

# Normalistas' Written Performance in Workshops based on the Task Based Approach\*

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### **Abstract**

This research was developed with Complementary Training Program students – normalistas- at Escuela Normal Superior Santiago de Tunja. Its core purpose was to analyze and describe what the implementation of writing workshops under the task based approach for a group of Complementary Training Program students revealed about their written performance. This qualitative action research used interviews, students' artifacts and field notes to gather information. Findings revealed that workshops helped students to strengthen their performance in several aspects such as vocabulary, grammar and structure and contributed to the students' language development in the communicative field.

**Key words:** written performance, Complementary Training Program students, written language development.

### **Desempeño Escritural de Normalistas en Talleres basados en Tareas**

#### **Resumen**

Esta investigación se llevó a cabo en la Escuela Normal Superior Santiago de Tunja con estudiantes del Programa de Formación Complementaria. Su propósito fue analizar y describir qué revelaba la implementación de talleres de escritura basados en tareas sobre el desempeño escritural de los estudiantes. Esta investigación- acción, de enfoque cualitativo, utilizó entrevistas, trabajos de los estudiantes y formatos de observación para recolectar información. Los resultados mostraron que los talleres ayudaron a fortalecer el desempeño escritural de los estudiantes en los siguientes aspectos: vocabulario, gramática y estructura; y contribuyeron con el desarrollo de su lenguaje en el ámbito comunicativo.

**Palabras clave:** desempeño escritural, estudiantes normalistas, desarrollo del lenguaje escrito.

## **Exercice d'Écriture de Normalistes en Ateliers basés sur des Tâches**

### **Résumé**

Cette recherche a été menée à bien dans l'École Normale Supérieure Santiago de Tunja avec des étudiants du Programme de Formation Complémentaire. Son propos était celui d'analyser et de décrire ce qui révélait le fait de mettre en pratique des ateliers basés sur des tâches en ce qui concernait l'exercice d'écriture des étudiants. Cette recherche-action, d'approche qualitative, a inclus des interviews, des travaux des étudiants et des formats d'observation pour collecter de l'information. Les résultats ont montré que les ateliers ont aidé à renforcer l'exercice d'écriture des étudiants par rapports aux aspects suivants: vocabulaire, grammaire et structure. Ces ateliers-là ont aussi contribué avec le développement du langage des étudiants dans le domaine communicatif.

**Mots clés:** exercice d'écriture, étudiants normalistes, développement du langage écrit.

## **Desempenho Escritural de Normalistas em Oficinas baseadas em Tarefas**

### **Resumo**

Esta pesquisa se realizou na Escola Normal Superior Santiago de Tunja com estudantes do Programa de Formação Complementária. Seu propósito foi analisar e descrever o que revelava a implementação de oficinas de escritura baseadas em tarefas sobre o desempenho escritural dos estudantes. Esta pesquisa-ação, de enfoque qualitativo, utilizou entrevistas, trabalhos dos estudantes e formatos de observação para coletar informação. Os resultados mostraram que as oficinas ajudaram a fortalecer o desempenho escritural dos estudantes nos seguintes aspectos: vocabulário, gramática e estrutura; e contribuíram com o desenvolvimento de sua linguagem no âmbito comunicativo.

**Palavras chave:** desempenho escritural, estudantes normalistas, desenvolvimento da linguagem escrita.

## **Introduction**

Carter and Nunan (2010) argue that “with the development of Communicative language teaching (CLT), the focus in syllabus design shifted from a focus on English as a system to be studied to a focus on English as a tool for communication” (p. 2). Thus, writing is one of the most essential skills because it allows people to communicate or exchange their ideas in different contexts such as the educational one. Therefore, in the educational context, foreign language teachers must help students to improve their written performance to enhance their communicative competence.

Bearing in mind previous teaching experiences, informal observations, and a diagnosis workshop applied at the Escuela Normal Superior Santiago de Tunja, we noticed that some high school students presented limitations in their English written performance in several aspects such as grammar, coherence, and cohesion. For example, they wrote ideas without sense, confused verbal tenses, and did not know clearly how to build a sentence. Moreover, we perceived that those students did not practice the grammatical topics studied in classes because they did not use them in their writings.

