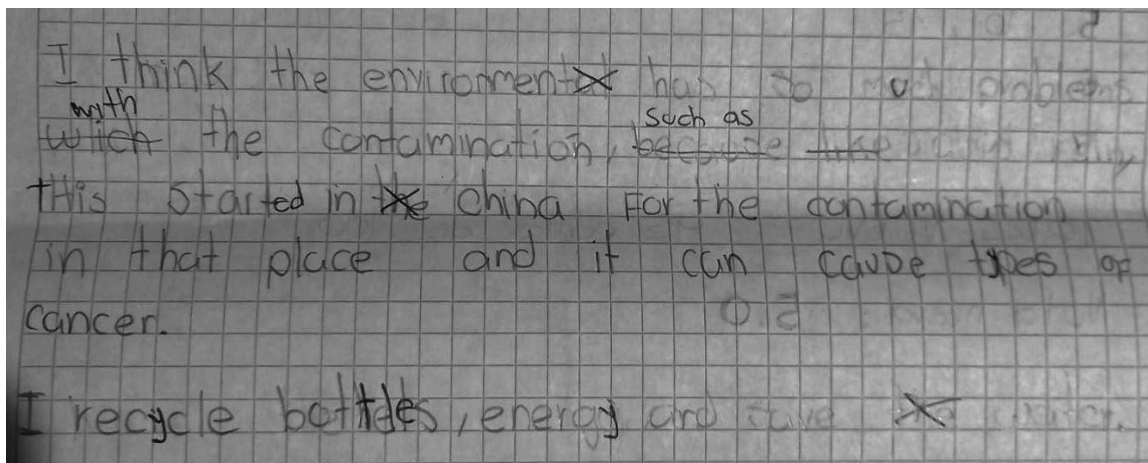
Student 20 got a score of 44/70 on the Independent Construction stage, while the average score for the text before the TLC was 15/70. In the second text, She wrote complete and meaningful ideas, used the simple present to describe environmental problems and included new

vocabulary about the topic (the difficult parts to read in line 2 stands for "because like <u>acid rain</u>".

And the last line says: "save the <u>water</u>").

After having carried out the first Teaching and Learning Cycle of the first text, the

descriptive one, the second TLC took place. This cycle was focused on the second text, writing a

personal recount. As in the first TLC, students were also asked to write a diagnostic text before

the cycle and a final text after the cycle. Although the results show that the average total score

did not exceed 50 points (which is half of the maximum score), there was noticeable progress

and improvement in students' writing practices and writing engagement. Some of the textual

features students improved in their recounts were related to giving a title to the text, sequencing

and describing events, and adding details to it.

The improvement of this type of text can be evidenced in the recounts written by Student

3. The first corresponds to the diagnostic text, and the second one to the text written during the

independent construction stage of writing.

(Student 3 recount. Diagnostic Text. April 5, 2022)

"My favorite day is:

When I stay in the sea in my birtday. This is my favorite day why I stay with my family;

my mother, my Grandfather and my Grandmother. in this day I can disfrute and

swimming in the Sea. My description is: The Perfect Sun, the perfect Sea, the perfect

cake and the perfect birthday, in the perfect, and incredible hotel in the life have one life

and I need living, living the life 1 love my family, and I need respect and love. I thanks

living, living the life."

 (Student 3 recount. Independent Construction Text. May 19, 2022)

"My travel to the Beach

My travel is in the Beach in January 11. From 2019. The why is with my family and in this day is my birthday.

The events when we are eatting in a beautiful restaurant in the night and after of the travel in car from nine hours I can sleep relax. Later I wake up and have a good breakfast, and the next I went to the beach I was happy, then I swin and the ocean its very salad until my family and me relax in the sand my interest in the beach in this day is found money and corals expectaculars. Finally my family sing me the birthday. We eated a delicious cake. I hat a big happy moment day and birthday and whent to the house happinned. The event finally in 14 of January of 2019, my best day with my family disfrute the beach and the ocean and the sand. I am happy from this day and I no't to forget this event."

