

# Content-based Instruction Strategies to Improve English Major Students' L2 Writing Skills Command

Marcia Mantilla  
Christian Andrade

Universidad Técnica del Norte  
mlmantilla@utn.edu.ec

## ABSTRACT

---

English major students must deal with the assimilation of subject contents while developing foreign language skills. This might be particularly challenging for all the actors involved, considering the future foreign language teachers' L2 command, especially regarding productive skills and, more specifically, their ability to express themselves through writing. The purpose of this study is to establish the effect of Content-Based Instruction on learners' writing skills development. This qualitative-quantitative research was carried out during the semester October 2018-February 2019, with twenty-seven English Major students, at Universidad Técnica del Norte, Facultad de Educación, Ciencia y Tecnología. Surveys were administered and tests were taken by twenty-seven students. The data collected were processed and, based on the results obtained, the effects of the application of Content-Based Instruction on the improvement of students' writing skills were analysed.

**Keywords:** CONTENT BASED INSTRUCTION, FOREIGN LANGUAGE, WRITING SKILLS

## RESUMEN

---

### **Estrategias de enseñanza basada en contenido para mejorar la habilidad de la escritura en L2 de los estudiantes de la Carrera de Pedagogía de los Idiomas**

Los estudiantes de la Carrera de Inglés deben lidiar con la asimilación de los contenidos de la asignatura mientras desarrollan habilidades en el idioma extranjero. Esto puede ser particularmente desafiante para todos los actores involucrados, considerando el dominio de la L2 de los futuros profesores de lenguas extranjeras, especialmente en lo que respecta a las habilidades productivas y, más específicamente, su capacidad para expresarse a través de la escritura. El propósito de este estudio es establecer el efecto de la instrucción basada en contenido en el desarrollo de las habilidades de escritura de los alumnos. Esta investigación cualitativo-cuantitativa se llevó a cabo durante el semestre octubre 2018 - febrero 2019, con estudiantes de cuarto nivel de la Carrera de inglés, en la Universidad Técnica del Norte, Facultad de Educación, Ciencia y Tecnología. Se administraron encuestas y se tomaron pruebas a veintisiete estudiantes. Los datos recolectados fueron procesados y, en base a los resultados obtenidos, se analizaron los efectos de la aplicación de la Instrucción Basada en Contenidos

**Palabras clave:** INSTRUCCIÓN BASADA EN CONTENIDO, IDIOMA EXTRANJERO, HABILIDADES DE ESCRITURA.

## Introducción

There are different and varied approaches teachers use to enhance students' learning opportunities in the foreign language classroom. They should be coherent with learners' actual foreign language command, as well as with official regulations, institutional rules, and international standards. This is particularly relevant in academic settings where future English teachers are being trained and, consequently, they are not only dealing with the development of L2 skills, but also with the assimilation of contents. Semester after semester, thousands of students enter the Ecuadorian University system. Many of them are not able to use English fluently (Heredia, 2017). Candidates for the foreign language teaching profession are no exception.

In previous times, university students were required to take foreign language courses, as part of their academic preparation, with no CEFR standard specified. Current Ecuadorian regulations, however, state that the foreign language level pregraduate students must develop upon the completion of their studies is B2 (CES, 2016). Every semester, though, placement tests results show that most students who are about to start a university career at our University, have developed a linguistic

command below CEFR B1 level, and that the lowest achievement scores correspond to productive skills, particularly writing. Among those students, some are admitted to the English Major, with no additional foreign language training required.

Currently, an updated curricular design for the foreign languages teaching career is being implemented, so it is indispensable to find ways to ensure learning outcome attainment in order to enable our undergraduates not only to communicate in the foreign language, but also to deal with content-based instruction successfully.

Through this study, we aim to provide English Major students with more efficient academic tools for the development of foreign language skills through Content Based Instruction (CBI) strategies. In order to do so, strategies will be designed and be applied in two specific subjects of the career fourth level. Later, we will assess the efficiency of the CBI strategies applied on the learners' writing skill development.

## Review of literature

Content-Based Instruction is an approach to second language learning in which teaching is organized around the content of information that students will acquire, rather than around a linguistic

type of syllabus (Richards, 2008). Lightbown (2014) defines Content-Based instruction (CBI) as an approach to teaching academic subjects in a language that students are still learning. Dueñas (2004) suggests that optimal conditions for learning a foreign language occur when both, target language and meaningful content are integrated in the classroom. In Content-Based teaching, learners deal with diverse topics rather than language form, which they can become aware of in an implicit way.

Although less than three decades ago Content-Based Instruction was used especially in primary and high school settings, it has become a widespread approach in university-level foreign language instruction (Grabe and Stoller, 2011). Furthermore, Brown (2007, p. 49) argues that in CBI, “language takes its appropriate role as a vehicle for accomplishing a set of content goals”.

Content-Based Instruction is a useful way to enhance language learner’s motivation by encouraging them to acquire a new language through actually using it, from initial to independent user stages (Stryker and Leaver, 1997). Students tend to be significantly more motivated when authentic materials, content, and contexts are used. This contrasts with traditional instructional methods and materials such as textbooks, rote memorization, and grammar rule drills (British Council, 2018). CBI focuses on what is being taught rather than on the target language itself, which implies learners are being exposed to L2 in a more dynamic and engaging way.

The active nature of Content-Based Instruction allows students to develop critical thinking and life skills that may then be used in countless ways outside of the language instruction environment. It also provides students with the opportunity to think actively by engaging in rich materials that are genuinely connected to the real world. (Tahsildar et al., 2018).

According to Stoller (2008), Content-based instruction is a powerful tool

to innovate foreign language teaching across an ample range of instructional contexts. This makes it possible to apply CBI strategies regardless of the age or level of instruction of the learners involved. This means that CBI supports, in a natural way, the application of methods oriented towards cooperation among learners, low-anxiety environments and diverse types of project-based activities in the L2 classroom.

### Writing in the mother tongue (L1)

Mother tongue or (L1) is the language that is acquired naturally, through interaction with the immediate environment, using minimal pedagogical intervention and scarce, or sometimes nonconscious, linguistic reflection. Mother tongue proficiency level is essential for all subsequent learning experiences because it is essential for the development of thought and knowledge acquisition. A low L1 skills level, in general, makes it difficult to learn second languages. Therefore, the mother tongue has a primordial role in the second language learning-teaching process. (Mota, 2006).

In Ecuadorian education, there is a crisis in terms of efficient learning of the mother tongue writing skills, an issue that begins in elementary school, continues in secondary school and is reflected at university level. Commonly, the Spanish and literature classes are characterized by being monotonous, not creative and passive, which triggers a negative attitude towards the subject. In Ecuador, students are finishing high school with a very low linguistic-communicative competitiveness even in their mother tongue (Aguirre, 2017).