Likewise, it was evident that students were not nurtured to write in English because they showed a low level in their written productions. The previous problems could occur because they were not foster to write. Besides, most of them, during the development of the workshop diagnosis, showed apathy towards the writing exercise because they did not know how to start their writings.

Therefore, the main objective of this research project was to analyze and describe what the implementation of writing workshops under the Task Based Approach for a group of Complementary Training Program students revealed about their written performance. The question that guided this project was as follows: What does the implementation of writing workshops under the Task Based Approach, for a group of Complementary Training Program students -normalistas- at the Escuela Normal Superior Santiago de Tunja, reveal about their written performance?

### **1. Research Setting and Participants**

This project took place at Escuela Normal Superior Santiago de Tunja, Colombia. In Colombia, a school named “Normal Superior” is an educative institution that aims at training students to become teachers in pre-school and primary education. Students who are enrolled in this kind of institutions are called “normalistas”.

This school offers three different educative levels: elementary, high and the Complementary Training Program. The Complementary Training Program looks for qualifying students to be better teachers. Once students finish eleventh grade, they are offered four more semesters that guide them in diverse areas with an emphasis on technology. English is one of the many subjects they should take. This program helps students improve their teaching performance and gives them the possibility to enroll in a teaching career at Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia. Hence, the participants of this study belonged to the fourth semester of the Complementary Training Program -normalistas-. The group was composed by 18 young adults. But our sample population deals with 7 students, 6 women and 1 man who were selected at random. They ranged from 17 to 20 years old. These students took four hours of English per week.

They were at a beginner English level. Thus, they knew some vocabulary and grammatical structures, but they did not use that knowledge to write in English. In classes, the majority showed apathy towards activities because they believed that English is a synonym of grammar. They saw the English learning as a non-useful and tedious task.

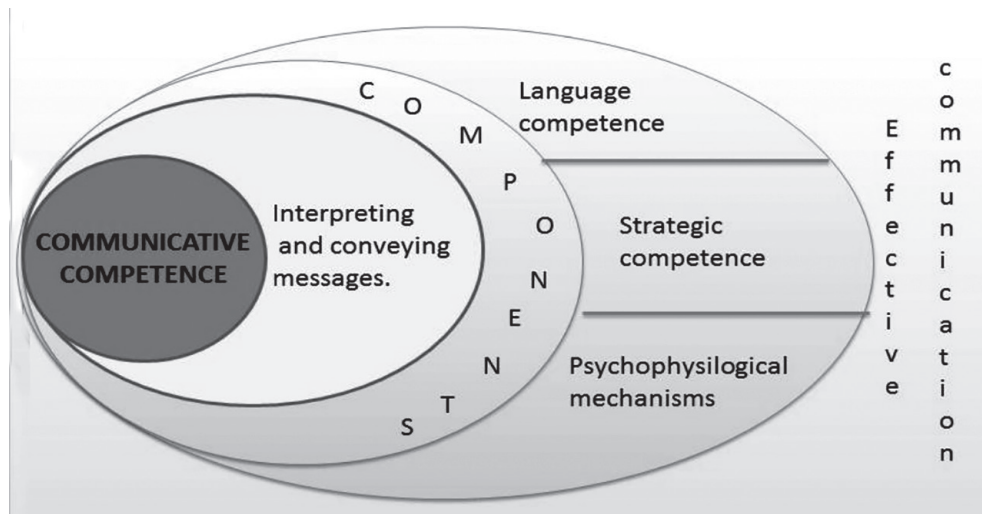
## **2. Theoretical Framework**

As an essential aspect of this research in the field of foreign languages learning, two pillars will be explained: first, communicative competence and second, writing skills and their relationship with the task based approach.

