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**PRESENTA:**

**REBECA GABRIELA MARTÍNEZ ZENTENO**

**DIRECTOR DE TESIS:**

**DR. SILVESTRE ANGOA AMADOR**

**ASESORES DE TESIS:**

**MTRA. GEORGINA AGUILAR GONZÁLEZ  
MTRO. HÉCTOR SORIANO GARCÍA**

## **THE PARAGRAPH CONSTRUCTION IN EXPOSITORY TEXTS**

This thesis has been read by the members of the thesis committee of

**REBECA GABRIELA MARTÍNEZ ZENTENO**

And is considered worthy of approval in partial fulfillment of the requirement

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**LICENCIADA EN LA ENSEÑANZA DEL INGLÉS**

Thesis Director

---

Dr. Silvestre Angoa Amador

Committee Member

Committee Member

---

Mtra. Georgina Aguilar González

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Mtro. Héctor Soriano Garcia

PUEBLA, PUE.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Introduction**

The paragraph construction in academic writing in the English language is a part of the theoretical knowledge undergraduate students must master by the end of the Bachelor's degree in English Language Teaching (BA ELT). Since academic writing involves several genres that serve different purposes, the paragraph construction in every genre is distinct. In the case of the expository genre, the paragraphs possess a particular structure, fundamental to organizing ideas within a text. Nevertheless, the academic writing instruction in the BA ELT courses, paragraph construction is not often considered a foundational component to writing organized compositions; instead, the overfocus on grammar structures is prioritized. In other words, since the focus of the instruction relies on correcting grammatical aspects of the target language, the organization of ideas within a paragraph does not seem relevant when it comes to writing expository texts. In consequence, some expository paragraphs lack organization and structure. Put differently, some undergraduate students' expository texts do not meet the academic writing guidelines for constructing paragraphs, that is, the organization of ideas through three basic sentences: the topic, supporting, and concluding sentences.

Based on the foregoing, the present research discusses paragraph construction in expository texts. In particular, it discusses the role of the topic sentence in expository paragraphs through four writing dimensions: the syntactic, communicative, cognitive, and semantic dimensions. First, the syntactic dimension and its overfocus in the product approach to teaching writing are put into perspective. Later, the communicative, cognitive, and semantic dimensions of writing are integrated into the analysis of the topic sentence. Last but not least, this research advocates the view that the topic sentence represents a concept that integrates the four writing dimensions already mentioned since it works as a fundamental component in organizing ideas in a paragraph to guide readers to the contents of an expository text.

The organization of this research is divided into three more chapters. Chapter two provides the background information necessary to understand the research objectives and the conceptual framework. In this sense, the literature review presents broad information until reaching the subject matter of this research. First, as an introduction, it exposes the importance of writing for society and students as individuals belonging to the academic community. Secondly, it portrays two main writing approaches and writing models within a classroom. Last, the literature review explores the communicative, cognitive, and semantic dimensions of writing and their relation to the concepts of genre and the topic sentence. Regarding chapter three, it outlines the methodology used in the data collection process and the analysis of paragraph construction of the literature review thesis advances from sixth-semester students currently taking Research Seminar I as part of the BA ELT program in the Languages School at the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (BUAP). Finally, chapter four presents the results, discussion, and conclusions related to the analysis of the paragraphs in the different writing samples of the participants, as well as further directions of this research.

## **1.2 Justification**

The importance of academic writing for tertiary levels is worth mentioning. Foundational to this research, Carlino (2005) elaborated on literacy as a term related to academic writing. The author claimed that within the academic context, literacy is a set of strategies to communicate knowledge through texts at the college level. Similarly, Marulanda et al. (2019) claimed that academic writing is a type of writing that students must develop at the college level. In short, academic writing represents a means to communicate knowledge through literacy skills at the college level.

Academic writing might be a daunting task; however, it provides several cognitive benefits. According to Nuñez (2011) and Graham (2019), the set of writing strategies that

students are to master triggers positive effects on academic performance and contributes to the development of intellectual skills. That is the ability to read and synthesize information. Therefore, academic writing is a way to develop students' cognitive skills.

