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THE USE OF DIARIES: PERCEPTIONS OF MEXICAN HIGH SCHOOL
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The use of diaries: Perceptions of Mexican high school students

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ABSTRACT

This thesis reports the results of a qualitative study concerning students' perceptions about the use of diaries. The study was carried out in a public high school in central Mexico. The aims explored perceptions about the use of English diaries in their classroom. Research data was collected by using a questionnaire. The research findings revealed most of the participants considered the use of diaries as a positive learning process through which they developed and improved their writing skills. They also emphasized how the teacher's feedback had an important impact on their English learning. This study attempts to contribute to the use of diaries in English as a foreign language high school class.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

1 Introduction

Writing is the one of the most difficult skills, especially when students are learning English as a foreign or a second language. However, if students find a particular reason, goal or purpose to write in the language they are learning, it could become easier for them to start writing. For example, some students like to write diaries/journals. They can write about their thoughts and experiences. But, what do we understand by diaries? Next, I will present some definitions of experts.

“A Diary is an academic instrument that is used to record introspective reflection in first person about someone’s learning or teaching” (Bailey, 1990 cited in Medina, 2013). It is a powerful tool that students could use to express their personal ideas, feelings, experiences, or show interest with a particular purpose. This promotes personal learning and students’ assimilation and consolidation of previous knowledge. Diaries could also help students to start communicating with clarity and develop more complex ideas effectively. “Journaling in its various forms is a means for recording personal thoughts, daily experiences, and evolving insights. The process often evokes conversations with self, another person, or even an imagined other person” (Hiemstra, 2001, p.19). Thus, diaries can be an open door to writing.

The main objective of this study was to explore students’ perceptions of writing a diary in English in a public high school in Mexico.

1.1 Significance the study

This study could give some light to the use of a diary in an English class. It could facilitate students' thinking, being able to start writing and could increase students' ability to write more complex writing during the process. Besides, this study provides teachers the rationale to use diaries outside the classroom. Additionally, this study explores students' necessities in order to increase students' autonomy to write by themselves in a future.

Also, with the findings of this research, students and teachers could have a better panorama of the use of diaries outside the English classroom and promote / enhance a better relationship between students and teachers.

1.2 Location

This study was carried out at a public high school in central Mexico. The participants were students of second grade who worked with mandatory diaries in their English classes. All the participants volunteered to participate in this study.

1.3 Context of the research

There are a few studies that investigate the use of diaries in curricular English classes. Tuan (2010) investigated if learners could grow out of the writing difficulties by engaging journal writing activity. Another researcher Supiani (2016) believed that through diary writing, students could express their ideas better. In a diary, students could express their interests, feelings, and wishes. In the case of the present study, the diaries will be

explored to identify students' perceptions and interpret what benefits they can get out of such diaries.

1.4 Aims of the study

This study's main purpose is to explore how the use of diaries affects high school students' writing.

To identify students' perceptions of writing a diary after they wrote one.

To examine what the benefits and difficulties of keeping a diary are in English as a foreign language high school class.

1.5 Research questions

This project addresses the following research questions:

1. What do high school students think about using a diary in their English class?
2. What do they think the benefits of using a diary are?
3. What are students' difficulties when writing a diary?

1.6 Chapter Summary and thesis statement

This chapter summarizes the study of diaries which are also called journals. it is focused on students' improvement in writing through diaries. In the following chapter, the literature review will be provided.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

2 Introduction

This chapter introduces the literature review about the main themes related to diaries. These are the process of writing, autonomous learning in relation to its dimensions, characteristics and the role of the teacher, feedback, the concept of diaries, main studies about diaries and the conclusion.

2.1 The importance of writing

Different researchers have their own understandings of the definitions of writing. According to Durga and Rao (2018), writing is crucial for effective communication, it often overcomes other forms of media. Besides this, writing motivates students to improve their writing abilities for personal purposes or academic achievement.

For Pincas (1982, p.58), “writing is a way of communicating a message to a reader for a purpose. The purposes of writing are to express one’s self, to provide information for one’s reader, to persuade one’s reader, and to create a literary work”. Furthermore, Surpano and Yunus (2009, cited in Surahman, 2021) define writing as a vital skill for students because it involves conveying messages through written language. In such skill they identify strong and low writing skills; the first ones enhance learning and academic outcomes, while the second ones can impede progress. Hence, it is crucial to prioritize teaching writing from an early stage focused on vocabulary, language structure and regular practice to improve their skills. Continuing with the definition of writing, Harmer (2007) affirms that writing has the same relevance as the other skills and it is a fundamental part of teaching English. He also points out that writing may be used in different situations and can be used with several purposes.

One last definition about writing is “Writing as a technology, it is a set of skills that should be practiced and learned through experiences” (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996, p.6). Thus, writing demands a diverse set of competencies. For example, L2 writers need to pay attention to advance aspects like planning and organization, as well as fundamental aspects like spelling, grammar and vocabulary (Richards & Renandya, 2002).

2.2 Cognitive process theory of writing

Hayes and Flower proposed the cognitive process of writing (1981). This theory proposes three important stages: Planning, Translating and Reviewing writing which includes topic, audience, and goals. Each stage will be presented as follows:

Planning

Planning is also called the act of building. This stage includes three sub-processes. Hayes and Flower (1991) state that they are Generating ideas, Organizing process, and Goal setting. Regarding the first sub-process, it re-collects relevant information from long-term memory. This type of memory is crucial to understand how ideas are generated. In such memory the writer has stored knowledge such as topic, audience and writing plans. It is not only focused on the writer, but it also includes different types of sources. In the long-term memory, the writer identifies the rhetorical problem and modifies all the information according to the context, leading to the growth of writer's writing. The rhetorical problem refers to the situation, problem, audience, and the writers' goals.

The second stage, organizing process, selects the most useful information from generating process. It helps the writer to identify the topics or sub-topics, relevant ideas,

and presentations patterns. Finally, in the third sub-process, goal setting, all writing goals are created by the writer. In this step, the writer has to verify particular aspects of his or her goals and how the writer's goals are generated, developed, revised, and organized new ideas; this process goes through composing, and it allows the writer to generate more ideas and to increase more complex goals.