### **2.1 Communicative competence**

Communicative competence is what Hymes (cited in Brown, 2000) defines as a “way to convey and interpret messages in a specific context” (p. 246). For developing a communication process, there are some other aspects to take into account; for this reason, Bachman (1990) offers us a complete version of the communicative competence components such as language competence which is related to the knowledge about the language in relation to language form and language use in context. Strategy competence is formed by the mental capacities needed to use the knowledge about the language in a communicative situation. Physiological mechanisms are linked to the physical mechanisms that make communication possible. Thus, there are several elements that intervene in the communicative competence. We can summarize all previous statements in the following diagram in order to give a general idea about this construct:

**Diagram 1. Based on Hymes (cited in Brown, 2000), Bachman (1990), and adapted by the researchers.**



The above schema shows the elements that people should take into account in order to obtain an effective communication with their interlocutors. This means people use different types of knowledge such as grammar, body movements, places, cultural environment, social issues, and self-control in every moment (linguistic and non-linguistic items). Then, the communication can be successful. In sum, communicative competence is the ability that human beings have for building appropriate oral or written texts in determined places or situations.

## 2.2 Writing skills

Cassany (1999) proclaims that “Writing is a manifestation of human linguistic activity such as the conversation, monologue or, in a different level, gestures codes or Morse code” (p. 24). There are two well recognized approaches for teaching writing: writing as a product and writing as a process.

Writing as a product is related to the writers’ final texts; those texts reflect if students consider teachers’ explanations. As stated by Andrews and Smith (2011) “written products permeate education. Students not only learn to write, but they write to learn and write to demonstrate understanding. The written product is an obvious place to look for evidence of writing development” (p. 44). That is written product is used to check the students’ advance in this skill but also in terms of their grammatical aspects. Thus, writing as a product is only focused on the students’ texts if they use good grammar, cohesion and coherence. In fewer words, in this approach, the most important point is the form of the text, not its contents.

In contrast, writing as a process is linked to Task Based Approach, since as argued by Hamp-Lyons and Heasley (2006), the writing process has three stages: “pre-writing, writing, and rewriting” (p. 13). Therefore, the writing process is a complex action because “it involves a number of activities: setting goals, generating ideas, organizing information, selecting appropriate language, making a draft, reading and reviewing it, then revising and editing.” (Hedge, 2003, p. 302). In this project, we, as teacher researchers, were focused on the second approach because we were more interested in the process than in the final product.

### 2.3 Task Based Approach

The Task Based Approach was the base of the planning, design, and development of our writing workshops. For this reason, we are going to explain its theoretical principles in the following lines.

The core concept of this approach is the “task”. According to Willis (1996), a task is “a goal, oriented communicative activity with a specific outcome, where the emphasis is on exchanging meaning, not producing specific language forms” (p. 60). In summary, a task has a communicative purpose. It is focused on the content, not in the form.

In addition, Izadpanah (2010) states that a task is focused on meaning; it has some connection to the real-world. Thus, learners are asked to convey their own ideas. The tasks developed by students are connected to their context or situations they face in their life. This approach is also characterized by having three stages. They are going to be presented and discussed further on taking into account the theories proposed by Willis (1996 & 2004) and Izadpanah (2010).

- The *pre-task* refers to the way the teacher introduces the topic. For instance, an exercise to recognize vocabulary related to the topic. The teacher also prepares the class by exploring the topic, highlighting useful words and phrases, and helping students in the understanding of task instructions.
- The *task cycle*, it is divided in three steps; task, planning and report. Those sub-steps are the main part of the task, since in this section students communicate their ideas, feelings, and worldviews. In the task, students do the task proposed under monitoring. In the planning, they organize a report to the whole class on the main task they were asked to do (for instance, a written reflection); the students ask the teacher to clarify their doubts about language. Finally, in the report, they share and compare their outcomes with other students.

- The *language focus*, it has two sub-stages: analysis and practice. Analysis deals with specific features of the language; they are identified and analyzed. Some of the possible starting points for analysis are: syntax and words use. Practice is understood as the phase in which the teacher conducts the practice of a new word, phrases or patterns, which were reviewed in the analysis activities.

In conclusion, the Task Based Approach is an organized methodology based on meaning and communication that allows carrying out classroom activities through the presentation and development of tasks. Consequently, students learn in a systematic way and have a more fruitful learning because they work step by step.

