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Fostering Writing Skills Through Self-Learning Materials

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Abstract

The Covid 19 pandemic, and the subsequent confinement of the population forced teachers to seek alternatives to continue the learning process of students. This paper reports an action research experience with seventh graders at Institución Educativa Fundadores in Medellín where Self-Learning Materials with a Product-Based Writing approach were implemented with the aim of fostering the students' writing skills. The data collection instruments used were students' artifacts, an interview with the Cooperating Teacher, and a survey for students. The analysis was made through the triangulation of the sources and the results evidenced that the characteristics of the Self-Learning Materials combined with the Product-Based approach had a positive effect on the students' writing skills in most of the categories assessed.

Key words: Self-Learning Materials, writing skills, Product-Based Approach.

Título en español: Fomentando Habilidades de Escritura a través de Materiales de Autoaprendizaje.

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 Medellín, Colombia.

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I want to thank all the teachers I have had in my life; they all contributed a little to this achievement. I also want to thank the 7th-3 students and Cooperating Teacher at I.E. Fundadores for their collaboration, my thesis and research advisor who made things easier, my family and some of my classmates and friends who have always supported me throughout my learning process.

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Preface

As teachers, we must always be willing to face new challenges; however, with the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent confinement of the population, this time, the dare exceeded our expectations. We had to rethink and redraw many of our beliefs, methodologies, and materials, not always achieving the best results because of the sudden and untimely situation.

This action research project is an attempt to redesign and apply appropriate material with a specific approach for distant students with a very basic level of English, in a public educational institution in Medellín, with the purpose of fostering their proficiency, and more specifically, their written production.

Description of the Context

Institución Educativa Fundadores is located in *El Socorro* neighborhood, in *San Javier, Medellín*. This educational institution was made official in 2015 and since 2017, it provides services in preschool, elementary, high school, and technical secondary education to around 1400 students from 19 neighborhoods of the Comuna 13.

The selected group for the project is 7th-3. The teacher in charge of the course, my Cooperating Teacher (CT), is a translator from the University of Antioquia with twenty years of experience teaching English, three of them at the Institución Educativa Fundadores. This group is made up of 39 students, 21 boys and 17 girls between 13 and 15 years of age, with an excellent relationship with the teacher. Although their academic level in English is basic (Pre A1-A1) (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, 2001, p. 24), it can be said that they are motivated and have a good attitude towards the class and English in general. These students were initially supposed to have English classes at the school with an intensity of three hours per week, mainly based on the workbook *Way to Go* (proposed by the Ministry of National Education), artificial material designed by the teacher such as flash cards and authentic material from the internet such as videos. However, due to the worldwide health emergency generated by the virus pandemic and the subsequent confinement of the population their learning conditions changed, decreasing their exposure to English. The first semester of the school year had to be developed through online sessions and Self-Learning Materials (*Guías de aprendizaje en casa: SLMs*). This move presented an obstacle for the students since most of them (about 90%) did not have access to the Internet or adequate electronic devices to continue their learning process online from home. Hence, they were limited and reduced to carry out the process during the first semester, exclusively through the physical SLMs. These materials were designed by the teacher

and delivered to them in printed form to be addressed, solved, and handed out at school or sent via email. For the second semester, the students went back to school, but for biosafety protocols, the group was divided into 2 subgroups. Each subgroup had 3 hours a week of face-to-face sessions interspersed with one week of independent work at home through the SLMs.

Statement of the Problem

As mentioned in the Description of the Context, due to the emergency generated by the pandemic and the subsequent confinement of the population, the normal development of school classes was as affected as the rest of the daily activities. In this instance, the change was really drastic since the traditional face-to-face sessions had to be moved to sudden online meetings and independent work with Self-Learning Materials (SLMs) in order to continue, as far as possible, with the educational process.

Nonetheless, the observation process, talks with the C.T. and the analysis of some of the SLMs used (see Appendix A) made it possible to conclude that the instruction the students had during the first semester was not enough for the foreign language acquisition goals in seventh grade. The exposure to English and the proficiency achieved through the SLMs used was limited and reduced. They were focused on receptive skills and demanded minimal production from the students. Moreover, following a request of both school authorities and parents, the teacher was asked to design them essentially concise and partially in the students' mother tongue (Spanish) with the aim to reduce the school load for students as part of a process of flexibility in times of pandemic. Besides, after exploring theories on SLMs, it was possible to conclude that these guides did not meet the requirements of an appropriate material for distance

learning, since they did not provide the necessary examples, illustrations, accompaniment, encouragement, and feedback that the students usually need throughout their learning process.

In short, the input and practice time received by the students in English decreased significantly with the Covid 19 situation and, in consequence, all this lack of exposure translated into a lack of opportunities to foster students' basic language skills. Since the SLMs used were mainly in printed form, they focused mostly on the written mode of communication. In spite of this, those materials seem to prevent the students from developing their writing skills in English as they do not provide enough input and illustration in writing tasks, they are not sufficiently engaging, they demand minimal output from the students, and they do not give the needed accompaniment and feedback on the students' progress in their writing skills.

Theoretical Background

After having defined the research problem, in this section, I will discuss the key concepts that frame this project. First, I am going to explain the concept of Self-Learning Materials and their characteristics and how they benefit the students' learning process, then I am going to discuss the notion of writing skills and its dimensions, and finally the Product-Based approach as an alternative for teaching writing.