Translating

Another cognitive process of writing is translating (Hayes & Flower, 1991). It refers to the individual process to express ideas in a written text or the task this process involves. The authors used the word translate such as “transcribe or write”. In order to emphasize the most peculiar qualities of the task, in this process the writer requires to be concentrated on written language demands such as lexical and grammatical rules.

Reviewing

The last stage of the cognitive process of writing is Reviewing. Hayes and Flower (1991) also mention that reviewing depends on two sub-processes: evaluating and revising. Evaluating results of /from a writing process such as translating or planning whereas in the other, revising, is made in the products of the mental processes of writing (texts, goals, or ideas).

Monitoring

The main cognitive processes such as planning, translating and revising emphasize that all these processes are controlled by the monitor while writers compose and they also monitor their current process and progress (Hayes & Flower, 1991). Monitoring is present

in such processes; it functions as a writer planner which determines the writer moves from one process to another. It also determines how long the writer continues generating ideas to achieve his purpose.

2.2.3 The writing process

The writing process involves at least five steps according to Boylan (2018): pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. Pre-writing selects the main topic, what to write about and gather information to support the main topic; it is planning how to organize ideas. The second step, drafting, is about exploring and writing down new ideas. The third step is revising in which all ideas and content of all writing are evaluated or revised including writing style and structure. The fourth step is editing where the focus is on correcting grammar, punctuation, spelling, and mechanics. The last step is publishing which consists of sharing the final work with others. Besides the five steps, Boylan argues that academic writing, professional writing, or personal writing are involved in the writing process.

“Academic writing refers specifically to writing undertaken at university in which students demonstrate their ability to read and think critically, to interpret and present ideas in relation to the goals of writing” (Sani, 2016, p.1). Regarding professional writing, it is a style of written communication used in a workplace environment that allows professionals to make informed decisions (Pennsylvania University State, 2022). Finally, personal writing consists of letters, emails, greeting cards, invitations, messages, notes, calendar entries, forms, diaries, personal journals, and fiction (Brown, 2001). In this last one, Oshima and Hongue (2007) argue that personal writing makes a distinction for the uses of colloquial language such as slang, abbreviations and short or incomplete sentences and

consists of emails or letters. Thus, the previous concepts have their own characteristics, but they may include some elements of the other. For instance, letters and e mails are considered in the personal writing but they may be used in the professional writing as well.

As we can see, the writing process involves several steps and authors may give them different names. For example, Boylan (2018) considers the five steps described above whereas Seow (2002) mentions there are four stages. These are: planning, drafting (writing), revising (redrafting) and editing. Both authors share almost the same terms. Although the authors name the first stage differently, pre-writing and planning, the characteristics of each refer to the same.

To better visualize the terms about the writing process, the table below presents them according to the authors.

Table 1

The writing process

Author	Stage	Characteristicts
Boylan (2018)	Pre-writing	1) selects the main topic 2) gather information 3) organize ideas
Seow (2002)	Planning	1)this stage might include: Brainstorming, clustering, rapid free questions, and responding wh-questions. 2) select the topic and organize the ideas based on the previous activities.

Laksmi 2006	Pre-writing	1) chose a topic. 2) gather and organize ideas. 3) define topic sentence.
Boylan (2018)		1) put ideas down in a paper 2) exploring new ideas while students write
Seow (2002)		1) writing first drafts, without trying to revise or edit.
Laksmi (2006)	Drafting	1) writing drafts. 2) emphasizes content rather than mechanics.
Boylan (2018)	Revising	1) all the ideas are evaluated including
Seow (2002)	Revising	1) teacher's written feedback 2) students make changes based on feedback 3) improvement of all content
Laksmi (2006)		1) sharing writing with teacher or students in writing groups. 2) students' participation about classmate's writing. 3) students make changes of all content based on teacher and classmate comments.
Boylan (2018)	Editing	1) correcting grammar such as punctuation spelling and mechanics.
Seow (2002)		1) correcting grammar such as punctuation spelling, dictation, and sentence structure.

**Laksmi
(2006)**

- 1) students proofread their own and or classmates' writings.
- 2) students increasingly identify and correct their own mechanical errors.

**Boylan
(2018)**

Publishing

- 1) share the final work with others.

**Laksmi
(2006)**

- 1) share the final work with the teacher
 - 2) publishing the final work in appropriate form.
-

2.3 Autonomous learning

The relevance of the concept of autonomous learning in language learning has been discussed in extensive literature for long years. The previous concept mentioned includes identical meanings that may be utilized in the same context as autonomous learning, such as learner independence, self-direction, learner autonomy, independent learning, and autonomy. All these terms have been used to refer to the same idea (Palfreyman, 2003 cited in Bekleyen, 2016; Benson, 2006; Khalil, 2019).

According to Benson (2001), autonomous learning is learning in which the learner's capacity for autonomy is exercised and displayed. It is learning in which learners demonstrate a capacity to control their learning. Similarly, Lowes and Target (1998) affirm that the learner is responsible of his own learning without leaving teachers aside; They provide students new ways to practice the language in the classroom and outside. For Raya

et al. (2007) learner autonomy is the individual who promotes participation in the educational environment, make his own decisions and is socially responsible and conscious.

In addition, Bajrami (2015) emphasizes that autonomous learning implies learning strategies. He affirms that autonomous learners are students who have created learning strategies and regulate their learning and also learners identify the best strategies to learn inside or outside the classroom.

