

AN EXPERIENCE TO ENCOURAGE STUDENTS' WRITING SKILL THROUGH MULTIMODALITY*

Una experiencia para fomentar la escritura en los
estudiantes por medio de la multimodalidad

* Original Research Article

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Abstract

Creative writing provides new options for students to motivate English language learning allowing them to use it meaningfully to interact with the world. Thus, this research experience attempts to integrate multimodality principles into creative writing as an opportunity to encourage eighth graders' EFL learning at a public institution in Tunja. This research project follows action research features where a pedagogical intervention is conducted: four workshops were designed conveying creative writing activities—using simultaneously image, video, text, sound, speech. Afterwards, they were uploaded to EDMODO learning space. Instruments used were surveys, students' artifacts and focus groups. A process of planning, testing, observing and reflective cycle was followed. Data collected was analyzed following the grounded theory approach. Results indicate that by integrating creative writing along multimodality and E-learning environments, English learning becomes meaningful for them as a means of real self-expression and communication during the Covid-19 pandemic; their motivation is enacted when English permeates digital spaces in order to share thoughts and ideas in a creative way by using songs, pictures, drawings, and their own voice along their texts. Therefore, multimodal creative writing activities in virtual spaces demonstrate to be joyful strategies to foster motivation to learn and use English language, and they

can be applied in the upcoming future in online and hybrid EFL classrooms.

Keywords: Multimodality, Edmodo, Online Classrooms, ICTs, education during COVID-19, creative writing.

Resumen

La escritura creativa proporciona nuevas opciones a los estudiantes para motivarlos a aprender inglés utilizando el lenguaje de manera significativa para interactuar con el mundo. Así, este proyecto incorpora principios de la multimodalidad con la escritura creativa como una oportunidad para incentivar estudiantes de octavo en una institución pública en Tunja. Durante este proyecto de investigación acción, se realizó la correspondiente intervención pedagógica: se diseñaron cuatro talleres con actividades de escritura creativa integrando articuladamente imagen, texto, sonido y lenguaje oral, etc. los cuáles fueron agregados a la plataforma multimedia de aprendizaje EDMODO. Los datos fueron recolectados a través de encuestas, artefactos de los estudiantes y grupos focales. Por otro lado, se siguió el proceso de planeación, prueba, observación y reflexión. Los datos recolectados fueron analizados a través de los principios de la teoría fundada. Los resultados indican que al integrar en escritura creativa con la multimodalidad y ambientes virtuales de aprendizaje, el inglés se vuelve significativo para los estudiantes como un medio de autoexpresión y comunicación durante la pandemia del Covid-19; su motivación aumenta cuando el inglés permea espacios digitales con el propósito de compartir pensamientos de manera creativa

utilizando canciones, imágenes, dibujos, e incluso su voz junto con sus escritos. Por lo tanto, la escritura creativa multimodal en ambientes virtuales demuestran ser estrategias positivas para potenciar la motivación del uso y aprendizaje del inglés y estas actividades pueden ser aplicadas en futuras clases virtuales e híbridas.

Palabras clave: multimodalidad, Edmodo, ambientes virtuales de aprendizaje, educación durante el COVID-19, escritura creativa.

Introduction.

21st century education has a multimodal nature which is potentialized because of the Covid 19 pandemic. Regarding the foreign language teaching and learning, teachers have to rethink their pedagogical practices and adapt their instructional materials by integrating digital tools such as the use of learning system platforms to face the new forms of learning, especially how to approach, or at least, encourage learners to improve the different language skills. Alternatively, writing in English remains a challenge for many learners due to the fact that it requires practice and mastery in order to produce coherent and meaningful texts; but particularly, in high schools, teachers' efforts deal with finding strategies to make learners feel motivated to write. Considering a previous experience in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) and a supervision process carried out at a public institution in the city of Tunja as part of the final pedagogical teaching practicum in a teacher education program, it is attempted to look into the use of multimodal works as a way to encourage their learners' creative writing during the pandemic time.

In doing so, it is noticed that learners are more concerned with learning the grammatical component of the target language than understanding writing as a means of self-expression and communication (Bilton and Sivasubramaniam, 2009; Pfeiffer & Sivasubramaniam, 2016). It has led students to feel unmotivated and with little creativity when writing in English. In this respect, Boscolo and Hidi (2007) affirm that "writing is mostly used as a rhetorical exercise and evaluation tool" (p.4). Its purpose is focused mainly on verifying knowledge on the topic following some steps and a list of criteria, which at some point, have been limiting learners' creativity and motivation to write about their *individual intrinsic motives* (Brown, 1994; Brown, 2000). That is, writing turns into a hindrance or an elaborate process rather than a challenging task which generates lack of interest to accomplish the goals in the English foreign language classroom.

Hence, it is intended to find a strategy through multimodal productions to help learners connect their daily situations and feelings through writing creatively, which in fact, has been rarely promoted in the English subject classes due to students having to give an account on their language learning goals. The New London Group (1996), a set of scholars interested in studying the evolution of learning trends, found that the language nowadays has been reshaped by new communication media; on that account, modality turns into an approach to develop a different literacy practice redefining the way we perform communication through the use of new learning environments. For instance, Kress (2003) claims that with the appearance of more visual affordances and devices, written mode has been stepped aside as the most relevant mode of meaning making; contemporary communication has migrated from paper to screens (cellphones, computers, tablets, etc.).

For this study, students from eighth grade at a school located in Tunja participated with the aim of exploring how multimodality principles encourage creative writing in English language. A survey was applied in order to explore their insights towards the foreign language (FL), their motivation towards this subject and their interest taking into consideration multiple modes of making meaning (the use of pictures, colors, music when doing activities in this area). Surveys can also be used to assess needs, evaluate demand, and examine impact (Salant & Dillman, 1994). In this sense, by applying this instrument, the impact of the research study on participants' motivation is analyzed when using English to write creatively by addressing multimodality principles.