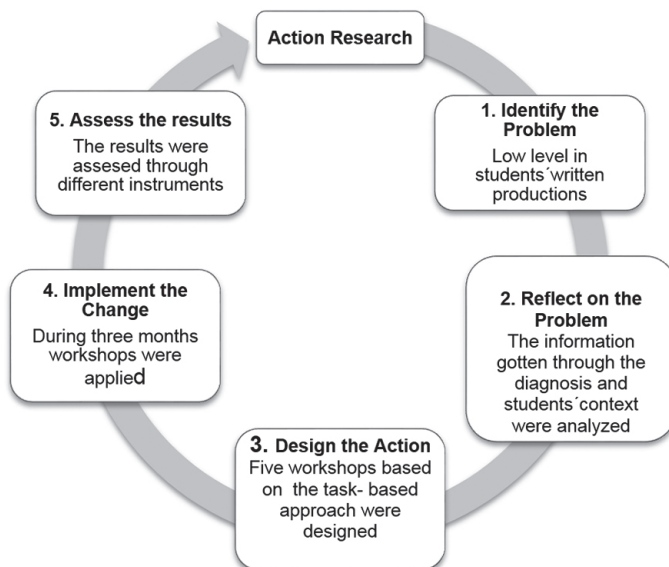
### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1 The type of Research

Our research is based on a qualitative paradigm. Furthermore, this study is an action research as it accounts for “A diagnosis of a problem, the implementation of a proposal and the evaluation of the proposal” (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 186). It arose from our teaching experiences and sought minimizing students’ writing weaknesses through the implementation of workshops.

Diagram 2 shows a summary on how we carried out the process of the action research. We contextualize each one of the action research stages:

**Diagram 2. Action research stages in the study. Designed by the researchers.**





### **3.2 Data Collection Procedures**

In the process of data collection, we applied five workshops under the Task Based Approach, one per week. Every week, we had three hours to implement each workshop. We also completed field notes in every class. The interviews were applied when we finished implementing the workshops.

The first instrument we used to gather data were students' artifacts, that is, the writing workshops. Students' artifacts gave useful information about the characteristics of students writing because in every assignment, students had to develop an activity related to writing such as reviewing vocabulary, writing short utterances or creating short paragraphs based on topics that dealt with education. With regard to elicitation techniques, we used a group interview. It was a data collection instrument which immediate goal "is to describe the state of the learner during particular language learning activities" Seileger and Shohamy (1989, p. 126). The interview was a valuable source, since questions allowed participants to reflect and express their views on the workshops and their writing. This instrument provided us a meaningful amount of explicit information. Thus, the data was easier to analyze and interpret. On the other hand, the data collected by means of this instrument derived from the students' perspective. It was good for doing a wide analysis bearing in mind diverse and particular points of view.

In relation to the second technique implemented in our process of data collection, observation, the chosen instruments were field notes. In our research, the field notes were registered in every session in which the workshops were applied. These field notes were organized into two parts, one for description and another for reflection. We mainly focused on the three stages of the workshop (pre-task, while task, and post-task). We transcribed the information that we considered important. So, the key was observing how the workshops worked on students' writing.

### **4. The pedagogical proposal**

We selected the Task Based Approach to organize the workshops. The main reason to focus our project on the Task Based Approach was that this methodology follows a sequence of stages which allows students to carry out a systematic writing process. The activities developed under this approach begin with basic elements of writing such as vocabulary, continue with the planning and report of the content of the text, and finish with the revision of the text form. In this way, students have a conscious understanding on how to develop an organized and quality writing process. They learn to write from the easiest to the most complex tasks. And consequently, they get better outcomes when writing.