Finally, Gardner (2011) states that autonomous learning also allows learners to work on different tasks at different times; they have the choice of both input and output of language information. In this way, one's own learning styles and good learning strategies can help to acquire a foreign language more efficiently.(cited in Khulaifiyah et. al 2021, p.35)

2.3.1 Dimensions of autonomous learners

According to Benson (cited in Picòn, 2012) the dimensions of autonomous learners are divided in three sections: Technical, psychological, and political. The technical dimension is based on techniques and strategies to help students to be engaged in their own learning process. Then, the psychological dimension refers to the development of students' critical thinking, responsibility and assume responsibility for their own learning process. Finally, the political dimension describes how students' problems have to face them, and it also mentions teachers leave their students to take partial or total decisions. Similarly, Littlewood (cited in Gamble, Alipongo, Koshiyama et. al 2012) emphasizes two dimensions of learner autonomy: The first dimension, which is responsibility, refers to the fact that students take responsibility for their own learning. Furthermore, students need to

be conscious, and they need to continue working on their own learning after completing their official schooling. This dimension also emphasizes how students are submerging in total or partial decisions such as deciding objectives, selecting learning methods and evaluating the process that commonly belonged to the teacher. The second dimension is the ability where students are capable of finishing those many processes or tasks previously mentioned.

The three dimensions of autonomous learners can be analyzed and discussed in multiple ways according to the context and the purposes. Thus, these dimensions are related to learning processes, critical thinking and decision making, which are directly implied in the writing of a diary.

2.3.2 Characteristics of an autonomous learner

Boud (1981), students take significant responsibility for their own learning. There is a set of characteristics that are considered for autonomous learners and it is pertinent to mention them because they encompass different aspects in the process of autonomous learning: identifying learning needs, setting goals, planning learning activities, working collaboratively with others, selecting learning projects, using teachers as a guide and counsellors rather than instructors, opting to undertake additional non teacher /directed work, such as learning through independent (structured) learning materials, determining criteria to apply to their work, engaging in self/assessment, learning outside the confines of the educational institution, deciding when learning is complete, reflecting in their own process, and making significant decisions throughout their life. (p.23)

Similarly, Rubin and Thompson (1993, cited in Mattarima & Hamdan, 2011) mention the good characteristics of good learners:

- 1) Using the language at every available opportunity
 - 2) Practicing what they have just learnt as soon as possible
 - 3) Willing to try out different ways in order to get their message across
 - 4) Being able to overcoming their uncertainty and uneasiness
 - 5) Monitoring own speech as well as the speech of others
 - 6) Analyzing, categorizing, and synthesizing new language
 - 7) Systematic organizing program and goals
 - 8) Applying different learning methods
 - 9) Understanding errors in working or learning
 - 10) Starting a conversation or be the initiator of a conversation
- Rubin and Thompson (1993, cited in Mattarima & Hamdan, 2011)

These set of characteristics collectively empower autonomous learners, and they are developed when students write their English diaries.

2.3.3 The role of teachers in autonomous learning

Teachers have an essential role and an impact in education. Some of the main roles are to help students in their learning, share knowledge, interact with students, teach students, adapt it to the circumstances, and create a positive impact on them. The afore

mentioned is related to the teachers' roles and these roles may be found in teachers' written feedback on learners' diaries. The different roles will be presented below (Zhao, 2018).

A facilitator: The first type makes sure that students develop more confidence with themselves and at the same time; The teacher encourages students to become interested in the field of autonomous learning.

A trainer or also known as a guide: This second type of teacher accompanies students to discover learning strategies and guide students in their process and foster autonomous learners.

A counselor or an advisor: The third type of teacher assists students to find appropriate learning strategies according to students needs and the teacher helps and gives advice to his students on how to solve their problems.

An instructor: The fourth type of teacher must openly express to students the teaching plan, teaching requirements, teaching topics, and even teaching focus and challenges for students to understand the teacher's expectations.

A resource provider: The fifth type of teacher gives sufficient knowledge, information, and materials.

A coordinator or organizer: The sixth type teacher creates a good environment inside the classroom also finds several opportunities for students to try things out in various situations.

A cooperator or peer learner: The seventh type of teacher is characterized to maintain a strong relationship with their students and learn from each other.

An assessor: The eighth type of teacher provides effective feedback and helps students to accomplish their projects and evaluate students' progress.

A monitor: The ninth type of teacher is charged to monitor his students in the learning process such as learning methods, learning and content.

A researcher: The tenth type of teacher is characterized to perform extensive study on teaching approaches and autonomous learning strategies, to execute effective and efficient autonomy during instruction.

A developer: The eleventh type of teacher creates long-lasting and appropriate teaching materials with varying levels of difficulty and content based on students' English competence and individual requirements.

According to Benson and Voller (2014), the teachers' roles in promoting autonomous learning are teacher as a facilitator, as a counselor and as a resource. They will be described as follows:

Teacher as a facilitator: the teacher is described as a helper which the principal role is to facilitate learning. This term is very used in the field of autonomous learning.

Teacher as a counselor: the teacher is considered a person who gives students advice who need it. Counseling enables students to communicate with someone about their accomplishments, challenges, and solutions.

Teacher as a resource: is the knower with a greater focus on the teacher's competence. This teaching position is especially ideal for pupils who are working independently but still require assistance from the teacher.

As we can see, each role is essential because teachers can help students improve their writing through written feedback.

2.4 Feedback

As we read above, one of teachers' roles is feedback. In the area of education feedback can have several definitions for many scholars and has great impact on learning. Hyland and Hyland (2006) declare that feedback is generally considered highly important in promoting and solidifying learning.

As revealed by London (2014), feedback represents the information individuals receive regarding their performance, which could include an assessment of the quality of their actions and suggestions for enhancements and constitutes a crucial component of the learning process. According to Henderson et al. (2019), feedback can be described as the process through which learners comprehend pertinent information to their performance, with the aim of enhancing learning. Additionally, Hattie and Timperley (2007, p.81) mention that "feedback is conceptualized as information provided by an agent (e.g., teachers, peers, books, parents, self, or experience) regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding". Finally, Ajjawi and Boud (2018, p.108) explain that "feedback is a communicative act and a social process in which power, emotion and discourse impact on how messages are constructed, interpreted and acted upon".