Self-Learning Materials (SLMs)

Regarding the need to resort to SLMs for the students due to the health emergency, the Ministry of National Education recognizes the urgency to adopt new schedules, methodologies and guides that allow continuity to the educational process without face-to-face sessions. These

new educational strategies must be flexible, accessible, coherent, relevant, and inclusive in terms of time, space, dynamics, and resources of the students. The Ministry also allocates resources for the printing and distribution of materials in the different students' homes. (MEN, 2020, pp.1-2).

These materials have a very relevant function at the Institución Educativa Fundadores. In the first place, as resources for distance learning, Bhebhe, Maphosa, & Rugube (2019) state that, most of the time, the materials serve the role of the teachers to the learners, and they must empower students to engage in meaningful learning on their own. In the same vein, Rahman (2015) declares that SLMs are mainly designed for students to study on their own with limited or no assistance from a teacher or classmates. Therefore, it is necessary that content is structured, sequenced, and presented in ways that make it easy for the student to understand. Something important to consider, given the current learning conditions of the students in the 7th-3 grade in these times of pandemic and partial school attendance. This type of learning materials seems to be helpful for students, such as the 7th-3 graders of Institución Educativa Fundadores, who cannot attend a given location at a given time and need to learn by themselves at home through the so-called: *Guías de aprendizaje en casa*.

Chaudahary (2018) also notes the convenience of these materials stating that they play the role of an effective classroom teacher by providing learning experiences alike to the classroom-based teaching-learning process. Thus, “the invisible teacher built in the learning materials facilitates the learners in their studies in the same way as the classroom teacher does within the face-to-face classes” (p. 8). Among its characteristics, the author suggests that these materials must be: 1. self-contained, it means that students should not need additional sources; 2. self-explanatory, in other words, students should not need external support; 3. self-motivating, that is, the materials should be highly encouraging for the learner; 4. self-evaluating, the

materials should provide learners with the needed feedback; 5. self-learning, it must facilitate independent learning; 6. self-directed, which means that materials must provide necessary guidance, examples, and illustrations (p. 10). In other words, these tools have the mission to guide, motivate, explain, discuss, ask questions, assess progress, make corrections, and provide feedback to the students as if they were in the classroom with the teacher and the classmates.

Writing Skills

Writing is one of the four basic language skills and according to Nunan (2003), it is at the same time a physical and a mental act. Certainly, it is a physical act as it involves communicating words or ideas to some audience in a written way, but it is also the mental work of developing those ideas, thinking about how to express them, and organizing them into statements and paragraphs that will be clear to a reader (Nunan, 2003). It is also known as the ability to produce a “system of written symbols, representing the sounds, syllables or words of language, with different mechanisms - capitalization, spelling and punctuation, word form and function” (Durga & Rao, 2018, p.1). Its relevance is highlighted by remarking that communication is transmitted more in written form than otherwise, and teachers should motivate their students to have good writing skills, by providing instruction in writing processes and rules of writing, such as grammar rules and writing practice (Durga & Rao, 2018). Thus, this ability becomes essential for students like those in the 7th-3 group to meet their academic needs since it helps them to be more autonomous, fluent, and creative learners that can put their thoughts in a comprehensible and meaningful way and mentally process messages in a proper manner (Ariana, 2010). In the same way, writing entitles the students to communicate their thoughts, ideas, feelings, and expressions (Rao, 2017, p. 55). As for the complexity of this ability, he expresses

that writing requires a lot of hard work and patience as it is considered to be the most difficult skill. As a productive skill, students find it difficult when they try to write something, so they have to put considerable effort and allot more time for it in order to develop this faculty. It is evident the importance of working on strengthening this ability as most of the students feel comfortable while they listen to any one or read something, but they face problems when they must speak or write (Rao, 2017). This is the case for the 7th-3 grade students, who face problems with written production and cannot solve them through the development of the initial *Guías de aprendizaje en casa* implemented by the C.T. since these neither provide the necessary input nor demand sufficient output.

Likewise, 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 (Quintero, 2008). Writing requires not only syntactic and lexical knowledge, but also the capacity to generate and organize ideas and thoughts in a way that can be clear and coherent. It needs to be fostered because it causes problems to most students in both the native and the foreign language as it implies using an abstract set of mental processes rather than only using the formal structures of the language itself. In other words, writing involves more than the selection of the right structures, words, and general conventions of the language, it is part of a mental process that use and arrange formal structures in such a way that they can create actual meaning to what the students have in mind and want to express in written form. Hence, it can be said that writing, as a productive skill, is not only one of the most important abilities for the students to foster but also one of the most problematic. Its development becomes relevant as it entitles the 7th grade students of Institución Educativa Fundadores to express their thoughts, ideas, and feelings in a meaningful and structured way. Besides, as part of a mental process that entails

more than grammar rules and structures, it can indirectly foster other language skills that students have not been able to develop properly due to their partial school attendance.

Product-Based Approach for Teaching Writing

Since this research project will be focused on developing writing skills, I decided to use the Product-Based Approach. As claimed by Hasan and Akhand (2010), it consists of a model text that is presented to the students to be analyzed and used as an example to build a new text with similar characteristics in four stages (See Figure 1).

