



4th International Scientific Convention UCLV 2023
Central University "Marta Abreu" of Las Villas
**"WRITING RESEARCH PROJECTS: ENGLISH LANGUAGE STUDENTS'
PERCEPTION"**

**6th INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF HUMANISTIC
STUDIES (CIESHUM 2023)**

**WRITING RESEARCH PROJECTS: ENGLISH LANGUAGE
STUDENTS' PERCEPTION**

**LA REDACCIÓN DE PROYECTOS DE INVESTIGACIÓN:
PERCEPCIÓN DE LOS ESTUDIANTES DE LENGUA INGLESA**

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Abstract:

- **Problem to deal with:** In academic contexts, writing has remained a great challenge for academic writers, especially students. Precisely, second-year students of the English Language with a Second Foreign Language Degree Course at Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de Las Villas (UCLV) should submit a research project as the final evaluation for the subject Metodología de la Investigación. Since this research project will serve as the basis for writing term papers and diploma papers students should submit in the subsequent academic years, it is crucial for them to design it and write it properly. However, some difficulties have been observed concerning the organization of ideas of research projects and the use of some writing conventions.
- **Aims:** To explore English Language students' perceptions about designing and writing research projects in the aforementioned degree course



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- **Methodology:** Considering the scenario and the researchers’ interests, the authors held to a mixed-method approach. The sample included nineteen students of the previously mentioned degree course who were provided with a questionnaire containing questions about both academic writing skills and language skills.
- **Results and Discussion:** The results of the questionnaire indicated that the students acknowledged that they have strengths and weaknesses when designing and writing their research projects.
- **Conclusions:** The overall results could be taken as a guideline for designing some preparatory exercises to improve the academic writing skills of students majoring in English Language with A Second Foreign Language at UCLV, particularly their skills to design and write research projects.

Resumen:

- **Problemática:** En contextos académicos, la redacción ha seguido siendo un gran reto para quienes escriben textos académicos, especialmente para los estudiantes. Precisamente, los estudiantes de segundo año de la Licenciatura en Lengua Inglesa con Segunda Lengua Extranjera de la Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de Las Villas (UCLV) deben presentar un proyecto de investigación como evaluación final de la asignatura Metodología de la Investigación. Dado que este proyecto de investigación servirá de base para la redacción de los trabajos de curso y de diploma que los estudiantes deberán presentar en los cursos académicos posteriores, es crucial que los diseñen y redacten adecuadamente. Sin embargo, se han observado algunas dificultades en la organización de las ideas de los proyectos de investigación y en el uso de algunas convenciones de la escritura.
- **Objetivo(s):** Explorar las percepciones de los estudiantes de Lengua Inglesa sobre el diseño y la redacción de proyectos de investigación en la citada carrera.
- **Metodología:** Considerando el escenario y los intereses de los investigadores, los autores emplearon un enfoque mixto. La muestra incluyó diecinueve estudiantes de la carrera antes mencionada, a quienes se les entregó un



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cuestionario con preguntas sobre habilidades de escritura académica y habilidades lingüísticas

- **Resultados y discusión:** Los resultados del cuestionario indicaron que los estudiantes reconocieron que poseen fortalezas y debilidades a la hora de diseñar y redactar sus proyectos de investigación.
- **Conclusiones:** Los resultados globales podrían tomarse como guía para diseñar algunos ejercicios preparatorios para mejorar las habilidades de escritura académica de los estudiantes de la especialidad de Lengua Inglesa con Segunda Lengua Extranjera de la UCLV, en particular sus habilidades para diseñar y redactar proyectos de investigación.

Keywords: Writing; Academic writing; Research project

Palabras Clave: Escritura; Escritura académica; Proyecto de investigación

1. Introduction

Writing has been referred to as a conventional system of marks or signs representing the expressions of a language. According to the online Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2020), writing is a medium of communication that involves representing language and emotion through written signs and symbols. This definition emphasizes the importance of the written word in communication as well as the role of writing in conveying ideas and emotions.

Alfaki (2015) sees writing as a cognitive process which tests memory, thinking ability and verbal command for expressing ideas successfully, because writing a text proficiently is an indication of successful foreign language learning. In turn, Dar & Khan (2015) believe that learning how to write has gained significant importance because of its use as a tool for effective communication of ideas, particularly in research work.