The relationship between the topics we managed in the workshops and the task based approach is that a task should have a goal and be meaningful for students. The tasks proposed in our workshops were meaningful in the sense that they were related to the students' identity as teachers. For instance, in the workshop about teacher characteristics the students had to write a paragraph in which they had to describe themselves as teachers. The entire set of topics was: teacher characteristics, teacher roles, teacher responsibilities, and school community and education. Those topics allowed students to think over and express their points of view regarding education. Moreover, the themes were also meaningful since our participants already had notions regarding the topics and through the workshops they acquired more knowledge that they contrasted or connected to their points of view to build a more elaborated position. In relation to the former lines, the stages of the Task Based Approach were taken into account in our workshops as we explain in the following paragraphs:

- The pre-task, it was sometimes an exercise to present the vocabulary and sometimes a short activity connected to the content of the workshop. For example: in the workshop about teacher characteristics the pre-task was to identify positive and negative adjectives that characterize a teacher (dynamic, angry, creative, etc.).
- The task cycle, it stated a reflexive activity. In the task, students read and review the examples of reflections we gave them and realized how to produce their text taking into account the models presented. In the planning, students asked teachers' questions about language use, organized their ideas, and proceeded to write. Finally, in the report, students shared their writings with their classmates.
- The language focus was developed in the following way. The analysis stage was the revision of the form of the texts (cohesion and coherence) and the reflexive component. The practice stage was the explanation of doubts in relation to language use. For this purpose, we wrote and give students examples of sentences.

## **5. Findings**

We used the Grounded Theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) to analyze the information gathered. We started reading and re-reading in order to analyze all the information. After that, we took out the most relevant data and organized it in three different groups: the first one, artifacts; the second one, group interview; and the third one, field notes. Thus, we could analyze the information taking into account our main research question to find and identify commonalities in order to answer the question by means of the three instruments.

Consequently, we organized and encoded the information by using several strategies such as making drawings and highlighting with different colors in order to select the common characteristics that allowed us to establish common patterns. The development of the previous procedure let us construct a category and two subcategories.

**Table 1. Categories and subcategories.**

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	CATEGORIES	SUB-CATEGORIES
What does the implementation of writing workshops under the Task Based Approach for a group of Complementary Training Program students -normalistas- at the Escuela Normal Superior Santiago de Tunja reveal about their written performance?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Towards the improvement of language competence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Walking a road to boost my vocabulary</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On my way to develop my grammar knowledge</li> </ul>

The previous diagram embodies all our findings. It represents the common patterns that we built to understand the connection between the writing workshops and the students' writing performance. To understand how the categories are connected to our study, these are going to be further explained below.

### 5.1 Towards the improvement of language competence

The category emerged from doing an analysis and interpretation of the entire data gathered through the different instruments. It received the name “Towards the improvement of language competence” because the writing activities developed were a tool that helped students to increase their knowledge about vocabulary and grammar. During the workshops, they did not only receive a certain amount of vocabulary and grammatical rules but also had the chance to put into practice that knowledge when they produce their own texts or utterances. They worked little by little and made meaningful improvements each time.

As we stated in the chapter of theoretical framework, written is conceived like the process followed by the student in search of being able to communicate successfully in a written way to strengthen the language competence. In this case, grammar and vocabulary are important elements since they allow students to organize and communicate their ideas. Under these circumstances, we extracted two sub-categories. They are explained further on.

## 5.2 Walking a road to boost my vocabulary

The name of this sub-category arose from our observation and reflection on the students' performance during the workshops. In the activities developed, students were exposed to specific vocabulary related to the topics worked. They were encouraged to use that vocabulary in the different workshops stages. Likewise, they showed interest in learning new words and learnt or tried to learn them. Students became aware that vocabulary is essential for expressing their points of view and they were excited of writing in English.

During the workshops, students were interested in learning vocabulary. They asked for the meaning of unknown words. So we told them the meaning and gave an example of a sentence in which the words were usually used. Consequently, they understood better what the words meant. Therefore, students were able to acquire the vocabulary and have an idea on how to use it in a written text. At the end of each workshop, students had learnt new words. We could notice it because they bore in mind the vocabulary when writing.

The workshops showed that students were able to describe and contextualize lexical items. In the workshop "School community and education", students had to describe the school members' commitments. And for example, Sophie stated:

*An "adviser helps students in their familiar and social problems in order to promote the good learning in students"* [sic] (Workshop # 5, activity 2)

In the same activity an answer from Max was:

*"Parents are the main school of the students"* [sic] (Workshop # 5, activity 2).