Based on the aforementioned, it is proposed the following research question:

“To what extent the use of a Social Learning Environment (Edmodo) focusing on multimodality principles encourages eighth graders' EFL creative writing at a public institution in Tunja?”

With the purpose of describing how students' motivation was enacted by addressing a multimodal approach to creative writing. Data collected showed that there was a significant change in their motivation to do creative writing activities along multimodal principles by implementing a Social Learning Environment (Edmodo), where they connected English language to their lives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study seeks to describe the constructs emerged from this research experience such as creative writing, multimodality and technology. These features are overlapped as powerful resources to motivate EFL learning worldwide as stated by several scholars and research studies.

Language Learning Motivation in Creative Writing

With reference to the main purpose of this study, it contemplates the learners' needs and motivation to write in the foreign language. Motivation is recognized as a key factor that determines enhancement and success in language learning and teaching (Dornyei, 1994; Cheng & Dornyei, 2007; Filgona *et al.*, 2020). In other words, without an accurate amount of motivation, learners are unlikely to achieve goals within the different subjects, particularly, in language proficiency. On the contrary, motivated learners by foreign language learning can work harder and change their behavior to reach their goals with the help of teachers through engaging learning activities.

Thus, this research study started with the aim of motivating students to write in English language. In psychology, motivation is connected to creativity in the sense that it needs to be present in a creative person. As stated by Csikszentmihalyi (1988), the creative person needs to be interested in a particular field which entails an important amount of psychic energy. With the purpose of constructing new paths of thinking that have never existed before, a person must pay a great deal of attention to the task. Besides, creativity permeates a myriad of fields in art such as painting,

sculpture and literature because these are different paths to inner-reflection and self-expression. This creativity as a means for self-expression is also attached to writing. In language learning, “creative writing” has been relevant in the students' development of writing skills. On the one hand, as stated by Pardlow (2003), creative writing can ease students' approach to writing skill due to the fact they do not need specific techniques to start writing; it fosters imagination and overall, allows students to experience the joy of learning a foreign language.

Keeping the same line of thought, regarding motivating foreign language learning by means of creative writing, Lambert and Gardner (1959) indicate that it can trigger students' desire for learning because they will use it for each one's purposes and make its own meaning. By the same token, motivation to write is acquired when learners are engaged in creative writing activities in the EFL classroom due to the fact self-expression is the core of the task (Riber & Sjögren, 2020). Accordingly, by promoting writing in a creative way in the present study it was analyzed how activities focused on this feature motivated participants' desire to learn English by sharing their thoughts, ideas, wishes and feelings in a free, spontaneous and secure way.

Based on Scarcella and Oxford (1992), the ideal thing is to have an integrative approach where creation of meaning is central to the act of writing. This idea in this study contributes to a significant sense of motivating students to create their own texts freely giving their own meanings, taking into account elements that are part of their lives and environments, spreading in them the desire of expressing themselves in another language. By the same token, Ávila (2015) mentioned that “English teachers can use their creativity to make classes much more original, and go outside the formal bonds of teaching” (p, 102). To reiterate, Dougherty & Dougherty (2008) assume the positive effects of creative writing in EFL learners as an engaging tool conducive to language learning success.

Motivation in Multimodality and Technology

Multimodality has been present in language acquisition and learning since its main purpose is meaning making; interpretation of realities and communication with these ones. Álvarez (2016) asserts that “the turn to the multimodal is in stark contrast with language studies that have primarily foregrounded oral and written modes of communication” (p. 99); in fact, the multimodal language learning interest led to resignify the way learners learn the foreign language nowadays.

Making meaning through language is not permeated by only one mode; spoken or written, as it is tended to think. This phenomenon of multimodality has taken strength since the 1990s. The New London Group (1996) argued that, “In a profound sense, all meaning making is multimodal. All written text is also visually designed” (p. 81). Moreover, this entails that multimodality demonstrates that meaning can be made, interpreted and expressed in different ways; however, these convey together provoking enriching communication. Cope and Kalantzis (2009) categorized the different modes of meaning in which language is represented and the language user can interpret it: written language, oral language, visual representation, audio representation; these modes are integrated in the current digital world. Nowadays, with the appearance of the Internet, computers, smartphones and social media, users are bombarded with all these modes joined together in these technological devices.

In the words of Howell, Reinking and Kaminski (2015), “In an increasingly digital world, teaching students to construct meaning using these various media and modes requires helping them understand the purpose of each mode and how to use each one effectively.” (p. 8). Consequently, it has positive implications in EFL; so that, teachers need to acknowledge the relevance of each mode of meaning making to address real communication by considering strategies to get learners engaged in unfolding their own ideas, thoughts, beliefs in a natural way in the EFL classroom, without limiting their self-expression, but also, to reflect on their written product. In the same way, Pelaez (2015) remarks that, by taking advantage of multimodality principles in languages learning can foster students' motivation in EFL:

A combination of multimodality with a student-centered approach will help fostering students' linguistic, information processing and digital competence in the vast majority of the cases, as well as increase their motivation and participation in the EFL classroom. Second, that employing a multiplicity of modes for EFL teaching will help adapting the EFL classroom and school context to students' out-of-school reality and lives and will increase students' engagement, motivation and participation in the EFL classroom; third, that in the same way that the use of different modes and technology can facilitate and promote language-learning motivation. (p. 47)

Keeping this in mind, technology is not only linked to multimodality but also it can motivate students' English language learning by means of its appropriation and use. Mayora (2006) claims the multiple assets that multimedia technology increases students' interest inside EFL classroom such as enacting students' motivation due by interacting tasks, perceiving language learning for relevant communication according to their realities, and the integrating different types of resources such as images, sounds and text according to their likes.

