



*Translated from the original in Spanish*

## **Metacognitive learning in english writing as a foreign language by university students**

### **Aprendizaje metacognitivo en la escritura del inglés como lengua extranjera por estudiantes universitarios**

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**Received:** June 07, 2019.

**Accepted:** September 10, 2019.

#### **ABSTRACT**

The metacognitive approach in the teaching-learning process is based on the ability of students to know how they achieve their own knowledge. Particularly in the teaching of English as a foreign language, the literature documents its applicability and usefulness in the development of different communication skills, such as writing. The metacognitive learning process around this skill is based at least on planning, textualization and revision of texts. The objective of the research

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was to identify if metacognitive learning is achieved in students who study English as a foreign language in the School of Languages of the University Pontific Catholic of Ecuador. A qualitative research was developed, with the application of theoretical and empirical methods. An interview questionnaire was applied to 18 students of a study group of the School of Languages; the results were analyzed qualitatively, and descriptive statistics was used with the use of Microsoft Excel, where possible. It was identified that the planning phase is the one performed least by the students; the most used practices are the reading of instructions, writing of the central idea, review of the text and feedback from the teacher. Metacognitive learning traits are recognized in the students at the School of Languages. The analysis from the metacognitive point of view in the writing of English is important for the development of didactic strategies that make easier the university students meaningful learning.

**Keywords:** Metacognition; learning; writing; English; university.

#### **RESUMEN**

El enfoque metacognitivo en el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje se basa en la capacidad que los estudiantes poseen para conocer cómo logran su propio conocimiento. Particularmente en la enseñanza del idioma inglés como lengua extranjera, en la literatura se documenta su aplicabilidad y utilidad, en el desarrollo de las distintas habilidades comunicativas, tal como la escritura. El proceso de aprendizaje metacognitivo alrededor de esta habilidad se basa al menos en la planificación, textualización y revisión de textos. El objetivo de la investigación fue identificar si se logra un aprendizaje metacognitivo en los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera en la Escuela de Lenguas de la Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador. Se desarrolló una investigación

cualitativa, con la aplicación de métodos teóricos y empíricos. Se aplicó un cuestionario de entrevista a 18 estudiantes de un grupo de estudios de la Escuela de Lenguas; los resultados se analizaron de forma cualitativa, para lo que se empleó en los casos posibles estadística descriptiva con el uso de Microsoft Excel. Se identificó que la fase de planificación es la que menos realizan los estudiantes; las prácticas más empleadas son la lectura de instrucciones, redacción de la idea central, revisión del texto y retroalimentación del profesor. Se reconocen rasgos de aprendizaje metacognitivo en los estudiantes investigados de la Escuela de Lenguas. De forma general, se reconoció que el análisis desde el punto de vista metacognitivo en la escritura del inglés resulta importante para el desarrollo de estrategias didácticas que propicien el aprendizaje significativo del estudiante universitario.

**Palabras clave:** Metacognición; aprendizaje; escritura; inglés; universidad.

## INTRODUCTION

Studies related to the learning process are increasingly directed towards approaches such as metacognition, which is considered as "a feasible alternative, to support and regulate the teaching and learning process" (Alama, 2015, p. 77). In the opinion of one of the classic authors of the subject, metacognition is "the knowledge that one has about one's own cognitive processes and products or any other matter related to them, for example, the properties of information relevant to learning" (Flavell, 1976, p. 232).

Metacognitive strategies are increasingly recognized as an effective way for the

university student to develop "skills that allow him to self-educate," based on "autonomous learning and critical thinking training" (Roque, Valdivia, Alonso & Zagalaz, 2018, p. 293). And it is precisely, the development of critical thinking one of the pillars of the current university education, the which must guarantee the active interaction of individuals with their social, political and economic context (Botero, Alarcon, Palomino & Jimenez, 2017).