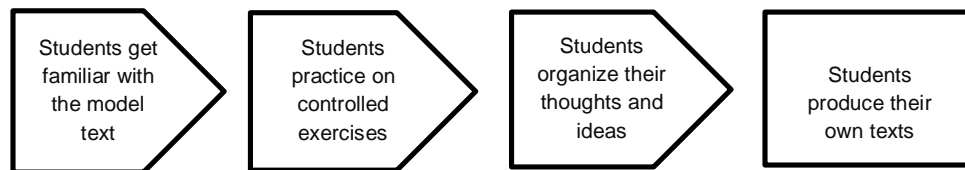


Figure 1: Product-Based Approach stages

First, students are exposed to a model text of the genre they are supposed to produce and analyze its features (it could be grammar, syntax, vocabulary, techniques, genre, tense, etc.).

After reading and identifying the key features, students practice on controlled exercises where the model is imitated, then they organize their ideas based on the model and finally, they undertake the writing task using the skills they have learned to generate a final product.

Gholami and Bazarmaj (2013) declare that this approach has always been considered as a beneficial source for providing feedback to students as well as being an effective teaching tool, if appropriately integrated into the context of the writing process. It can lead students to be aware of various aspects of writing such as style, vocabulary, organization, and structure. However, they recognize that the main disadvantage is that model texts prevent learners' creativity as they

are oriented to mimic a model text. In addition, Ghufron (2016) states that this approach serves to reinforce writing in second or foreign language in terms of grammatical and syntactic forms as it is focused on appropriate use of vocabulary, syntax, and cohesive device, but also points out that there is no benefit for the students to be authentic in their writing as the product is more important than the process. This approach seems to provide a useful process for students, who have not had much contact with English, to focus not only on grammar rules, vocabulary, and syntax but also on content, writing techniques, cohesion, coherence, semantics, pragmatics, etc. Thus, through familiarization, exploration, analysis, and imitation they can first handle basic units of language and then move to more complex forms that enable them to express their ideas, feelings, opinions, interests, desires, etc., in a meaningful and structured manner.

Research Question

Considering the discussion above and taking into account that at IE Fundadores, during the second semester SLMs will be used for the weeks of independent work, this research project will be guided by the following question: How can Self-Learning Materials focused on a Product-Based Writing Approach foster 7th grade students' writing skills in English at I.E. Fundadores?

Objectives

General Objective

- To determine how self-learning materials focused on a product-based writing approach can foster 7th grade students' writing skills in English.

Specific Objectives

- To suggest a framework for new SLMs focused on a product writing approach.
- To monitor the implementation of new SLMs aimed to foster the students' writing skills.
- To evaluate students' writing skills before and during the implementation of SLMs focused on a writing approach.

Action Plan

This action research project will have three stages that will be carried out during the second semester of the school year. The first stage will take place in the month of August, and it will be a diagnostic stage. The purpose of this diagnosis is to evaluate the initial students' writing skills through writing rubric based on a previous study.

The second stage will be developed during the months of September and October. This will be a stage to design the new SLMs based on a new framework that matches the six characteristics described in the previous section: self-contained, self-explanatory, self-motivating, self-evaluating, self-learning, and self-directed (Chaudahary, 2018). Additionally, I will discuss the proposals of the different SLMs with the C.T., implement the materials, collect the results, analyze the students' written products (artifacts) with the rubric used for the diagnosis, and make the necessary improvements to the SLMs. Finally, I will have a stage of general balance in early November. Here I will make an overall analysis of the process and the results of the implementation of the new SLMs, and I will implement an interview for the C.T. and a survey for the students to know their perceptions about the process that we will develop.

Development of Actions

The data gathering process took place between the months of August, September and October, that is, the third school term. Initially, the students participated in a diagnostic test (see Appendix B) to assess their initial writing skills in accordance with the third specific objective of the research, that is, to evaluate students' writing skills before and during the implementation of new SLMs (See Appendix C) focused on a writing approach. To do this evaluation, I designed a writing skills rubric based on Rukmini and Saputri (2017), which contains the categories to be assessed, namely structure, content, vocabulary, grammar, and creativity, as well as five score levels for each category. (See Appendix D).

Then, the first new SLM was introduced. This is within a new framework that meets all the recommended characteristics of SLMs, that is, to be self-contained, self-evaluating, self-explanatory, self-motivating, self-learning and self-directed (Chaudahary ,2018). I decided to work with students on expository texts that are suitable for beginners such as the 7th-3 graders. This type of text is used to provide factual, detailed and structured information about a topic in the simplest terms, therefore, it could be not only manageable but also meaningful for the students to work on it and address familiar contents in an organized way.

When I introduced the first SLM, students were already attending classes at school as part of a hybrid process due to the pandemic. At the beginning there was reluctance from the students to work on the materials since they misunderstood the time assigned for independent work as free time; therefore, the new material was considered as an extra load. For this reason, it was necessary to socialize the new material again in light of the implementation of the whole project and to ask for volunteers among the students willing to work on it. In the end, 19 students out of 39 (48 %) accepted to participate. After solving this issue, the project continued

successfully for the next six weeks. A second new SLM was applied in late September and a third one in late October, all of them designed under the new framework, that is, following the recommended characteristics. In all, three new SLMs were implemented with students of each subgroup. It was not possible to implement more, due to constant cancellation of classes, extracurricular activities in the institution and the week of school holidays. The topics for these new materials were established according to the course plan provided by the school, and they were *My likes and dislikes regarding food and drinks, The things I can and cannot do, and Where I will go and what I will do on my next vacation*. This implementation was in accordance with the second specific objective which was to monitor the implementation of new SLMs aimed to foster the students' writing skills.