In this respect, teachers motivate students through the design of workshops encouraging EFL creative writing at a public institution with the use of Edmodo, a free learning management platform, which facilitates sharing of information and ideas in regards to the workshops proposed (Charoenwet & Suratpittaya, 2016). This virtual learning environment has demonstrated a myriad of assets. For instance, Díaz (2017) reveals that it enables a virtual and digital channel leading to creativity also boosted by knowing others' perceptions, thoughts and feelings. Equally important, Wahyuni *et al.* (2020) affirm that "Edmodo provided students with multimodal affordances, therefore, it altered students' learning strategies which resulted in fun learning activities" (p.1594). In this perspective, learners can produce texts in another language from different standpoints addressing real interpretation and communication. In addition, they increase creativity, understand others' realities and go beyond self-expression by exploring different ways of making meaning through technology and virtual learning environments.

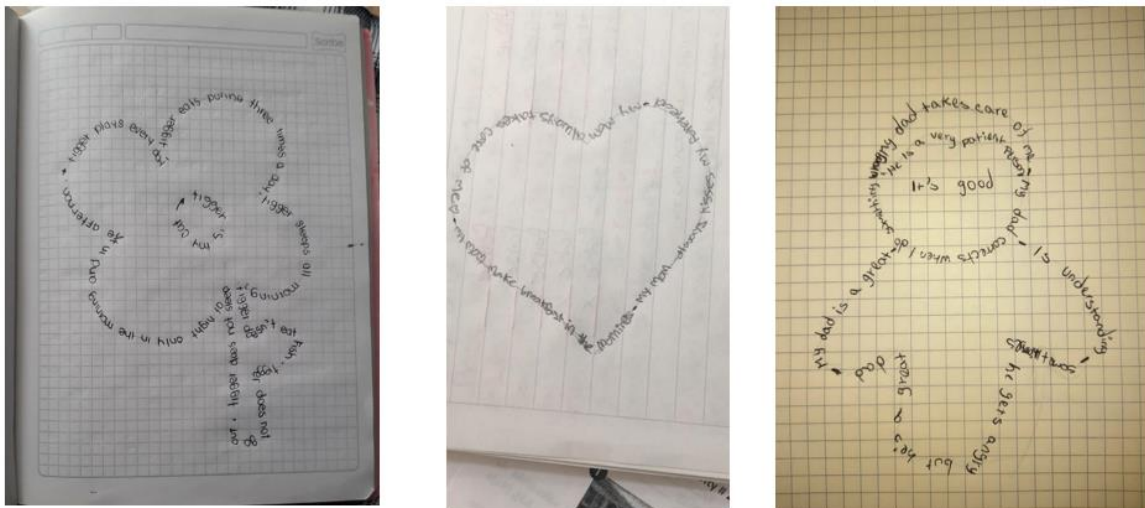
In conclusion, by implementing strategies looking for increasing motivation in EFL, learners are provided with tools and different insights to make English language useful for their lives. These are adapted to their needs and realities in order to enhance communication regarding the 21st century demands. Letting students explore multimodality when writing creatively in English with the use of virtual learning environments encourages them to produce their own texts; as a result, their perceptions about learning a foreign language change positively, their creativity and imagination are enacted and they meet the expectations of digital era where technology and multimedia are taken place worldwide.

METHODOLOGY

Due to the nature of this study, it was important to determine the research type needed to be followed to give an answer to the research question. As the purpose of this research study was to describe how multimodality principles and a social learning environment (Edmodo) encourage students' creative writing when learning English language in a group of eighth graders at a public institution in Tunja, action research was selected as an opportunity to observe participants' engagement and joy. Activities with these features (multimodality, creativity and technology) were implemented in order to address an alternative path towards writing in a foreign language. In the words of Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), action research is described as a spiral process of self-reflection which is conformed by a set of steps: planning, acting, observing and reflecting. This cyclical procedure leads to exploring the phenomenon of students' encouragement in the EFL classroom by making meaning (multimodal approach) to writing skill. The next section describes the procedure as follows.

Keeping this line of thought, creative writing allows certain flexibility to learners to examine writing in a pleasurable way to address writing practice. In the same way, virtual learning environments embrace these features in media space, where technological resources and applications allow visual, audio and text affordances facilitating various modes of making meaning. Furthermore, they are familiar for

digital learners and permit ubiquitous interaction necessary in language learning. An initial exercise, a calligram (Figure 1), was applied. In the words of Zou *et al.* (2016), it is a set of words, letters, sentences or even texts that creates an image. This had the purpose of discovering if a creative writing strategy from a multimodal approach (permitting using a drawing as a means of expression) enabled students' a joyful perception about a writing task.

