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“Poor writing skills in 1st and 2nd baccalaureate of María Auxiliadora High School and the e-portfolio to improve writing skills”

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ABSTRACT

This research study aims to analyze and offer a solution in a problematic area of English as a Foreign Language, which is writing composition. This project has as an objective the development of a technological tool (e-portfolio) to make students improve their writing skills through the proposal of a technological and collaborative methodology.

An action research methodology was used to conduct this study since its process matched with the features of the present work. The participants of this study were students from María Auxiliadora high school from 1st and 2nd baccalaureate. To demonstrate the deficit of writing skills that the participants had, 56 writing sample papers were collected and analyzed by the researcher. This data was classified and quantified to show the different types of errors that the participants presented. In addition, statistics graphs were used to show the frequency of each of the errors found. The study revealed that the most common errors were related to grammar and punctuation.

Based on the need to improve students' writing skills, the e-portfolio arises as a solution to make students get better at writing. The proposed strategy consists on grouping students to work collaboratively under the basis of a process writing methodology aided with peer correction on each other's documents (google docs). The documents are going to be developed by students individually. After

students have written their first draft, they have to peer correct the two other documents of their peers using correction symbols proposed by the teacher at the beginning of the scholastic year. In this study, it is also established the role of the teacher as an audience, monitor, resource, evaluator, editor and examiner. In the methodology it is also considered a plan to assess students' online performance.

Research words: e-portfolio, methodology, ICT, writing composition, peer correction, collaborative learning.

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the productive skills of English language and if students know how to write effectively they might have more opportunities for success. In discussing the significance of writing to learn, Suleiman, (2000) stresses that writing is an essential factor of language. Suleiman added that any reading and language curriculum must think about the multidimensional nature of writing in instructional practices, evaluation procedures, and language development.

At María Auxiliadora High School students have a workload of 14 periods of English classes weekly and 45 minutes each which is sufficient amount of time since it is not a bilingual school. Nevertheless, teachers usually complain that students have poor writing skills. The causes of this problem may be rooted on the lack of attention paid to the writing field, this is not the concern of this study but the composition itself is the central focus. At María Auxiliadora High School, writing has not been seen as a process but as a final product in which teachers score pieces of writing without giving students the opportunity to reflect on their errors and correct them. Based on these composition problems the idea of developing an engaging and collaborative tool arises.

One of the principles of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for education is the collaboration, the website AQA (2014), defines collaboration as a recursive process where two or more parties (people, organizations or countries) work together towards meeting common targets. Technology has been developing very fast in the last years. It is used everywhere, from the transportation industry to the educational field. The government and city leaders are making big efforts to offer students from public schools technological devices such as laptops or tablets, but it is still questioned how these tools can be used within an educational context. One of the first drawbacks for education in Ecuador is the fact that even though students have these technological devices, training for teachers is still needed. Technology provides opportunities that education never had before. For instance, information can be shared and sent in a matter of seconds, books can be found easier and faster than before,

opportunities to find job positions are everywhere on the web and in the field of education many are the options to consider to develop well-structured curriculums to help Ecuadorian students be ready to face a technological world after graduating from their high-school.

1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

According to Ecuadorian Standards students must achieve a B1 level regarding the Common European Framework of Languages, but according to María Auxiliadora High School goals; students should achieve a B2 level in which students can produce a clear; detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options. (Council of Europe, 2001)

Under this insight, we can say that students from 1st and 2nd baccalaureate from Unidad Educativa María Auxiliadora present several specific problems in the field of writing composition, like: subject verb agreement, punctuation, capitalization, grammar and verb tenses usage. This affects the students since their writing skills don't reflect what they really want to express. This situation is evident when students have to do writing tasks during class activities, workshops, exams, quizzes and homework.

Nowadays that we are living in a technological age where teenagers spend most of their time on their cellphones, laptops, tablets or any other device. It is advisable for teachers to use ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) as a new teaching approach to motivate students in the process of learning.

According to Yunus, Lubis, & Lin, (2009), "Students can manage their own learning at their own speed and based on their own choice. This helps learners to take more responsibility for their own learning, which leads to greater autonomy and more learner – centered." When students have the autonomy of choosing their own topics to make a composition, they have an intrinsic motivation that can stimulate them to have more ideas and develop a better

piece of writing. In addition, the fact of not having someone to supervise them allows the opportunity to be their own teachers.

At María Auxiliadora High School, there is not any curriculum in which ICT is used. Even though, publishers offer digital resources such as books, or platforms. Any of them offer a portfolio in which teachers can evidence the progress and final results of students at the end of the course.

1.2 JUSTIFICATION

This research work is going to be important due to the characteristics of Writing Composition as a subject of the Language Arts. Writing composition is one of the skills in which students at María Auxiliadora High School present several difficulties which need to be taken into consideration by teachers. Taking into consideration that while students write, they make decisions, organize, contrast, compare and evaluate their own ideas and structures required for a good written communication.

The present project will be useful for teachers since they will know new strategies to instruct students with appropriate processes to develop well elaborated compositions. It will also let teachers update about the fundamentals or principles for building compositions. In addition, they will get innovative schemes to assess this subject into a more productive way.

For students, the effects of this work will be reflected in motivational practices. Students will be engaged in the process of writing since they will have the freedom to self-correct their work and also to accept suggestions from their peers rather than only from the teacher. Another advantage for the students is that they will be involved in a more attractive environment for learning, which is the Information and Communication Technologies.

Along with the era of technology it arose the need to incorporate technology with teaching strategies and methods to overcome difficulties in all the skills that

involve learning a second language and if new strategies or methodologies are not implemented to engage students overcome these difficulties, it will lead to a failure in the development of students' communicative skills.

The present project's strategy is a valuable resource for students and teachers. For the students because, the strategy may help improve their writing skills through the use of technology and collaboration of peers. For the teachers since they can implement this strategy to make their writing composition classes engaging and technology oriented.

Research Questions

- What type of writing composition problems do students from 1st and 2nd baccalaureate show?
- How can an e-portfolio differ from a traditional portfolio in writing composition?

1.3 OBJECTIVES

General Objective:

To develop student's writing composition skills in the EFL classroom through the use of technology to promote an accurate use of the target language and to enhance independence in the process of writing.

Specific Objective 1:

To establish the writing composition problems that students from María Auxiliadora High School present.

Specific Objective 2:

To design a strategy for using an e-portfolio as a technological collaborative tool for evidence of progress regarding to syntax, mechanics and semantics.

Specific Objective 3:

To design an assessment instrument for writing composition tasks.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Concept of Writing Composition

Writing Composition in Ecuador is not studied in isolation, since it is part of the English as a Foreign Language Curriculum and usually comes within the text books syllabus. In this framework, composition could be defined as:

A piece of writing about one central topic. It may consist of one or more paragraphs. If the central topic is broad and needs to be divided into several subtopics, each of these subtopics should be developed in at least one paragraph. (Huizenga, Meade, & Berro, Basic Composition for ESL, 1982)

Some authors argue that composition is more complex than just exposing ideas along paragraphs, as Berlin (1988, cited in Kroll, 1990) states, “writing is both a process and a product; it is a whole process–product skill that requires instruction, organization, and coherence for the development of cognitive skills, knowledge, experience, feelings, and purposes in order to communicate.”