2.4.1 Teacher's written feedback

In the field of education, the integration and the use of written feedback plays an important role in guiding students towards improvement. Some concepts will be discussed as follows.

Hyland and Hyland (2006) argue that teachers' feedback could enhance teacher-student relationship in which teachers choose suitable language and style in their feedback. According to Stagg (2010, p.2), "teachers can determine the content of the feedback by considering the elements of the writing that are strong or that need more work." Moreover, Bound and Molloy (2013, p.28) state that "teacher feedback should be planned in ways that ensure that students are provided with explicit opportunities to evaluate and/or to act on it."

2.4.2 The benefits or use of feedback in English diaries

The implementation of feedback in English diaries provides significant opportunities for growth, reflection, and improvement for students. Certainly, feedback plays an important role in students' learning. The following authors mention the benefits of feedback in diaries.

Klimova (2015) emphasizes the value of diaries, highlighting its effectiveness as a learning strategy. She points out that using feedback supports students' learning processes and also allows teachers to understand students' difficulties and limitations they face. In the case of Cavallari and Aranha (2022, p.67), they state that when "teachers read their learners' diaries and provide feedback, they can select the information that they consider pertinent to guide teaching and learning" whereas Tood et al. (2001) mention that teachers do not necessarily need to be selective about the information they choose from diaries when they provide feedback. They suggest that positive feedback can foster trust and establish a stronger relationship between teachers and students.

Diaries enable teachers to offer feedback on the learning process students undertake. The researchers provide a list in which teachers can provide feedback on students' diaries: (1) replying or talking to the individual students directly, (2) providing more general and collective feedback, or (3) using the information to modify course content and approaches to instruction. Yorke (cited in Wallin & Adawi, 2017, p. 516)

Finally, Matsumoto (cited in Young & Sim, 2003) affirms that feedback received from teachers regarding the diaries plays a significant role in motivating students to express themselves openly in their entry diaries. The encouragement provided by teachers can provide students with the support they need during challenging moments. Furthermore, teacher' guidance on improving students' learning skills encourages them to reflect on their actions.

Based on the diverse perspectives with the use of feedback in diaries, the authors emphasize the importance of this tool in fostering not only academic growth but also the reinforcement or the improvement of teacher/student relationship through teachers' feedback. All in all, we can see the benefits that feedback may provide to students.

2.5 Diaries

Journals, reflection journals, learning journals, journal writing or learning diaries are some terms used for the concept of diaries. Diaries may be used in different ways or for different purposes; this term can have a different connotation for many teachers (Moon, 2003). "Teachers use learning diaries only for reflection, while others may require more such as integrating experiences, observations, and readings. Common to all learning diaries

is that students write and reflect on their experiences related to the course content” (Boonyasaana,2020; Vaner & Peck,2003 as cited in Hyttinen & Suhonen, 2022 p.450)

For Bazir (2016) a diary, also known as a journal, is a notebook in which people can write about their feelings, thoughts, ideas, or experiences. Everyone has a distinct motivation for keeping a diary. Some are concerned about forgetting the majority of what they have done. Others are frightened to interact with people. There might be a variety of causes. Some individuals, for example, feel ashamed of their secrets or they prefer not to tell them. All these factors might lead to diary writing. According to Supiani (2016), a diary is a personal record that comprises information on experiences and occurrences in confidential writing style. One can include various kinds of emotions and events in their diaries, including their feelings of joy, sadness, anger, sympathy, resentment, love, and others. Due to its accessibility, no one else can read the diary without the owner’s permission.

Klimova (2015) asserts that journal/diary writing is a very natural and successful technique for both students and teachers since it allows students to reflect on what they have learned, how they have learnt it, what sort of issues they have when writing in formal English.

Furthermore, Rubin (2003) mentions that diaries allow students to reflect in their own learning process and take control of the situation. During this process of writing a diary, teachers can see their diaries and write relevant comments on them.

As we read, diaries have different names, and the uses can be multiple. Besides this, Rubin (2003) suggests a set of steps on how to use diaries and these are the following:

1. The professor can look over each journal or diary and provide recommendations.

2. The professor can request that students review each other's diaries and give recommendations. This may be quite effective for a variety of reasons. (a) Peers can frequently advise to solve a problem. (b) Peers can learn from their peers' solutions, and (c) the professor sometimes do not have enough time to read all the diaries, but learners may still receive information this way.

3. After receiving multiple diary tasks, learners might be asked to go over them and identify their own patterns of issues and ways for addressing them.

4. The professor can look over the diaries and provide comments based on the patterns of difficulties and solutions that specific students have. (p.23)

Finally, journal writing can occasionally offer another advantage over classroom writing. Journal writing can reduce the distance between students and teachers and foster mutual trust, whereas in-class writing assignments tend to make students anxious. (Ngoh, 2002, cited in Tuan, 2010). According to Mlynarczyk (2013, cited in Ni'ma & Sumardi et al. 2020), reflective journals allow students to have significant writing practice, the possibility to express and maybe change their attitude about writing, and the opportunity to develop a personal relationship with their teachers.

2.5.1 Studies about diaries

There have been interesting studies in the literature about the use of Diaries or Journals in the field of education. For example, in the study called enhancing EFL learners' writing skill via journal writing by Tuan (2010), the main focus was to investigate if learners could grow out of the writing difficulties by engaging journal writing activity. In this study, 85 second –year students from the two writing classes, one treated as an

experimental group and the other as a control group participated. The researcher used an experimental style methodology and employed two instruments. The first instrument was a pre-test in form of an essay designed to measure students' fluency and accuracy. After the first instrument was applied, students began to write in their journals. The experimental group possessed two journals over a period of thirteen weeks because the teacher was able to revise students' entries and provide comments while students continued writing in the other journal. When the thirteen weeks were almost finished, the second instrument, a post-test, was applied to corroborate the impact of writing a journal for the experimental group. The first instrument revealed that the control group and the experimental group had similar English proficiency levels. After the second instrument the results indicated that, in the terms of accuracy, the experimental group made fewer mistakes than the control group. Those findings mentioned the benefits of journal writing as an extensive activity to promote learners' writing motivation and improve their writing.