Since the emergence of the concept of metacognition, at the end of the previous century, there have been numerous studies from psychology and pedagogy aimed at monitoring the way in which individuals develop their cognitive activity; evidencing that unfortunately his considerable or extended practice has not been achieved (Preiss & Grau, 2015).

A synthesis of the applicability of metacognition in students of English as a foreign language can be found in the work of Chumaña, Llano & Martínez (2018), who highlight the role played by students together with the other actors in the teaching process and learning, to "overcome the historic gap of bilingualism in developing countries" (p. 6). In the specific case of teaching English as a foreign language, it is recognized that one of the most important functions is the development of autonomy, based on the criterion that "the different skills, abilities, attitudes, dispositions, values and strategies that facilitate the own learning will have a greater value if they train in autonomy" (Velázquez & Santiesteban, 2019, p. 2).

There are particular studies focused on the application of metacognition in the development of writing ability, evidencing by Campo, Escorcía, Moreno & Palacio (2016) positive correlations with the academic performance of university students. According to these authors,

the skill of writing is influenced by both aspects of academic culture and the specific cultural context, and has a high importance in the university context. Also, the need for students to develop a process of metacognitive learning is based, in addition, for the variety and complexity of information both written, audiovisual, hypertextual and multimedia is handled in different areas of knowledge (Cerrón & Pineda, 2016).

Chumaña, Llano & Martínez (2018) document examples of the application of the metacognitive approach in the development of said ability, in the phase of regulation of the writing process based on the processes of planning, textualization and revision of the text; all of which should be evaluated in a process like the one developed in the investigation.

The School of Languages of the Faculty of Communication, Linguistics and Literature of the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador develops programs of study of English as a foreign language, counting each academic period with an estimated 15 groups of level B1.3, which record turn 20 students as average. The courses are aimed both at obtaining the requirement of language proficiency, required by law for the graduation of undergraduate students (Higher Education Council, 2019); as to facilitate "student mobility, graduate studies abroad and have all the opportunities available to them for a future professional and personal development success" (Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador, 2019). In order to achieve these purposes, it must

be constantly innovated in pedagogical and didactic practice, in order to apply strategies and methodologies that guarantee the effectiveness of the teaching-educational process, given the challenges of contemporary times. Thus, this research aims to identify whether metacognitive learning was achieved in students of English as a foreign language at the School of Languages of the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Exploratory research was conducted, applying theoretical methods as the historical and systemic. From the empirical point of view, an interview questionnaire was applied to the 18 students of a group of level B1.3 of the School of Languages of the Faculty of Communication, Linguistics and Literature of the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador in the first period Academic of the year 2019. The qualitative method of analysis of interviews was applied and was used the statistical descriptive using Microsoft Excel and SPSS v 22, some questions included in the questionnaire in relation, in order to define useful conclusions on the Investigation process.

## RESULTS

In the table 1 the result of calculating the Chi - square test regarding the influence of gender of respondents in the answers to some selected questions are shown.

**Tabla 1-** Resultado de la prueba Chi cuadrado en relación al sexo de los entrevistados y algunas preguntas de la entrevista

Question	Sig Asymptotic	Interpretation
Do you like to write in Spanish?	,814	There are no significant differences
Do you like to write in English?	,502	There are no significant differences
How do you like to write?	,410	There are no significant differences
Do you plan before writing?	,737	There are no significant differences
Do you make a mind map before writing?	,410	There are no significant differences
Do you sketch before writing?	,814	There are no significant differences
Does the audience consider the structure exercise in English addressed?	,280	There are no significant differences
Does the work requirement take into account before writing?	,596	There are no significant differences
Do you pay attention to the purpose of the writing exercise?	,180	There are no significant differences
Do you pay attention to the type of writing exercise?	,737	There are no significant differences
Do you first develop the main idea and then the secondary ones?	,814	There are no significant differences
As you write identify your deficiencies?	,387	There are no significant differences
Do you use synonyms in writing?	,800	There are no significant differences
Do you check what you write?	,396	There are no significant differences
Do you take into account teacher feedback?	,671	There are no significant differences

Source: Own elaboration based on statistical processing results.