2.2 Importance of Writing Composition in the EFL

Teaching effective writing skills to students may be beneficial for several reasons.

First, writing gives students more ‘thinking time’ than they get when attempt spontaneous conversation. Harmer (2012)

Writing composition is one of the productive skills that in contrast with speaking let students communicate a final message with clarity and accuracy since it must be revised several times before presenting the final piece of writing.

For instance, having a well written curriculum or resume with no grammar or spelling mistakes is essential to be considered for the position they are applying. If they are likely to choose careers as journalism or public relations good writing skills is a job requirement. And even if students do not have a writing profession, having good writing skills makes the difference.

For these reasons, even with large classes, limited time, and students with limited language proficiency, writing is critically important to be included in the EFL classroom.

One of our aims as teachers of writing is to teach our students to be self-sufficient writers. For this reason as Cheng (2007) states:

It is a need to help students to look at their own writing critically. One way to achieve this is through writing conferences, which is face to face feedback. Rather than marking the student's paper all up in red ink and handing it back to them; it is much more effective to meet individually with students and discuss the strong and weak points of their papers.

2.3 Problems of Teaching Writing Composition

When teaching writing composition, there could arise several complications. "Despite the significant role played by writing in the school curriculum, studies point out that secondary school students lack basic skills of writing." (Kemboi, Andiemba, M'mbone, 2014)

One of the main problems behind teaching Writing Composition is that students in writing classes often interact with their instructors and peers with great passivity (Cheng, 2007).

Cheng continues arguing that, "given the large writing classes, it is easy to see how teachers can become dispirited. Once the instructor is done marking essays for grammatical errors, the students may invest little time in revision, settling to find the simplest solutions to surface errors."

2.4 Types of Writing Composition for EFL

Huizenga, Meade, & Berro (1994), suggest the following classification of writing composition for EFL learners:

- **Giving Instructions:** In academic and professional situations, it is often necessary to explain clearly in writing how to do something. There are several important points to consider, such as: chronological order, keep the audience in mind, be clear, be exact, stick to the point and, be complete.
- **Objective Reporting:** It is an organized presentation of facts. Its purpose is to tell someone about something that happened. For instance, reports of accidents, fires, and political events. Some key points to observe are: to follow chronological order, be precise, objective and accurate.
- **Analyzing by Cause and Effect:** It tells causes or reasons for effects or consequences. This type of writing composition answers the question why or supplies the reason. (Reid & Lindstrom, 1985)
- **Comparing and Contrasting:** Comparing means thinking and writing about the similarities between two things or people; contrasting means thinking or writing about differences.
- **Classifying:** It is another way to organize thoughts in writing. When it is necessary to explain the relationship among a number of this, they must be classified. Things with similar characteristics are grouped together.
- **Describing a Process:** This kind of writing composition describes how to do something and it is organized in chronological order. Sometimes, technical terminology is required.

2.5 Mechanics

Mechanics indicates the conventions of spelling, punctuation, quotation, and capitalization (Dowell, 2012). On the other hand, grammar reflects the forms of words and their relationships within a sentence. For instance, if an apostrophe is used in a plural word (“Create two file’s”), it is a mistake of mechanics of writing, not grammar. (Sun Technical Publications, 2009)

Spelling: Spelling helps to see the patterns in the language, to see how words are really built. (Fox, 2012) Then, if spelling errors are made in a piece of writing; the final message might be missed and the audience will not understand what the author is intended to communicate.

Punctuation: Punctuation marks are essential when you are writing. They show the reader where sentences start and finish and if they are used properly they make the writing easy to understand. (Online Oxford Dictionary, 2016)

Quotation: A quotation is an exact reproduction of another speaker's or writer's words. (University of Illinois at Urbana - Champaign, 2013)

Capitalization: Capitalization is the writing of a word with its first letter in uppercase and the remaining letters in lowercase. Experienced writers are stingy with capitals. It is best not to use them if there is any doubt. (Straus, 2011)

2.6 Assessment for Process Writing Composition

Corder (1967) quoted in (Wu, 2014), remarks that errors are significant in the process of learning in three different ways. First, to the teacher, they show how far towards the goal the learner has progressed. Second, they provide to the researcher evidence of how the language is acquired and what strategies the learner is employing in his learning of a language. Thirdly, they are necessary to the learners themselves because errors could help them to learn. From this inside, it can be concluded that a descriptive evaluative tool to analyze and quantify errors is needed to help students succeed in the process of writing.

“A rubric is a guide for evaluating student work along certain dimensions. For each dimension there are concrete descriptors for different levels of performance. Essentially a rubric takes professional judgments about qualities of student work and aligns them with a rating scale.” (Riesbeck, 2011)

The main drawback of rubrics is the fact that teachers become judges who determine what is right and wrong without giving the students an opportunity to reflect and correct their errors. Teachers might grade and give back writing composition papers to students that will read the final score and never rewrite or correct those errors. Chart 1 illustrates how a standard rubric looks like.

Subjective Scores, difficult to apply and critical to students.

Dimensions	Focus/Organization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The piece fulfills its purpose by retelling the main idea and important details. • The piece does not include minor details or unrelated information. • The piece is written in writer’s own words. • The piece is arranged in an appropriate and clear order. 	Comments Score ____ / 35
	Elaboration/Support/Style <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The opening or closing sentence clearly states the main idea. • All of the important details that support the main idea are included. • Transition words are used effectively. 	Comments Score ____ / 35
	Grammar, Usage, and Mechanics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The writing is free of misspellings, and words are capitalized correctly. • Sentences are punctuated correctly, and the piece is free of fragments and run-ons. • Standard English usage is employed. • The paper is neat, legible, and presented in an appropriate format. 	Comments Score ____ / 30

Chart 1. Rubrics for writing assessment based on (Glencoe, 2005)

When teachers return corrected work to their students, they should ensure that the students do not immediately put it to one side, with only a cursory glance at the grade and some of the mistakes. (Harmer, 2004) To avoid this, Harmer proposes using correction symbols to encourage students to think about what the error is, so that they can correct it themselves.

Chart 2 demonstrates the process of evaluating written assignments in which the teacher is not a judge, but an assistant, examiner, audience and resource.