Writing the events of the recount in a sequence was another relevant change in some of the students' texts. There were students that had a high score in both texts, and some other students improved in this part. The latter was the case of Student 26, who had a score of 0 in the Diagnostic text, and in the Independent Construction text a score of 5. This improvement can be evidenced in the two texts:

(Student 26 recount. Diagnostic Text. April 5, 2022)

"My best day it was when my mom buyse for me my makeup for me to become a makeup artist and the day I was whit my stephfather and my sister. The artistic makeup is my happynees." (Student 26 recount. Independent Construction Text. May 19, 2022)

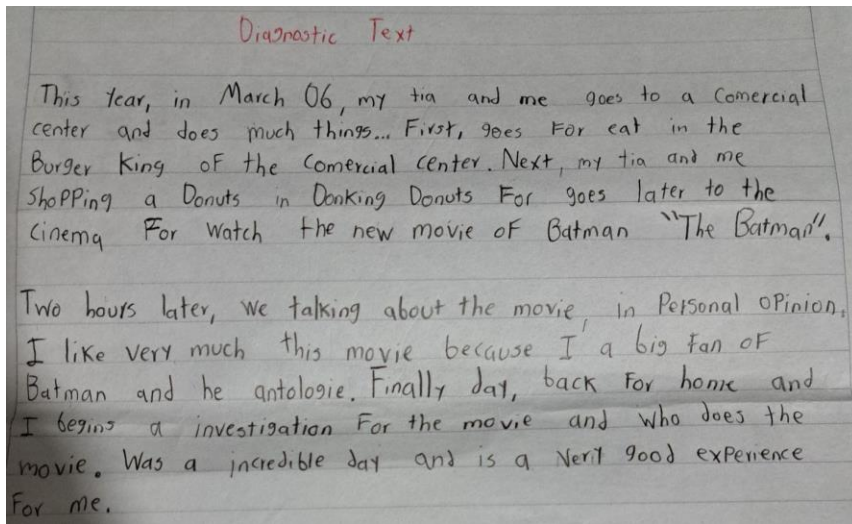And now, the Independent construction text written by the same student:

"My best day

My best day was when I can back in Italy because I not sauw my family for five years but the reaction of my family it was not what I expected, but nevertheless I was happy why did I see them. Althought I do think they love, perhaps the distance affected me, but they love me." (Student 26 artifact, May 19, 2022).

As can be seen, in the first text the student did not include a sequence of events to describe and narrate the situations of her best day, while the second text is mentioning the main events of this moment in her life: the arrival in Italy, then the family reaction, and after that, how she felt about this situation.

The criteria "Use of simple past to recount the events of the story" had an important improvement, and although it did not reach half of the maximum score, the following student artifacts show the enhancement. It can be inferred that students were more aware of the verb tense they need to use to recount events.

(Student 10 Recount. Diagnostic Text. May 19, 2022)

As it can be seen, the students wrote the verbs in the present tense. There is only one verb in the past form and it is in the last line: "<u>Was</u> a incredible day…"

On the other hand, in the independent construction stage, Student 10 continued having mistakes with writing the verbs in the present form, but he included several verbs in past forms, such as "wanted, arrived, talked, and screamed".

(Student 10 Recount. Independent Construction Text. May 19, 2022)

"The trip of Venezuela

In December 28th, 2014, my family of Venezuela goes to visit. My dad, my brother and my grandpas wanted time with me and this is what does:

First We arrived in a hotel, For ten days we are in the hotel, the First day I Play with my brother and I talked with my Father and grandpas. For the next's days, goes to Park Explora, a Water Park, a Comercial centers… etc. But one time goes to the Park of the comercial center Viva Envigado, and my dad, my brother and me we are in a Russian

Mountain very long, my dad as scared and screamed for the addrenaline, are very funny

when days.

Finally, I talk goodbye to my Family, when it's sad, but I lovem and we are a family

beautiful."

Nonetheless, there were also aspects that students did not improve. This is the case of one

of the criteria included in the personal recount to give a score to the students' texts. This criteria

was "Feelings and emotions", and according to the results, this had a lower score after the TLC

than before the TLC. But since there was a general improvement of the total scores, it can be

inferred that students did not center their attention on describing the place(s) or in writing about

their feelings and emotions, instead, they focused more on writing the events in order and in a

detailed way, and also on using the simple past tense.

Another improvement opportunity is the inclusion of a conclusion for the personal

recounts. When students received instruction about how to write the personal recount, they were

asked to include an ending or conclusion in their texts. However, most of the students did not

include this text characteristic criterion in their texts and did not have a noticeable improvement

either. Sometimes I was able to notice that students did not finish their texts and I had to take

their papers because the class was about to finish, so this may be one of the reasons why the

conclusion of the texts did not have a higher score on both the diagnostic and the independent

construction of the texts.

Effectiveness of Teacher's instruction

The teacher's writing instructions during the Teaching and Learning Cycle (preparatory activities and explanations, modeling, and joint construction) were crucial to allow the students to feel confident about the process of writing and to produce situated and contextualized texts for their life project. During an interview with two students, they mentioned that they were involved in preparatory activities before producing the final text: "Did you feel that there was a preparation or activities prior to writing the final text? -Yes, well, you always explained the topic to us and we did activities about that topic" (Student 13, Focus Group Interview, May 11, 2022).