Finally, academic writing is expected to accomplish high proficiency levels at the college level. In this regard, Marulanda et al. (2019) further affirmed that academic writing proficiency must meet higher educational demands and international quality standards of the twenty-first century. In brief, academic writing is an essential set of strategies that every undergraduate student needs to develop at the college level to meet educational and social demands.

In light of the above, this research shows an absolute interest in academic writing and how it is taught within the classroom since it provides intellectual and social benefits to the students. In particular, this research focuses on less explored dimensions of writing, such as the communicative, cognitive, and semantic dimensions, which will be applied to explore the topic sentence as an organizational component in constructing paragraphs of expository texts. Finally, since traditional writing instruction leans toward only one perspective that focuses on the syntactic dimension, this research also aims to propose an integrative approach to the existing body of knowledge that includes the writing dimensions already mentioned. In this sense, writing instruction would be based on a solid conceptual framework and realistic models that might contribute to students' academic writing and cognitive skills development.

### **1.3 Previous Research**

There exists a lack of information regarding the importance of paragraph construction in expository texts. Hence, the paragraph construction and the role of the topic sentence in expository texts in English can be considered a newly explored area in writing education in Mexico. Nevertheless, there were only two previous studies that are closely related to the concerns of this research. The first study was published by the Universidad Autónoma de

Baja California (UABC) in 2012. It first explores the graduate profile writing competencies of the language teaching bachelor's degree program at UABC. Subsequently, the study focuses on a comparative analysis of other languages teaching bachelor's degree programs at universities in Mexico and Latin America. Finally, the analysis of the graduate profile writing competencies in Latin America was compared with the guidelines for teaching languages according to the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP) of Mexico. The second study was published by the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Quintana Roo (UQROO) in 2017. This study analyzes the curricular policies of public institutions addressed to writing instruction in the Spanish Language on the Mexico-Belize border. Both studies explored the current writing instruction panorama in the universities of Mexico and reached similar conclusions about it.

Regarding the first study analyzed, Nuñez (2012) examined the profile competencies students from the bachelor language teaching program must master by the end of the degree. The study's main objective was to determine if writing competence was a part of the graduate profile at UABC. The findings were compared with several universities in Mexico and Latin America, such as Argentina, Panama, Chile, and Colombia. After analyzing those results, the author contrasted them with the guidelines established by two different institutions, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP). The results showed that none of the Latin American universities have a uniform profile of writing competencies, nor are they following the standards of UNESCO or SEP. This study also demonstrated that some universities do not consider writing as a fundamental skill for the curriculum of language teaching programs. Upon investigation, the author claimed it is paramount to change the bachelor programs in language teaching to help future language teachers to develop efficient teaching skills.

In the second study, Perales et al. (2017) analyzed the curricular contents of four different institutions: la Universidad de Quintana Roo, (Uqroo), el Instituto Tecnológico de Chetumal (ITCh), la Universidad Tecnológica de Chetumal (UTCh) y la Universidad Politécnica de Bacalar (UPB). The authors focused on the linguistic policies, planning methods, and social semiotics related to writing instruction, that is genres and specialized language. The objective of this study was to find out to what extent the subjects of different bachelor degrees were linked to academic writing in the Spanish Language. The results showed that academic writing was little to not included in the curriculum of a significant majority of bachelor degrees. On the other hand, to some degree, the planning of the curricular contents lacked a solid theoretical framework in terms of academic discourse models, genres, and specialized language when it comes to writing instruction in Spanish. The authors further claimed that writing instruction is little to no related to the students' context since it only reproduces the traditional focus based on grammar. Upon reflection, the authors proposed a change in the curricular policies to integrate solid writing methods that can provide the elements to develop social, discursive, and cognitive processes based on the needs of each discipline.