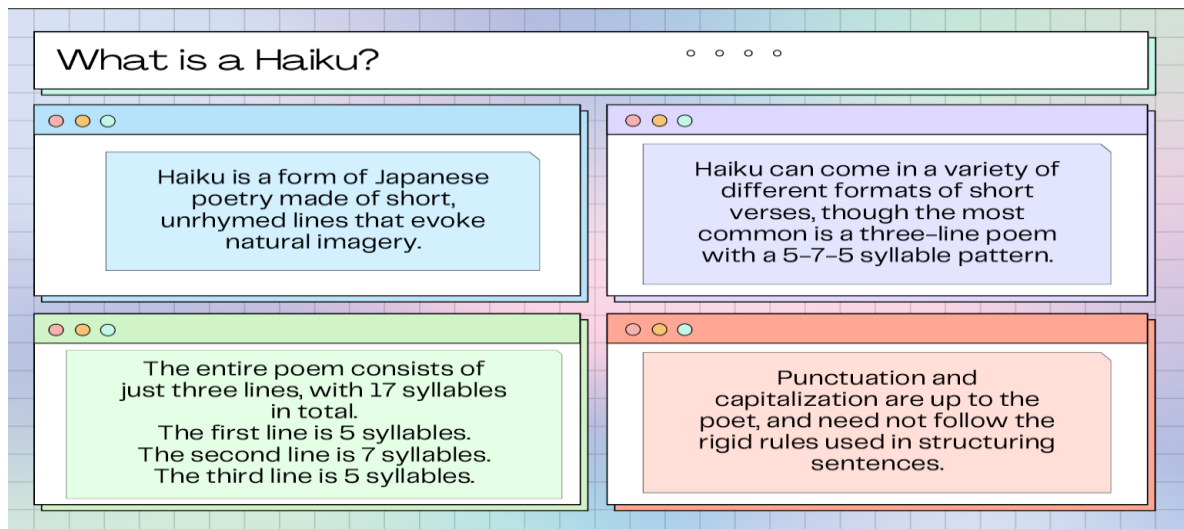


Source: Students' Artworks from Needs Analysis

Figure 1. Participants' calligrams

Participants demonstrated a positive attitude due to the fact they were engaged to cooperate in the activity and felt proud of their work. In this connection, the first workshop of the pedagogical intervention was planned (Figure 2) out of four along this experience. Through writing a Haiku, just a prompt was given to students as a trigger of their creativity adding any kind of visual representation. At the same time, they could get inspired by music of their choice. The guidelines of the workshop 1 were available on the Edmodo platform for students to check them out anytime they wanted. Students developed the task during the English class and posted on the platform where their products could be analyzed, and classmates were able to interact with one another. It is important to highlight that this implementation was not

mandatory for students to accomplish; consequently, students decided on their own if they were part of the implementation.



Note: Online material, Eight Grade, Teachers-Researchers

Figure 2. First Workshop: Haikus

Afterwards, it was reflected upon participants' first workshop (Haikus), analyzing different aspects evidenced in their writing; for instance, willingness to use the target language to write from a different perspective rather than traditional school-based assignments. Besides, how visuals/music added to their texts and the role of the platform evoked interest in using the FL as a means of self-expression. With this in mind, the three remaining workshops conformed the instructional design of the present study as part of the steps of action research with the purpose of describing how the implementation of multimodal principles through a virtual learning environment encourages students to write creatively in English.

Context and population

This research study was carried out at a public institution in Tunja. 12 students from eighth grade were the participants and their identities were protected by filling a consent form that was hand-in to their parents. These students had smartphones or computers to access the Internet for submitting assignments during asynchronous

time sessions; notwithstanding, internet quality was not sufficient to attend regular synchronous lessons. These drawbacks limited the whole group's participation. Likewise, students count on an institutional blog to upload and submit their school assignments; nevertheless, they do not have a learning platform to interact with their peers and teachers in a flexible way. Instead, they use other resources to send their works, such as WhatsApp and email where they might get some interaction; however, this one is absent the majority of times. Hence, this study was beneficial for the participants because it facilitated focusing more on the process of making meaning based on multimodal principles by means of writing skill rather than focusing on the form and structure of the language which is normally perceived as a mechanical and boring activity.

Data Collection Instruments

In order to elicit data required to give an answer to the research question addressing the general objective, three instruments were used for this section: surveys, students' artifacts and a focus group. These three instruments were selected with the purpose of triangulating data and finding patterns among the information provided by students. By means of the proposal of writing activities through the virtual learning space, it is attempted to foster students' motivation taking into account multimodality principles. The instruments are described below.

Focus Group

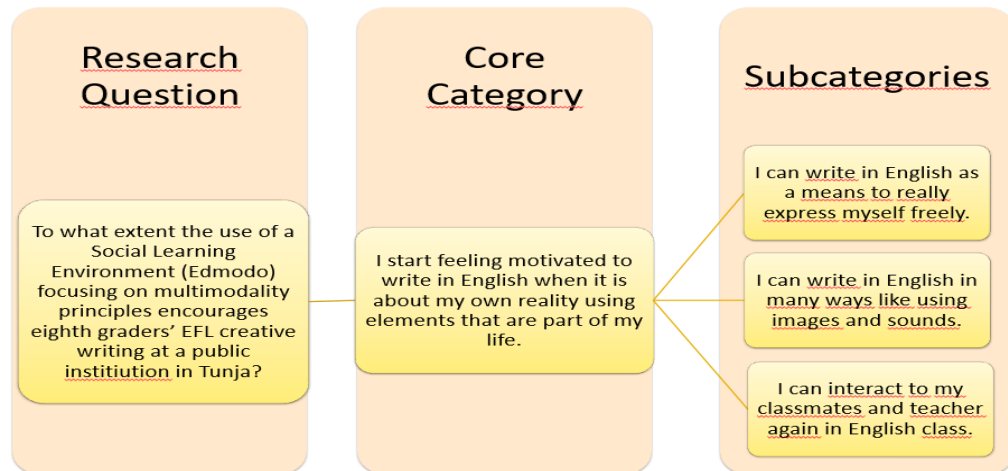
Two focus groups were held: the former at the beginning of the experience, and the latter at the end. In these online encounters, students' voices, perceptions and thoughts about the study were heard. According to Dilshad and Latif (2013), focus groups are sessions attended by few people together where the researcher asks questions with the purpose of taking a look at attitudes and feelings about a particular topic; they can help gather collective points of view that enrich the research process. By talking to participants individually, and as a group, it was identified the role of the virtual learning environments to foster learners' imagination and creativity.

Students' Artifacts

These products permit analyzing students' understanding of multimodality as a means for making meaning in writing activities. According to Kaire (2016), students' artworks and displays portray their pride mirroring their school achievements. Participants' works are a reflection of their creativity when writing by integrating different modes of meaning unveiling their realities, thoughts and ideas related to how they interpret and communicate in a FL. It allows observing their motivation to write from a different angle. Thus, these artifacts were relevant in participants' motivation at the time of this pedagogical intervention.

Results

This research project seeks to describe how students' motivation is enacted by addressing a multimodal approach to creative writing. In order to do so, a pedagogical intervention took place listening to participants' thoughts, reflections and attitudes towards the encouragement of writing in FL. For this purpose, technological resources for learning (Edmodo platform) and some features related to multimodality were taken into consideration. Consequently, data was analyzed. Grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) took on account of the nature of the qualitative data elicited by following the three levels of coding analysis. In the open coding step, data was interpreted and organized using different colors to find relevant patterns. Then, in the axial coding those patterns were transformed into categories and subcategories related to the objectives of the study. Finally, in the selective coding step, the categories were used to describe the researched phenomenon. Figure 3 shows the core category supported by the three emerging subcategories.



