



Creative Writing on the Development of Writing Skills

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Dirección de Posgrado, Cooperación y Relaciones Internacionales. Universidad Laica Eloy Alfaro de Manabí. Trabajo de Titulación, presentado como requisito para la obtención del grado de Magíster en Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros Mención Inglés.

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04 de Agosto del 2026

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RESUMEN

This study investigates how creative writing strategies can support English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in improving their writing skills and overall learning motivation. The research stems from a common classroom challenge: students frequently face a difficult time writing in English, particularly when trying to make their texts clear, comprehensible, and well-structured. Furthermore, a lack of confidence often hinders their ability to express themselves in an authentic and expressive manner. To address this issue, the study analyzes the influence of creative writing strategies in the perception and performance of EFL students' writing skills. Methodologically, the research examined a group of 24 EFL students from an educational institution in Manabí, Ecuador, selected through a convenience sampling method. Data were collected through field observations and semi-structured interviews with the classroom teacher. The findings reveal that a profound fear of making mistakes significantly obstructs students' writing development and performance. However, when engaged in collaborative, narrative-based, or imaginative tasks, students demonstrated a notable increase in motivation and enthusiasm toward writing. They also showed a stronger capacity to organize and express their ideas in a coherent way. Ultimately, the study highlights creative writing as an effective approach to enhancing EFL writing instruction, making the learning experience more enjoyable, engaging, and meaningful for students.

Keywords: writing, writing skills, motivation, English as a Foreign Language learners, language learning, teaching strategies.

INTRODUCCION

Creativity has been identified as one of the top competencies that future workers need to acquire to survive and work effectively (Uslu & Uslu, 2021). When it comes to young learners, creative writing instruction directly impacts the development of their critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Barton et al., 2024). Therefore, providing creative writing instruction to students is an essential responsibility for teachers. Given the significance of creative writing instruction, there has been a strong focus on creative writing practices in primary schools, where introducing narrative tasks helps children develop a personal voice (Assimonye & Ibe, 2019; Barbot et al., 2012; Barton et al., 2024; Göçen, 2019). Besides several positive signals, several challenges have been recognized, which consist of teachers and students' misconception of creative writing, leading to ineffective pedagogy. To effectively guide this process, teachers need to understand the essential domain-specific cognitive and literary skills required for creative production (Barbot et al., 2012).

In order to develop writing skills, one must first have affective readiness since writing is a multidimensional language skill involving cognitive, affective, and procedural aspects. Individuals benefit from creative writing activities as they provide a free writing environment that supports the writing process. According to Maltepe (2006), creative writing promotes the use of language creatively, makes students participate in the writing instruction process at every stage, and requires students to use other language skills. In this sense, the creative writing process successfully combines feelings and thoughts with a subjective expression by blending them with imagination (Horng et al., 2005).

However, external pressures—such as the negative impact of high-stakes testing and a limited amount of instructional time—have historically hindered students' writing development. In local EFL classrooms, identifying strategies that overcome these barriers by fostering a supportive writing environment remains an essential instructional priority.

Motivating Students to Write through Creative Writing Activities

Research on motivation and motivating has been extensive. It has shown that it is possible to positively influence students' motivation in different ways, some more beneficial than others. Motivation is difficult to define, but broadly comes down to the driving force behind individuals' actions, desires, and needs. In the context of foreign language learning, motivation determines the extent of effort and persistence learners exhibit in mastering a new language. According to Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model, motivation in language learning comprises three main components: motivational intensity, desire to learn the language, and attitudes toward learning the language. This background is highly relevant since a student's overall success and proficiency development in a foreign language are deeply tied to sustained motivational factors over time (Gardner, 2007; Tütüniş, 2014).

Motivation for language learning is very different when compared to motivation for other subjects, when looking at an academic context (Zareian & Jodaei, 2015). Other subjects, such as geography or history, can more easily be associated with students' local or national culture, whereas learning a new language involves stepping outside of that culture and "making something foreign part of one's self" (Gardner, 2007).

In some ways, the most important task of a teacher or designer of a curriculum is not to motivate students, but rather to make sure not to demotivate them (Littlejohn, 2008). The lack of focus on motivating students is a clear issue in teaching writing. To address this gap, action research projects have shown that active, open-ended writing interventions can significantly reverse passive attitudes and boost students' confidence (Nasir et al., 2013; Pokhrel, 2023).

Research Context

The study was conducted at the Educational Unit Ibarra #2, a regular education institution located in the province of Manabí, specifically in the city of Chone, Santa Rita. This school operates under the fiscal regime, with its main focus being education in Spanish, while English is

taught as a foreign language. The research focuses on a core group of 24 basic education students selected from the institution through convenience sampling to evaluate the integration of creative writing strategies. The educational staff includes a specialized administrative and teaching team, consisting of the principal, the inspector, the English teacher, and the head of the English department.

The general objective of this research is to analyze the influence of creative writing strategies in the perception and performance of EFL students' writing skills. To accomplish this objective, field observation and interviews were employed as data collection instruments. The findings from these instruments inform the analysis and discussion of creative writing strategies aimed at enhancing clarity, coherence, and expressive communication.

METHODOLOGY

This study follows a qualitative approach with a descriptive scope, focusing on the development of students' writing skills through creative writing strategies. The research was conducted with a group of 24 participants chosen through convenience sampling out of the 300 of the institution's student total population.

Data were collected through field observation and semi-structured interviews. During the observation process, close attention was given to students' participation, motivation, and ability to express ideas in written form while engaging in creative writing activities. The interviews allowed the researcher to explore the English teacher's perspectives, opinions, and experiences regarding the implementation of these strategies. The activities were observed during the English class, aiming to improve clarity, coherence, and expressive communication in students' writing. Finally, the collected data were analyzed qualitatively to identify patterns, pedagogical challenges, and improvements in students' writing performance.