As can be seen, 66 % of the students interviewed are women; demonstrating through the calculation of the Chi-square test that there are no significant differences between the students of both sexes, in relation to the answers of some questions included in the interview, about the processes of planning,

textualization and revision of texts as phases of learning Metacognitive in writing.

In table 2 results calculating frequencies absolute in such questions are shown.

**Table 2** - Absolute frequency (most frequent category) of some interview questions

<b>Interview Question</b>	<b>Most frequent response category</b>	<b>Absolute frequency (%)</b>
Do you like to write in Spanish?	Yes	72,3
Do you like to write in English?	Yes	66,7
How do you like to write?	Silent	72,3
Do you plan before writing?	no	66,7
Do you make a mind map before writing?	no	72,3
Do you sketch before writing?	no	72,3
Does the audience consider the structure exercise in English addressed?	no	61,1
Does the work requirement take into account before writing?	no	55,5
Do you pay attention to the purpose of the writing exercise?	Yes	66,7
Do you pay attention to the type of writing exercise?	Yes	66,7
Do you first develop the main idea and then the secondary ones?	Yes	72,3
As you write identify your deficiencies?	Yes	61,1
Do you use synonyms in writing?	no	66,7
Do you check what you write?	Yes	72,3
Do you take into account teacher feedback?	Yes	55,5

Source: Own elaboration based on statistical processing results.

As it is shown in Table 2, 72.3 % of respondents like to write in their native language, a frequency that falls to 66.7% when writing takes place in English. 72.3 % also stated that they prefer to write in silence (without noise). In relation to the planning phase, 66.7 % said they did not plan before writing; 72.3 % acknowledge not making mental maps or sketches before writing; 61.1 % do not take into consideration the audience to whom the text is addressed; 55.5 % of students acknowledge not paying enough attention to the requirement of the writing exercise they face; while 66.7% do observe their purpose or purpose and type of exercise to be performed. From a qualitative point of view was determined that 10 of the 18 students recognizes reading of the instructions is important.

In relation to the textualization phase, 72.3 % of the analyzed subjects state that they initially develop the main idea of the text; 61.1 % state that while writing they identify their deficiencies; Only 33.3 % use synonyms in writing. Additionally, qualitatively it was determined that the use of vocabulary is the main weakness of the students. Precisely the vocabulary, together with the grammar, was identified by all students as the factors that most influence to become a good writer in English.

On the other hand, the factor that prevailed among the interviewees as strength and positive experience in English language writing is related to the contents of the texts, when they address aspects of their personal life, academic or

social environment. The students also expressed concern about the excessive use of the Spanish translation, both of the text, the instructions and their own ideas at the time of writing.

El 72.3 % of students said that they check texts written in English, while 55.5 % take into account the teacher feedback to improve their writing skills. The majority of the students expressed concern regarding the qualification of the writing exercises, specifically due to ignorance of the parameters of the evaluation, the lack of clear understanding of the indications and that in some cases the subjective teacher's criteria must be present, and not Feedback and student-teacher interaction.

## DISCUSSION

The results obtained in the calculation of Chi square, coincide with that of Gomez (2018) who showed in a study in Colombia, that individuals of both sexes have similar believes in relation to learning the English language.

It was demonstrated that students have a preference for writing in their mother tongue over writing in English; In this regard, Castellón, Carballo & Ruiz (2018, p. 23) consider that one of the causes is given by the fact that "the teaching of Spanish has a more dynamic teaching than foreign languages".

In turn, the preference of writing in silence that prevailed in the interview is a condition that is recognized together with others such as the psychological interaction, light, temperature and biological conditions of the writer, as one of the environmental factors that influence the action of writing (M orales, Hernández, Peña, Chávez & Carpio, 2017).