From Sophie and Max's answers, we deduced they learnt words such as adviser and parents, since they were able to express thoughts related to what those words represented for each one. They recognized what those words meant.

In sum, the workshops allowed students to go over and increase their vocabulary. For this reason, this first subcategory had the name "Walking a road to boost my vocabulary". But, what is vocabulary? According to Crystal (2008) there are two types of vocabulary, passive and active. "Active refers to lexical items people use; passive to words which they understand, but do not themselves use" (p. 12). Regarding the previous statement, we can state that the workshops promoted both, active and passive vocabulary. For instance, in the workshop "Teacher characteristics", Louise defined herself as a critic, smart, creative, eager and dynamic teacher. (Workshop # 2, activity 4).

Louise described herself with those adjectives because she understood and considered that those words were suitable to characterize herself. About the previous idea, some students argued:

*En un taller me enseñaron como se decían las profesiones y papá, mamá, abuelo, etc... Entonces, pues bueno, uno a veces solamente uno sabe que papá se dice "father" y mamá se dice "mother", uno solamente sabe lo simple, lo de uno. En cambio, uno ya aprendió como se dice: cuñado, primo... Entonces uno ya aprende un vocabulario más amplio* (Interview, question 5, lines: 5-8, Annie).

*Mi nivel antes de empezar con estos talleres pues era muy malo, por decirlo así, pero a medida que iba avanzando en estos talleres pues ya se me iba facilitando un poco más el vocabulario... por ejemplo se me dificultaban muchas palabras, entonces ya iba adquiriendo esa habilidad para saber cómo era, ehbb y por ejemplo cuando me decían una palabra ya la entendía más claramente y podía escribirla tal como era.* (Interview, question 5, lines: 1-3 & 7-9, Lauren)

According to Annie and Lauren, the workshops increased their knowledge of vocabulary and they learnt the words they most commonly used in the writing activities that they developed. In this sense, it is accurate to say that writing was a good way of learning vocabulary in a more meaningful way, since they modified and improved their vocabulary knowledge.

Writing is really a powerful tool for learning vocabulary. As Webb (2005) states: writing a sentence is probably a more effective method of learning vocabulary than reading several sentences that contain a specific word. Regarding this, we realized that students learnt the words easily when they became familiarized with their written form and even more when they contextualized them in writing task because they comprehended how to write in English and felt more motivated to do it. Moreover, they realized that vocabulary is relevant for communicating their feelings or opinions.

Finally, we can also conclude that during the applied workshops, students developed a productive vocabulary, since according to Hiebert & Kamil (2005), "productive vocabulary is the set of words that an individual can use when writing and speaking" (p. 3). In this case, it is the vocabulary used in writing tasks. So, we can say that the workshops allowed students to advance a step in their process of word learning, since they incorporated new words to their written production.

At this point, we already explained that the workshops were a vehicle to gain vocabulary. But they also allowed students to do a brief revision of grammatical topics they had studied during previous courses. They let students obtain more solid grammatical

bases. So, we are going to describe it further in the following lines, in the sub-category “On my way to develop my grammar knowledge”.

### 5.3 On my way to develop my grammar knowledge

This sub-category took this name because each workshop worked on a grammatical topic, implicitly. As we know, grammar is not the most essential component when practicing or teaching writing. However, it is necessary to express ideas and thoughts in a structured way. In the workshops, students read the examples of texts presented by the teachers and reviewed how to build a sentence and a paragraph. Although, grammar usually bores students, it also allows them to build more clear texts, especially in writing.

The purpose of the workshops was not to teach grammar. It was to encourage students to write in English. Nevertheless, we cannot ignore that there are grammatical rules that must be taken into account. For this reason, students were asked to follow the sentence structure (subject + verb + complement). During the workshops, students tried to write ordered texts. However, they continued making mistakes. But at least, they became aware of the usefulness of grammar and were able to build simple sentences like: I am a lovely teacher. As we are going to illustrate below:

In the following fragment, Danielle talks about herself and she tries to follow the structure of the simple present tense. She wrote:

*“My name is... I am 18 years old. The people who live with me are: my mother, is a house wife. My father, is a carpenter. My brother, is a student.”* [sic] (Workshop # 1, activity 5)

It is evident that although the text is not completely grammatical, it is understandable.