The data were collected throughout a two-month period and the tools to do it were defined based on Burns (2010). These were: 1. an interview applied to the C.T. (see Appendix E), in order to know the opinion of someone who is familiar with the antecedents and learning process of students and also to be informed about her perceptions of the process and results of the project; 2. a survey for the students (See Appendix F), to know their perceptions and feelings about the project (in accordance with specific objective #3); According to Burns, this tool is recommendable when we want to get responses from several people and we do not have time to interview. In this case, it includes multiple choice and open items; 3. The students' artifacts, results of the implementation of the new SLMs 1, 2, 3 (See appendix G) were used as evidence to evaluate their process and outcomes during the implementation of the different new SLMs (all the above in accordance with the second and third specific objectives of this research study).

Data Analysis

This is an action research study. According to Burns (2015) this type of research inquires into the identification of diverse problems present in educational contexts with the purpose of creating meaningful solutions, generating social and academic improvement. The students' outcomes in 30 artifacts and the answers from nine students in the survey were analyzed with the use of descriptive statistics, specifically tabulation, mean and percentages as proposed by Mertler (2016), given that these "procedures serve to simplify, summarize, and organize relatively large amounts of numerical data." (Mertler, 2016, p. 285). This analysis was made in light of the five categories established in the rubric (structure, vocabulary, grammar, content and creativity) and these categories were also scrutinized in the answers of the C.T. interview. The answers were analyzed using the inductive analysis proposed by Mertler (2016) in which I coded the different categories emerging from the data to be then described, and interpreted looking for patterns connected to the research question. The analysis of the whole set of data was made through the triangulation (Mertler, 2016) of the different sources: the survey for the students, the interview with the CT and the students' artifacts, which were the SLMs. This was done to examine all the data for patterns and similarities and give trustworthiness to the whole process.

Findings and interpretation

Initial Status of Students' Writing Skills

Regarding the evaluation of the students' writing skills before the implementation of the new SLM in the Diagnostic test, the findings revealed that all the students had a very basic

level of writing skills. All of them had no or limited proficiency in terms of (1) the text structure, since there was not a sequence of events or development of a clear topic sentence in their paragraphs; (2) word choice, which most of the time was vague, careless or inaccurate; (3) content, as the length was extremely limited and with no details; (4) grammar, with frequent mechanical errors in respect of capitalization, punctuation, usage and spelling; and (5) creativity, as the production of ideas was very scarce in every case. These initial results are in accordance with the C.T.'s opinion when she says that students have language difficulties, even in Spanish, their mother tongue: “...ellos son estudiantes con muchas dificultades en ese sentido, incluso desde su lengua materna. Ellos son estudiantes que no identifican un verbo, un adjetivo, un sustantivo y eso se transmite también al inglés” (C.T. interview). Thus, it is evident that the C.T. was also aware of the students' English level and the many needs they had in that regard.

Similarly, the student's perceptions confirmed it when they were asked about their difficulties in the survey. As shown in Figure 2, 77% (7 students) of the survey respondents recognized having problems with vocabulary, 66% (6) mentioned problems with grammar and 22% (2) expressed lack of ideas. Likewise, one of the students expressed his lack of knowledge: “...antes no sabía nada” (Student A, survey). This is a sign that the students were aware of their limitations and needs in English. Therefore, it is evident that the previous knowledge of the students was very limited, and they had a really basic level not only in terms of the different categories assessed for their writing production but in general terms of English, despite being in seventh grade. Through the test results, it was confirmed that students had problems creating long sentences and paragraphs in a structured way, with accurate word choice, authenticity, and free of errors, to address topics close to their lives in a written way.

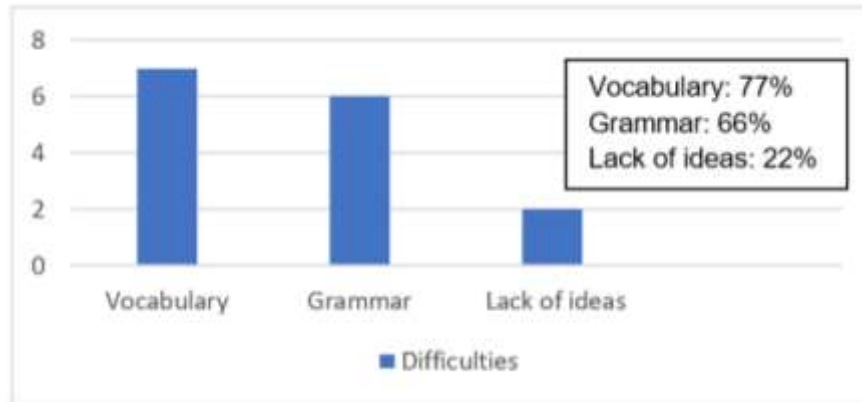


Figure 2. Percentages of students' difficulties according to the survey

Status of Students' Writing Skills After the Implementation of New SLMs

After the implementation of the three new SLMs, it was possible to make a comparison between the results from the diagnosis test and the new materials (see Graphic 3). The data analysis indicates mainly two aspects: High level of progress and Low level of progress.