According to Chávez (2017), writing is still just used to reply literal questions that are explicitly answered in the textbook of study, or to comply with the order “look for information about ...”. When in fact what is required is the critical analysis of the information, most of the students surf on the internet using key words and

only copy and paste, many times without even reading the information, the first task required to complete the task. In other words, L1 writing production is constructed around a sterile practice, which confuses writing with copying or transcribing. The creativity of the student is restricted by denying him the opportunity to experience writing as a tool of free expression, which develops critical thinking and allows to build and share knowledge. For writing consists of expressing our thoughts in written form, and thought is that process of search or realization of connections and disjunctions (Lipman, 1998; Chávez, 2017).

### **Writing in second language L2**

Concerning writing skills development, the problem in the mother tongue has a significant impact on the learning of a foreign language. As Durgunoglu & Goldenberg (2010) pointed out, writing production knowledge and skills in the mother tongue, whether deficient or not, are transferred to writing in a foreign language. This statement corresponds to the hypothesis of linguistic interdependence proposed by Jim Cummins in 1979 reviewed by Jiménez and O'Shanahan, (2010), which predicts that children who have problems in the L1 acquisition will also present difficulties when learning a second language.

Assuming that writing skills are transferred from one language to another, it is possible to affirm that the inefficient performance of the Ecuadorian high school graduates, in terms of the written production in their L1, will be reflected at the time of writing in the foreign language, in this case English. This would partly support the fact that the teaching and learning of foreign languages in our country has not attained the expected results, since the young graduates from high school do not manage to improve the basic skills in receptive and productive language abilities. Evidence of this problem

is found in results of studies as the one conducted by the international company specialized in teaching Languages Education First in its eight-edition entitled EF English Proficiency Index. In this study it was announced that Ecuador was ranked 65 out of 88 globally and 13 out of 15 among Latin America countries with a score of 48.52 out of 100 (Education First, 2015). Given the described scenario, it is vital to promote activities that create an adequate context to address learners' formative and academic needs, which boost not only the language communicative skills, but also general cognitive skills.

The development of writing in a foreign language is a continuous process, which requires the application of a series of strategies and activities based on theoretical contributions that point towards the appropriation of writing as a tool for expressing ideas, building knowledge and the expansion of culture. That is, it should not be limited to dealing with vocabulary and isolated grammatical structures, but also to develop cognitive skills while understanding the language as a tool and not as an end. One of the approaches that meet these requirements is Content Based Instruction. (Arismendi, et al., 2008).

### **Previous studies**

According to Arslan and Saka (2010), who conducted a research at a Turkish university, with students from different majors, argued that Content-Based Instruction proved to increase motivation related to the foreign language acquisition process. Students needed to develop skills such as understanding lectures presented in English, writing assignments and projects related to their field of study, and understanding the detailed information in texts in L2. After the introduction of Content-Based Instruction through thematic units related to their own field of study, students reported improvement of their academic language skills.

In a 2011 research carried out at the

Colombian Universidad del Norte, with Medical English Program students, it has been reported that the participants learned language and content through CBI because the information was meaningful, interesting, and met their present and future needs (Corrales and Maloof, 2011). In this study, students related that they found the material meaningful because it met their present and future needs. Students commented that studying medical topics and vocabulary in English helped them in their other classes where they had to read articles and books in English.

As Spenader, A., Wesley, P. and Glynn C. (2018) studied 36 unit plans developed for a graduate-level course on Content-Based Instruction in one North American institution. They intended to identify and describe teachers' understanding of this methodological approach. In some cases, teachers connected the language and content objectives with more than one academic content area, offering learners a more multidisciplinary scenario. They found that focusing on multiple content areas provided a more complete view of the topic and allowed students to analyse the topic from multiple perspectives. Similarly, we intend to improve our learners' writing skills by implementing Content-Based Instruction class activities in research and psychology related topics.

Al Amrani (2019) developed a research to assess the impact of Content-Based Instruction (CBI) on developing comprehension and vocabulary in a course of English for Specific Purposes at an engineering school in Morocco where English is learnt as a Foreign Language. Forty students participated. They were taught a fifteen-hour course of legal English over a period of six weeks, twice a week. It was found that Content-Based Instruction strategies helped participants improve their comprehension and vocabulary skills in their specific area of knowledge. The researcher concluded that the content aspect of the language should be considered as important as the language

aspect. Besides, relevant content was interesting to learners and enhanced their motivation.

## Methodology

This project was developed through a qualitative - quantitative research type, using inductive-deductive methods, in order to find out if fourth level English Major students' writing skills might be improved by the application of Content Based Instruction strategies. Observation, surveys and interviews were used in order to collect all the required data. Five teachers with at least ten years' experience and twenty-seven students from the fourth semester of the English Major were actively involved in this research process. These students have been exposed to the foreign language for at least two years in higher education. So far, they are getting familiar with and showing progress corresponding to B1 Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) standard.

A diagnose exam was administered to identify the students' actual writing skill command. Students were given a real B1 Cambridge practice exam, which is divided into three different parts: Reading and writing, Listening and Speaking. The B1 exam attempts to assess learners' L2 command at intermediate level. Then, based on the exam results, the research team designed and applied strategies based on the syllabus contents of Psychology for language teachers and Research in TEFL, which are two of the subjects studied at this level of the career. Students were working on these activities for four hours a week along the whole semester.

Interviews were conducted to identify teachers' main concerns dealing with students' writing difficulties, and to determine the strategies they have already applied to deal with them. On the other hand, students were given a questionnaire in order to identify their perception of the relevance and usefulness of the writing tasks used by teachers in the class.

At the end of the semester, students took a post-test with the same B1 standard difficulty level, in order to find out the effect of CBI strategies on their writing skill command. As the objective of this research project was to improve students' skills through the afore mentioned method, the class tasks involved a series of assignments such as bar charts and pie charts analysis, writing survey results and paragraph structuring. Learners were expected to expand their writing skills as a real means of communication.

### RESULTS TEACHERS' INTERVIEW AND SURVEY RESULTS

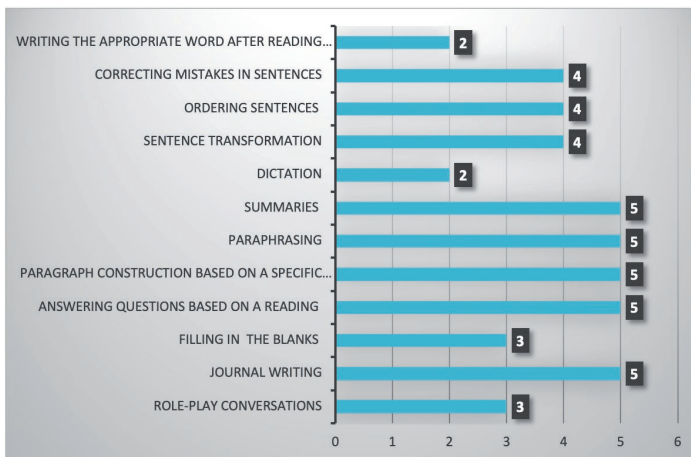


Figure 1: Perceived usefulness of different writing tasks types used by the English Major teachers

Source: Own elaboration

Teachers were required to identify writing tasks usefulness using a using a 1-5 scale, in which 1 means “not useful at all” and 5 “very useful”. Teachers consider that the following activities have affected students' writing skills deeply: “Answering questions based on a reading”, “Paragraph construction”, “Paraphrasing”, “Summaries” and “Journal writing”, all of them with five points, meaning they are the most useful. On the other hand, the activities perceived as the least useful are “Dictation” and “Writing the appropriate word”, with two points each. However, these are the types of tasks used out of the scope of CBI and usually in subjects dealing with L2 skills development, where En-

glish is not the vehicle for learning content but the end itself.