The two previous studies have demonstrated that writing instruction is not considered a relevant practice across the curriculum of Mexican universities neither in English nor in Spanish Language. For example, after analyzing bachelor language teaching programs, Nuñez (2012) found that writing instruction competencies do not match the national or international standards for training language teachers. Similarly, when Perales et al. (2017) analyzed curricular programs for different bachelor's degrees, found that students lacked the necessary tools to develop writing competencies in their mother tongue. Moreover, according to the authors, the kind of writing instruction undergraduate students receive is far from the academic discourse they need to develop for each discipline, that is, to have control over

genres and specialized vocabulary. Upon review, the authors of these two studies agreed on the problem that writing instruction should be considered a fundamental subject across the curriculum. The authors further claimed the urgency for changing the curriculum programs to include academic writing subjects that help undergraduate students to improve their writing competencies in both English and Spanish Language.

The two previous pieces of research further showed that writing education is an area that has not been properly explored in Mexican universities. Notwithstanding, both studies contribute to understanding the importance of developing students' writing competencies and future language teachers. As a matter of fact, obtaining a broad perspective on writing instruction will be possible through a study that integrates the communicative, cognitive, and semantic dimensions of writing. On this basis, the present research shares similar concerns as the study of Perales et al. (2017) regarding social, discursive, and cognitive processes when it comes to writing an academic text, particularly in the construction of paragraphs where the topic sentence plays a pivotal role.

#### **1.4 Problem Statement**

A significant majority of English Language Teaching (ELT) students encounter several problems when writing academic texts in English. Particularly, when writing an expository text students struggle to organize sentences within a paragraph. Consequently, the communication of ideas seems disrupted by the lack of knowledge to write a solid paragraph. As a matter of fact, the type of writing instruction students receive does not include the study of paragraph construction nor the importance of the role of the topic sentence to create organized compositions. Instead, students mainly focus on the correction of grammatical structures. Hence, some expository paragraphs lack organization and structure.

The paragraph construction and the role of the topic sentence are fundamental to creating expository texts. On the basis that a paragraph is a unit of thought (Zinsser, 2012), it

possesses a structure constituted by three essential elements that develop one single idea (Wali & Qayum, 2020). According to Oshima & Hogue (2007) and Marulanda et al. (2019), a paragraph has a topic, supporting, and concluding sentences. The topic sentence represents the main sentence in an expository paragraph in that it is in charge of controlling one single idea and guiding the following sentences (Hogue, 2007). Therefore, it is paramount to give close and thoughtful attention to the paragraph construction and the topic sentence since they are essential for constructing a paragraph. Nevertheless, in the current panorama, when students are to write expository texts, there exists an overfocus on correcting grammatical aspects while paragraphs lack organization and structure.

The previous statement can be related to the type of writing instruction students receive based on the product approach. In this regard, Mirhosseini and Kianfar (2019) argued that there exists a lack of coherent, comprehensive, and practical approaches within the theoretical frameworks of teaching writing. Yet, teachers commonly lean towards only one perspective that predominates within the classroom: the product approach (Hyland, 2003). According to Hyland (2003), this approach conceives writing as a process of creating a product to evaluate grammar proficiency. In this way, teaching writing under this approach forces writing teachers to evaluate a final product instead of teaching students to organize and structure their ideas through paragraph construction.

Teachers' language conception is one factor that contributes the most to conceiving writing as a system to improve grammar. Notably, Liddicoat & Scarino (2013) pointed out that language is conceived as a set of structures and rules as part of teachers' beliefs. Thus, since language is commonly conceived as a system of grammar rules and syntactic structures (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013), writing instruction then focuses on improving the grammatical aspects of the language (Hyland, 2003). In other words, rigid language conceptions greatly influence how writing is taught. Similarly, Bazerman (2012) claimed that this language

conception leads to the idea that teaching writing is to improve grammar aspects instead of teaching rhetoric and communicative dimensions of writing. That is to say, due to a structural view of language, the semantic and communicative dimensions are often left behind due to a strong preference for the syntactic dimension of writing. In this regard, some theorists, notably Grabe & Kaplan (1996), asserted that the preference for the syntactic dimension leads to an incomplete conception of writing. The authors further affirmed that both syntax and semantics dimensions are involved when it comes to text construction. Nonetheless, as stated above, writing instruction is mainly based on correcting syntactic elements due to a structural conception of language.