Answering the same question, student 15 said:

"Yes, I would say that there was a lot of preparation because in previous tasks, for example, we did a text about the environment and about an environmentalist whose name I don't remember at the moment but who was quite influential, so we did have a lot of preparation for all the activities." (Student 15, Focus Group Interview, May 11, 2022).

Scaffolding strategies and giving feedback on the activities carried out along the cycles were also important to provide students with writing preparatory activities and with elements that directed them not only to engage in writing but also to guide and reinforce the lessons, so they could remember and practice with all the knowledge acquired. According to the focus group interviews, most students felt that there were preparatory activities before writing the independent construction texts. Brainstorming, asking students questions about the class activities, and adapting their ideas by writing them on the board were some of the activities that

helped students to build knowledge and understand the tasks and outcomes they had to produce.
This can be evidenced in the following extract from a Journal:

"Then, I showed them a picture of Greta and started to brainstorm the following aspects

to create the text about her. I wrote those categories on the board and I started to ask them

for words and sentences according to each category and they included words and

sentences from the video." (Journal 1, Entry 7, May 19th).

Finally, the findings also showed a lack of engagement in some cases with few students.
These students sometimes did not take the notebooks off their bags, they did not participate, or
did not write the required texts:

"After 20 minutes of class, the CT arrived at the classroom and saw that they were not

paying full attention, so she asked me for permission to talk. She immediately assumed a

strong attitude and a strong voice and asked them to take notes because there were Ss that

didn't even have their notebooks on their desks." (Journal 2, Entry #6, May 3).

During an interview with Student 1, who was a low achiever, his answers to the questions
of the interview were almost always an "I don't know". The questions designed for these focus
group interviews were related to the teacher's methodology, the topics seen during the two stages
of the Life Project, and the student's perceptions about these two aspects. The answers given by
Student 1 lead me to think that maybe the activities were not interesting for him and that is why
he did not engage. Or, besides autonomy, there are emotional and personal matters that affected
his commitment with the course.

Conclusions and suggestions

In sum, the goal of the project was reached, since the majority of students participated in class, engaged in the writing process and their writing practices improved. Nevertheless, it is important to remark that during my teaching practice there were still students that did not engage in the classroom activities or in the writing process although I considered their personal interests to plan the lessons and used scaffolding techniques to guide their processes step by step.

Another important characteristic that needs to be considered is the dedicated time to the English subject at the Institution. Little time exposure to the language is a barrier to having a significant improvement in the students' writing skills, because writing is an active skill that requires time to plan, create, and organize the ideas to express them on paper. Besides, it is necessary to go through a process of building knowledge about the topics and grammar before moving to the writing process.

Furthermore, there was a notorious enhancement in some of the characteristics worked in the two types of texts, the descriptive text, and the personal recount such as giving the text a title, writing the events in order, giving details about the events, and using the simple past tense to write the recount. However, including descriptions and using adjectives to write descriptive texts are aspects that need to be improved.

In addition, it is important to mention that implementing a Teaching and Learning Cycle was not only positive in the improvement of writing engagement, but also in the students' learning process since they learn vocabulary, theory, and grammar step by step.

Suggestions for further research is to include the factor of autonomy, by the creation of a sequence of tasks in which students can be aware of their progress and set their own goals. I consider that the reason why few students did not engage in the process may be because of a lack of autonomy and awareness of their learning process, and this leads them to have gaps or do not understand the theories and activities developed in class, causing at the same time a lack of engagement. Therefore, autonomy could be promoted through classroom activities in which students recognize their roles and responsibilities as learners.

Reflection

This teaching practice in foreign languages has significantly contributed towards my professional development in the sense of experiencing the reality of a public school context. I was able to know how an institution works and how a teacher's professional life is: the planning process, the classroom management, and the relationship with students. This experience was a great opportunity to change my perceptions of teaching in a public school. And although I still consider it a big challenge, it is also an exceptional and enjoyable profession. In terms of the development of actions, I feel that according to the analysis of the data and the students' outcomes, the strategies used to improve students' engagement and students' writing practices had positive outcomes. They could improve their writing and it makes me feel satisfied.

On the other hand, I must confess that the research part was a very challenging and laborious task. I love teaching and improving my practices by reading, analyzing, exploring my students' needs, and also enriching myself from the research articles and the example of other colleagues to adapt and implement those strategies in the courses I give. I genuinely admire the

enthusiastic teacher-researchers because they dedicate their energy and love to this important and

powerful task, but I truthfully feel a deep displeasure towards executing research myself.

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