### Tabla 2

Perceived effect of writing tasks on writing aspects

| Writing activities                            | Grammar | Spelling | Vocabulary | Punctuation | Paragraph structure | Use of cohesive devices |
|---|---------|----------|------------|-------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| a. Answering questions based on a reading     | X       |          | X          |             |                     | X                       |
| b. Correcting mistakes in sentences           |         | X        | X          | X           |                     |                         |
| c. Dictation                                  |         | X        | X          |             |                     |                         |
| d. Filling in the blanks                      |         |          | X          |             |                     |                         |
| e. Journal writing                            |         |          | X          | X           | X                   | X                       |
| f. Ordering sentences                         | X       |          |            |             | X                   |                         |
| Area del gráfico                              |         |          |            |             |                     |                         |
| h. Paragraph Construction of a specific topic |         | X        | X          | X           | X                   | X                       |
| i. Role-play conversations                    |         |          | X          | X           |                     | X                       |
| j. Sentence transformation                    | X       |          | X          | X           |                     |                         |
| k. Writing the appropriate word               |         |          | X          |             |                     |                         |

After the application of CBI writing tasks for one semester, teachers were required to identify their effect of the CBI class tasks carried out along the semester on the learners' writing quality. Teachers perceived that chart analysis, paragraph structuring, and writing survey results were the most relevant activities in terms of the writing aspects involved in the writing process.

### WRITING DIAGNOSE EXAMEN RESULTS

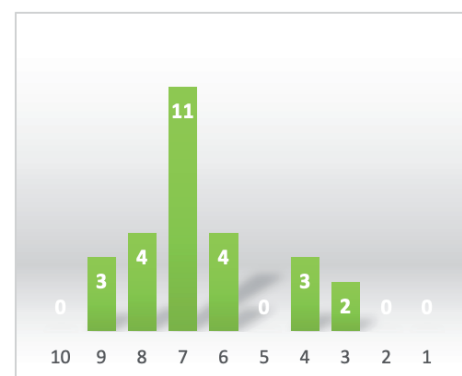


Figure 2: B1 level results of the written quiz given to fourth level English Major students. Source: Own elaboration

No student got a perfect score of ten over ten in the B1 section. Three students got nine over ten; four students got eight and eleven students got seven. In total, seventeen students got grades over seven points. Nine students got grades from three to six in this section of the diagnose quiz. Since these students are required to have reached the B2 level upon completion of their career, and they were taking fourth level at the moment this research was conducted out, it is expected that through the implementation of strategies like this, they will improve their language command in the next four semesters of the career. No student got a perfect score of ten over ten in the B1 section. Three students got nine over ten; four students got eight and eleven students got seven. In total, seventeen students got grades over seven points. Nine students got grades from three to six in this section of the diagnose quiz. Since these students are required to have reached the B2 level upon completion of their career, and they were taking fourth level at the moment this research was conducted out, it is expected that through the implementation of strategies like this, they will improve their language command in the next four semesters of the career.

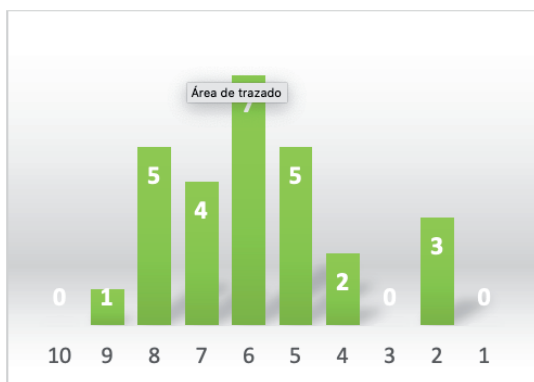


Figure 3: B2 level results of the written quiz given to fourth level English Major students. Source: Own elaboration

Ten students got grades over seven in the B2 section of the exam. Seventeen students got grades below seven. This section of the quiz focuses on upper intermediate level and students are not expected to fully master it yet. Based on the results of the writing quiz section, we can see that students are not ready to deal with B2 difficulty level writing tasks yet.

Tabla 3  
A2 standard written quiz results

| B1    |           |
|-------|-----------|
| Grade | Frequency |
| 10    | 0         |
| 9     | 3         |
| 8     | 10        |
| 7     | 7         |
| 6     | 4         |
| 5     | 2         |
| 4     | 0         |
| 3     | 1         |
| 2     | 0         |
| 1     | 0         |

Source: Own elaboration

Tabla 4  
B1 standard written quiz results

| B1    |           |
|-------|-----------|
| Grade | Frequency |
| 10    | 0         |
| 9     | 3         |
| 8     | 10        |
| 7     | 7         |
| 6     | 4         |
| 5     | 2         |
| 4     | 0         |
| 3     | 1         |
| 2     | 0         |
| 1     | 0         |

Source: Own elaboration

**Tabla 5**  
*B2 standard written quiz results*

| B2    |           |
|-------|-----------|
| Grade | Frequency |
| 10    | 1         |
| 9     | 6         |
| 8     | 11        |
| 7     | 6         |
| 6     | 3         |
| 5     | 0         |
| 4     | 0         |
| 3     | 0         |
| 2     | 0         |
| 1     | 0         |

Source: Own elaboration

By comparing the results of the diagnostic and final test, it can clearly be seen a score improvement in the three language standards indicators shown in each table above. In the A2 standard, however, the same number of students in the highest possible 9 and 10 ranges are maintained, in the grade of 8 from having a 14% of students who obtained this grade, to a 33% of students placed in this range. Concerning indicator B1, the range of grades 9 and 8 placed a 22% of the study participants, in the second test 48% of students reached the range. Finally, in the highest possible indicator of this test B2, one student got the grade of 9 in the diagnostic test, while 6 students reached the same range in the final test results. Finally, in the grade of 8, it went from 5 students to 11. Putting in percentages the range of 9 and 8 numerically increased from 22% to 62% of the population of the study.