High Level of progress. On the one hand, the students' writing skills were fostered in most of the criteria. Graphic 3 shows the comparison between the different averages achieved for each category in each of the artifacts collected. Initially, the students' artifacts, that is, the expository texts they produced, show that there was understanding and development of the text structure, 47% (14) of the artifacts showed that participants met the structure of expository texts with a clear topic sentence, introduction, middle and closure. Moreover, there are explicit transitions, and all paragraphs are coherent and easy to follow (See Appendix G). Another 40% (12) of the artifacts revealed that they did so to a large extent, as sometimes they omitted one of the paragraphs, usually the closure. Concerning the vocabulary, the data analysis yielded that 95% (28) of the artifacts analyzed showed strengthening of word choice and made an appropriate

selection and purposeful use of it. Regarding content, 60% (18) of the artifacts contained texts of three paragraphs with relevant details and 34% (10) of them met a little less length text of two paragraphs, as sometimes they omitted the closure. As to the grammar, 53% (16) of the artifacts presented texts with very few or no mechanical errors and 40% (12) of them did it with occasional errors that did not impede the reader. This finding is in harmony with Ghufon's idea when asserts "...this approach serves to reinforce writing in second or foreign language in terms of grammatical and syntactic forms and it is focused on appropriate use of vocabulary, syntax, and cohesive device" (Ghufon, 2016, p.40). This is also in congruence with Gholami and Bazarmaj (2013) who declare that this approach is focused on raising students' awareness, especially in grammatical structures vocabulary and style (Gholami and Bazarmaj, 2013). Regarding the participants of this study, this is also confirmed by the C.T. who says that:

La verdad, si puedo observar una mejoría muy significativa en los estudiantes. Pues...es muy evidente el avance que han tenido en ese sentido, me parece que en realidad el material sí ha contribuido para que ellos mejoren su nivel de escritura y de inglés en general, se nota la producción (C.T. interview).

Thus, the C.T. agrees with the improvement students have had in their writing skills and English, in general, since the implementation of the new material. Students also acknowledged this progress, as 55% of them (5) admitted having improved a lot and 44% (4) enough with these types of materials. 55% (5) of them affirmed having fostered their vocabulary, 33% (number)their structure, and 33% (3) their grammar (Students' Survey). They gave opinions about their learning expressing their progress: "*he aprendido algunas frases y palabras*" and "*me pareció muy fácil de entender*" (Student M Survey). In these answers the students attest the

advance they consider have had regarding their writing skills and the SLMs. Taking all the above into account, it is undoubtable that the implementation of the SLMs had a positive effect in most students and categories assessed. The C.T. agrees with it in the interview by saying that she has realized about the students' achievements through the SLMs:

Bueno, yo diría que en realidad sí hay una mejoría en todos estos aspectos, partiendo pues del nivel que ellos traían. Yo creo que la producción que han logrado a través del material es muy alta si tenemos en cuenta las falencias iniciales. Me parece pues como muy completo el avance que tuvieron. (C.T. interview).

Further, when asked if they would be willing to use this material again in the future, both the C.T. and students agreed expressing that: *“todo esto sí me serviría para fortalecer las guías que utilizaría en ese caso y crear un mejor material para los estudiantes. Entonces sí implementaría algo así” (C.T. interview)* and *“Sí, en otro tiempo me gustaría aprender más con estas actividades porque me enseñan a desarrollar mi mente y mi vocabulario”, “Si lo utilizaría porque es más fácil para indicar lo que a veces no sabemos escribir y pronunciar, por eso sí” (Student C, survey)*. These comments allow me to say that both the C.T. and the students acknowledge the usefulness and the benefits of this type of material. This evidence shows that the participants coincided to be disposed to use it because of its advantages, something that I could evidence by seeing their final reaction and attitude towards the material after weighing their results.

Low level of progress. On the other hand, in the matter of creativity, it can be said that there was not much progress in terms of development of ideas and authenticity. This was

probably due to the participants' over-relying on the model texts and hardly detaching from it. As shown in Figure 3, 66% (20) of the analyzed artifacts revealed that there was no introduction of new elements to their productions and another 34% (10) showed that they scarcely did it in a few cases. This was also reflected in the students' answers for the survey, where none of them claimed to have developed their creativity with the writing activities. This finding is in line with Gholami and Bazarmaj (2013) who warned that this approach could also affect creativity and inhibit writers rather than empower them since it encourages the learners to use the same plan in different settings, and apply the same forms, regardless of content. Similarly, Ghufroon (2016) states that "There is no advantage for the students to be innovative in their writing since the product content is more important than the process" (Ghufroon, 2016, p. 40). Therefore, it is important to note that this category, which was intended to be fostered, did not have a significant advance as the nature of the approach does not allow its development. Students rarely took initiative to add different elements, other than those presented in the model, and only in a few cases they went beyond. However, it is possible to say that the students' authenticity was not completely overshadowed as there were some flashes of it throughout the process.