According to Tribble (1996), developing writing skills is essential for individuals to effectively organize their thoughts and ideas and to express them in a clear and compelling manner. This ability is crucial not only for everyday communication but also for presenting and defending arguments in academic and professional contexts. Therefore, writing involves basic knowledge of grammar, lexis and vocabulary, as well



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as the skill to express ideas in an appropriate English language unaffected by the mother tongue (Tribble, 1996).

With respect to academic writing, some people think that it is just about stating facts, especially in the sciences. However, it is more of a conversation between the writer and the reader. In this interaction, readers anticipate what the writer will say, ask questions, and evaluate the writing's usefulness and importance to their own research (Hyland, 1994).

Concerning the nature of academic writing, Hartley (2008) claims that "academic writing is unnecessarily complicated, pompous, technical, authoritative, humorless, and elitist and excludes outsiders (p.14)." Moreover, the language of academic texts is also the language of rhetoric and persuasion (Afful, 2016).

Since academic writing deals with the fundamental theories and causes which determine processes and practices in everyday life, it has its own set of features. These include complexity, formality, precision, objectivity, explicitness, accuracy, responsibility, planning, and hedging (Education U.I, 2017).

Precisely, research projects are an important part of academic writing that involve systematic inquiry, investigation, and analysis of a problem using scientific methods (Booth, Colomb, and Williams 2016). It is an extended scholarly endeavor that involves collecting and analyzing data to provide new knowledge or insights to a particular field or discipline (Creswell, 2018).

The research project is characterized by its methodological rigor, empirical inquiry, and logical progression. It requires a clear and well-defined research question, a review of relevant literature, a methodology for data collection and analysis, and a clear presentation of the findings and conclusions (Walliman, 2017). The research project is an essential tool for advancing knowledge and understanding in various disciplines, including social sciences, humanities, and natural sciences (Swales and Feak 2012).

The research project has specific conventions and requirements that differentiate it from other types of writing (Booth, Colomb, and Williams 2016). It is typically written in a formal style, using specialized terminology and citation conventions that reflect the



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particular discipline or field. The research project also has a clear structure and it adheres to strict ethical guidelines (Creswell 2018).

Second-year students of the English Language with A Second Foreign Language Degree Course at Universidad Central “Marta Abreu” de Las Villas (UCLV) are required to submit a research project as the final evaluation of the subject Metodología de la Investigación. They should demonstrate they have acquired the necessary skills to conduct a research work on a given topic. This project will serve as the basis for writing both term papers and diploma papers students should submit in the subsequent academic years. Thus, this project is crucial for students to be successful when submitting them for evaluation. However, some difficulties have been observed concerning the organization of ideas of research projects and the use of some writing conventions.

In the present paper, the authors report a study conducted with a group of students of the degree course mentioned above. Its purpose was to explore students’ perceptions about designing and writing research projects.

2. Methodology

The authors of the present study adopted a mixed-method approach, as it focused on collecting, studying, and processing quantitative and qualitative data, which provides a more accurate understanding of the situation and the research problem (Creswell, 2018).

In the research herein reported some methods were applied:

Theoretical methods: historical and logical, analysis and synthesis, inductive and deductive, structural and systemic. These methods allowed for the systematization of the main concepts associated with the topic of research and their relationships.

Empirical methods: questionnaire and participant observation. One questionnaire was given to students in order to determine their perceptions about the design and the writing of a research project. The participant observation allowed for a closer insight into students’ practices regarding research projects.

Statistical and mathematical methods: percentage analysis for processing the data obtained from the questionnaire.



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The sample comprised nineteen students of the academic year 2022: 12 from third year and 7 from fifth year. To choose the sample, the authors took into consideration the academic level of students and their willingness to collaborate with the research.

3. Results and Discussion

In order to conduct the research, the authors of this paper designed a questionnaire which was provided to a sample of nineteen students. Its purpose was to determine their perceptions about the design and the writing of a research project. The questionnaire was applied by means of Google Forms, a web-based survey and form creation tool provided by Google, because it offers the tools for getting fast and reliable insights from real people across the web, allowing to take more informed decisions.