### Students' survey results

The following data were collected at the beginning of the semester, before the application of CBI writing strategies

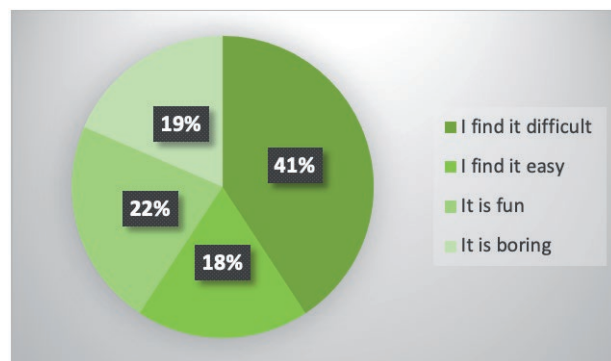


Figure 4: Students' feelings about writing in the foreign Language. Source: Own elaboration

This question was aimed at finding out students' general perception on writing. Most students feel writing is a difficult task, 41%, while 18% of 27 students feel it is easy. On the other hand, 22% find writing tasks fun, and 19% find them boring. This might reflect students' experiences of failure and success, as well as their writing skills development and fluency not only in L2 but also in L1 (Cárdenas-Hagan et al, 2007).

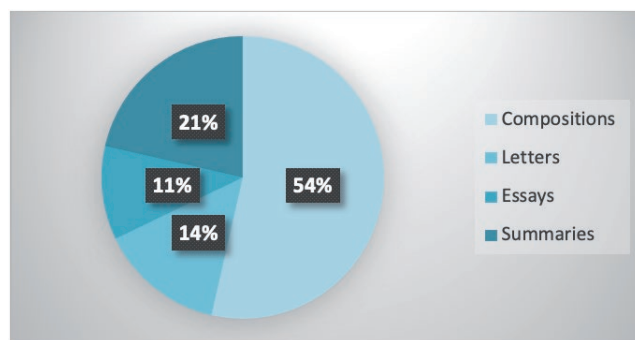


Figure 5: Students' writing tasks preferences Source: Own elaboration

54% of students like writing compositions. 21% of students enjoy writing essays. 14% of third level students prefer writing letters, and 11% like writing summaries. These percentages might reflect the fact that students perceive compositions as freestyle writing, and therefore not rigid templates nor citation rules are required.



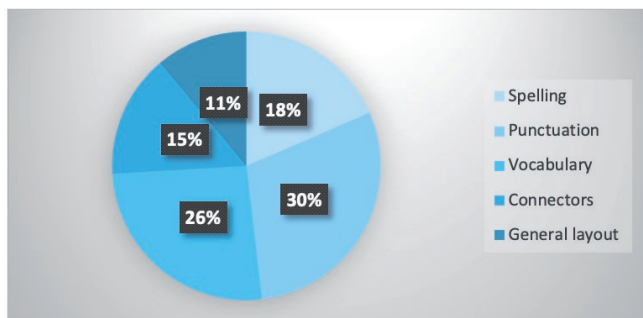


Figure 6: Students' perception of writing aspects they need to improve. Source: Own elaboration

30% of students state they need to improve their use of connectors. 26% of students require help with connectors. 18% of students have trouble dealing with spelling. 15% of students find it hard to deal with vocabulary issues. 11% of students claim they need help with writing general layout, which means templates should be provided for students as a guide. These students are aware of their weaknesses in the writing process, and can describe these aspects with greater precision due to the nature of the subjects they have been studying in the English Major (Universidad Técnica del Norte, 2020). This academic journey includes linguist and methodological subjects.

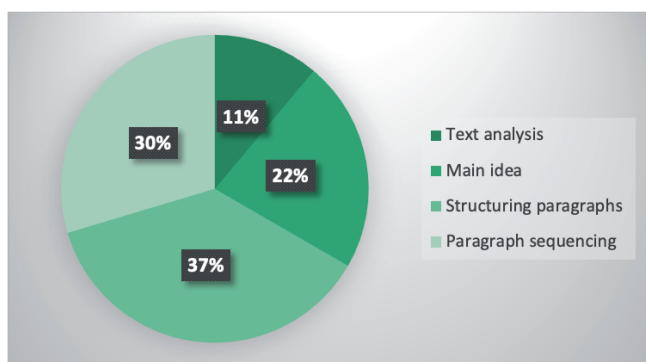


Figure 7: Students' perception of the difficulty experienced while working on specific class writing tasks. Source: Own elaboration

37% of students find the most difficult class-writing task is structuring paragraphs. 30% of students feel paragraph sequencing is a very demanding writing

task in class. 22% of third level students think finding the main idea in a text is a difficult task. 11% of students perceive text analysis as a complex process. In general terms, our educational system, at all levels, suffers from a lack of emphasis on the development of reading and writing skills. Students' perception of the difficulties they experience when required identifying or articulating ideas, reflecting the Ministry of Education findings regarding functional illiteracy: 10.62% of Ecuadorians do not understand what they read, nor can they solve basic calculations (El Telégrafo, 2017).

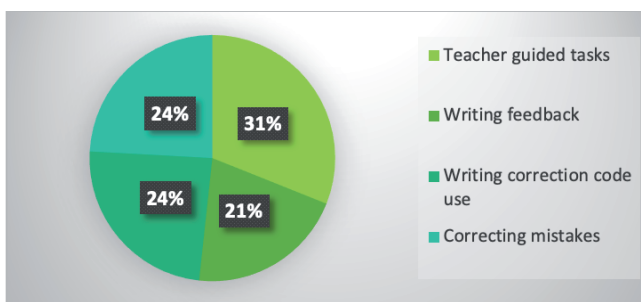


Figure 8: Students' identification of class tasks that would help them improve their writing skills. Source: Own elaboration

31% of students think doing teacher-guided tasks would improve their writing skills. 24% believe that incorporating writing correction code and correcting mistakes would help them write better; while 21% feel feedback would be a useful teacher's strategy to identify and understand why they are making mistakes. Before writing, students should be provided with checklists about the goals related to the type of text they will produce (British Council, 2020). This will enable them to gradually avoid making the same writing mistakes.

## Discussion

Content Based Instruction was originally designed in the mid-1980s, and applied by full immersion programs to support non-English-speaking students in L2

scholar systems. Therefore, some difficulties may appear when adapting this method to EFL settings at different stages of the language learning process. Applying CBI in an EFL context has yielded positive and negative results, some of which are synthesized in the next paragraphs.

There is strong empirical support for CBI, and the success of many well-documented programs offers additional support for the approach. Moreover, numerous practical features of CBI make it an appealing curricular approach to language instruction.

As some previous studies results show, the application of BCI strategies for one semester, four hours a week, while studying the contents of Research in TEFL, in fourth level of the English major, had an effect on students' writing skills. Students also reported increased interest towards the L2 and the subject matter.

The data analysed also shows that students of the sample groups in this study obtained higher scores in their post-tests, compared with their pre-tests.

As Arismendi, Díaz, and Salazar (2008) state in their study, it could be evidenced that CBI, allows students a better organization and assimilation of the structures, vocabulary and concepts, and forces them to express themselves understanding the language as a tool and not as an end. Therefore, they have strong reasons to use the language that they are learning. They are not memorizing words for a test, which they will soon forget. Instead, they need to use L2 to talk to classmates, read textbooks and write reports.