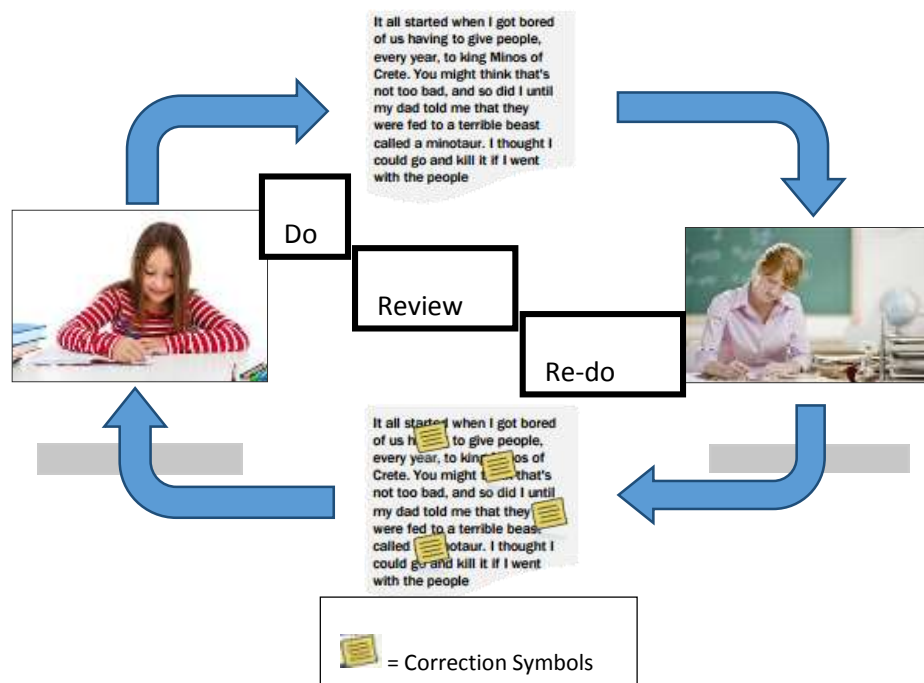


Chart 2. Process of evaluating writing assignments based on (Riesbeck, 2011)

For the purpose of this study, the following correction symbols suggested by Harmer (2004) are going to be used as parts of the strategy designed.

Symbol	Meaning	Example error
S	A spelling error	The <u>asnwer</u> is <u>obvius</u> .
WO	A mistake in word order	I <u>like very much</u> it.
G	A grammar mistake	I am going to buy some <u>fornitures</u> .
T	Wrong verb tense	I <u>have seen</u> him yesterday.
C	Concord mistake (e.g. subject and verb agreement)	People <u>is</u> angry.
λ	Something has been left out.	He told λ that he was sorry.
WW	Wrong word	I am interested <u>on</u> jazz music.

{ }	Something is not necessary.	He was not {too} strong enough.
?M	The meaning is unclear.	That is a <u>very excited photograph.</u>
P	A punctuation mistake	Do you like London.

Chart 3. Table of correction symbols, adapted from (Harmer, 2004)

3. STATE OF ART ON COMPOSITION AND ICT

3.1 Didactics of Writing Composition

When helping students to become better writers, teachers have a number of crucial tasks to perform.

According to (Harmer, 2004) the tasks which teachers have to perform before, during and after student writing are the following: demonstrating, motivating and provoking, supporting, responding and evaluating.

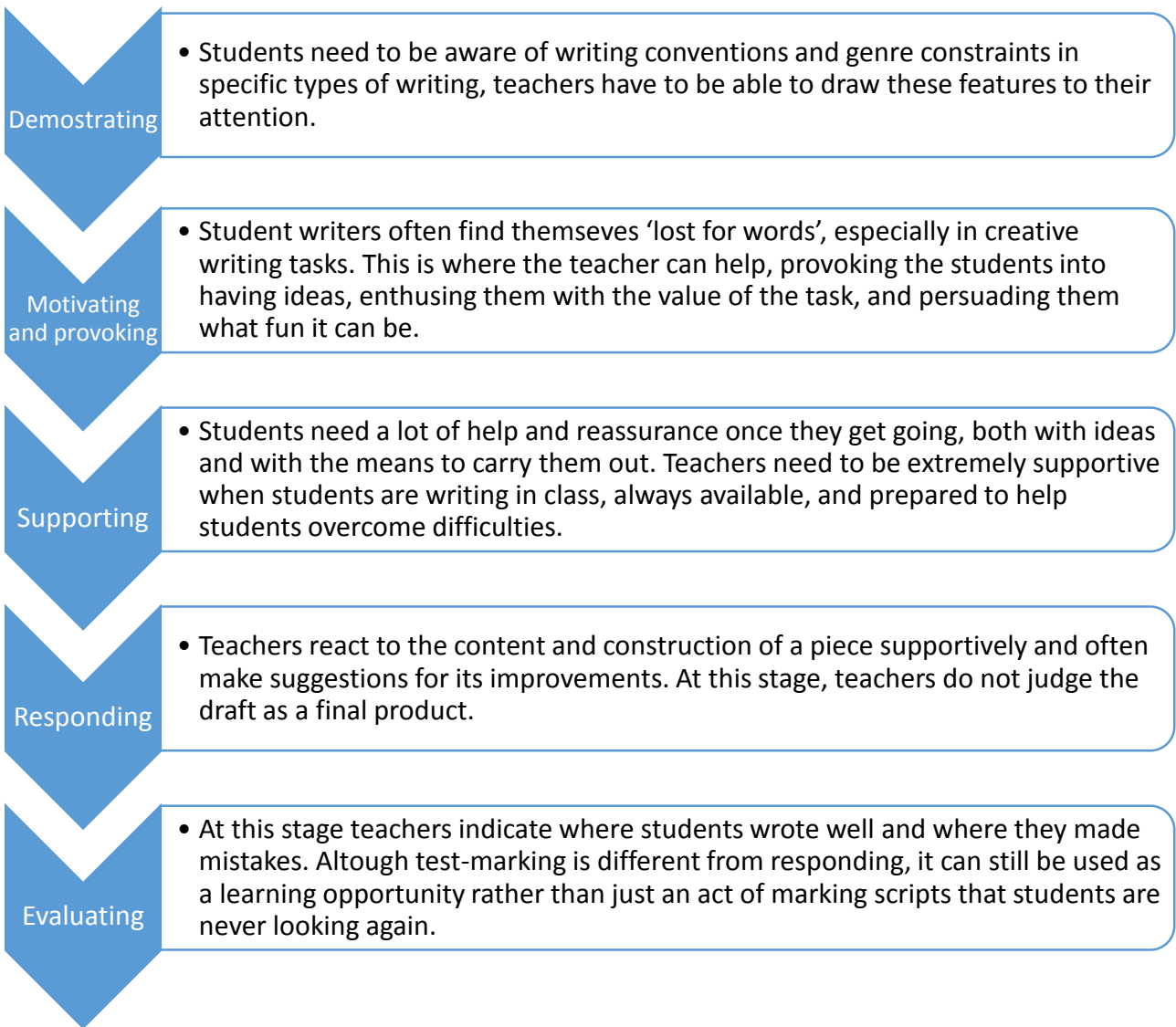


Chart 4. Tasks which teachers have to perform before, during and after student writing. Author's elaboration, adapted from Harmer (2004)

3.2 Roles of the teacher

In the process writing approach the teacher is not just a guide or model but he/she plays different roles through the stages of the writing sequence. Harmer provides a description of the different roles a teacher plays in a writing composition process.

