

Collaborative Work, through Google Drive Tool, to Develop the Writing Skill in A1 level.

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Abstract

This quasi-experimental research has determined the incidence of collaborative work in developing the written skill, in the students of basic levels of English at university in Ecuador, by implementing collaborative work through the Google Drive tool. This research has been carried out with two groups: the control and the experimental one; each group consisted of 30 students. Both groups were given a pre and a post-test to evaluate their written performance. A rubric was used to grade their tasks. The application of the instruments permitted the researcher to proof and accept the alternative hypothesis through posing a hypothesis test, which determined that the implementation of activities based on collaborative work, through Google Drive, had a positive impact on the students' writing performance. This can be stated by comparing the final means from the experimental group where the grades raised from 3.46 out of 10 in the pre-test to 6.34 out of 10 in the post-test. This research has confirmed the importance of working collaboratively by using technology in the development of the English writing skill.

Keywords: collaborative work, writing skill, google drive, basic english level, rubric.

Resumen Ejecutivo

La presente investigación de tipo cuasi experimental ha determinado la incidencia del trabajo colaborativo en el desarrollo de la habilidad escrita en los estudiantes de los niveles básicos de inglés en una universidad del Ecuador mediante la implementación del trabajo colaborativo usando la herramienta Google Drive. El presente trabajo ha sido llevado a cabo con dos grupos, uno llamado control y el otro experimental consistiendo cada grupo de 30 estudiantes. Ambos grupos fueron asignados un pre y post test para apreciar su desarrollo en la habilidad escrita y se utilizó una rúbrica para evaluar las actividades. La aplicación de los instrumentos permitió al investigador probar y aceptar la hipótesis alterna la cual determinó que el uso del trabajo colaborativo, a través del Google Drive tuvo un impacto positivo en el desarrollo de la habilidad escrita, la información puede ser afirmada al comparar un incremento en la nota final de un 3.46 por ciento sobre 10 en el pre test a un 6,34 por ciento en el post test aplicado, es así que el presente trabajo confirma la importancia del trabajo colaborativo a través del uso de la tecnología en el desarrollo de la habilidad escrita en el idioma inglés.

Palabras clave: Trabajo Colaborativo, Habilidad Escrita, Google Drive, Nivel Básico de Inglés, Rúbrica.

Introduction

The present idea was born from the need to reduce the high incidence of students with a low level of writing performance. Their grades are the reflection of their lack of skill to elaborate a short paragraph and even to build a sentence; this is to say, that their writings lack coherence and cohesion because of their poor knowledge regarding the steps to be followed along the writing process as it can be evidenced in the grading files. For what has been

stated, it is important to motivate learners to enhance this skill through a collaborative and cooperative participation, but not in a traditional way by using papers and pencils, but by using technology, in this case Google Drive, which is a file storage and synchronization service where you can work with many different students simultaneously. This type of teaching turns out to be coherent with the socio-constructivist pedagogy which states that language and thought are mediated by society (Vygotsky,

1986); this claims that a task which is carried out in small groups collaboratively and cooperatively within a virtual classroom where participants are interacting among them will allow to develop not only their socio-affective development, but also their thinking skills while constructing a coherent and cohesive paragraph.

The development of the written expression within the teaching-learning process is one of the fundamental objectives when it comes to acquiring a second language. In recent years, it has become evident that learning how to write improves significantly if students work in small groups in a collaborative way to maximize their own and each other's learning through technology. This view is aligned with the perspective of Johnson and Johnson (1996) regarding collaborative work. Therefore, it is imperative for teachers to use methodologies and strategies appropriate to the students' needs and one of their needs is to properly express their ideas in a written way which is in fact one of the skills teachers and students struggle with (Arnaudet, 1990). Unfortunately, students have difficulty in producing a well built and meaningful paragraph; it seems hard for students to follow the paragraph components which mainly consist of three elements: topic sentence, supporting ideas and a conclusion (Ruetten, 1997). It happens that students don't use the parts of the paragraph at all or used them in a disorganized way. Some authors consider certain factors as causes for poor paragraphs; one of those may be the fact that such paragraph components are not found in the student's mother tongue; (in this case Spanish) (Rubens & Southard, 2004); this is to say that first language influences in the students' writing panache (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). Another reason could be that students have misinterpreted the correct use of the elements included in the construction of a paragraph. Besides the previous causes, there could also be the existence of the students' lack of enthusiasm or motivations because they are learning how to write but in a traditional way. Whatever the reasons are, the targeted learners are not only required to follow the paragraph components, but they are also required to practice them as many times as possible to develop their writing skill.