As Bentley (2010) pointed, the teaching of curricular content through a foreign language fosters the development of cognitive skills, such as reasoning, creativity and evaluation. These skills development occurs when the student works collaboratively in class. Students can develop their cognitive skills when, working in a group, they are able to share their point of view on a given topic and support their arguments. It is in this way that the CBI model

promotes the development of reasoning among the participants. Consequently, the subject matter chosen for this study, Research in TEFL, presented appropriate conditions for the unfolding of L2 writing skills and the development of cognitive skills, through the analysis and assessment of data collected as part of the course objectives.

Bula (2014) explains that peer evaluation is a characteristic of the CBI model. During the implementation of this teaching-learning model, students from the English major exchanged points of view, while evaluating the opinions expressed by their classmates.

Since CBI might not be explicitly focus on language skills development, using Content-Based strategies might represent a cognitive challenge for students. As Pérez and Luque (2005) identified, they can sometimes feel confused, saturated or even frustrated. They could also have a limited time to achieve an adequate academic level. The case scenario presented, was perceived mostly in students that were at a lower English level than the class average.

## Conclusions

CBI offers a wide variety of strategies, techniques and activities integrating language teaching and curricular content, that promote an adequate context to address learners' formative and academic needs, and that boost not only students' language communicative skills, but also general cognitive skills. However, it is essential to point out that both, teachers and students, must face several challenges when working with the Content-based approach.

Effective CBI application requires considering various guidelines, the most important along this study can be summarized as follows:

1. The teacher should clearly define the content and language objectives, ensuring that they are appropriate for the

students of a specific class.

2. Educators must also adapt the contents to the academic-linguistic needs of the students, using complementary material. It is important to highlight and practice new language items, to connect them with students' personal experiences and the content knowledge that will be studied.

3. It is also necessary to emphasize that teachers must explain tasks by using visual aids, gestures, negotiating meaning, realia, among others, to adapt content explanations to student current knowledge and skills development level and in order to minimize L1 use in the foreign language class.

4. It is worth mentioning that this methodology does not deny the importance of grammar but approaches it in a different way. In CBI, rather than the learning object, grammar, which is conscious and transferable knowledge, is seen as a tool to help students improve their language use.

5. Students must be actively engaged in the foreign language class in order to make the most of the learning opportunities available for them, to fully immerse in the new language learning experience, being aware of their own learning process, and to assume their irreplaceable role as co-constructors of knowledge.

6. By applying this method daily with English Major fourth level students, it was evident that they acquire more than academic vocabulary as they learn through content. They also learn the ways of writing and jargon used in different academic fields. The language learned includes the knowledge of the various genres used in

several academic disciplines. For instance, English Major fourth level curricula include subjects like Research in TEFL, Psychology for language teachers and Methodology.

7. Concerning CBI possible disadvantages in an EFL setting, three major difficulties arose while conducting this research. First, in order to use CBI it is necessary that educators are not only content specialists, but also have to be at a high English proficiency level. In Ecuador's higher education context, it is sometimes challenging to find experts on a specific subject who can additionally speak fluent English. On one hand, it is very common that instructors in Ecuador are not proficient enough to teach a content-based course; on the other hand, English teachers may not be content specialists.

8. Finally, excessive use of the native language from both, students and teachers, is a potential issue in the process. Given the fact that the lesson is explicitly focused on the content rather than the teaching of the language per se, students could find it much easier to use their mother tongue during the class. Teachers could find themselves in a dilemma, try sharing a rationale with students using only L2, that would take longer and require more resources, or switching from time to time to L1 to optimize the time and available materials. It is imperative to be aware that students in the class do not have the same abilities understanding L2, some learners might lose interest in the lesson due to lack of content comprehension taught in the target language.

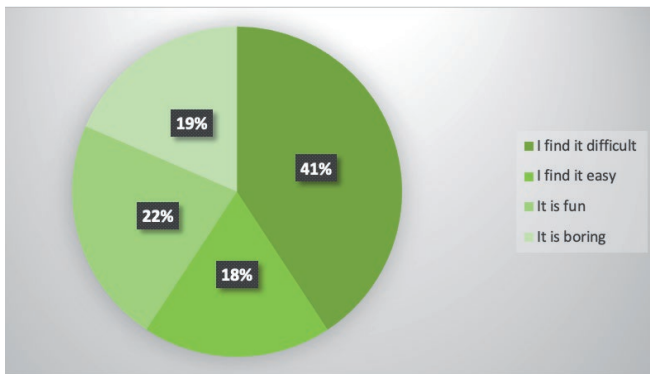
## APPENDIX

UNIVERSIDAD TÉCNICA DEL NORTE. FACULTAD DE EDUCACIÓN CIENCIA Y TECNOLOGÍA - FECYT. ENGLISH MAJOR RESEARCH PROJECT: CONTENT BASED INSTRUCTION TO DEVELOP FOURTH LEVEL STUDENTS WRITING SKILLS

### ANNEX 2

#### INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

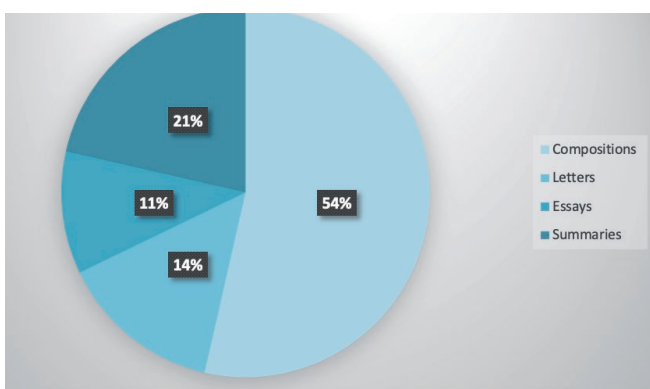
##### 1. How do you feel about writing



Source: Own elaboration

Most students feel writing is a difficult task, 41%, while 18% of 27 students feel it is easy. On the other hand, 22% find writing tasks fun, and 19% find it boring. This might reflect students past experiences of failure and success. This question was aimed at finding out students' general perception on writing.

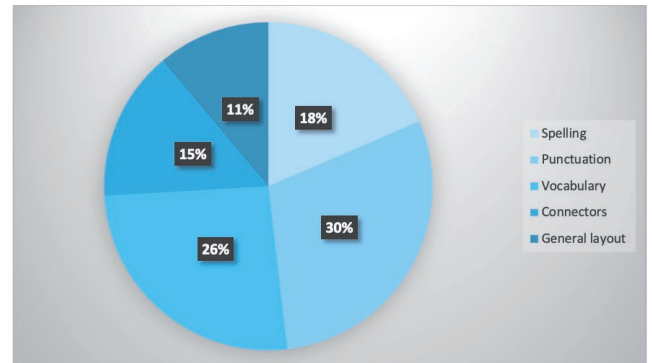
##### 2. What do you like to write?



Source: Own elaboration

51% of students like writing compositions. This might reflect the relatively simple structure of a composition. 21% of students enjoy writing essays. 14% of third level students prefer writing letters, and 11% like writing summaries.