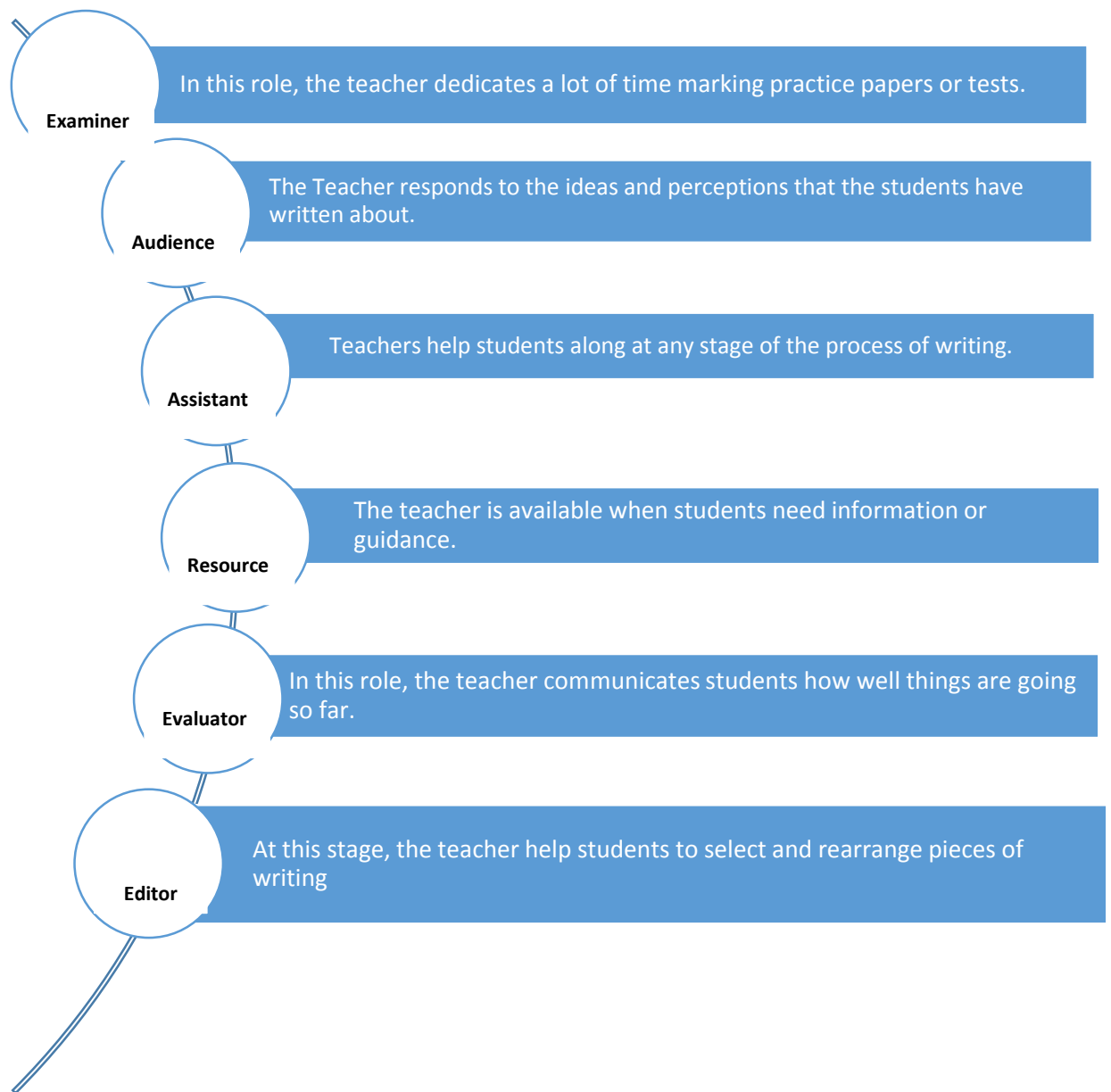


Chart 5. Roles of the writing teacher adapted from Harmer (2004)

For the purpose of the final design this approach is going to be adressed focused on peer correction which is going to be explain in the following pages.

3.3 Strategies

It is useful to keep students engaged in the process of writing. There are several strategies to accomplish with this aim. Harmer (2004), states in his book “How to Teach Writing” the following ones.

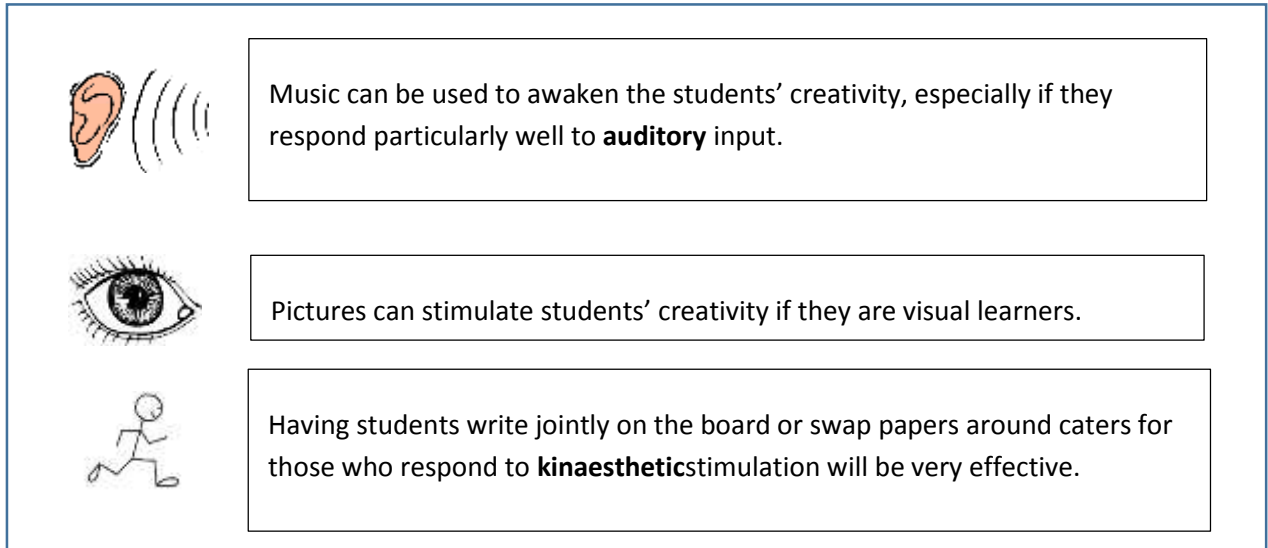


Chart 6. Writing strategies based on learners' learning style.

3.4 E- portfolio

Teachers look for resources that are appealing to students and also strategies to provoke students' learning. In this technological era where computers, laptops, cellphones and other technological devices are used by students, e- portfolios seem to be an alternative to get students involve in the process of learning writing composition skills.

Lorenzo & Ittelson, (2005) in their document “An Overview of E- portfolios” define e-portfolios as digitalized collection of artifacts including demonstrations, resources individual, group, or institution. The Glossary of Education Reform, 2016 defines a student portfolio as:

A compilation of academic work and other forms of educational evidence assembled for the purpose of (1) evaluating coursework

quality, learning progress, and academic achievement; (2) determining whether students have met learning standards or the academic requirements for courses, (3) helping students reflect on their academic goals and progress as learners and (4) creating a lasting archive of academic work products, accomplishments, and other documentation.

In this project, e-portfolios are going to be used as a collection of written assignments during certain period of time in which students peer correct their work specific number of times prior a final revision by the teacher.

(Barnstable, 2010) lists some benefits from the process of developing an e-portfolio.

- They will discover a valuable exercise in reflecting their errors and their peers' ones.
- Their self-esteem and self-confidence will be enhanced as they take control of their own learning.
- Assessment of their learning may become more student centered rather than teacher centered.
- They will receive more recognition for individual learning as his/her final product might be published on the web.