Another study about diaries was called diary writing as a tool for students' self-reflection and teachers' feedback in the course in academic writing. In the study, Klimova (2015) investigated diary writing used in the course of academic writing at the faculty of informatics and management and analyzed some students' entry diaries with respect to teaching approaches and strategies. From fifteen students who were enrolled in the class only four students shared their diaries with the teacher in an online dairy to keep students' privacy. The students only wrote their diaries once per week. Before students began to write their diaries, the teacher provided pertinent information about how to write an English diary and about students' progress or problems in English. In the findings, students' entry showed that students were quite aware not only of their shortcoming in the

learning of English but also in the strategies which can help them to improve the process of learning.

In a different investigation titled the use of diary in teaching of writing recount texts, Supiani (2016) explored the effectiveness of diary writing as a pedagogical tool in the context of teaching recount texts he believed that through diaries, the students could express their interests, feelings and wishes better. The study was designed to describe certain activities in the classroom related to teaching writing by using a diary. The participants were thirty students at the eighth grade, for one scholar year. Previously the teacher asked the students for a definition about English diary, after that the teacher provided a sample of an English diary including the elements of a diary.

The researcher used a diary study methodology, he observed and interviewed students about their activities in the classroom. The researcher used descriptive qualitative design in order to obtain useful information. The students admitted that the diary used by the teacher helped them become more creative and motivated to make the personal stories in a diary.

In another study which was called using diaries in a second language research and teaching. Pierce (1994) investigated the use of language learning based on experiences of adult immigrants. The study focused on participants' diaries in which students made comments about their experiences in learning English including: feelings, thoughts, concerns, classroom, home, the workplace and the community. The participants were only 5 women who participated as volunteers from 16 students who were enrolled in the course, from January to June 1990. The researcher used a diary study methodology. In order to collect information about entry diaries, the researcher and the participants agreed to hold

meetings once a week for checking entry diaries and those meetings lasted about three hours. Later they held meetings once a month for the next three months. At the same time the researcher found the opportunity for the participants to share their entry dairies once a week with their partners and improve their speaking skill. In addition, in those sessions the researcher clarified participants' doubts such as grammatical rules, vocabulary and how to improve their written expression. In the findings students mentioned they made good progress which also increased the confidence in their social interaction with Anglophones Canadians.

The last study was called the use of learner diaries in the teaching of English as a second language. Mei (2003) implemented English diaries to 19 students between 19 and 20 years old, from December 1997 to June 1998. She used an experimental style methodology. Students' entries were not evaluated by the teacher; She believed that students would have more confidence with their writing if their diaries were not corrected. Nevertheless, she was able to read students' entries once a week and make comments for the students had the opportunity to write in their diaries every other week. She found that learners initiated writing topics and wrote whatever they wanted. This exercise motivated students to write more extensively as the topics were interesting to them. She also found that students asked for English advice in their diaries, and the teacher responded to their entries; she also provided comments according to students' needs taking in consideration their personalities. She was able to tape all those previous topics as a source of ideas for language learning activities while students kept writing their diaries. The teacher based on students' entries to develop more complex writing activities such as essays, debates, and project work for her future classes.

In summary, these studies highlight the significant impact of diary writing as a versatile tool for enhancing language learning for both teachers and students. Teachers use diaries for reflection whereas students use them to express their emotions or to improve their writing. We can see that diaries foster writing motivation, improve language proficiency, encourage the writer to express their thoughts and feelings or to improve their writing skills. The use of diaries as a tool to improve students' writing has shown different results across different contexts and uses. The findings of the different studies above showed the several uses diaries have with different purposes and the importance they have in education.

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed the principal concepts related to diaries. All those concepts previously mentioned help us understand the importance of writing through diaries in an English classroom. The methodology and the results will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

3 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore how the use of diaries affects high school students' writing. Therefore, a questionnaire was designed to explore students' perceptions about the use of diaries in their classroom. Thus, in this chapter a description of the setting, the participants, the research methodology, the instrument, the data collection and analysis procedures are presented.

3.1 Setting

This study was done at a public high school located in the central part of Mexico. Students take English courses for 3 years. This high school has almost 2000 students divided into two shifts. As part of the curriculum, English is taught as a foreign language in courses along the three years of high school. The English classes last five hours per week but in this occasion, students were asked to write an English diary every day. In addition, students have an hour weekly practice at the English laboratory. This class has forty students but only contemplates ten students because they participated in this study.

The participants were enrolled in the same classes for 2 years but in the 3 grade students must be enrolled in different groups. The students took classes for 190 hours per year. At the end of the official program, students received approximately 570 hours of English classes.

3.2 Participants

The participants were 10 high school students from an English course in the third grade; 4 men and 6 women were between 17 and 18 years old. These participants were selected because they had a previous experience with the use of diaries in their English classes during a whole year.

3.3 Research methodology

The present study was qualitative since it sought to investigate how the use of diaries helped students' writing development.

Cresswell (2009) states that qualitative research aims to explore and comprehend how individuals or groups interpret a social or human issue. Data is usually gathered in the participants' natural environment and analyzed inductively, moving from specific observations to broader themes. During this process the researcher interprets the significance of the findings. Thus, "qualitative research is an inductive approach and its goal is to gain a deeper understanding of a person's or group's experience" (Wahyuni, 2024, p.1)

3.4 Instrument

The instrument used in this research in order to collect the data was a questionnaire. "An effective questionnaire is one that enables the transmission of useful and accurate information or data from the respondent to the researcher" (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003, p.8).

Using a questionnaire, which included several open questions, allowed the participants to express their own experiences and thoughts using their own words. The questionnaire was adapted by Castellanos (2008) (see appendix A).