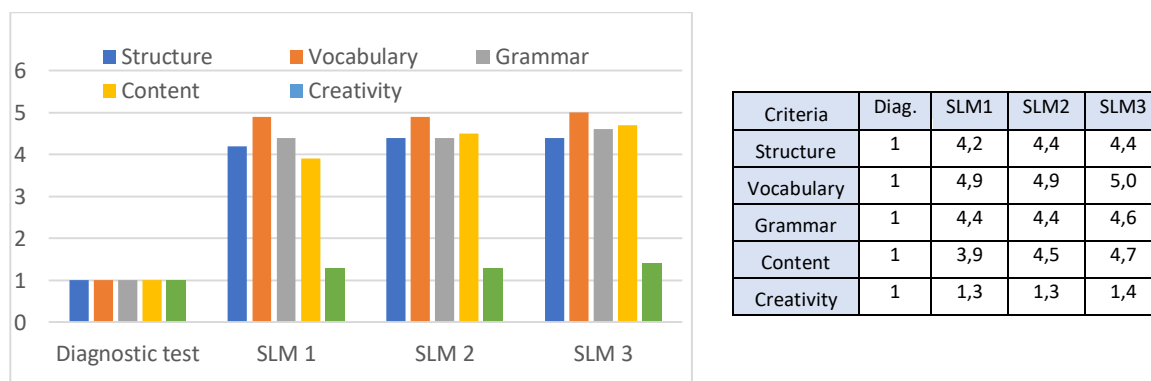


Figure 3. Mean of students writing skills progress

Conclusions

Confinement due to the Covid-19 pandemic, studying from home, and the specific conditions of the students of Institución Educativa Fundadores made it necessary to resort to SLMs to continue the learning process. Nevertheless, an initial evaluation of those materials that were implemented made it possible to establish that they did not comply with the characteristics of an appropriate SLM. This issue seemed to be preventing the students from developing their writing skills in English as the materials did not provide enough input and illustration in writing tasks, they were not sufficiently engaging, they demanded minimal output or production from the students, and they did not give the needed accompaniment and feedback about the students' learning progress in writing skills.

With the implementation of new guides designed within a suggested framework that meets the characteristics of proper self-learning materials, that is, to be self-contained, self-explanatory, self-motivating, self-evaluating, self-directed, and self-learning (Chaudahary, 2018), combined with a suitable approach for teaching writing such as the Product-Based Approach, the results from this study show that there can be significant progress regarding the students' writing skills. The findings led me to conclude that the use of this type of materials allowed students with basic level of proficiency to produce structured and coherent texts with a topic sentence and explicit transitions between introduction, middle and closure. Additionally, the SLMs strengthened the students' word choices and helped them make purposeful use of vocabulary. Besides, students also included more content, longer texts with more details; and finally, in terms of grammar, the students' production improved in terms of mechanical errors.

However, due to the nature of the approach, there was no or very little advance in respect of creativity and authenticity in the students' output as they hardly detached from the model.

Only in a few cases the students took the initiative to include new elements other than what was provided to them, in a few exceptions they dared to go beyond the model and added new vocabulary.

Although there was an initial reluctance on the students and a certain lack of continuity in the class meetings, the project was finally carried out successfully. Both the participants and the C.T. agreed with the results and expressed that they are willing to use this type of material in future opportunities. In this sense, it is recommendable for further research on this approach trying to find ways of fostering or promoting creativity and authenticity in the students, so that they can detach little by little from the model texts and become more autonomous in their productions.

The implementation of SLMs, with the appropriate characteristics that consider both the environment and the students' current conditions and a writing approach, will serve as a scaffolding for the students to strengthen different aspects of their writing skills. Ultimately, it allows to move them progressively toward bigger understanding and independence. However, it is important to note that in other facets the approach falls short as it also has its limitations as any intervention. What matters finally is to highlight what is useful and beneficial for the students and identify the shortcomings to work on them in possible future projects with this type of materials and approach.

Reflections

Overall, I can say that all this practicum experience has been very enriching both professionally and personally. It was really rewarding as it was my first contact not only with

real research, but also with teaching and public schools. I must admit that initially I felt insecure, worried and overwhelmed, but with adequate planning and constancy things gradually went well. Working with young people was a stimulating and energizing task, and even though there was initial reluctance by the students to work on the guides, after all, there was a general willingness to learn and participate in the different sessions and I can say that I learned as much from them as they did from me.

This experience also served me to gain a deeper understanding of everything that happens in a classroom, as well as to confirm my vocation as a teacher, my desire to work in a public school, and my willingness to help transform people's lives and the environment, through the spread of meaningful knowledge and practices that empower society to overcome the current conditions. It was also a rewarding time of experience in research since I could make a brief contact with some theory and practice; however, I do not think it is something I would devote myself to in life. Likewise, throughout all this time I could realize that I still have a lot of things to learn in this field and that my training as an English teacher is far from over.

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Appendix A

SLM: Guía de aprendizaje en casa #4 (before the implementation of the new SLMs)

GUIA DE APRENDIZAJE EN CASA	
AREA/ ASIGNATURA	HUMANIDADES IDIOMA EXTRANJERO - INGLÉS
NIVEL	Básica secundaria
CURSOS	7°3 – 7°4 – 7°5
DOCENTE	Rocio Arango Ángel
Email	rocio_arango@yahoo .es
WhatsApp	WhatsApp: 314 407 3837
Enlace o link	http://meet.google.com/kuu-nebk-ive
FECHA	Del 10 al 28 de mayo de 2021 (GUÍA N°1 SEGUNDO PERIODO)

TOPIC: INSTITUTIONAL PROJECTS
FREE TIME

CONCEPT

- Time available for hobbies and other activities that you enjoy.
- A time period when you are not required to work.
- Time that is free from duties or responsibilities.
- Time available for ease and relaxation.