In relation to the metacognitive development of the English language writing process, specifically in the planning phase, the results are not positive, indicating the need to employ more teaching strategies that promote the cognitive process at this stage of writing in English (Bonilla & Díaz, 2018). Specifically, the use of mental maps - which was recognized as infrequent in the interview - has been identified as a way to use creativity and all the resources available by the student with the objective of "classifying, ranking and presenting the information of a creative, efficient and fun way" (G. de Montes & Montes, 2019, p. 350).

As part of the planning, he stressed that students mostly take into consideration the purpose or purpose and type of exercises. In this sense, the transmission of the objective of the teacher's writing exercises to the university student, as a basis for a process of self-regulation in learning, is an important edge of the application of the metacognitive approach around writing, as it has been addressed by Arciniegas (2016).

In the process of planning and organization of writing, the importance of reading the instructions was evidenced, taking into account that it is a fundamental aspect to organize any teaching activity as "slogans or contexts of written expression" (Cassany, 2016, p. 97).

In general, as concluded by Boillos (2018), it is observed that part of the students interviewed does not develop a planning process prior to writing, which may be influenced by the lack of experience and awareness of the importance of Develop such ability.

In relation to the elaboration or production of the text, it was determined that the majority of students state that they initially develop the main idea of the text (topic sentence) and subsequently

the secondary ideas, which is very positive given that it is recognized as one of the most influential metacognitive practices in the effectiveness of the writing process (Aguirre, 2016). In relation to the use of vocabulary as the main weakness, together with the use of synonyms and grammar, they are recognized by Guamán & Morillo (2015) as success factors in writing.

The students' recognition that the positive factor that impacts them the most in writing in English is the themes or contents of the texts, coincides with what was exposed by Bañales, Vega, Araujo, Reyna & Rodríguez (2016) who recognize him as a factor to achieve greater motivation of students towards writing.

One of the factors that was most recognized by students is the use of the translation strategy during the writing process; determining as a fundamental problem that they fail to think directly in the foreign language (English), but at all times the thinking in the native language prevails. This factor is not valued as positive or negative, as it is often a strategy used in writing, however it is recognized by the interviewees as a barrier they face to be better writers in English.

In relation to the last phase evaluated in the interview, a more positive result was evidenced both by the revision of the texts and by the influence of the teacher's feedback to improve their writing skills, which has been shown to significantly influence the effectiveness of the writing process in English (Hernández, 2017). On the other hand, the supervision of what they write is done by reviewing the text in parts, identifying errors, correcting, especially in relation to the arguments, grammar, vocabulary, spelling and use of punctuation marks; These are the strategies most used by students.

The students interviewed recognized as the most frequent ways they use to overcome problems in writing in English, the following: reading books, movies, music, use of the Internet and the use of translators. Precisely, the use of technology in recent years has led to the increase in the use of collaborative writing strategies by university students (Ubilla, Gómez & Sáez, 2017).

One of the most important aspects of the teaching-learning process is evaluation, being essential to measure educational quality (Jordán, Morán & Camacho, 2017). The aspects that most concern the students investigated about the qualification of the writing exercises, and mentioned above, are according to De la Orden & Pimienta (2016), characteristics that must be respected in an evaluation process that promotes meaningful learning.

In general, the research carried out allowed us to show that there are no differences in the responses of students of both sexes, in relation to metacognitive learning in English writing. The evaluation of the phases of planning, textualization and revision of texts, allowed to determine that the planning is recognized by the students as the one that less is done during the writing process in English.

Likewise, they were recognized as practices frequently used by students reading the instructions, writing the central idea, reviewing the written text and teacher feedback, among others.

The management of English vocabulary, mental translation into the native language and concern about qualification were identified as the main deficiencies and / or concerns in the English language writing process.

The study made it possible to determine certain traits of metacognitive learning in the students of the selected group of the

School of Languages of the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador.

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