The questionnaire comprised two dimensions with corresponding descriptors: 1) Academic writing skills and 2) Language skills. The first dimension is concerned with those skills associated with the actual design and elaboration of a research work, whereas the other dimension is related with the style and mechanics of writing.

In the questionnaire, students had to indicate the level of difficulty of the skills in both dimensions on a scale from 1 to 5, being 1 the easiest and 5 the most difficult. The results of the questionnaire are summarized in the table below.

Table 1.

Results of the questionnaire

Dimensions		Very easy				Very difficult
No.	Academic Writing Skills	1	2	3	4	5
1	Searching for appropriate literature/bibliography using databases and other resources	----	26.3%	42.1 %	15.8 %	15.8 %
2	Writing references to other published studies (citations/in-text citations)	----	5.3 %	57.9 %	26.3%	10.5%
3	Revising and evaluating previous research or studies related with topic of research and formulating a research problem/gap	----	26.3 %	31.6 %	31.6%	10.5%
4	Establishing overall aim/objective and specific objectives of research project	5.3 %	47.4 %	31.6 %	15.8%	----
5	Determining methodology and research methods	5.3%	26.3%	36.8 %	26.3%	5.3%
6	Choosing population and sample of research	31.6 %	15.8%	36.8 %	-----	10.5%
7	Writing references/bibliography using appropriate citation method	5.3%	15.8%	36.8 %	21.1%	21.1%
8	Please specify other academic writing skills and mark the difficulty, if any: _____	----	----	----	----	----



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No.	Language Skills	1	2	3	4	5
1	Understanding the specific language features of a research project as an academic genre	5.3%	36.8%	36.8%	15.8%	5.3%
2	Summarizing/paraphrasing information from different sources	10.5%	31.6%	31.6%	15.8%	10.5%
3	Using appropriate phrases (e.g., on the basis of, it should be noted that) freely to build up sentences and paragraphs	21.1%	36.8%	26.3%	10.5%	5.3%
4	Writing coherent paragraphs (coherence)	21.1%	42.1%	15.8%	10.5%	21.1%
5	Linking sentences smoothly (cohesion)	36.8%	42.1%	----	----	10.5%
6	Using proper academic language and vocabulary (style)	26.3%	31.6%	21.1%	----	15.8%
7	Using appropriate grammar (e.g., correct tenses, agreements, reporting verbs, and prepositions)	36.8%	15.8%	26.3%	----	15.8%
8	Please specify other language skills and mark the difficulty, if any: _____	----	----	---	----	----

Source: Own elaboration.

Based on the findings with respect to the academic writing skills as can be seen from the table above, it can be inferred that six items were considered relatively difficult by a significant number of students:

- Searching for appropriate literature/bibliography using databases and other resources (42.1%)
- Writing references to other published studies (citations/in-text citations) (57.9 %)
- Revising and evaluating previous research or studies related with topic of research and formulating a research problem/gap (31.6 %)
- Determining methodology and research methods (36.8 %)
- Choosing population and sample of research (36.8 %)
- Writing references/bibliography using appropriate citation method (36.8 %)

As for the language skills, results seem to be more favorable because only two of the items exhibited a relatively high level of difficulty:

- Understanding the specific language features of a research project as an academic genre (36.8 %)
- Summarizing/paraphrasing information from different sources (31.6 %)

Unfortunately, students did not add any other item to the list in both dimensions.

4. Conclusions



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In this paper, the authors reported a study conducted at the Universidad Central “Marta Abreu” of Las Villas (UCLV) with students of the degree course English Language with A Second Foreign Language. It was aimed at exploring students’ perceptions about designing and writing research projects in the aforementioned degree course. A mixed-method approach was held and the sample comprised nineteen students of academic year 2022. Despite the sample was relatively small, results of the research may shed light on the necessity to create awareness among professors and students by providing some insights in relation to two dimensions for the design and writing of research projects. In general, the findings of the study herein reported can be a great help to professors in specifying the problematic areas for students when they design and write their research projects. This way professors may undertake further actions so that students can improve their skills when designing and writing research projects.

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