This research article aims to prove that collaborative work, through the use of the Google Drive tool,

promotes the development of the writing skill in A1 English learners.

Methods

The research design is quantitative, longitudinal correlational, and quasi experimental; this is to say, that in this study, the participants were not randomly chosen but intentionally. (Hernández RF, 2010, p 188). Therefore, they were groups that were already set in a class group before the experiment.

The present investigation has the control group and the experimental one. The two groups were given a pre-test and a post-test. It should be noted that with the control group, a traditional methodology was used; while with the experimental one, the collaborative methodology through the computer tool of Google Drive was applied.

The relationships between the independent variable: "Collaborative work through the Google Drive computer tool"; and, the dependent variable: "The written expression and the causal effects of the independent variable over dependent one were analyzed in this research.

It should be noted that this research is longitudinal because the research was carried out with two groups of students, in a determined time, to analyze changes along the researching process. This type of study collects data at different points, over time, to make inferences about changes, its causes and effects. (Hernández & Lucio, 2003, p.169).

Population

The study population corresponds to A1 level students of a university in Ecuador. There were two groups: the control and the experimental one. Each group or sample was composed of 30 students, men and women of different careers, with a basic English level; giving a total of 60 students. The sample chosen refers to the average number of students in each classroom. As Galindo (2010) points out, a sample refers to a group of selected units of the population according to a plan or rule, with the objective of obtaining conclusions about the population from which it comes. The students in this study have a basic level of English according to the placement taken by the university evaluation department.

This research lasted 10 weeks. Three daily hours were devoted to developing the controlled group's writing skill. These 30 writing sessions were given within the regular schedule, as part of their curricula, using a traditional methodology (paper and pencil) whilst, the experimental group was exposed to 30 online tutorials. It is important to mention that these online sessions were taken out of their regular English class scheduled and outside the university due to the lack of labs and Internet in the language center. The experimental group had session on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays from 6 p.m. to 8p.m. A collaborative methodology was applied through the Google Drive. The 30 students from this group were divided into five groups of six students accordingly.

Data Collection Techniques and Tools

The technique used was done through a survey applied to teachers of the Language Center; While the instruments were a rubric, a pre and a post-test applied to the controlled and to the experimental groups.

Standardized instruments or instrument validation.

A rubric based on the one that holds the Ministry of Education was used to grade the pre and the post test.

The rubric allowed the researcher to grade parameters of linguistic competences such as the writing process, spelling, punctuation, grammar, and paragraph structure. It also included items related to the communicative competence such as: sequence, coherence, and content and its relevance. Each category had a value of 1 to 10 points, the same ones that were multiplied by 7. Giving a total valuation of 70 points.

On one hand, a pre and a post-test were applied to the control and to the experimental group. The pre-test instrument that was applied in both the control and the experimental group consisted in the creation of a paragraph. Each student was given a sheet of paper which contained a set of pictures to be used as prompts to help students write a 60-word paragraph to describe their daily activities and one of their relative's daily activities as well. This instru-

ment was applied to verify the students' linguistic and communicative competence.

The post-test also consisted in the elaboration of a 70-word paragraph to describe their favorite city in Ecuador. The participants were given each a piece of paper with pictures of different places of Ecuador. This post-test was applied to verify the incidence of collaborative work using Google Drive in the construction of a paragraph.

On the other hand, a survey was applied to 25 teachers in charge of teaching A1 level of the of the Central University; This survey was intended to measure the collaborative work through the Google Drive platform and its impact on the development of written expression in students and basic level of the Language Center. It should be noted that the instrument was validated by three experts under the following parameters: Correspondence of the items with the objectives, variables and indicators; Technical quality and representativeness; and, language, grammar and spelling. The instrument consisted of a questionnaire with 18 items evaluated according to the Likert scale, which is scored from 1 to 5 where one means never and 5 always.