Source: Teachers-Researchers' Notes.

Figure 3. Research Question and Categories and Subcategories of the Analysis

CORE CATEGORY: I START FEELING MOTIVATED TO WRITE IN ENGLISH WHEN IT IS ABOUT MY OWN REALITY USING ELEMENTS THAT ARE PART OF MY LIFE

Students' encouragement towards writing in English language was enacted by using creative writing activities along with multimodal features of making meaning (colors, images, sounds) and working with Virtual Learning Environments in the EFL classroom in the time of pandemic. By integrating these elements in this study, participants transformed their perceptions towards writing in FL. English language learning moved from traditional grammar-based activities to varied modes of communication leading to a meaningful experience. Learners expressed themselves freely not only using texts, but also, they used pictures and music communicating their voices and reflecting upon their lives. Besides, they were able to share their products to one another through the Edmodo platform.

Hence, Edmodo as an educational social networking platform integrates multimodality and writing in an accessible environment for students to explore themselves, their self-expression, thoughts and ideas fostering creativity, particularly at motivating them to write (Purnawarman *et al.*, 2016); this helped English language learning to be seen by the participants as a familiar experience; it is appropriate to their everyday realities since they are immersed in the digital world. At the end of the pedagogical intervention, a student emphasized the role Edmodo platform played during the English class as a tool to embrace interaction among classmates:

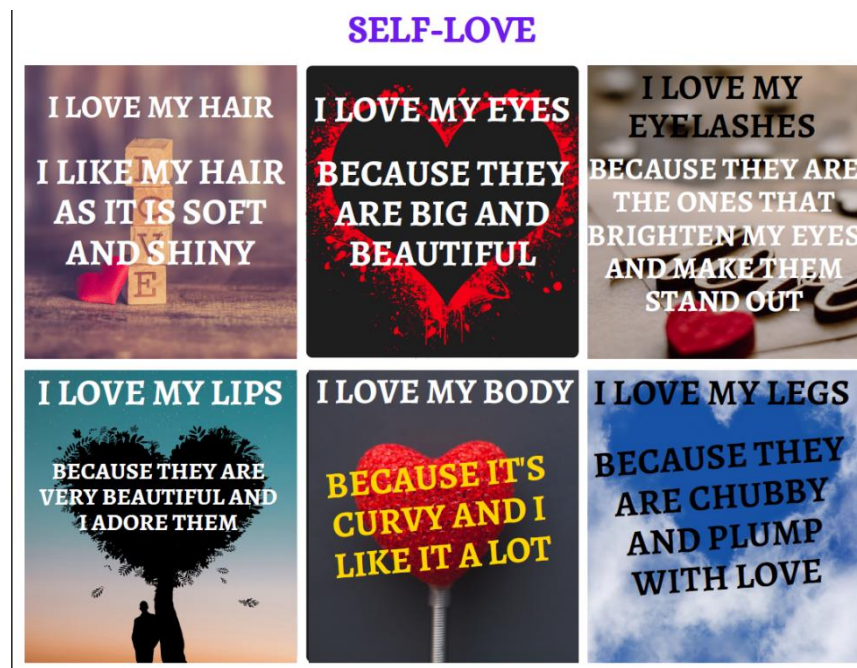
Las clases con Edmodo eran más entretenidas, la verdad (...) Podíamos ver los trabajos de nuestros compañeros (...) Era como tener un grupo de Whatsapp pero con más herramientas (Estudiante, Grupo Focal 2)

[Classes with Edmodo were more entertaining, being honest (...)] We could see our classmates work (...)] It was like having Whatsapp but with more tools] (Student, Focus Group 2)

Indeed, technology is relevant in the educational field nowadays. In the time of pandemic, it was demonstrated that it was not only a means of transmission of knowledge but also, it has the capacity of embracing different modes of making meaning in only one digital space: sound, text, voice and images (Shanahan, 2013). In that sense, the student felt motivated to participate actively bearing in mind the similarities with other applications. But most importantly, the way he could collaborate with classmates, at least, commenting on their perceptions towards their products. This fact allows teachers to incorporate multimodality in their classrooms to enhance creative writing activities to get learners engaged in using language from a familiar and spontaneous scope.

By the same token, another student created a comic talking about self-love (Figure 4). She wrote some sentences freely by listening to background music, representing her thoughts and self-image using hearts and a particular set of colors to make

meaning beside what she wrote. The colors used were red, blue, gray and black; this, without doubt, implies more meanings, such as calm, passion, or even melancholy; however, its analysis does not represent the goal of this study. These assumptions are connected to what Kress (2008) claimed in regards to the use of images and colors as features of human communication and their potential in making meaning. It is finally the purpose of multimodal creative writing; providing different meanings beyond words through the assets that technology provides. Moreover, the student felt free to express her feelings and ideas about the topic from a natural perspective as she would do it on social media.



Source: Students' Artworks from Workshop 2.

Figure 4. Student's workshop 2

Another excerpt that unveils the relevance of enacting motivation in the EFL classroom when it becomes familiar for students was taken from the Edmodo platform. Students used other ways of communication such as clicking "like" to their classmates' work, besides, they gave positive comments.

“I want to congratulate you (...) it is important to explore students' self-esteem by means of writing” **(Student, Edmodo platform)**

Quiero felicitarte (...) es importante explorar la autoestima de los estudiantes por medio de la escritura (Estudiante, Plataforma Edmodo)

Students' feelings were also reflected upon the reactions they received on their posts. The abovementioned comment encouraged students to explore self-esteem matters. These values are important for participants, and due to the fact, their self-esteem was brought into the English class, it moved from a teacher-centered class to a student-centered one because their “selves” were the core of this pedagogical experience.