RESULTS

Analysis of the Field Observation

The observed class began with a traditional yet participatory pedagogical structure. The teacher included a briefing activity before introducing the topic, incorporating tools such as images, which provided context. Throughout the class, the explanation of grammatical rules received significant attention, and students actively asked the teacher questions. This mediation was crucial in achieving the teacher's immediate instructional objective.

However, upon reaching the final phase of the class, where students were expected to present their work, it was observed that they lacked the necessary confidence to share their writing. Although the students understood the dynamics and the teaching process, the productive outcomes were not entirely satisfactory. This observation revealed that despite the use of images and a dynamic methodology that facilitated comprehension, there was an imbalance in independent writing production. The students lacked confidence in sharing their final work with the rest of the class. This finding highlights the importance of implementing creative writing as a necessary resource for transforming writing from a purely technical, rigid exercise into something more meaningful and reassuring.

INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

The affective dimension emerges as the first axis of analysis, where it is identified that emotional factors profoundly condition technical performance. The professor maintains that success in writing depends not only on grammatical knowledge, but also on overcoming psychological blocks. In the words of the professor: "I think the biggest challenge is fear—the fear of making mistakes, of being ridiculed by others, as is often the case." This fear, along with a lack of interest in new things, is identified as one of the main causes of the limited quality of students' vocabulary and written output. To mitigate this, the teacher suggests starting the sessions with daily dialogues to establish an environment of trust before beginning formal writing.

Another key dimension is the relationship between imagination and grammatical accuracy. According to the participant, the creative exercises do not neglect technique, but justify it through a "communicative need". In this sense, the teacher affirms that when recreating a story, this "will lead the student to see the need to use terms (connectors, verb tenses, among others) to complete their writing." In this way, creativity acts as a driving force, encouraging students to conduct independent research in dictionaries or digital media to satisfy their own expressive curiosity.

The analysis also reveals a methodological dimension based on scaffolding, where external resources are used to guide free creation without losing the logical structure of the language. The teacher explains her initial methodology: "The use of images, real stories, even videos that encourage them to imagine 'what happens next...'" It also uses playful strategies such as the order of sentences with physical cards or digital applications. Finally, assessment focuses on cohesion and coherence, ensuring that ideas are correctly linked and that the text has logical meaning. The teacher emphasizes that the most effective strategy is to arouse the interest of students and promote collaborative work to receive feedback among peers.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight the significant role of affective factors in the development of students' writing skills. The interview results revealed that fear of making mistakes and being judged by peers negatively influences students' performance in writing tasks. This emotional barrier limits students' willingness to participate and affects their confidence when expressing ideas in written form. These results are consistent with previous research, which emphasizes that motivation and emotional security are essential components in the writing process (Dörnyei, 2008). In addition, the study demonstrated that creative writing strategies can help reduce these psychological barriers by fostering a more supportive and engaging learning environment.

As observed in the classroom, students showed greater interest during activities that involved images, storytelling, and imaginative tasks. This supports the idea that creativity promotes intrinsic motivation, allowing students to feel more comfortable and engaged in the learning process (Cremin, 2022; Cremin et al., 2006). Furthermore, the findings indicate that creative writing does not replace grammatical instruction but rather complements it. According to the teacher's perspective, students develop a "communicative need" when engaged in creative tasks, which encourages them to use appropriate grammatical structures such as connectors and verb tenses. This aligns with the notion that language learning becomes more effective when it is meaningful and contextualized (Hyland, 2003). This integration is particularly crucial in academic settings, where merging creative expression with target language rules enhances overall grammatical achievement and positive attitudes toward foreign language learning (Şenel, 2018; Tok & Kandemir, 2015).

Reflecting on the field observation, there is a clear gap between understanding and production. Although students were able to follow the teacher's explanations and participate in guided activities, they showed low confidence when asked to present their written work. This suggests that traditional approaches, even when combined with some dynamic elements, may not be sufficient to fully develop students' writing skills (Harmer, 2006).

Another important finding is the role of scaffolding in the teaching process. The use of visual aids, real-life situations, and guided exercises helped students organize their ideas and understand the structure of writing. Quantitative and experimental research in primary contexts similarly reinforces that structured creative interventions foster measurable gains in descriptive clarity and logic (Vicol et al., 2024). Modern classrooms also benefit heavily from integrating creative writing with digital media, such as collaborative digital storytelling, which reinforces both

linguistic proficiency and 21st-century social-emotional skills (Pentury et al., 2020; Uslu & Uslu, 2021).

Nevertheless, the lack of autonomy in the final stage indicates the need for more consistent implementation of creative writing strategies that promote independent production (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). Overall, the results confirm that creative writing strategies are an effective tool to improve not only students' writing skills but also their motivation and confidence. By transforming writing into a meaningful and expressive activity, students are more likely to develop clarity, coherence, and effective communication. Therefore, integrating creative approaches in the classroom is essential to overcome emotional barriers and enhance students' performance in writing.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that creative writing strategies play a crucial role in improving the writing skills of EFL learners. Data gathered from classroom observations and teacher interviews show that engaging in creative activities helps students organize their thoughts logically, use words that make sense, and express themselves with greater assurance. Concurrently, the research highlights those affective factors—such as performance anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and low self-confidence—heavily impede student progress during conventional writing tasks.

When educators implement supportive, imagination-based activities, students show a greater willingness to participate and develop a genuine interest in writing. Consequently, creative writing should not be treated as an occasional or marginal activity, but rather integrated systematically into the EFL curriculum. Doing so will help students overcome emotional roadblocks, enhance their academic performance, and foster their long-term growth as competent, expressive individuals.

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