Results

As for the writing process, it can be observed that both the control group and the experimental one show an increase in their final grade; however, the group experienced a significant increase with a difference of 6.6 points with respect to the pretest; While the control group increased by 4.2 points.

Regarding the correct spelling of words, the control group maintained a similar score in both the pre- and post-test. This leads us to the conclusion that, with the use of traditional methods, like paper and pencil, students are not able to improve their spelling. With respect to the experimental group, it can be evidenced that spelling of words has improved through collaborative work and through the interaction and feedback received by their peers and their teacher as well.

As it can be evidenced, the scores of the pre- test (7.3) and post-test (7.5) are almost equal in the control group; while the experimental group showed a two-point increase in comparison between the pre and the post-test (5.5 and 7.5 accordingly). These

results ratified that the use of collaborative work through the Google Drive platform does influence in the correct use of punctuation.

Regarding grammar, both groups increased their grades. This makes it possible to show that the traditional methods used in the control group and the collaborative method used in the experimental group helped students use correctly the target grammar.

As for the internal of the composition (title, main idea, secondary idea, and conclusion) an increased in their grades is evidenced in both groups; nevertheless, a greater significance is notorious in the experimental group with a difference of 4.7 points in relation to its pre-test.

Regarding the sequence and coherence of the paragraph, the experimental group showed a higher result (pre-test 4,3/ post-test 7) in comparison to the control group (pre-test 4.5 /post-test 5.8); this is to say that the experimental group had an increment of 27 points while the control group only raised in 1.30 in relation to the pre and the post-test.

Finally, as far as the content of the paragraph is concerned, there is an increase of 1.4 with respect to the pre and post-test of the control group; and a difference of 1.5 points when it comes to the pre and post-test experimental group. This implies that the collaborative method did influence in enhancement of the content of the paragraphs.

Discussion

In this research, a theoretical analysis of collaborative work as the independent variable and the writing performance as the dependent variable was performed. The first was defined as a learning model that uses a methodology based on Vygotsky's pedagogical model, where the student is the protagonist of the teaching and learning process. The first variable "Collaborative work" promotes interdisciplinary work and knowledge, shared among learners, using digital tools. The second variable was defined within the teaching of a second language, in this case English, as a complex system of human communication consisting of written messages by using written communication and the writing skill to develop meaningful, coherent, cohesive, and adequate texts.

Collaborative work is a model of interactive learning which can be done through a digital tool such as Google Drive to encourage reciprocity, responsibility, relationships, positive interdependence and shared work among beginner levels from the English Language at a university in Ecuador. After the implementation of a post-test (a paragraph graded with the use of a rubric) it was possible to demonstrate that collaborative work, through the use of the Google Drive, facilitates the creation of virtual communities and group work to encourage active participation and to enhance students' writing skills.

This research has designed a pre-test and post-test with its corresponding rubric. The tests were applied to the control and to the experimental group. The groups consisted of beginner level students. The purpose was to assess their written performance. The statistics results showed that there were deficiencies regarding the written production in both groups. After applying the collaborative methodology and through the post test, it was noticeable the enhancement in the experimental group's written production. In this context, it was also proceeded to conduct a survey to the teachers. The results of this survey showed that they have never worked with any digital platform for working collaboratively with their students; and therefore, 80% of their students do not participate or contribute in the activities proposed by the teacher. Although teachers recognize the importance of teamwork, they have not designed activities focused on collaborative work within a virtual platform.

From the difficulties found after the application of the pre-test and the lack of use of digital tools as an innovative teaching methodology used by teachers, a proposal of activities focused on collaborative work through Google Drive was developed to improve written production in university students. The results obtained in the post-test, after the implementation of these activities have shown a significant improvement in the learners' written skills. Their mean was 7.34 out of 10; its standard deviation increased by 65.7% in the construction of their paragraph through collaborative work. Consequently, the alternative hypothesis was accepted, which states that the proposed methodology did influence in the improvement of their scores, and obviously in the enhancement of their written production.

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