In the next quotation, we can see that Louise follows the structure of the simple present; but also she uses the linking word “finally”. She tried to incorporate another linguistic element to her writing, it is the link word.

*“I am nice person and my classes are very interesting for my students and finally I love my profession.”* [sic] (Workshop # 2, activity 5).

It corroborates that for her it is important to build a well-structured text. As well, other students wrote:

*“I think that the children are free people for learning, since they acquire things very quickly, for this reason, the teacher should provide materials according to their needs”* [sic] (Workshop # 3, activity 3, Sophie)

*“The education has been evolving according to the teacher and students, in the learning and the teaching process... In the past years the teacher was the authority in the classroom and now, the students are the center of the education”* [sic] (Workshop # 5, activity 3, Max).

From the previous writings, we can affirm that Sophie and Max knew how to build a sentence. But it is unavoidable to continue making small mistakes. In Sophie’s case, we noticed that she knew how to build a sentence using the modal verb “should”. In Max’s case, we see that he took the risk of writing a sentence in present perfect progressive. He tried to use a more complex grammatical form.

Students could write a sentence following a structure, since they had and assimilated grammar knowledge. Usually, it was necessary to review briefly the English grammar so that students could infer how it worked. Consequently, it could be easier for students to write by themselves.

For instance, during the interview some students argued:

*“En el caso de la gramática y todo lo que tiene que ver con el inglés mejoró, porque hicimos como –review- repaso, de la estructura, del orden de las oraciones, de los verbos: de los infinitivos, y todo lo que va acompañado del inglés y la estructura del inglés”.* (Interview, question 5, lines: 8-1, Louise).

According to what Louise mentioned, her grammar knowledge improved because during the workshops there was a review on grammatical aspects like sentence structure.

In Max’s opinion, he improved his grammar knowledge, a little bit; because of the tasks developed during the workshop. He proclaimed:

*“...bueno cuando yo inicié el taller mi nivel de inglés era regular, pues bueno pero no tanto...pero no tenía mucho en el aspecto de la forma gramatical y en la forma estructural de las palabras, y pues eso ya va mejorando un poco”.* (Interview, question 5 lines: 1 & 4 - 5).

In a study led by Kollin (1981), she pointed out that teaching grammar in the context of writing might be much more effective than teaching grammar as a separate subject. In our study this was totally true because teaching grammar in an isolated way is tedious for the learners. But if grammar is taught in the context of writing, students do not get so confused and start to write more easily and fluently because they have the bases to do it. Furthermore, they can realize that grammar allows them to develop their writing skills.

This latter idea is confirmed in observations three and four. In relation to the first one, we pointed out:

*“The second activity was solving a crossword. This exercise was interesting, since it allowed students to reflect on the teacher roles . . . But also they reviewed the conjugation in present simple tense - for the third person -. The statements were written in the next form: “guides students when developing classroom work”. Then, students deduced this phrase corresponded to the teacher monitor. So, students could review this grammatical rule” [sic] (Field note # 3, paragraph 3, -description-).*

In the second one, we stated:

*“In third part of this workshop, students had to read a reflective text in which they could see where the linked words such as: besides, so and other were placed inside the text. They also can realize of the advantage of using them to give sequence to the ideas. After reading the text composed by the teacher, students started to use linked words in their writings” [sic] (Field note # 4, paragraph five, -description).*

In order to conclude, the activities and the texts presented in the workshops were a valuable tool for strengthen students grammatical knowledge since students were not exposed to boring and magisterial explanations of grammar. They studied grammar because they needed it for writing. Furthermore, students showed self-motivation for improving their grammar understanding and practice.