3.5 Collaborative writing

Successful collaborative writing allows students to learn from each other. It gives each member of the collaboration access to others' minds and knowledge (Harmer, 2004)

A pair or group of students working together on a piece of writing can respond to each other's ideas, making suggestions for changes, and so contributing to the success of the finished product. (Harmer, 2004)

One way of encouraging drafting, reflection, and revision is to have students involved in collaborative writing. A pair or group of students working together on a piece of writing can respond to each other's ideas(both in terms of language and content), making suggestions for changes, and so contributing to the success of the finished product. (Harmer, 2004)

3.6 Peer Review

Peer review is a valuable element in the writing process. It has the advantage of encouraging students to work collaboratively and it reduces their self- reliance in the editing process developing our students' ability to edit and revise when they are on their own (Harmer, 2004). Harmer also claims that students become their colleagues' audience and, sometimes, their evaluators.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Since teachers and students need to be involved in the process of learning, action research is the appropriate method to conduct this project. Action research can be looked at as a professional development tool since it tries to enhance the capacity of teachers as generators of professional knowledge in contrast to enhancing their ability to apply someone else's knowledge. (Burns R.B., 2000) In this context, we can say that Action Research is critically suitable for educational situations where teachers wish to make a change or improvement in their teaching techniques and additionally enlarge the knowledge on an educational topic. Kemmis, S.; Taggart, R. Mc, (1988) argue that the three defining characteristics of action research are:

- It is carried out by practitioners (classroom teachers) rather than outside researchers;
- It is collaborative; and
- It aims at changing things. For the purpose of this research work, the aim is a change of methodology.

Action research, as stated by Calhoun (2002) can change the social system in schools and other education organizations so that continual formal learning is both expected and supported" (p. 18). There is a gap, however, between what action research may provide to the classroom teacher and what technology education researchers have discovered in favor of education. Zuga (2000)

Technical action research is the strategy of inquiry that is going to be used in this study as it is a branch of action research. In this kind of strategy, the researcher plays three roles: 1) Designer: Designing a technique, 2) Helper: Using the technique to help others, 3) Researcher: Drawing lessons learned about a technique. The key to a proper methodology for (TAR) is keeping these roles separate. This premise could be verified along the research, the final product (e-portfolio) and the help provided for students and teachers of María Auxiliadora school.

For the data analysis it was considered a quantitative approach since numeric data and frequencies were used to interpret and analyze the errors in the writing composition samples from students.

4.1 Data collection

The study was focused on the analysis of the students' writing composition production. It has been taken a representative sample of 40 writing compositions homework and 40 quizzes from the second quimestre of the scholastic year 2015 - 2016 in order to help understand the nature of the problem.

It was also necessary to conduct a document review on the students' grading records, in order to evidence the writing mistakes.

4.2 Participants and Sample Size

The participants of this study are 54 students from María Auxiliadora High School from 1st and 2nd Baccalaureate studying in the scholastic year 2015 – 2016 whose ages fluctuate between 15 and 17. The sample size used is 46 students with an error margin of 5% and a confidence level of 90%.

4.3 Data Collection Procedures

To collect the data, participants were administered a writing assignment that involved paragraph writing. They were asked to write a descriptive paragraph describing touristic places of Caribbean South America. Students were asked to send this homework to the teacher by e-mail.

Their writing assignments were collected and analyzed to check various errors that were counted and classified.

4.4 Data Analysis and Interpretation

After collecting the data, the following steps of error analysis adapted from Brierley Allen & Corder (1974) were applied. First, all paragraphs were analyzed word by word and sentence by sentence. Writing symbols based on Harmer (2004) were used to classify errors. Second, the number of classified errors were counted and transformed into percentages to analyze the frequency of

occurrence. Finally, errors were quantified and statistics graphs were made to interpret the results of the research.

4.5 Results

An instrument to quantify the writing composition errors was designed to keep an objective and pragmatic vision about students' performance along the 56 pieces of composition papers.

Participants	S SPELLING	WO WrongOrder	G GRAMMAR	T TENSE	λ Sthissing	WW Wrong Word	{ } SthisnotNecessary	?M Meaning is not clear	P Punctuation	cap Capitalization
AA	1		2			1	1	1		1
AB	1		7		2			2	4	3
AC		2	6			1	2	2	5	3
AD			1				1			
AE			4			1	1	1	4	1
AF	1	3	3	1						2
AG		2	6			1			1	
AH	1	1	3						2	4
AI			2		1			1	1	
AJ			1			2	1		1	
AK	2		4	1		6				
AL	1		6		3	2	1	1	3	
AM	1		1	1	1	1	1		1	3
AN	1		3	2			3	1	2	1
AO						1				
AP			1	3		1			2	
AQ	2		4	2	1		1		3	1
AR		1	3	1	1				2	1
AS			5	1					4	1
AT			5	1			1			3
AU	1	2	7						2	
AV	1	2	4			1			1	1
AW	1			1			1		2	
AX			3						1	
AY	1		4	1			2		1	1
AZ	1		3	1			1		3	

BA	1	3	3	1						2
BB			5	3			2	1	3	1
BC	1									2
BD			2	1					2	
BE	1	2	3			1			3	1
BF			2	1						
BG	1	1	3						2	4
BH	1		4	1			2		1	1
BI		2	8						1	
BJ			2						4	
BK	1		3						4	
BL	1		1	2	1	2	1		3	1
BM		2	5				1	2	5	
BN		3	4						2	
BO	1									
BP		1	7	3	2				4	1
BQ			5	1		1			3	
BR	1	2	4						2	2
BS										
BT			2						1	1
BU		1	6	2				2	3	2
BV		1	4	2					4	
BW		1	3			1	1		1	
BX			4			3			3	2
BY	1	1	4	1				1	1	
BZ		1	3						3	
CA		1	3	1	3				1	
CB			5	1		1	1	1	3	2
Total	26	35	183	36	15	27	25	16	104	48

Chart 7. Instrument used to gather the numeric data of errors in this study.

Chart 8 illustrates the frequency of errors found in the study. From the 56 students 515 errors were found and classified under the criteria of: spelling, wrong order, grammar, tense, something has been left out, wrong word, something is not necessary, the meaning is not clear, punctuation and capitalization.

VALUE	MEANING	PERCENTAGE	FREQUENCY
S	Spelling	5%	26
WO	Wrong Order	7%	35
G	Grammar	36%	183
T	Tense	7%	36
λ	Something has been left out	3%	15
WW	Wrong word	5%	27
{ }	Something is not necessary	5%	25
M?	The meaning is not clear	3%	16
P	Punctuation	20%	104
CAP	Capitalization	9%	48
Total		100%	515

Chart 8. Table of common errors found in the study among students from MaríaAuxiliadora High school in writing composition.