Bearing in mind all these features, students acknowledged this research experience where English was also a component of their everyday lives. From this perspective, connecting writing to multimodality by means of a virtual learning environment, learners' motivation can be enhanced when perceiving written communication as really learning a language instead of just as a set of rules far from their lives and realities. This writing approach can be also reshaped by means of creative writing and its nature of freedom where students express themselves with no restrictions. Furthermore, O'Halloran & Smith (2019) state that “Technologies are implicated in the study of multimodality both as semiotic (multimodal) artifacts in their own right and as media which impact on multimodal semiosis (as the means of multimodal communication)” (p. 3). Hence, creative writing joined to multimodality principles will help to increase students' initiative to write because it leads them to express themselves in several ways, according to their own ideas, beliefs, feelings, and realities.

Thus, teachers following the principles of multimodality lead to a natural approach for their students' FL learning, particularly in the challenging process of fostering the writing skill through multimodal productions that support self-expression, values and critical thinking. In this sense, students could use these assets in order to express

what they feel when writing in English facilitating their interpersonal development and the way they interact with others in these times.

SUBCATEGORY 1: I CAN WRITE IN ENGLISH AS A MEANS TO REALLY EXPRESS MYSELF FREELY

Expanding the discussion to the first subcategory, during the pedagogical intervention, students embraced English writing as a means of real interpretation, self-expression and communication by creating texts creatively about their own ideas, thoughts and lives from a free and natural angle. In this regard, a student pointed out how multimodality was an utterly change from traditional classes where normally written mode is the most used in the EFL classroom.

Me gustó porque no solo es escriba y escriba

[I liked it because **it is not just writing and writing**] (Student, Focus Group 2)

This participant's perception towards writing in English was metamorphosed: she perceived writing skill as an unsubstantiated exercise; just following instructions without being taken into account her own likes, interest and ideas. It is implied that creative writing can be transformed into a more sensitive opportunity different from the formal procedure to approach this skill in the EFL classroom, Dell (1964) believes that:

Students can choose their own materials and forms. Most often they will write from the "I" point of view. Creative writing starts and ends with what is behind the words –the expression of students' own feelings and thoughts– more than with the words themselves or the rules used to put words into composition. Creative writing is emotional and sensual. (p. 500)

Therefore, within the development of the different workshops and her creations, she realized writing in FL can be seen as a chance to make meaning to express the significance of values such as respect and being supporting to each other, using

language beyond structure focusing more on senses; additionally, her confidence and motivation increased when posting on the platform.

Keeping this line of thought, in this following visual excerpt, another participant designed a comic showing an example of a moment where self-love also implies creating a bond to others' feelings and problematic situations in life (Figure 5). This visual representation helped him to exemplify how people must listen to each other and how it brings a sensation of relief. This is powerful because, for him, self-love entails connection to others. Henceforth, the pictures highlighted more meanings beyond the written mode with the purpose of deepening into the text. Besides, he used the English language to communicate his ideas of self-love in English, it was represented through a set of images addressing a multimodal writing product. This confirms that the mix of modes attached to writing can be possible by embracing creative writing in the EFL classroom; it has demonstrated to be a powerful resource to engage students' learning towards writing skill (Avramenko & Davydova & Burikova, 2018; Abdul & Awan, 2019).



Figure 5. Student's second workshop product

Additionally, this pedagogical experience triggered participants' creativity. This can be observed in Figure 6. That is, the aim of the fourth workshop was to write a funny news story. This news could unveil participants' likes and dislikes alongside fostering creativity to imagine unexpected situations. Here, a participant made the decision to write about her favorite band "Twenty-One Pilots". Moreover, she wrote upon one of its members' lost pet, Ned, representing it in the news by means of a "baby Yoda"; perhaps transmitting the idea of tenderness and feeling towards that unfortunate event which the participant tried to show as amusing, followed by #Nedcomehome. It is assumed she selected this image and hashtag based on current trends.



Source: Students' Artworks from Workshop.

Figure 6. Student's Funny News

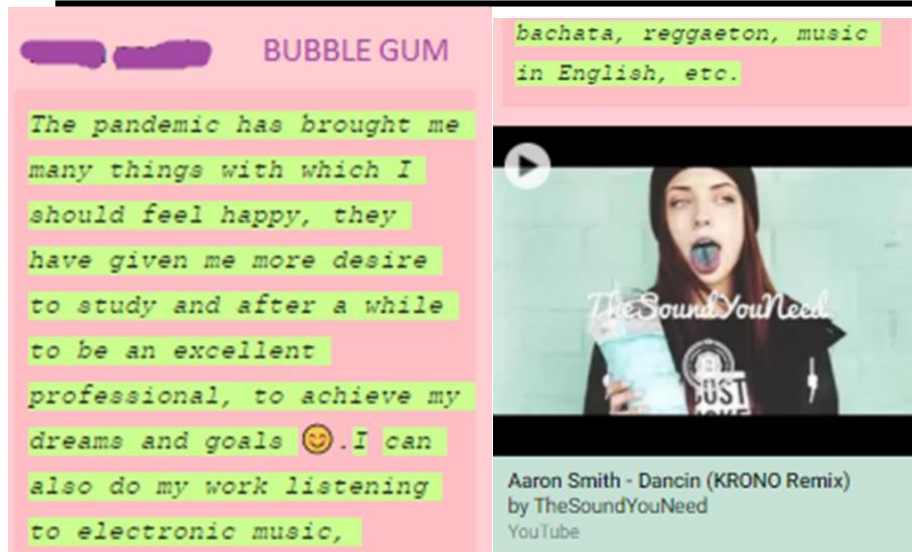
As it is mentioned by Maloney (2019), "Motivation increases as self-esteem rises. From a starting point where students feel unable to express themselves, over the course of a creative writing program they can feel themselves strengthening in this

area” (p.12). Consequently, her self-esteem and self-confidence were higher than learning English in an “inflexible” way. It is noteworthy that the participant made use of some tools to “skip” the writing process; however, the teacher called a reflection about the real purpose of creative writing as an opportunity to explore this skill with no fear of mistakes, but most importantly, to enact self-awareness to write meaningfully. This kind of positive feedback is a point of departure for acknowledging their effort and engagement to get acquainted with the pivotal features to start the writing process when these will be required in upcoming English language courses.