KEYWORDS (palabras clave)

1. Spare time	17. to read
2. Time off	18. to go camping
3. Leisure time	19. to go dancing
4. to dance	20. to go fishing
5. to draw	21. to go to a disco
6. to chat	22. to ride a bike
7. to cook	23. to sing
8. to drive	24. to skate
9. to hike	25. to watch a film
10. to listen to music	26. to go shopping
11. to play basketball	27. to go swimming
12. to play bowling	28. to go to the gym
13. to play chess	29. to go to the concert
14. to play football	30. to have a barbecue
15. to play the drums	
16. to play the guitar	

ACTIVIDADES A DESARROLLAR

1. Lee el concepto acerca del proyecto institucional "TIEMPO LIBRE" y trata de comprenderlo desde tu lengua materna (español)
2. Consulta el significado de cada una de las keywords (palabras clave)
3. Ingresa al siguiente enlace <https://youtu.be/xU5ikYwR3QQ> y haz un video basándote en ese ejemplo; describe en inglés cómo inviertes tu tiempo libre (How do you spend your day?) hazlo como en el video, es decir, en forma didáctica y recreativa.

PLAZO Y FORMA DE ENTREGA

El plazo de entrega es hasta el 28 de mayo de 2021

Enlace para ingresar a las clases virtuales de inglés: <http://meet.google.com/kuu-nebk-ive>

Appendix B

Diagnostic test samples:

Instruction: Write a text answering the question "What do you do in your free time?"

You play futbol on
free five

I'am play baseball.

¿What do you do in your free time?
I'm music

1. You play fotbooll, Play con
mis amigos

I Like

Yo Paso tiempo libre con el
celular

Appendix C

New SLM #3

THE THINGS I CAN AND CANNOT DO

Hi everyone, it is the opportunity we are going to learn how to talk about the things we can and cannot do.

Objectives (objetivos):

- By the end of this class, students will be able to understand and use modal verbs to tell their peers about their abilities and disabilities.
- By the end of this class, students will be able to identify and produce expository texts.

Concepts (conceptos):

CAN: We use "CAN" to talk about possibilities. We always use CAN with another verb.

CANNOT: We use "CANNOT" to talk about impossibilities. We always use CANNOT with another verb.

Expository text: It is a type of text that informs, explain, or give details about a topic. It is a non-fictional text, it is factual, gets to the point quickly and efficiently and uses specific vocabulary.

Structure (estructuras):

Subject	Can	Verb	complement
I / He / She	can	run	fast.
You / we / they	cannot	climb	trees

Expository text structure: opening + details + closing

Activity (Actividad):

1-Read Daniel's story to explore a little more the use of **CAN** and **CANNOT** to talk about your abilities and disabilities. (Lee la historia de Daniel para explorar un poco más el uso de CAN and CANNOT para hablar acerca de sus habilidades e inhabilidades.)


Hi, my name is Daniel and I want to tell you a little bit about the different abilities and disabilities I have. For example:

- I can run very fast.
- I can lift weights.
- I can swing high.
- I can cook very well.

My goal:

- I cannot read.
- I cannot dance any music.
- I cannot drive a car.
- I cannot ride a bike.

I'm so happy to be able to do the many things I can do and hope someday I can learn to do the things I cannot.



2 Circle the sentences that express abilities in Daniel's text and search for the meaning of unfamiliar words. (Encierra las oraciones que expresan habilidades en el texto de Daniel y busca el significado de palabras desconocidas.)

3 Underline the sentences that express disabilities in Daniel's text and search for the meaning of unfamiliar words. (Subraya las oraciones que expresan inhabilidades en el texto de Daniel y busca el significado de palabras desconocidas.)

4 Complete the sentences using CAN or CANNOT according to the image. (Complete las oraciones usando CAN or CANNOT de acuerdo con la imagen.)

- I _____ do exercise.
- I _____ play volleyball.
- I _____ act very well.
- I _____ play videogames.
- I _____ memorize many things.
- I _____ play the flute.
- I _____ make handicrafts.
- I _____ write stories.

REMEMBER:

THE THINGS I CAN DO

THE THINGS I CANNOT DO

5 You can find the answers at the end of the page. Use them to analyze if you are doing it correctly. (Puedes encontrar las respuestas al final de la página. Úsalas para analizar si lo estás haciendo correctamente.)

5-Use Daniel's example to write an expository text on a piece of paper about the things you can and cannot do. Use a piece of paper (at least 8 activities). Get ready to share your plans with your classmates only. (Usa el ejemplo de Daniel para escribir un texto expositivo en una hoja de papel acerca de las actividades que puedes y no puedes hacer. (al menos 8 actividades).)

Key words (palabras clave): You can use the vocabulary of the matching activity. (Puedes usar el vocabulario de la actividad de apareamiento.)

Answers (Respuestas):

- 4-I can do exercise.
- I cannot play volleyball.
- I cannot act very well.
- I can play videogames.
- I cannot memorize many things.
- I cannot play the flute.
- I can make handicrafts.
- I can write stories.

Suggested materials (material sugerido): If you want to go deeper into this topic, you can visit the following link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5G3b0E7T7d4&list=PL4080404040404040>

Appendix D

Writing skills rubric

Criteria:

Structure: Production of expository texts with a clear topic sentence, introduction, middle and closure, coherence and explicit transitions between paragraphs.

Vocabulary: Appropriate selection and purposeful use of words.

Content: Length and relevance of the details.

Grammar: Lack of mechanical errors.