The previous problem statement is present among some BA ELT students at the Languages School. The academic writing instruction students receive is mostly based on the product approach. In this way, the structural conception of language inevitably forces students to focus on grammatical features over the structure of their expository paragraphs. In consequence, some expository texts lack organization and structure.

### **1.5 Research Questions**

This research attempts to address the following question:

1. How do students use the topic sentence to organize ideas in a paragraph of an expository text?

### **1.6 Research Objectives**

This research aims to explore how students use the topic sentence to organize ideas within a paragraph of an expository text of students currently taking Research Seminar I which belongs to the BA ELT program in the Languages School at BUAP.

## **1.7 Instruments & Participants**

The expository texts analyzed were five samples of thesis advances of students currently taking Research Seminar I that belong to the BA ELT program in the Languages School at BUAP.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.0 Literature Review**

The present chapter attempts to provide a network of concepts related to the main concern of this study which is the role of the topic sentence in paragraph construction. To begin with, this section is divided into three main axes. In the first place, writing is analyzed in the academic context as well as the two main writing approaches within a classroom based on the syntactic and cognitive perspectives correspondingly. In the second place, the communicative perspective of writing is explored through the concept of genre. Later, a semantic perspective is held to explain the paragraph construction of expository texts. Finally, the communicative, cognitive, and semantic dimensions of writing are integrated into the analysis of the topic sentence in expository paragraphs.

### **2.1 The Implementation of Writing in Academic Settings through Writing Approaches**

Historically, writing education developed gradually according to the needs of particular contexts. To illustrate, Rijlaarsdam et al. (2012) related that, after the nineteenth century, writing education became part of classroom practices due to the settlement of public education. In turn, classroom conditions changed to create an appropriate environment for students' instruction. Similarly, Grabe & Kaplan (1996) related that during the twentieth century, positivism influenced educational systems, and writing skills were categorized and stratified for the first time. It was only after the second world war that exigent professional literacy became the primary goal of education for systems. In this regard, Rijlaarsdam et al.

(2012) claimed that “until the second half of the twentieth century, the purpose of writing instruction was mainly to teach mechanics and conventions: handwriting, sentence construction (grammar), spelling, and punctuation” (p.189). Subsequently, after the second half of the past century, writing instruction focused on text, content, style, and creativity (Rijlaarsdam et al., 2012). It can be understood that the implementation of writing in academic settings changed over time according to the needs of a particular social context.

Eventually, writing became a subject of study to design teaching writing approaches. Hyland (2003) claimed that throughout the history of writing instruction, different approaches had sought the ideal way to teach and develop writing skills within the classroom. Within this context, Rohmatika (2016) explained that writing approaches influenced teaching and learning and affirmed that “teaching approaches play a fundamental role in determining the success of the teaching writing itself since different approaches will give different results and effects to the students” (p.470). Put differently, since writing education turned into a subject of study, it was proved that writing approaches influence teaching and students’ performance. Therefore, several theorists have sought the best approach to teach writing effectively.

Consequently, now there exists a broad spectrum of theories, perspectives, and approaches that focus on acquiring writing proficiency (Hyland, 2003). In this regard, Mirhosseini and Kianfar (2019) argued that within the theoretical frameworks of teaching writing, there exists a lack of coherent, comprehensive, and practical approaches. In other words, a conceptual polarization within the experts’ community is present due to the different writing approaches that have sought to develop writing skills (Mirhosseini and Kianfar, 2019). Similarly, Hyland (2003) claimed that the theoretical context for teaching writing is a polarized framework and a minefield of controversies. As seen, a polarized framework is behind writing approaches that have been the subject of study by several scholars to improve writing instruction.