SUBCATEGORY 2: I CAN WRITE IN ENGLISH IN MANY WAYS LIKE USING IMAGES AND SOUNDS

Making meaning in language is multimodal. Different scholars proposed theories connecting modes with language. Vigliocco, Perniss and Vinson (2014) have given an account on varied modes of representation which are connected to language processing and acquisition features. In other words, multimodality can be used for students to learn English in a contextualized way. That new perception encouraged students to explore writing skill in an approachable and enjoyable way by using different and supporting digital resources such as Canva, Paint, PowerPoint slides, among other online resources. In this perspective, participants designed a digital bulletin board using Padlet, as a product of the third workshop during the pedagogical intervention. Here, learners had to reflect on the Covid 19 pandemic understanding others' realities and valuing the positive aspects that arose from lockdown.

This intervention had multiple assets such as collaborative work due to the fact different participants could work in real-time. Figure 7 shows a student's outcome exploring meaning beyond the text she was writing; she attached a song she enjoyed listening to, this made the experience more enjoyable for her because it is the same activity as posting on social media, in this case using English language. Moreover, she used emojis, colors and different fonts in a spontaneous way, calling teacher and classmates' attention.



Source: Students' Artworks from Workshop 3.

Figure 7. Student's Padlet post

Keeping this line of thought, by the use of visual and audio affordances, they got engaged with those creative writing activities because these features are present in their daily lives; they become completely involved in interacting with a myriad of multimedia content. Equally important, Fisher (2017) stated:

Students do not need to wait their turn to speak or compete with their neighbors to make a contribution, allowing many ideas to be put forward in a short space of time. Students from face-sensitive or non-English speaking backgrounds may feel more comfortable contributing to class discussions through a written post than by making an oral statement to the class. (p. 163)

In this connection, through this type of assignments, teachers promote different practices giving learners the chance to discover their own perceptions about language using images and sounds in order to encourage them to use the FL for their personal and linguistic growth, letting others find this experience of creative writing interesting to comment their classmates' posts, realizing that writing in English is possible and valuable (Maley, 2009).

By the same token, in the following excerpt, a student worked with Canva, a webpage with a variety of different templates, shapes and picture resources (Figure 8). Users can explore it by changing word fonts, sizes and colors when they create posters (Hadi, 2021). In hers, she applied a contrast of colors, pink and green. Perhaps, she attempted to represent her identity or likes beyond the Haiku she wrote, as the workshop had to deal with things that make her happy. For instance, by using colorful berries or fruits, she could also project more meanings than just those provided with written text, liaising these elements with her interests. This has to do with the relevance of creative writing along multimodality; integrating semiotic elements to enrich interpretation of realities and addressing purposeful communication.



Source: Students' Artworks from Workshop 1.

Figure 8. Student's Haiku

By and large, Husárová (2012) carried out a similar research study by proposing a more attractive teaching method, taking advantage of the interaction through a blog which in fact, integrates creative writing with multimodality. She claimed that "It wants to foster a more advanced orientation to creativity, multisensory stimulation and

inclusion of easy-access tools in the form of multimedia, new media, digital technologies into the current curricula” (p. 18). Thus, conveying alternatives focused on addressing multiple ways of “self-re-creation” to writing skill has proven to enrich learning processes and educational practices.

SUBCATEGORY 3: I CAN INTERACT TO MY CLASSMATES AND TEACHER IN THE ENGLISH CLASS AGAIN

Students had real interaction in the EFL classroom despite all the drawbacks virtuality entails in Colombia at the time of pandemic. When using Edmodo as the virtual learning environment, participants' works were openly accessible for everyone. They were able to share their multimodal creative writing works with their teacher and classmates reacting by means of posts, likes and comments. This type of ubiquitous interaction and communication encouraged meaningful learning processes and triggered students' joy when expressing themselves in an instinctive way. In figure 9, another participant of the study uploaded an image representing his free time activity (using a drawing software), and classmates commented positively, showing a remarkable interest in his hobby.



Source: Screenshot from Students' interaction on Edmodo.

Figure 9. Student's post on Edmodo

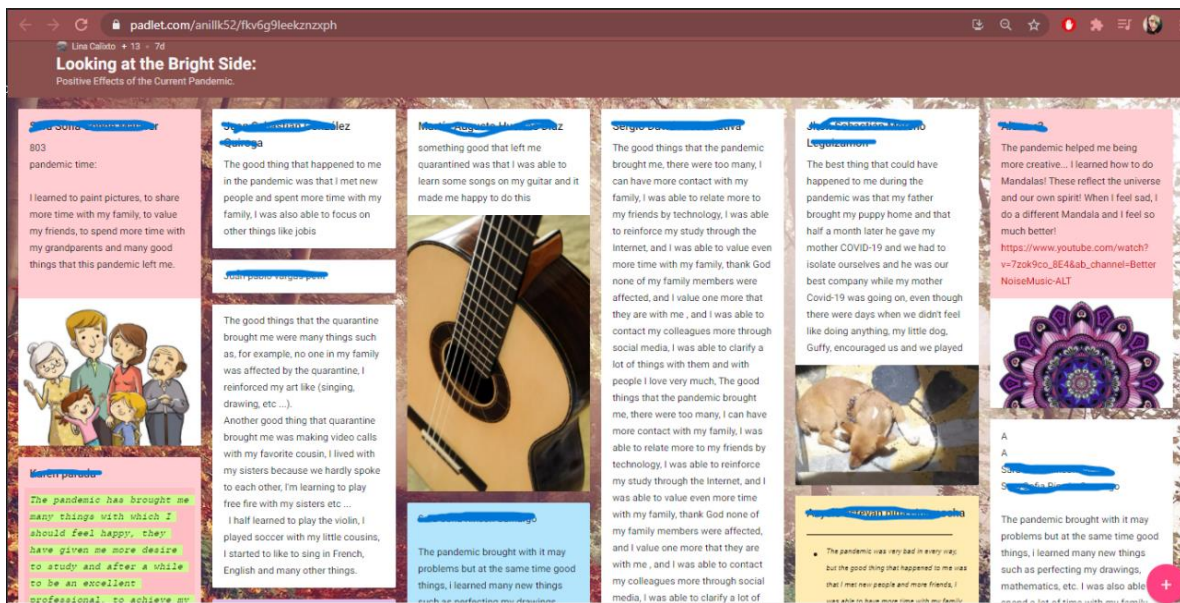
Although, it does not seem a relevant progress in regards to language complexity or grammar knowledge, the encouragement to use the language was boosted. Students used English on their own to communicate about a free topic (not an assignment). This is evidenced when learners address real world communication as the main goal of the English class, FL learning becomes an enjoyable and beneficial activity. Furthermore, this has been possible with the teachers' support as a trigger for participation and engagement in the virtual EFL classroom. Indeed, virtuality during the Covid-19 Pandemic had led teachers aside, just as facilitators of content; however, in this research study, teachers took a more active role promoting students' motivation to use the FL on Edmodo. Choi and Youngjoo (2016) mentioned that "teachers should help students become producers, not just consumers, of multimodal messages" (p. 323). It ratifies the paramount teachers' relevance when working with students regarding technology and multimodality.