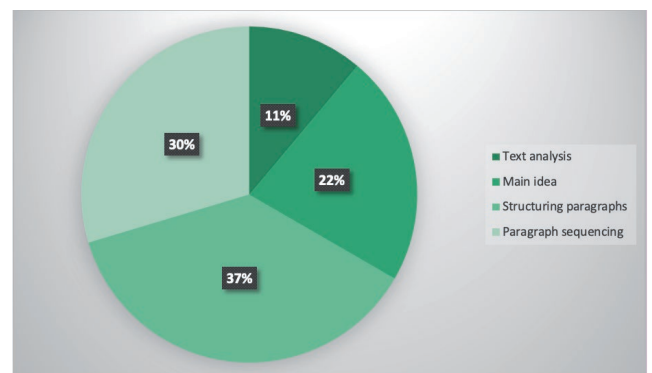
##### 3. What do you need help with in your writing?



Source: Own elaboration

30% of students states they need to improve their use of connectors. 26% of students requires help with connectors. 18% of students have trouble dealing with spelling. 15% of students find it hard to deal with vocabulary issues. 11% of students claim they need help with writing general layout, which means templates should be provided for students as a guide.

##### 4. What is the most difficult class-writing task for you?

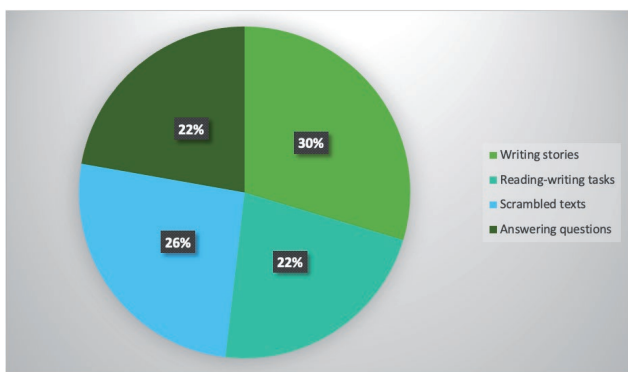


Source: Own elaboration

37% of students find the most difficult class-writing task is structuring paragraphs. 30% of students feel paragraph se-

quencing is a very demanding writing task in class. 22% of third level students think finding the main idea in a text is a difficult task. 11% of students perceive text analysis as a complex process.

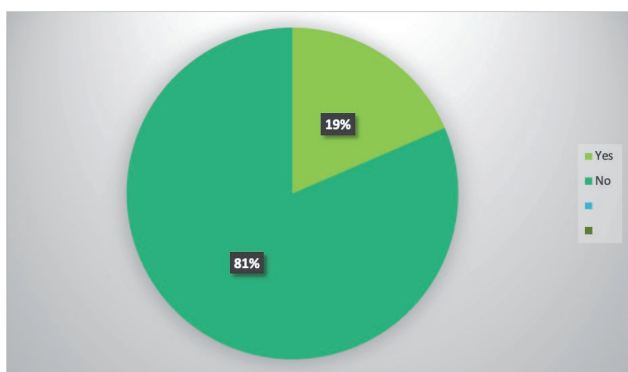
5. What is the class-writing task you enjoy the most?



Source: Own elaboration

30% of surveyed students enjoy writing stories. 26% like answering questions about a text. 22% of students prefer answering questions and reading-writing tasks.

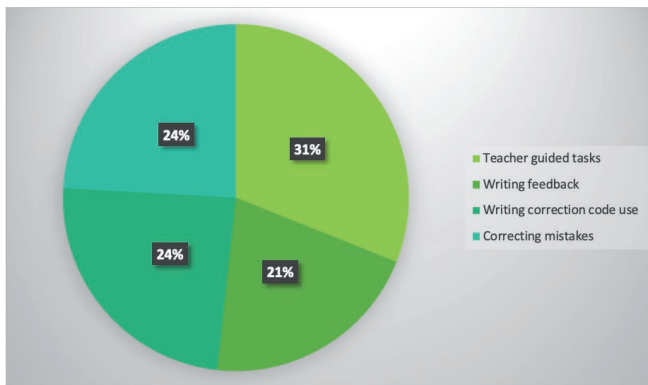
6. Do you know your writing skills development level, according to the CEFR?



Source: Own elaboration

Most students ignore what Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) their writing skills development corresponds to, 81%, while 19% can identify what CEFR standard their level is.

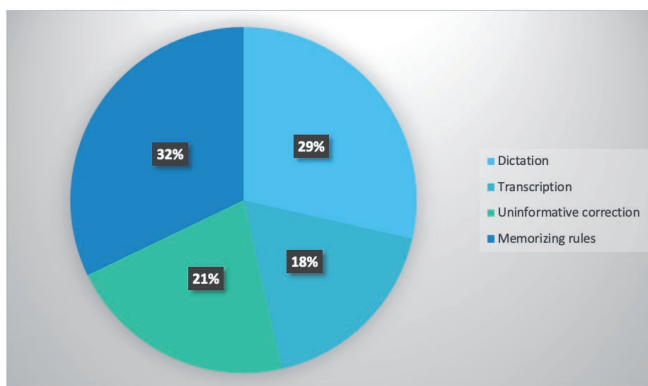
7. What class tasks would help you improve your writing skills.



Source: Own elaboration

31% of students think doing teacher guided tasks would improve their writing skills. 24% believe that incorporating writing correction code and correcting mistakes would help them write better, while 21% feel writing feedback would be a useful tool.

8. Which class tasks have not been helpful?

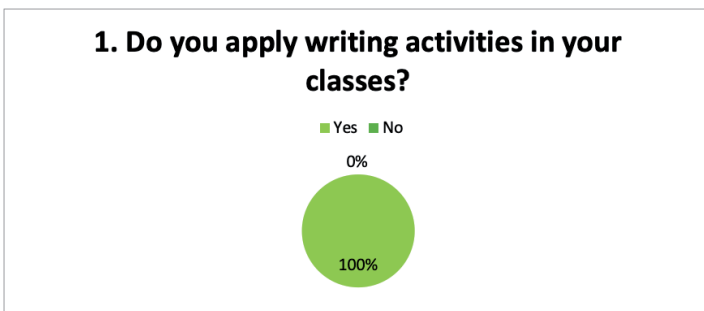


Source: Own elaboration

32% of surveyed students feels memorizing rules has not been a useful strategy. 29% of students think dictation does not contribute to the development of their writing skills. 21% of participants perceive uninformative correction as a non-relevant task for writing skill improvement. Finally, 18% of students have experienced that transcription does not impact their written production in a positive way.