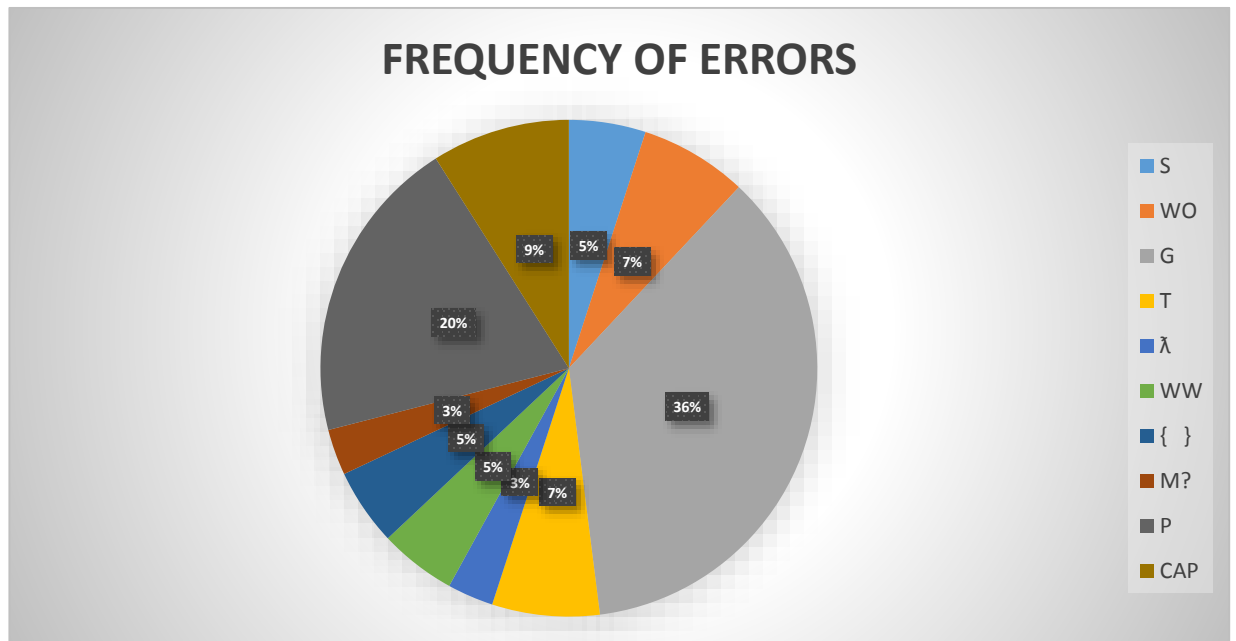


Chart 9. Pie diagram of writing composition frequency errors.

From samples of writing composition reviewed, it was found that the majority of errors were located in the grammar field. Grammar errors included: sentence structure, relative clauses, pluralization, verb omission, and fragments.

The second most common errors occurred in the punctuation field. Incorrect use of periods, semicolons and colons were obvious among the participants of this study. Capitalization errors were also a common omission.

Students demonstrated weakness in verb tenses and wrong order of words. For instance, they confuse simple past tense with present perfect or past perfect tense with present perfect tense among other errors related to tenses. They also showed a significant vulnerability in placing adjectives and nouns correctly.

Minor errors included: Spelling, word omission (not verbs), words used in an inappropriate context and the use of unnecessary sentences, phrases or words within a specific context

5. DESCRIPTION OF INTERVENTION AND ACTION PLAN

5.1 Implementation Strategy

It must be established a route for the delivery of the technological tool (e-portfolio) for students of 1st and 2nd baccalaureate of María Auxiliadora High School.

First, objectives must be established to guide the teaching strategy and to get students to know the benefits of using an e-portfolio to enhance writing skills and create a collaborative environment.

Second, design the site and e-portfolio format that the students and the teacher are going to work on.

Third, assign a writing composition type (e.g. narrative, descriptive, cause and effect, etc.) to be worked on the specific units of the scholastic year.

Fourth, establish the group distribution for the peer correction process along each unit and explain that students must work collaboratively and consistently checking each other's errors.

Fifth, an instrument for assessment is going to be designed and socialized in the classroom.

5.2 General issues to consider for the management of the e-portfolio

- Students are going to use google docs because this electronic documents verify the day to day activity (records) of the student which is an advantage for the teacher since it allows to keep track of students' autonomous performance.
- The process of building accurate writing compositions through peer correction and collaborative learning is going to be assessed by proof reading symbols and by checking the students' records on google docs. The former assessment let students peer correct themselves and the

latter helps the teacher grade the students' efforts based on scales proposed by the teacher.

- Each unit will last three weeks, time in which students must get into the assigned google document to peer correct their classmates' work. At the end of the unit the teacher is going to collect evidence checking the records and modifications done to each document to assign an individual score.

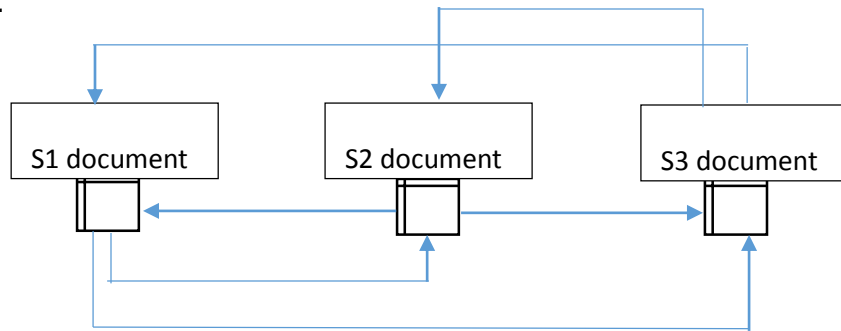


Chart 10. Peer correction process.

- If there is a student that has not been corrected, the rest will not have the maximum score. It must be kept the principle of collaboration.
- At the beginning of each unit students will be taken to the computer lab to rehearse the process of peer correction with the guidance of the teacher.

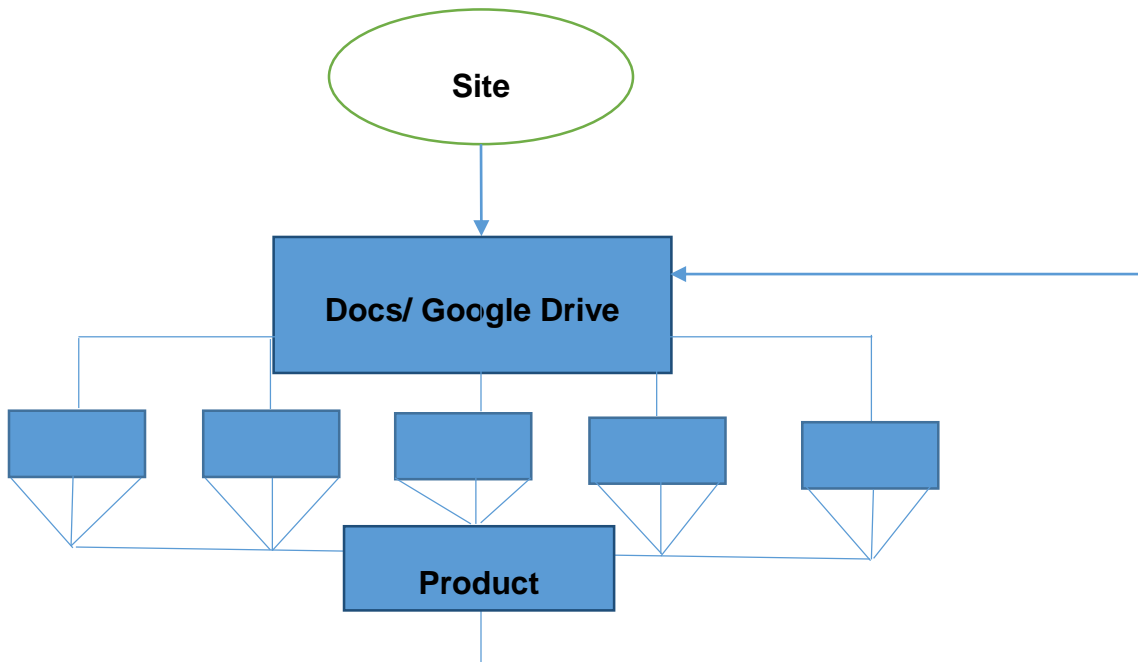


Chart 11. Descriptive diagram of the ICT's tool used for writing composition

5.3 Assessment instrument to evaluate the progress of students' e-portfolio.

As this study is based on the process approach for writing composition, rubrics are not considered as a means for evaluating students' final works. Nevertheless, there was a need for an instrument that could quantify the students' efforts in a collaborative environment.