Besides, they were able to interact with their classmates again and discover others' thoughts, likes, backgrounds, etc.; bringing some similarities from their personal lives to the EFL classroom. This is supported by Pazilah *et al.* (2019) affirming that:

Technology has proven its significance to the education field. With the integration of technology, students can be motivated and they become more indulge in learning. Technology provides a more interesting classroom environment and attracts students' attention. (p. 3210)

Hence, with the appearance of smartphones at an affordable price, communication has been revolutionized by the digital sphere. Learners enjoy spending more time talking with others using social media. Making use of Edmodo, English language learning metamorphosed into a more natural communication within this pedagogical experience. As a result, participants felt engaged with the class and the activities performing multimodal writing tasks.

Another evidence of an interactive EFL classroom is shown in figure 10, which corresponds to the development of the third workshop; its purpose dealt with the positive effects of the pandemic. Students were asked for a cooperative product designing a bulletin board on the Padlet website. With this in mind, each participants' voices took part in the artwork. Many aspects of their lives emerged through the development of the group activity, such as, the importance of family, pets, hobbies, religion, among others. Many of their ideas have commonalities helping them reflect about the relevance of spending time with their beloved ones.



Source: Students' Artwork from Workshop 3.

Figure 10. Students' Final Padlet

Here, technology allows addressing different alternatives for communication and interaction. Virtual learning environments and multimodal online websites promote diverse perspectives of approaching the FL teaching and learning in the 21st century classroom. Although the sanitary emergency gave the institutions opportunities to look inwards their needs, new learning scenarios such as phygital classrooms and hybrid classes have been required with the help of language teachers' technical knowledge to be managed simultaneously in a single class. Current times are

changing and communication deals directly with technology. This understanding needs to be permeated to the EFL classroom as well (Haswani, 2014).

In summary, teachers lead to a natural approach for their students' FL learning by following the principles of multimodality, particularly in the challenging process of fostering the writing skill through multimodal productions that support self-expression, values and critical thinking. In this sense, students could use these assets in order to express what they feel when writing in English facilitating their interpersonal development and the way they interact with classmates. Furthermore, students were triggered to use written language from an organic perspective as they belong to the digital era. Conveying that form of interaction to FL learning was familiar for them; consequently, they felt encouraged to use the English language meaningfully and creatively.

CONCLUSION

After carrying out this research study, it was reflected on the importance of analyzing how English language teaching and learning had been addressed in the Covid-19 pandemic. On the one hand, students perceived writing in English as an extremely complex task to be enhanced due to the lack of support to master the necessary processes that it entails. These limitations came out when it was required to embrace a fully virtual learning environment and the difficulty for teachers to assess written productions, dynamizing this process taking advantage of the nature of online learning and technological tools.

At the end of the pedagogical intervention, it was observed that there was a significant change in eighth grade students' encouragement in regards to implementing creative writing activities from a multimodal approach through the use of a social virtual learning space (Edmodo). Participants made the decision to be part of this experience because the elements that the researchers integrated in this research project (Creative Writing, Multimodality and virtual learning spaces) were extremely connected to their lives. Learning the English language became

meaningful for them as a means of real self-expression and communication; students perceived writing skill as an opportunity to share their thoughts and ideas reflecting upon values, likes and interests, their own realities and contexts.

Furthermore, participants took advantage of the English class as a space to express themselves naturally to their inner voices: their skills, weaknesses, and ideas became relevant, they self-reflected making use of elements that are pivotal in their daily lives due to the fact they live in digital environments. Henceforth, they used the English language beyond making meaning in several forms such as texts, images, and sounds. This helped them realize English language learning is not only memorizing a set of grammatical rules to approve a school subject but it is also using words with other non-verbal representations with the purpose of interpreting and communicating themselves.

This demonstrated the paramount role of multimodality in English language learning, specially in writing skill; how it is pivotal to integrate several ways to make meaning through different modes in the EFL classroom. Participants enjoyed this experience because of the myriad of opportunities visual and audio affordances provided when making sound decisions on how to use them along with their texts.

Finally, the role of Edmodo in this research study was relevant in order to address real interaction again in the EFL classroom in the time of pandemic. Students were able to join the virtual learning environment to interact with their classmates showing their works and thoughts by taking advantage of the assets this online space provided. Therefore, it was useful in order to embrace in the participants the use of technological devices for educational purposes. Although there is a significant lack of technology, this project was an opportunity to test the scope of implementing and applying virtual learning environments in public institutions.

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