**UNIVERSIDAD  
 TÉCNICA DEL NORTE  
 FACULTAD DE EDUCACIÓN CIEN-  
 CIA Y TECNOLOGÍA - FECYT  
 Carrera de Pedagogía en idiomas  
 Extranjeros  
 Professor's survey results  
 RESEARCH PROJECT: CONTENT  
 BASED INSTRUCTION TOOLS TO  
 IMPROVE THIRD LEVEL ENGLISH  
 MAJOR STUDENTS FOREIGN  
 WRITING SKILLS  
 COMMAND**

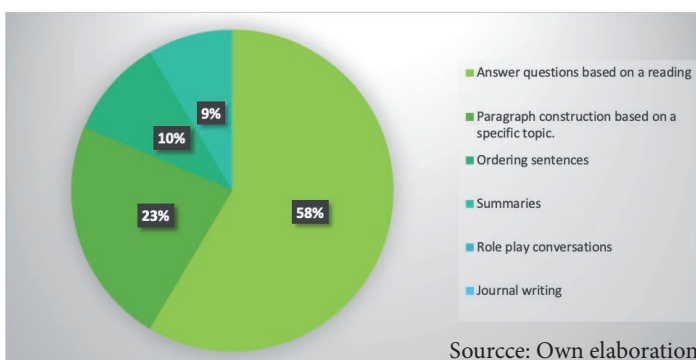
1. Do you apply writing activities in your classes?



Source: Own elaboration

All teachers surveyed apply writing skills in class. One of them is in charge of an academic writing skills subject, the others are teaching content-based subjects. Therefore, besides concentrating on the subject contents, students are, at the same time, developing their linguistic skills.

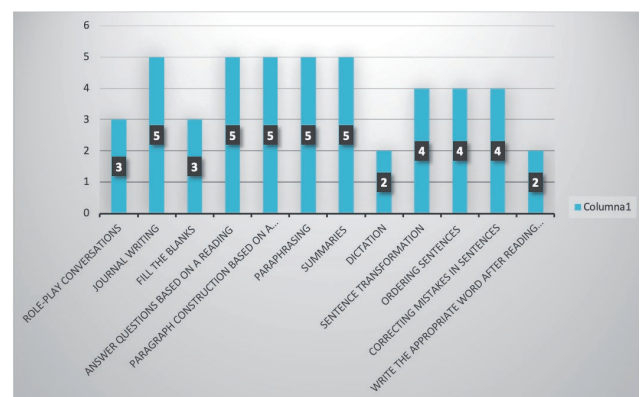
2. Which of the following writing activities do you apply in your classes this semester? Mark with an "X".



Source: Own elaboration

Teachers are mostly applying the Answer questions based on a reading strategy, with 58% relevance. Paragraph construction based on a specific topic is another useful strategy, with 23%. Ordering sentences and summaries are not considered relevant, with 9% and 10%.

3. Based on your experience, how useful do you think the following activities are to help your students improve their writing skills? Write a number, considering 5 as the most useful and 0 as the least useful.



Source: Own elaboration

The activities teachers consider impact writing skills deeply are Answer questions based on a reading, Paragraph construction, Paraphrasing, Summaries and Journal writing, all of them graded with 5 points, meaning they are the most useful. On the other hand, the activities perceived as the least useful, are Dictation and Writing the appropriate word, with 2 points each.

4. In which area have you seen more impact after applying the following strategies? Mark with an x.

| Writing activities                        | Grammar |    | Spelling |    | Vocabulary |    | Punctuation |    | Paragraph structure |    | Using cohesive devices |    |
|---|---------|----|----------|----|------------|----|-------------|----|---------------------|----|------------------------|----|
|   | P1      | P2 | P1       | P2 | P1         | P2 | P1          | P2 | P1                  | P2 | P1                     | P2 |
| l. Role-play Conversations                |         |    |          |    |            | X  |             |    |                     |    | X                      | X  |
| m. Journal Writing                        |         | X  |          |    |            |    |             |    | X                   | X  |                        |    |
| n. Fill in the blanks                     |         |    |          |    | X          |    |             |    |                     |    |                        |    |
| o. Answer questions based on a reading    | X       |    |          |    |            |    |             |    |                     |    |                        |    |
| p. Paragraph construction specific topic. |         |    |          |    |            | X  |             |    |                     |    | X                      | X  |
| q. Paraphrasing                           |         |    |          |    |            |    |             |    |                     |    |                        |    |
| r. Summaries                              |         |    |          |    |            |    |             |    | X                   | X  |                        | X  |
| s. Dictation                              |         |    |          |    |            |    |             |    |                     |    |                        |    |
| t. Sentence transformation                |         | X  |          |    |            |    |             |    |                     |    |                        |    |
| u. Ordering sentences                     |         | X  |          |    |            |    |             |    |                     |    | X                      |    |
| v. Correcting mistakes in sentences       | X       | X  | X        |    |            |    |             |    |                     |    |                        |    |

Source: Own elaboration

Teachers were required to associate strategies and area of language impact. As we can see, in their opinion, Grammar is developed by journal writing, sentence transformation, ordering sentences and correcting mistakes I sentences. Spelling is developed by correcting mistakes in sentences. Vocabulary is positively affected by Role-play Conversations, Fill in the blanks and Paragraph construction specific topic strategies. Finally, paragraph structure is developed by applying Journal writing and summaries strategies. Using cohesive devises is a skill developed by applying Role-play Conversations, Paragraph construction specific topics and Summaries.

5. Are there any other writing activities you think should be incorporated in class in order to improve your student's writing skill? Please explain.

- Multi-tasking
- Composition writing
- Essay writing
- Reaction paper writing
- Writing emails
- Writing short stories
- Writing advertisements
- Writing surveys
- Writing surveys results
- Writing projects
- Writing postcards
- Writing thanking notes
- Writing examples- Grammar review.

Source: Own elaboration

Teachers surveyed suggested a set of tasks not considered in the data collection instrument, in order to be considered in the design of Content Based Instruction strategies for this research project.