The instrument consists of ten questions which will be described in detail as follows: in the first part of the questionnaire the purpose of the study is given, and personal information is required such as name, age, gender, and grade. Next, the first two questions (1,2) were yes-or-no questions designed to collect data about students who wrote a diary in their previous course. In the second question, the students had the opportunity to explain in detail the reasons whether they liked or did not like this kind of activity. The following three questions (3,4,5) were multiple choice, in which the students chose the option according to their own experiences. These questions were designed to obtain specific information about the time they had spent writing in their entries as well their main difficulties. The next three questions (6,7,8) were open questions, so students could write freely. These questions were designed to obtain more details about students' experiences when they wrote their diaries. Questions number 9 and 10, a yes/or no question and an open question respectively, were designed to find out if students asked for help when they wrote their diaries.

3.5 Data collection procedure

As it was mentioned before, the instrument was adapted to carry out this research project. It was piloted with some students who had previous experience with diaries in their English classes.

After redesigning the instrument and having investigated more about the participants, the researcher visited the school to ask for permission to collect the necessary data. However, there was a negative response to the request and I had to contact the teacher

who applied the diaries during 2018. I asked for the students' emails, in this case through Facebook, and the researcher explained the students the purpose of the study and the reasons why they were selected for this study. Thus, I sent the questionnaire link to 20 students. I asked them politely to answer it, but only a few of them did. During the next days, I had to be more persistent with them and fortunately 10 students answered the questionnaire.

3.6 Data analysis

Once the questionnaire was administered, the researcher analyzed the data to explore students' perceptions about diaries. The data was classified according to students' answers regarding students' feelings, reflections, motivations, difficulties, the relationship with the teacher among other themes. It was pertinent to make this classification to present the results in a very explicit way regarding students' perceptions. These perceptions will be presented in chapter four.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter was very important for the development of the instrument and the data collection orientation and procedure. Besides this, although the data analysis was challenging for me, I realized the importance of classifying it to have clear and precise findings

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

4 Introduction

This chapter presents the results from the analysis of the data collected through a questionnaire. The results are divided in the following sections: the first section provides students' background, the second section presents the findings related to student's opinions about the use of dairies, the third section discusses the impact of writing a diary in their English classes, the fourth section focuses on tools students used to write the diary, and finally the last section discusses teacher's feedback.

4.1 Research questions

The research questions that were answered in this study are the following:

1. What do high school students think about using a diary in their English class?
2. What do they think the benefits of using a diary are?
3. What are students' difficulties when writing a diary?

4.2 Students' background

This section presents a panorama of the students' opinions about dairies. Such students wrote a diary for their English class in a public high school in Central Mexico. The participants were between 17 and 18 years old; they were 6 women and 4 men and all the students were enrolled in 3rd grade of high school in 2018.

4.3 Tools used to write a diary

Firstly, it is very important to mention all the diary entries were handwritten so they could practice their writing. Such students used cellphones and dictionaries while writing

their diaries. Four students reported they used their cellphones to write and four of them mentioned they used their dictionaries and only two of them mentioned the use of both tools.

It is evident in today's world that the use of digital tools brings a lot of benefits to students because they facilitate their writing. The table below shows the results regarding the tools they used to write their diaries:

Tools used to write a diary	Number of students
Cellphones	4
Dictionaries	4
Cellphones and dictionaries	2

As we can see the diverse use of digital tools is important for students during their process to write diaries. These tools help them simplify or clarify their doubts in the subject of English.

4.4 Students' opinions about the use of diaries

In this study, although only two of the students had experienced with diaries before, most of them had a positive attitude towards them after a school year. Thus, I will present excerpts from students where it can be appreciated how they expressed their emotions, feelings, thoughts, therapeutic implications and learning experiences. The students' opinions are presented below (I copied them as they wrote them and did not correct the mistakes):

About, feeling, emotions and thoughts, students stated the following:

It helps me to understand my own feelings, order my thoughts and keep track of what I do and want to do.

Student 1 (showing feelings)

As I was said, I never written a diary before. But in this case, I liked having written my emotions, thoughts and feelings on the notebook; especially when the teacher Laura gave me advice.

Student 3 (showing emotions, thoughts and feelings)

It was so helpful to unleash all of my anger and stress, and I confessed some secretes in many lines that nobody will never know but the teacher, besides the short answers or notes that she used to wrote were very cute and funny.

Student 6 (showing emotions, feelings and thoughts)

"I thought it is just for girls."

Because in it, I just wrote things that I like it. Also I wrote things my feelings, emotion or my love life.

Student 7 (feelings, emotions, and thoughts)

Because when I write my diary, I was expressed my emotions.

Student 8 (emotions)

Another finding was that one of the students thought that the diary was another way to feel more comfortable with herself. She thought it was a way to relax. The excerpt is presented below:

Because I had to peace me a relax me.

Student 5 (showing tranquility)

One more finding was that a student answered it was a flash of events in her life. The excerpt is given below:

Because it helps me remember important events in my life and vent a little at the end of the day.
Student 4 (showing past student)

Finally, the last three findings showed that students mentioned it was a way of practicing the English language. The excerpts are the following:

I liked because I think it's a great idea to practice our English everyday, also personally I felt it as a way to tell anyone how was my day.
Student 2 (showing learning)

Because it was helpful with my grammar and vocabulary.
Student 9 (showing learning)

Of course I liked Because is a form to practice my knowledge in this subject.
Student 10 (showing learning)

As it can be seen, participants considered writing a diary was a good experience. They not only expressed emotions, feelings and thoughts, but also learned about the language itself and even conceived it as a therapy.

4.5 The impact of writing a diary- learning skills and sub-skills

As it was shown in the last three excerpts above, they were about learning English. Regarding learning more specifically the skill of writing and sub-skills grammar and vocabulary, one student wrote that he learnt the skill of writing, I will provide the excerpt :

It helped me because being realistic one of the worst parts of learning English is that I cannot practice it as frequently as I'd like to, so, writing a diary got me close to the language at least in one of the principal skills: writing.
Student 9 (writing skill)

The following section gives more details about students who were benefited in their grammar. I will present the excerpts accordingly:

I think that it was of very helpfully, in somethings I can't write very good some words (grammar)

Student 6(grammar)

Recognize sentences or words that I don't understand

Student 7 (grammar)

The next section two students wrote that vocabulary helped them at the moment to write in their diaries. The excerpts are given below:

In trying to express my emotions and daily activities, I greatly expand my vocabulary

Student 3 (vocabulary)

It helped a lot because I didn't know a lot of words in English that I wanted to write so I had to extend my vocabulary.