In this sense, only two main writing perspectives have greatly influenced writing instruction in school settings. In this respect, Mirhosseini and Kianfar (2019) exposed a strong tendency for two well-known approaches to teaching writing: the product approach and the process approach. Nonetheless, teachers commonly lean toward only one perspective that predominates within the classroom: the product approach (Hyland, 2003). The following section aims to provide an overview of the main approaches to teaching writing within academic settings to understand the theoretical framework of writing better.

### **2.1.1 The Product Approach: a Syntactic Perspective**

The product approach carries a particular conception of writing. For instance, Thulasi et al. (2014) exposed that within this approach, writing is conceived as the creation of “an end product” (p. 709). Similarly, Beaudet et al. (2012) discerned writing “as a result of grammar, syntax, readability, and text structuring” (p.111). Additionally, Hyland (2003) stated that writing is also conceived as the union of grammatical features and a coherent arrangement of words and sentences based on a system of rules. In sum, the product approach conceives writing as the production of a text following grammar rules.

Under the product approach, writing instruction focuses on improving grammar proficiency. In this regard, Beaudet et al. (2012) asserted that, under this traditional paradigm, writing instruction focuses mainly on grammar and modes of discourse. Similarly, Hyland (2003) claimed that writing instruction is a means to practice and correct the grammatical proficiency of learners through guided compositions. In this sense, learning to write involves manipulating lexis and grammar to create a final product with well-formed sentences to test learners’ ability to create texts (Hyland, 2003). In a nutshell, under this writing approach, the transmission, practice, and evaluation of writing, are mainly focused on correcting grammatical aspects (Mirhosseini and Kianfar, 2019; Bazerman, 2012).

Concerning the construction of texts under this approach, only the syntactic dimension of writing predominates over the semantic one. In this respect, Grabe & Kaplan (1996) observed a strong preference for the syntactic dimension of writing when constructing texts. Therefore, the authors proposed a model that showed that syntax and semantics are involved when writing a text. This analysis also showed that the syntactic and semantic dimensions of writing work together in constructing sentences. The syntactic component involves ordering words into phrases and using different types of clauses, whereas the semantic component translates linguistic forms into meanings. In other words, the syntactic and semantic components of writing are involved in constructing sentences within a text; nonetheless, when it comes to teaching writing, there is no balance between these two components (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996). Understanding the text only as a syntactic unit diminishes the importance of language philosophy and partially portrays the nature of writing (Beaudet et al., 2012; Grabe & Kaplan, 1996). It can be understood that when it comes to constructing texts, there exists a strong preference for the syntactic component over the semantic one that comes from a rigid conception of writing and an incomplete understanding of text construction (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996).

Within this context, language conception might be the origin of the syntactic understanding of writing in the product approach. To illustrate, Liddicoat & Scarino (2013) argued that the overemphasis on grammar comes from the structural conception of language understood as a set of structures and rules. That is, language is conceived as a hermetic system of rules that contributes to understanding grammar as the main focus of language. In that sense, the rigid conception of writing might be why several writing teachers rely on the product approach.

On this basis, Liddicoat & Scarino (2013) further presented arguments to emphasize that teaching requires not only teaching language structures but also teaching meaning. Under

the same perspective, Bazerman (2008) remarked that the success of writing is based on how well the meanings are introduced into a text. In other words, the authors above affirmed that teaching writing entails not only teaching written discourse but also how to convey meanings. Additionally, according to Fasheh (2007): “in mainstream language education, there is a *disease* of considering independent the instrumental function of words and the personal aspect that brings meaning to those words” (as cited in Mirhosseini & Kianfar, 2019, p.2). Put differently, the traditional view of language focuses on the form (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996) and leaves behind the communicative function of words and meaning. In sum, the structural language conception influences writing instruction and the way students learn to construct texts focusing only on the syntactic dimension.