To go in accordance with the principles of e-portfolios, process writing and collaborative learning; students will have to write a first draft which will be checked by two peers using correction symbols introduced in a paced way by the teacher in the different periods of class during each of the book units. Then, he/she will have to rewrite the composition assignment in the same electronic document (Google docs) to evidence the differences between the first and second draft.

Afterwards, students will have to correct the second draft and rewrite his/her work to create the final product. This process is repeated depending on the number of writing assignments planned by the teacher. At the end of the

scholastic year, students will have a collection of documents (e-portfolio) through which they can evidence their progress from the beginning of the school year to the end.

At the end of each unit, the teacher will give a quantitative score, based on the assessment tool proposed by the author of the present study.

The assessment tool consists in evaluating four dimensions present in each of the writing composition assignments. These are: accurate use of correction symbols, number of corrections made during the unit, drafts with corrections and the final product.

Process Writing Rubric for Writing Composition					
Composition works	Accurate use of correction symbols.	Number of corrections made	Drafts with corrections.	Final Product.	Observations
1					
2					
3					
4					
	___/2,5	___/2,5	___/2,5	___/2,5	Total= ___/10

Chart 12. Process writing rubric for writing composition

5.4 Course Unit Plan

The English Composition curriculum is designed to develop students' abilities to think, organize and express their ideas clearly and effectively in writing, and in the same line it was designed a plan adapted to the collaborative online environment. It is a writing composition course with online practice.

María Auxiliadora High School				
Unit Plan			Unit	1
1. General Information				
Teacher:	Subject:	Course:	Time Frame	
			Weeks:	Weekly Periods:
Jorge Luis Andrade Ramos	Writing Composition	1st and 2nd Baccalaureate	5	2
2. Resources				
For students:			For teachers:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Book (English Language Learner Adapted Interactive Reader by Holt McDougal) • Internet • Google docs • Computer (laboratory) / Laptop / tablet • E-portfolio 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Book, Teacher's guide • Holt McDougal Platform • Teacher's web site • Lesson Plans • Board, markers, board erasers • Realia • Visuals • Videos 	
3. Unit topic : The Paragraph: An Introduction				
4. Unit Objectives				
Unit Language Objectives			Unit Communicative Objectives	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ss. will be able to use punctuation (commas, colons, semicolons, hyphens, etc.) correctly. 2. Ss. will be able to write sentences considering subject-verb agreement. 3. Ss. will be able to differentiate topic sentences and controlling ideas. 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ss. will be able to argue about the construction of well-formed sentences regarding punctuation and subject-verb agreement • Ss. will be able to construct topic sentences and controlling ideas within a paragraph. • Ss will be able to persuade a 	

		<p>specific audience that a judgement is valid.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ss will be able to demonstrate with specific detail.
Weekly Development		
	Teacher's Activities	Students' Activities
Week 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to the subject "Writing Composition." • Introduction to the e-portfolio. • Motivation for the implementation of the new technological tool. • Analysis of the importance of punctuation in Writing Composition. • Show how to write sentences using punctuation (capital letters, periods, question marks, exclamation points, commas and colons) correctly. • Explain the use of two correction symbols: P= punctuation, C= capitalization. • The teacher monitors the process of assessment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brainstorming ideas about writing composition and its importance. • Speaking activity: Discussion about the advantages of technology in education. • Ss. will read two texts. The first one with any punctuation mark and the second one with all the punctuation needed. • Ss. will discuss in pairs the importance of punctuation and they will brainstorm sentences to present their sentences to other pairs. • Ss. will write 5 sentences following the pattern given by the teacher. • Ss. will correct each other's papers.
Assessment	<p>Students will peer correct each other's papers to get used to working collaboratively. The teacher is going to divide them into groups of three and each student will check their peers' papers using correction symbols. Finally, each student will correct two papers.</p> <p>Two points will be given to students for the complete correction process (two revisions)</p> <p>Homework: Ss. will have to create a Gmail account for academic</p>	

	purposes (not personal e-mail) if they do not have one.	
Week 2	<p>T. Will present a text with sentences that have subject-verb agreement incongruities.</p> <p>T. will explain that subjects must agree with verbs in number.</p> <p>T. Will provide examples of subject-verb agreement in sentences.</p> <p>T. will establish the collaborative groups to work on the process of peer correction in the current unit.</p> <p>T. will take students to the laboratory to explain them how to peer correct documents within established groups in google docs.</p> <p>T. will assign different documents to different groups to practice the process of peer correction and the principle of collaboration in the class using the already presented correction symbols.</p> <p>T. will monitor and provide help for any student.</p> <p>T. will demonstrate how all the corrections are saved automatically in the section of recordings in Google docs.</p>	<p>Ss. will circle the subject and underline the verbs of the text provided by the teacher.</p> <p>Ss. will identify subject-verb agreement mistakes in the given text.</p> <p>Ss. will correct individually those mistakes and compare their corrections in groups of three.</p> <p>Laboratory activity: Ss. will work collaboratively online checking the errors on punctuation and subject-verb agreement on a document given by the teacher.</p> <p>Ss. will use correction symbols in the electronic document given to get used to the process of peer correction online.</p> <p>Ss. will be able to see each other's online activity through the icons of Google docs.</p>
Assessment	<p>T. will present several topics appealing to their age and gender for students to write a five line paragraph.</p> <p>Students will peer correct each other's papers to promote collaborative learning. The teacher is going to divide them in groups of three and each student will check their peers' papers using correction symbols.</p>	

	<p>Finally, each student will correct two papers.</p> <p>Homework: Students will be assigned a writing composition exercise in Google docs in which they will have to write a five line paragraph about his favorite artist, singer or character of a movie.</p>	
Week 3	<p>Laboratory activity: T. will give 15 minutes to students, so they can peer correct the homework of two classmates.</p> <p>T. will monitor the laboratory activity while students are working individually.</p> <p>T. will project five sentences of a paragraph in isolation and elicit information about topic sentences and controlling ideas.</p> <p>T. will provide examples of topic sentences and controlling ideas to clarify or reinforce content learned.</p>	<p>Laboratory activity: Ss. will peer correct the two pieces of homework of their peers.</p> <p>Class Activity: Students will find the most important sentence of a group of five sentences that belongs to a paragraph and infer which statement is the topic sentence.</p> <p>Ss. will brainstorm topic sentences and write five controlling ideas for each topic sentence.</p>
Assessment	<p>Ss. will be assigned a google doc. to write about an appealing topic for them.</p> <p>Homework: Ss. will use the correction symbols learned in the unit to peer correct the two other classmates of their collaborative group.</p>	
Methodological Strategies		Assessment Tools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communicative Approach of Language Teaching. - Information and Communications Technology 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students' e-portfolio - Process writing rubric for writing composition suggested by the author.
Observations:		
Date:		