Student 8 (vocabulary)

In this section it is important to recall that three students identified that vocabulary supported them when writing in their diaries. The excerpts are provided below:

High my vocabulary in some words and better my writing.

Student 2 (vocabulary and writing)

I considered that it helped me to practice and remember all the vocabulary I had learnt, to improve my writings in new ways involving my feelings, improved in me a writing a habit.

Student 5 (vocabulary and writing)

The last section students emphasized that grammar and vocabulary played a key role in helping them write more precisely.

It is really helpful, especially with grammar and vocabulary, it makes you think of the specific words you need to write and of the correct way to do it.

Student 1 (grammar and vocabulary)

My Dairy helped me a lot of to reinforce each tense and lean more vocabulary.

Student 4 (grammar and vocabulary)

As we can see the use of English diaries contributed significantly to enhance students' English learning, to improve their writing skills and the sub-skills the grammar and vocabulary. In addition, students had some difficulties when writing a diary. Five of them reported a similar problem to start writing, they agreed their main problem was vocabulary. Four students revealed their main problem was grammar. Finally, one student mentioned that he had problems with both, vocabulary and grammar. He also emphasized it was challenging for him to use of phrasal verbs. It is evident that these difficulties present obstacles for students when they start writing in their diaries.

4.6 Teacher's Feedback

Regarding teachers' feedback, it is important to mention that students felt motivated about writing a diary when they received such feedback. In the results, three students mentioned that the teacher's comments encouraged them to write. The excerpts are given below:

Actually that's really good. I used to feel happy and more motivated because I knew that I wasn't writing just to do the homework. I felt the teacher's interest and I'd feel

great when I was reading the teachers comments and tips.
Student 2 (motivation)

Nice, because it was only constructive criticism that motivated me to write better.
Student 9 (motivation)

It was a good activity, I never imagine to write a English dairy and teacher's comments encouraged me to write every single day without to de judge about grammar etc.

Student 10 (motivation)

As we can see, the teacher's feedback had important implications on students' affective aspects. For example, one student expressed the following:

I feel more connection with my teacher.
Student 8 (connection)

Another implication of the teacher's feedback was about the teacher-students relationship. Two students mentioned that they developed a better relationship with the teacher.

It was great, because we create a sort of bond or relationship, different from the one we had personally during class, that helped me to try to improve my journal entries so my teacher could be even part of it...

Student 1 (improvement of relationship)

It was the best part of it all. I expected them desperately because I wanted to know what the teacher's thoughts were when reading my diary. She used to advise me every week.

Student 6 (improvement of relationship)

One more implication about feedback is when students felt free to write. The example below shows how one student felt:

I liked it because more than corrections most times were comments of encouragement in bad days and congratulations on good days.

Student 4 (freedom to write)

Finally, the last three excerpts showed that students mentioned that they felt good with the idea of writing an English diary. These are the following:

Cool, I mean Teacher Laura wanted the best for us.

Student 3 (feeling good)

I felt very good, very happy because those comments were tips that helped me.

Student 5 (feeling good)

Oh very good, I feel a person very proud of someone gives me time to give me advice. That was my part favorite of the diary.

Student 7 (feeling good)

Evidently, positive comments from the teacher encouraged students to write every single day with motivation. Thus, feedback can promote or hinder students' writing development. Furthermore, teachers' feedback is crucial because all their comments can help students improve or discourage them to continue writing. Positive or negative feedback may affect students' attitudes towards writing.

Feedback in the English language is the information that students receive according to their performance in the area they are learning, in this case writing. Giving feedback on writing is not an easy task but it is always necessary to include constructive comments, recall the strengths of writing, the missing points and the areas they could improve. For

example: *You are doing a great job in your diary and sharing your day well done! To make your diary even better, try checking verb tenses after finishing your writing. For example: instead of “Today I go” , it should be “this morning I went”. Remember. You are writing about something that has already happened. Keeping writing your ideas are fun to read!.*

In contrast, feedback that focuses on emotions and feelings responds to the writer’s mood or the emotional content or the message. This type of feedback shows empathy and acknowledges to the writer’s experiences for example: *it sounds like the situation was really frustrating for you!* Both types of feedback are valid. It depends on the content of the writing, while the first type of feedback supports linguistic development and helps build communication skills, emotional feedback trust and connection between people.

As we can see, the implementation of diaries in English classroom may create a better relationship between teacher-students or student-teacher through writing a diary and giving feedback even though this strategy is not very commonly used in the English class.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS

5 Chapter overview

This chapter presents a summary of this study having a quick revision of the aims. Then, the research questions will be answered, and my personal reflection. At the end of the chapter, the limitations of the research project and the suggestions for the further research will be presented.

5.1 Summary

The purpose of the present paper was to explore how the use of diaries affects high school students' writing. More specifically, I was interested in identifying students' perceptions of writing a diary after they wrote one and in examining what the benefits of keeping a diary were in English as a foreign language high school class. For this purpose, ten high school students participated as volunteers in the study. The instrument administered was a questionnaire, all the data information was classified according to students' answers. The results indicated that ten students who participated in the study revealed that students had a positive attitude towards the implementation of English diaries and students consciously used them for expressing their emotions and feelings. Besides this, some of them used them for learning and one student did as a form of therapy. Furthermore, students' diaries showed that students felt more enthusiastic when they received teachers' feedback. Finally, these students mentioned that through feedback they improved their relationship with their teacher.

5.2 Research questions

This project was focused on answering three research questions, which are shown below and each question will be answered according to the participants' information.