## Bibliographical references

- Aguirre, R. (2017) Relevancia del pensamiento crítico para la mejora de la educación en la sociedad global. Retrieved: 24/08/2018 from [http://www.pucesi.edu.ec/congreso\\_LESG2017/wpcontent/uploads/2017/09/Actas-COILESG-2017.pdf](http://www.pucesi.edu.ec/congreso_LESG2017/wpcontent/uploads/2017/09/Actas-COILESG-2017.pdf)
- Al Amrani, M. (2019). ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF CONTENT-BASED INSTRUCTION ON LEARNING EFL IN AN ESP CLASS. *Journal of Languages for Specific Purposes*. -. Retrieved: 02/01/20 from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331647992\\_ASSESSING\\_THE\\_IMPACT\\_OF\\_CONTENTBASED\\_INSTRUCTION\\_ON\\_LEARNING\\_EFL\\_IN\\_AN\\_ESP\\_CLASS/link/5cd968a2299bf14d9591e800/download](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331647992_ASSESSING_THE_IMPACT_OF_CONTENTBASED_INSTRUCTION_ON_LEARNING_EFL_IN_AN_ESP_CLASS/link/5cd968a2299bf14d9591e800/download)
- Amiri, M and Fatema, A. (2014). The Impact of Content-Based instruction on Students' achievement in ESP Courses and their Language Learning Orientation. Retrieved: 10/02/2019 from <http://www.academy-publication.com/issues/past/tpls/vol04/10/24.pdf>.
- Arismendi, F. Díaz, C. y Salazar, N. (2008). Designing and Implementing Content-Based Courses in English with a Non-Language Faculty at a Public Colombian University. Retrieved: 01/16/2019 from [http://www.scielo.org.co/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S165707902008000200007](http://www.scielo.org.co/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S165707902008000200007)
- Arslan, R. and Saka, C. (2010). Teaching English to Science Students via Theme-Based Model of Content-Based Instruction. Retrieved: 27/12/2019 from [https://www.academia.edu/3139873/Teaching\\_English\\_to\\_Science\\_Students\\_via\\_Theme-Based\\_Model\\_of\\_Content-Based\\_Instruction](https://www.academia.edu/3139873/Teaching_English_to_Science_Students_via_Theme-Based_Model_of_Content-Based_Instruction)
- Bentley, K. (2010). The TKT course CLIL Module. Oxford University Press.
- British Council (2018). Retrieved: 22/12/2018 from [www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/content-based-instruction](http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/content-based-instruction)
- British Council (2020). Retrieved: 01/20/2010 from <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/blogs/loli-iglesias/giving-learners-feedback-their-writing>
- Brown, D. (2007). *Teaching by Principles*. United Kingdom: Longman.
- Bula, O. (2014). Content-Based Instruction: A Relevant Approach of Language Teaching. Retrieved: 11/09/2018 from [ContentBasedInstruction-5181354.pdf](http://ContentBasedInstruction-5181354.pdf)
- CES. (2016). Reglamento de Régimen Académico.
- Chávez, J. (2017). LA LECTURA Y LA ESCRITURA EN ESTUDIANTES, DOCENTES Y PADRES DE FAMILIA. Retrieved: 08/06/2018 from [http://www.pucesi.edu.ec/congreso\\_LESG2017/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Actas-COILESG-2017.pdf](http://www.pucesi.edu.ec/congreso_LESG2017/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Actas-COILESG-2017.pdf)
- Cárdenas-Hagan, Elsa & Carlson, Coleen & Pollard-Durodola, Sharolyn. (2007). The Cross-Linguistic Transfer of Early Literacy Skills: The Role of Initial L1 and L2 Skills and Language of Instruction. *Language, speech, and hearing services in schools*. 38. 249-59. 10.1044/0161-1461(2007/026). Retrieved: 01/23/2010 from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/6213252\\_The\\_Cross-Linguistic\\_Transfer\\_of\\_Early\\_Literacy\\_Skills\\_The\\_Role\\_of\\_Initial\\_L1\\_and\\_L2\\_Skills\\_and\\_Language\\_of\\_Instruction/citation/download](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/6213252_The_Cross-Linguistic_Transfer_of_Early_Literacy_Skills_The_Role_of_Initial_L1_and_L2_Skills_and_Language_of_Instruction/citation/download)
- Corrales, K. and Maloof, C. (2011). Student perceptions on how content based instruction supports learner development in a foreign language context. Retrieved 26/12/2019 [https://www.google.com/search?q=ContentBased+Instruction+in+Higher+Education+Settings&rlz=1C1NHXL\\_esEC704EC704&oq=ContentBased+Instruction+in+Higher+Education+Settings&aqs=chrome..69i57j69i61.727j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8](https://www.google.com/search?q=ContentBased+Instruction+in+Higher+Education+Settings&rlz=1C1NHXL_esEC704EC704&oq=ContentBased+Instruction+in+Higher+Education+Settings&aqs=chrome..69i57j69i61.727j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8)
- Durgunoglu, A. Y. & Goldenberg, C. (2010). *Language and literacy development in bilingual settings*. New York: Guilford.
- Dueñas, M. (2004). The Whats, Whys, Hows and Whos of Content-Based Instruction in Second/Foreign Language Education. Retrieved: 15/02/2019 from [DialnetTheWhatsWhysHowsAndWhosOfContentBasedInstructionInS-919483.pdf](http://DialnetTheWhatsWhysHowsAndWhosOfContentBasedInstructionInS-919483.pdf)
- El Telégrafo. (2017). El 10,62% de los ecuatorianos no entiende lo que lee, ni puede resolver cálculos básicos. Retrieved: 11/01/20 from <https://www.eltelegrafo.com.ec/noticias/41/4/el-10-62-de-los-ecuatorianos-no-entiende-lo-que-lee-ni-puede-resolver-calculos-basicos>
- Gaffielf-Vile, N. (1996). Content-Based second language instruction at the tertiary level.
- Grabe, W. and Stoller, F. (2011). *Teaching and Researching Reading*. Routledge
- Heredia, V. (2017/11/18) Ecuador alcanzó el puesto 55 de 80 en idioma inglés, según EF English Proficiency Index. *El Comercio*. Retrieved 27/02/2018 from <https://www.elcomercio.com/tendencias/ecuador-ingles-evaluacion-aprendizaje-educacion.html>.
- Jiménez, J. E. y O'Shanahan, I. (2010). Aprender a leer y escribir en inglés como segunda lengua: Un estudio de revisión en Canadá EE. UU. *Revista Iberoamericana de Educación*. N.º 52(2010), pp. 179-202.
- Lightbown, P. (2014). *How languages are learned*. Oxford University Press.
- Mota, C. (2006). El rol de la escritura dentro del currículo de la enseñanza y aprendizaje del inglés como segunda lengua (esl / efl): una perspectiva histórica. *Acción Pedagógica*, 15, 56 – 63.
- Pérez, M. and Luque, G. (2005). *Current approaches and teaching methods*. Universidad de Granada.
- Richards, J. (2014). *Approaches and methods in Language Teaching*. Cambridge University Press.
- Shibata, N. (2016). Improving Students' Writing Abilities through Content Based Instruction. Retrieved: 29/03/2019 from [www.nufs.ac.jp/media/Naoya2016.pdf](http://www.nufs.ac.jp/media/Naoya2016.pdf)



- Spenader, A., Wesley, P. and Glynn C. (2018). When culture is content: Applications for content-based instruction in the world language classroom. Retrieved: 28/12/19 from <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1362168818799768>
- Stoller, Fredricka. (2008). Content-Based Instruction. 10.1007/978-0-387-30424-3\_89.
- Stryker, S. and Leaver, L. (1997). Content-Based Instruction in Foreign Language Education: Models and Methods. Georgetown University Press.
- Tahsildar Tehrani, Hesam & Razali, Abu Bakar. (2018). Developing Thinking Skills in Teaching English as a Second/Foreign Language at Primary School. Retrieved: 27/02/2019 from: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328968451>
- Universidad Técnica del Norte. (2020). Pedagogía de los idiomas nacionales y Extranjeros. Malla Curricular. Retrieved: 01/23/2020 from <https://www.utn.edu.ec/fecyt/carreras/idiomas/index.php/malla-curricular/>