Given this, the product approach has several teaching and learning disadvantages. First, the product approach does not focus on the context. To illustrate, Mauludin (2017) affirmed that this kind of instruction does not consider the social context. In other words, “it does not emphasize the importance of the connection between the function of writing and real-world context” (p.156). Therefore, writing tasks are decontextualized and do not consider the audience (Thulasi et al., 2014). In short, since the product approach only focuses on grammar proficiency, the context under which writing tasks are created is irrelevant to the text construction.

Second, the product approach does not consider students’ interests or knowledge. In this regard, Mauludin (2017) affirmed that interests and students’ knowledge seem to be left aside. Similarly, Mirhosseini and Kianfar (2019) also claimed that when teaching writing, students are asked to perform extended grammar exercises decontextualized and far from their interests. Indeed, this kind of instruction helps students improve grammar proficiency instead of writing about what they know (Fearn & Farnan, 2007, as cited in Mauludin, 2017). In brief, the product approach does not consider the students’ interests and knowledge.

Third, this approach does not focus on teaching the structure of texts and the organization of sentences. In this respect, Mauludin (2020) affirmed that “there is no support on developing the organization or structure of writing, but it only focuses on how sentences are constructed” (p.156). Similarly, Mirhosseini and Kianfar (2019) further claimed that since writing instruction consists of working with grammar exercises, students frequently struggle with sentences and word choices instead of ensuring they write systematically. Indeed, as Beaudet et al. (2012) asserted that the product approach sees the text as an object which is analyzed syntactically; however, it is not subject to revision. In conclusion, the syntactic conception of the product approach does not consider text structure or the organization of sentences.

All things considered, when teaching writing based on the product approach, there exists an overfocus on grammar. As Yang (2016) agreed, the main problem with the writing instruction of this approach is the over-emphasis on both vocabulary and grammar. In this way, the activities presented in many writing courses are intended to improve only the grammatical aspects of language. Nevertheless, some other relevant aspects are not considered in the writing instruction, such as the semantic dimension of text construction, the social context, students’ knowledge and interests, and the organization and structure of writing. Yet, the product approach is the most representative in academic settings (Hyland, 2003).

### **2.1.2 The Process Approach: a Cognitive Perspective**

In modern writing education, several theorists led the study of different conceptions of writing from a cognitive perspective. Within this framework, writing is conceived as a problem-solving activity that encourages writers to use their “memory, language and thinking ability” (Kellogg 2008, as cited in Ghufroon, 2016, p. 38). It can be understood that, under this perspective, writing is conceived as a process that involves several cognitive resources that

work together to solve a problem. Additionally, Thulasi et al. (2014) defined writing as “translating thought into text” (p. 790), whereas Rohmatika (2016) affirmed that “writing itself is a process of thinking” (p.471). As seen, the conceptions behind this approach relate cognitive functions of the mind to the writing process.

Unlike the product approach, the process approach focuses on different aspects other than grammar. First of all, Thulasi et al. (2014) further exposed that the process approach focuses on “content prior to form” (p.790). That means that under this approach, the contents of students’ ideas are more relevant than their grammar mistakes. Indeed, the process approach creates a product after several drafts, and grammatical mistakes are tolerated to improve the content of the ideas (Thulasi et al., 2014). Second, this approach focuses on “the individual learning and process of the mind rather than a product” (Thulasi et al., 2014, p.791). In this regard, Rohmatika (2016) claimed that “learners focus on the process by which they produce their written products rather than on the products themselves” (p.470). In other words, unlike the product approach, the process approach prioritizes contents and the process of the mind over the creation of a final product.

The process approach attempts to analyze the writing process through several stages. Accordingly, Mirossenhi & Kianfiar (2019) argued that in the process approach, there exists a stage-based view with challenges of text composition. The process approach involves several stages: planning, drafting, generating, and revising (Thulasi et al., 2014). In this approach, Graham & Sandmel (2011) stated that “students engage in cycles of planning (setting goals, generating ideas, organizing ideas), translating (putting a writing plan into action), and reviewing (evaluating, editing, revising)” (p.396). Additionally, Beudet et al. (2012) explained that, unlike the product approach, this approach focuses on tracking the activities of the mind during the process of writing, allowing teachers “to detect and diagnose strengths and needs in the different stages of writers’ writing processes” (Rijlaarsdam et al., 2012,

p.189). In brief, the process approach focuses on the writers' cognitive processes in each stage of the writing process.