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

After researching and designing a strategy to improve writing composition skills, the following conclusions are drawn:

- More than the half of students from 1st and 2nd baccalaureate present several errors in the writing composition field.
- Students may need an updated and technology oriented methodology appealing to their age and interest that could help them improve their writing composition skills.
- This proposal on composition may spark teachers' interests to research more about alternatives to use Information and Communication technologies (ICTS) in the EFL classroom.
- There should be a moment for all the school community to learn about the topic and the outcomes after the implementation.
- There is going to be a final report with a description on detail for authorities of the school for implementation purposes.
- Students could learn more when the teacher values the process more than the final product.
- Students could be more willing to participate when they work in a collaborative environment (peer correction).
- The role of the teacher should change from being the controller of the class to be the audience, examiner and assistant.
- The use of correction symbols might help students to become an international student since that is the common strategy used among universities in the academic writing field.

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ANNEXES

Annex 1

Letter to the principal of the school



Guayaquil, 11 de Noviembre del 2015.

Muy estimada Sor Lucía Maldonado,

Rectora – Directora de la Unidad Educativa María Auxiliadora de Guayaquil

Me pongo en contacto con usted para comunicarle mi interés en realizar una investigación en el marco de mi tesis para la obtención de mi título de Licenciatura en Lengua Inglesa con Mención en Gestión Educativa en la Universidad Católica de Santiago de Guayaquil. La investigación es tendiente a observar como los estudiantes de primero y segundo Bachillerato General Unificado se comportarían utilizando las TICS (Tecnologías para la Información y Comunicación) como herramienta para desarrollar habilidades de composición en Inglés como Lengua Extranjera.

Debido a que se trata de una investigación-acción los resultados redundarán en beneficios de la institución educativa. Pudiendo servir como un plan piloto en TICS para futuros cursos.

Por todo ello, solicito su autorización para desarrollar este estudio y me gustaría contar con su colaboración, así como la del resto de la comunidad educativa, para el desarrollo de esta investigación, en lo que pudiese resultar necesario.

Sin otro particular, me despido.

Jorge Luis Andrade Ramos

Annex 2

Writing Composition Sample from one of the participants

Hi Cassie!!

How are you? I hope you are fine! I'm writing you this letter because the last day you talked me a lot about your country and your culture, well, now im going to talk you about mine country.

Where can i start? oh!! the people. Here the people is very kind and nice, they are always trying to help you when you need it! We are like a huge family and our accent is so funny! When I speak in english I sound like Sofia Vergara, is hilarious!

Then, the food. The colombian food is so delicious, my favourite one is the AREPA DE HUEVO! Is amazing! when you come here, you will get in love with it! I promise! Also we are one of the country that exports the banana and the coffee. If you like Starbucks... you will love our coffee.

Now let's talk about touristic places! we have so many! We have museums, waterfall, forest, and one of the most beautiful cities in latin america. Bogota and Cali!! Here you will get in love with the lights and with the nature. Colombia is also one of the capitals of fashion in Latin America, you can find jackets and boots of leather! and they are incredibly beautiful.

And in the end, our culture. My culture. How i said before, we are very friendly and kind. The colombian people is hard worker, we love futbol! (in your country soccer) The futbol is like our religion! And also, most of the colombia are catholics, here you don't see jewish and muslims. but how I said, we are a huge family!

I really want to see you soon! it was so funny talk you about my country and learnt about yours!

Love, XXXXX

Annex 3


Web Site

English Language Teaching JLAR Search this site

Mr. Andrade's Classroom

- [Home](#)
- [Homework Assignments](#)
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- [Contact Me](#)

Meet Your Teacher




[Click here](#) to read about Mr. Jorge Luis Andrade R.

More Stuff

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About Me




Personal:
Jorge L. Andrade R. enjoys spending time with her wife, family and friends. He also enjoys reading, movies, martial arts and soccer.

Education and Experience:
I have been involved in education since 2010 and have worked as an EFL teacher, Content Area Instructor (Social Studies, History, Science and Literature) and teacher trainer.

I now work as a Social Studies and Literature teacher at Maria Auxiliadora Highschool and as an EFL teacher at Illingworth Global Language Institute.

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Yo, Jorge Luis Andrade Ramos, con C.C: # 0930263728 autor del trabajo de titulación: "Poor writing skills in 1st and 2nd baccalaureate of María Auxiliadora High School and the e-portfolio to improve writing skills" previo a la obtención del título de **LICENCIADO EN LENGUA INGLESA CON MENCIÓN EN GESTIÓN EDUCATIVA BILINGÜE** en la Universidad Católica de Santiago de Guayaquil.

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C.C: 0930263728



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TÍTULO Y SUBTÍTULO:	Poor writing skills in 1st and 2nd baccalaureate of María Auxiliadora High School and the e-portfolio to improve writing skills		
AUTOR (apellidos/nombres):	Andrade Ramos Jorge Luis		
REVISOR(ES)/TUTOR(ES) (apellidos/nombres):	Vásquez Barros Mariela Fátima		
INSTITUCIÓN:	Universidad Católica de Santiago de Guayaquil		
FACULTAD:	Facultad de Artes y Humanidades		
CARRERA:	Lengua Inglesa		
TÍTULO OBTENIDO:	Licenciado en Lengua Inglesa con Gestión en Educación Bilingüe		
FECHA DE PUBLICACIÓN:	16 de Febrero del 2016	No. DE PÁGINAS:	39
ÁREAS TEMÁTICAS:	Propuesta Metodológica		
PALABRAS CLAVES/ KEYWORDS:	E-portfolio, methodology, ICT, writing composition, peer correction, collaborative learning.		

RESUMEN/ABSTRACT (150-250 palabras):

This research study aims to analyze and offer a solution in a problematic area of English as a Foreign Language, which is writing composition. This project has as an objective the development of a technological tool (e-portfolio) to make students improve their writing skills through the proposal of a technological and collaborative methodology.

An action research methodology was used to conduct this study since its process matched with the features of the present work. The participants of this study were students from María Auxiliadora high school from 1st and 2nd baccalaureate. To demonstrate the deficit of writing skills that the participants had, 56 writing sample papers were collected and analyzed by the researcher. This data was classified and quantified to show the different types of errors that the participants presented. In addition, statistics graphs were used to show the frequency of each of the errors found. The study revealed that the most common errors were related to grammar and punctuation.

Based on the need to improve students' writing skills, the e-portfolio arises as a solution to make students get better at writing. The proposed strategy consists on grouping students to work collaboratively under the basis of a process writing methodology aided with peer correction on each other's documents (google docs). The documents are going to be developed by students individually. After students have written their first draft, they have to peer correct the two other documents of their peers using correction symbols proposed by the teacher at the beginning of the scholastic year. In this study, it is also established the role of the teacher as an audience, monitor, resource, evaluator, editor and examiner. In the methodology it is also considered a plan to assess students' online performance.

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