As we have exposed in the previous lines, the workshops worked as a tool to develop students' grammar and also were very suitable because they helped students to create their own texts. Before starting with the workshops students already produced written texts, but those texts were disorganized. The workshops told students how to present their ideas in a more clear and coherent way, since they revised the examples given by the teachers and then started to write. Consequently, students got more confident in their writing abilities and were able to compose their reflections.

## **6. Conclusions**

Students used the workshops to create their writings, as we discussed in the first category, *“Towards the improvement of the language competence”*. During the workshops, the students learnt some vocabulary and grammar. They had to put into practice their understanding of those language components to develop the tasks on which they had to write.



In summary, they used all the knowledge about grammar and vocabulary they acquire as a tool to create their own writings. They took advantage of every activity proposed during the workshops to strengthen their knowledge in those aspects. When they wrote, they trained their language competence as they became more skillful to express their opinions.

Regarding the first sub-category of the above category, “*Walking a road to boost my vocabulary*”, we can assure that each workshop introduced vocabulary to the students; for example, vocabulary related to school community members. Furthermore, the students mechanized the vocabulary since each workshop presented an activity to practice it. Likewise, the students asked for the words they did not know to use them in their writing. Thus, as Crystal (2008) points out, the workshops promoted two kinds of vocabulary: active and passive. However, the students mainly increased their passive vocabulary due to there were many words they understood, but they only used some of them in their writings (active vocabulary). The active vocabulary was promoted when they felt identified with words that they used to describe themselves; for instance, the characteristics that described them as teachers. Through the workshops, they improved the quality of their writings.

From the sub-category “*On my way to develop my grammar knowledge*”, we can say that the workshops told us that the students strengthened their written performance and practiced grammar, since each workshop implicitly included a grammatical topic. Moreover, grammar was reviewed in the language focus stage. Thus, students surely developed their grammar knowledge. Grammar also was necessary and required in order for students to write understandable texts. At the beginning, many students did not know how to write a sentence and then by the end of the workshops, they were able to do it. Besides, most of them were able to write understandable reflexive paragraphs.

In general, the students reinforced their written performance not only due to their grammar knowledge, but also due to the vocabulary that was introduced in the workshops. In the process of the improvement of the students’ written performance the organized sequence of stages was a crucial factor to obtain good outcomes because it allowed them to learn step by step.

## **7. Discussion and Pedagogical Implications**

The development of this project constitutes an important element inside the educational environment, since it might help to improve our future performance as teachers in the classrooms. So using writing workshops under Task Based Approach permits teachers to create material that follows three moments of the class, in the writing process: pre, while and post. Thus, the class is more organized because each activity is sequenced and catches the students’ attention because they do not feel lost in the class.

Moreover, we, as teachers, should shape integral human beings. Thus, the writing workshops contribute with the previous statement because students, by means of writing, can reflect upon their performance in their lives. Therefore, they can identify any error or mistake and can correct it. It means that the writing allows students to express their feelings, thoughts, needs, and expectations about their real context. Hence, they can communicate in a deeper way. Teachers can take advantage of the students' words in order to find some likes to elaborate strategies to promote their learning process in a meaningful way. Additionally, the reflection process was a positive aspect because as some students commented in their interviews, they had the opportunity to think over their future role as educators.

Likewise, the topics that are related to students' reality contribute with their learning process, in this case in their writing, because those themes are interesting and meaningful for them. Students feel motivated towards the new learning. Hence, it is important to identify the students' needs and likes for using the appropriate vocabulary in order to promote a meaningful learning in the students. In this research, the words used were associated with the teachers' labor because the participants are future teachers. Thus, they improved in their writing with vocabulary that was easily linked to their environment.

Additionally, working with tasks is very useful for teachers, since one of its main objectives is to work with topics that are meaningful for students. In our case, the topics were about educational issues. So, this study showed that tasks were meaningful and an effective resource to contribute with the students' English development. It means that teachers have to plan their classes taking into account students' environment so that they can reflect about any situation or issue that happen in their society in order to create integral human beings. If they are encouraged to reflect on their social reality, they are going to become more sensitive and intellectual people. So, they are going to work on the improvement of their community.

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