On this basis, the process approach offers several advantages for writing instruction. First, Thulasi et al. (2014) claimed that the process approach allows students to develop cognitive structures to reconstruct previous knowledge. Second, Rohmatika (2016) stated that since "the process approach tends to be student-centered" (p. 470), students can choose the genre and topics they want to discuss and learn. In this way, students write based on a real purpose, address themselves to specific audiences, develop ownership of what they write, and acquire self-reflection and self-evaluation skills (Graham & Sandmel, 2011). In short, unlike the product approach, the process approach favors writing instruction in that students develop cognitive skills that allow them to be aware of what they write and how they write. More importantly, students develop responsibility and "ownership of their own learning" (Rohmatika, 2016, p.471).

In summary, the process approach conceives writing as a process involving the mind's function. In this way, this approach focuses on improving students' knowledge, the content, and the organization of their ideas in a text. This approach also demonstrates that writers use different cognitive functions at different stages of the writing process. On this basis, two writing models were proposed to understand better how students write and the cognitive activity behind each stage.

#### **2.1.2.1 Two Writing Models: Knowledge-Telling & Knowledge-Transforming**

In order to analyze the writers' cognitive processes in each stage, several writing models have been presented. To illustrate, Bereiter & Scardamalia (1987) proposed two different models of writing: knowledge telling and knowledge transforming. These two models contribute to understanding how students elaborate when writing a text. In doing so, Bereiter & Scardamalia (1987) found that the way students write changes depending on the

available knowledge about the topic and the genre, writing skills, and intended goals (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987). In other words, thanks to these models, it was possible to know that students write differently according to a task required, their knowledge, and the purpose of the task. On this basis, analyzing the differences between these two models is key to explaining the complexity of the writing process in school settings (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996) and understanding the writing process when it comes to writing academic texts.

On the one hand, the knowledge-telling model described how writers created compositions about topics they already know. Consistent with Bereiter & Scardamalia (1987), this composing model does not represent a problem-solving process because both topic and genre are familiar to the writer. In this model, the writer generates a text without a coherent plan or goal; instead, the planning stage involves only recalling and reiterating. This model provides an efficient and natural solution in that the writer recalls information from personal experience and starts composing in a matter of seconds when given a topic and genre (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1987). Some examples of this composing are narratives, descriptions, and opinion essays (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1987). As explained by Hayes (2012), “this process is focused on presenting the writer’s knowledge and not at all adjusting that knowledge to the reader’s needs. Thus, we can characterize it as a none rhetorical writing process” (p.12). In sum, the purpose of this model was to analyze the writing process of writers who write about topics they already know through narrations, descriptions, or opinion essays. The model exposed that since the genre and the topic are familiar to the writers, they only focus on writing sentences down on paper as they recall information.

On the other hand, the knowledge-transforming model explained the complexity of writing to communicate new knowledge acquired through extensive research about a topic.

In this respect, Scardamalia & Bereiter (1987) remarked that this composing model implies complex problem-solving processes, unlike knowledge telling. The writer is considered an expert who possesses the ability to grow and change their knowledge while writing. It also represents a complex task in that it improves the competence of the mature writer (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987). Grabe & Kaplan (1996) also identified that composing as transforming is the ability to create authentic texts. According to the authors, the planning stage involves exhaustive research to join all the pieces of information available, as well as to be conscious of the usage of rhetorical features and possible constraints. Some examples of this composing are expository and argumentative texts.

Similarly, Hayes (2012) remarked that knowledge-transforming is a sophisticated model that only skilled writers use, and unlike the previous model, “writers using *knowledge-transforming* engage in a rhetorical process in which they try to shape their knowledge to meet the reader’s needs” (p. 12). In sum, the knowledge-transforming model attempted to explain the process skilled writers experience when writing an argumentative or expository text, the research they do to obtain information about a topic, and the rhetorical features they use to communicate with their readers. Viewed in this way, transforming students’ knowledge might be seen as a complex task to achieve in the academic setting; nevertheless, it is possible to achieve it with great effort, training, instruction, practice, experience, and purpose (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Grabe & Kaplan, 1996).