Creativity: Detachment from the model and introduction of new elements.

SCORE					
	1 No proficiency	2 Limited proficiency	3 Some proficiency	4 Proficiency	5 High proficiency
Structure					
Vocabulary					
Content					
Grammar					
Creativity					
CRITERIA					

Appendix E

Interview with the C.T.

Buenas tardes, profesora, y muchas gracias por facilitar este encuentro para hablar acerca del proyecto desarrollado con los estudiantes del grado 7. Esta entrevista solo será utilizada con fines académicos, y la información no será divulgada en otros sitios.

1 ¿Qué condiciones iniciales encuentra usted en los estudiantes con respecto a las habilidades de escritura en inglés? ¿Qué tipo de dificultades o fortalezas presentaban ellos en el primer semestre del año? ¿Qué tipo de textos podían/solían escribir?

2 a ¿Considera que el material implementado ha contribuido a mejorar las habilidades de escritura de los estudiantes? ¿Por qué? ¿Cómo?

2b ¿En cuál de los siguientes aspectos considera que hubo una mejoría en las habilidades de escritura de los estudiantes: Contenido, estructura del texto, vocabulario, gramática, creatividad, ¿otro?

3 ¿Tiene algún comentario adicional sobre el proceso llevado a cabo con el material o sobre los resultados?

4 ¿Le interesaría implementar algo similar el próximo año en sus grupos en caso de una nueva contingencia? ¿Cómo lo haría?

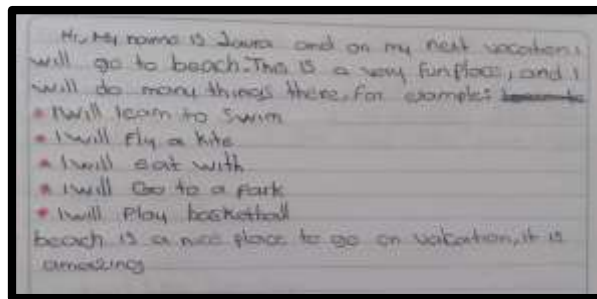
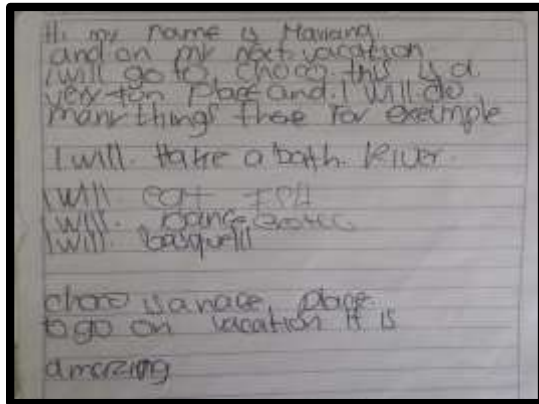
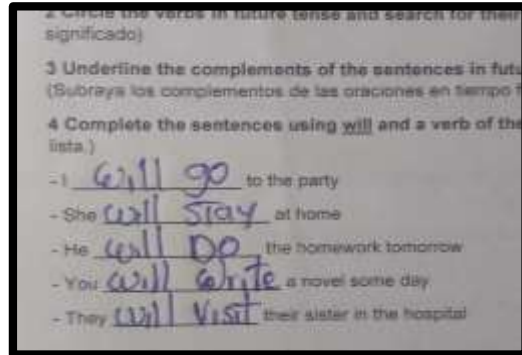
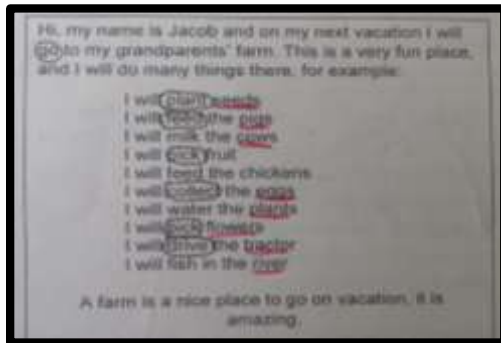
Appendix F

Students' survey

Encuesta sobre habilidades de escritura para los estudiantes del grado 7 ^o -3 de la I. E. Fundadores	
Nombre:	
1 ¿Cómo te sentiste durante el ejercicio de diagnóstico de escritura?	
Fue muy fácil___	Fue difícil___
Fue fácil___	Fue muy difícil___
Fue normal___	
¿Por qué?	
2 ¿Qué dificultades tuviste para responder a la pregunta sobre las actividades que realizas en tu tiempo libre? (Puedes seleccionar varias)	
Falta de vocabulario___	Faltas de ortografía___
Falta de estructura en el texto___	Otra___
Falta de ideas___	Ninguna___
3 ¿Consideras que el material de autoaprendizaje te ha ayudado a desarrollar tus habilidades de escritura?	
Mucho___	
Bastante___	
Moderadamente___	
Poco___	
Nada___	
¿Por qué?	
4. Si tu respuesta anterior fue "Sí", ¿en qué aspectos consideras que mejoraron tus habilidades de escritura? (Puedes seleccionar varias)	
Vocabulario___	
Estructura del texto___	
Ortografía___	
Creatividad___	
Otro___	
5. Estaría dispuesto/a a utilizar este tipo de materiales en futuras oportunidades?	

Appendix G

Self-learning material implementation #1



Self-learning material implementation #3