RQ 1 What do high school students think about using a diary in their English class?

In this study, I asked ten students about the use of diaries. For most students the use of diaries was a way to express their emotions and feelings. Additionally, some of the students acknowledged that writing helped them remember significant events in their lives. The findings indicate that students had positive responses regarding the implementation of English diaries outside the classroom. The use of these outside or inside the classroom, especially in an English class, is not very common in public high school mainly because the students' language level is basic and the class is usually large.

RQ 2 What do they think the benefits of using a diary are?

Most of the students agreed that keeping an English diary helped them to expand and improve their vocabulary. Other students recognized that writing helped them with grammar points such as tenses and phrasal verbs. A few students agreed that maintaining a diary helped them to develop a writing habit and to improve in their writing. They expressed positive comments about the teacher and how feedback helped them to improve in some areas like writing through motivation as well as strengthening the relationship between teacher and student and vice versa.

There are a lot of ways to work with English diaries, and each teacher has different purposes in mind. However, the most crucial aspect is to initiate a dialogue with each student and respond according to their writing. In this case, the teacher who was in charge

of the group decided to let the students write whatever they wanted in order to encourage them to write, unlike other types of diaries in which the teacher provides specific content to follow. Another interesting action that the teacher decided to do was giving feedback by means of comments focused on the context.

RQ 3 What are students' difficulties when writing a diary?

Most of the students agreed that one of the main problems was grammar. For instance, in the excerpts that were presented above in this work, the main problems were the use of past with the verb to be and simple past, the omission of object pronouns, the use of indefinite articles in singular, the possessive form and so forth.

Regarding the difficulties with vocabulary, students may struggle because they do not know enough vocabulary. Despite of this fact, they can communicate effectively. Nevertheless, the participants in this research mentioned some actions they carried out when they had difficulties; five of them asked for help, three students asked for advice from the teacher, one sought assistance from a sibling and the last student approached a classmate.

5.3 Limitations of the study

I had two limitations during the development of the research. The first limitation I had while writing my thesis was the number of participants. I expected to work with more of them, but only 10 students out 20 answered the questionnaire of this study.

The second limitation was that the principal of the school did not allow me to administer the questionnaires initially because the students were divided into different groups at that time. She explained that she had facilitated the access to some students in the past, but the situation ended in chaos.

Although I had these limitations, I could send the questionnaire to some of them.

5.4 Further research

This research project explored 10 Mexican high school students' perceptions from a public school about writing a diary in English. Other research studies could explore the use of English diaries to develop students' critical thinking, and help them reflect through diaries.

5.5 Personal reflection

I would like to mention that it was not an easy task to develop this research. It required time, patience, dedication, commitment, motivation and other aspects. The aforementioned was crucial to write a thesis; to be honest, I had good and bad days, because I spent a lot of time reading articles and I could not find the pertinent information easily. It is also important to emphasize that it was difficult for me to know how to write the thesis. Rewriting paragraphs was hard for me; however, with the feedback provided by the teacher I could see my progress working in this project. I modified my attitude because of the teacher's encouragement to not give up and try to improve each day.

I consider that through this research project I learned several aspects of academic writing, such as writing coherent paragraphs and communicating ideas. Besides this, I realized the importance of punctuation to express well sounded ideas. Reflection was another crucial aspect while writing my thesis; for example, I did personal and critical

thinking. At the same time, it was satisfactory for me to learn and reflect about new information and apply it throughout my writing process; I learnt different ways of thinking and connecting my ideas.

Regarding my own research, I had the opportunity to see the diverse use of English diaries based on students' perceptions in high school. I found them to be invaluable tools for personal growth and self-expression. I noticed that in students' excerpts, students expressed daily life thoughts and emotions in a confident way. Moreover, I found that it was very important to learn how diaries can also be used as a therapeutic exercise. I think, this helps students to break the gap between teacher and student towards a better relationship. I could observe that they played a crucial impact in a personal way and in academic development. Also, these tools provide a safe private space, and they constantly help improve students' writing, increase vocabulary, creativity and students get used to writing their ideas.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire about the journal writing task.

Castellanos

Appendix 1: Questionnaire about the Journal Writing Task

Student's Name: _____ Date: _____

Topic: Keeping a journal

Please answer the following questions in a few words or sentences.

1. What is the best thing about writing in your journal each week?
2. What do you think is (are) the purpose(s) of writing in your journal each week?

1. How has the journal helped you to reflect on _____
_____? (Write the topic of your journal here)
2. How has the journal helped you in your English-learning process?

1. How do you feel when you read the teacher's comments each week?
2. How do you feel when the teacher doesn't comment in your journal?
3. What could someone learn about you through this journal?
4. Would you recommend the use of journals? YES _____ NO _____ Why?



Appendix B: Questionnaire adapted from Castellanos (2008)

BENEMÉRITA UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA DE PUEBLA

**FACULTAD DE LENGUAS
LICENCIATURA EN LA ENSEÑANZA DEL INGLÉS**

QUESTIONNAIRE

Objective : The purpose of this questionnaire is collect information about students' perceptions about the use of diaries or journals in their English class for my thesis.

This will take around 10 minutes to answer it.

Section 1. Personal information

Age _____ Male (☐) Female (☐) Semester _____ or Grade _____

Please answer the following questions in English:

1) Did you ever write a diary before?

2) Did you like writing a diary?

Why?

3) How often did you write your diary?

Everyday (☐) once a week (☐) occasionally (☐) other _____

4) How much time did you spend writing in your diary?

1 hour (☐) 30 minutes (☐) 20 minutes (☐) 15 minutes (☐) other _____

5) What are your main difficulties in writing something in English?

Vocabulary () grammar() (*such as prepositions and tenses*) other_____

6) How did writing a diary help in your English-learning process?

7) How did you feel when you read the teachers' comments?

8) Which tools (*cellphones, dictionaries, computers etc.*) did you use to write your diary?

9) Did you ask someone for help?

10) Who did you ask?

Thank you for your help