As seen, thanks to Bereiter & Scardamalia (1987) and their explanation of the cognitive models, it is possible to know that several factors influence the writing process. For example, in the case of the knowledge-telling model, writers’ knowledge and familiarity with genres such as descriptions, narrations, and opinion essays allow them to write quickly about a particular topic. On the contrary, in the knowledge-transforming model, the knowledge of the writers is not enough to create a composition since they are to write about an unfamiliar

topic. Thus, one of the stages of the writing process involves the search for information. Moreover, the knowledge of the argumentative and expository genres and the use of rhetorical features to communicate with the reader are essential for this model. By doing so, writers create authentic compositions that transform their knowledge. In sum, thanks to the writing models proposed by Bereiter & Scardamalia (1987), it can be understood that the process approach conceives writing as a complex problem-solving activity that involves cognitive factors such as memory, language, and the ability to think (Ghufron, 2016).

In general, writing requires conscious effort from students and teachers. In Hyland's (2003) opinion, it is a must for writing teachers to take into account or at least know different theories behind writing orientations to contrast solid information with our assumptions and beliefs about writing. Having the whole picture of several orientations beforehand would offer a valuable opportunity to design, plan and deliver meaningful courses based on an informed and critical point of view. Indeed, understanding writing is more complex than adopting only one definition. A minority of teachers tend to conceive writing as an eclectic range of methods with different perspectives and adapt the theories behind writing instruction to teaching contexts considering the needs of the students (Hyland, 2003). Finally, Scardamalia & Bereiter (1987) concluded that helping students to move from knowledge telling to knowledge transforming is a realistic educational objective.

So far, this section has explained the role of writing in academic settings. In particular, it discussed how writing was first included in academic settings through writing approaches. In this way, it also attempted to explain the purpose of each of the two main approaches. Whereas the product approach focuses on a syntactic dimension of writing, the process approach offers a broader focus that allows studying writing from a cognitive, communicative, and semantic dimension. Since this research is not based on the product approach in which the grammatical and syntactical aspects of writing have a significant

influence on teaching, this research appeals instead to the process approach where the cognitive process of writers along with the communicative and semantic dimensions of writing is critical for understanding writing as a whole. Therefore, according to some cognitive theorists, the next section is dedicated to exploring the communicative and semantic dimensions of writing through the concept of genre.

## **2.2. The Genre: A Communicative Perspective**

The semantic dimension of writing is vital in understanding writing as a means of communication to share meanings. In conveying meanings in a text, the communicative dimension of writing is also present when choosing a genre. In this regard, Bazerman (2008) claimed that the genre is essential for both the reader and writer to establish a shared space to communicate based on the form and the contents of a text. Indeed, writing is a social activity involving the communicative dimension that considers the reader part of an audience (Bazerman, 2012). As Mirhosseini & Kianfar (2019) agreed, the nature of writing is dialogic. In other words, the text and the genre create a connection between the writer and the reader. The dialogic function of the text starts from the social interactions of both the writer and the reader's values, understandings, and experiences (Mirhosseini & Kianfar, 2019). Put another way, knowledge and experiences lead writers to create a dialogue with the readers. As Mirhosseini & Kianfar (2019) further remarked: "Technical ability and issues of structure, genre, and text, although they should not be seen as ultimate targets in themselves, are vital to the act of writing" (p.10). Writing reflects the writer's interaction with the world expressed in their own words; however, that does not imply forgetting formal issues such as the genre.

In light of this, it may be worth clarifying what is meant by 'genre' according to some theorists. For example, Liddicoat & Scarino (2013) expressed that communication is represented through meanings and forms, better known as genres. According to the authors, genres are communicative events within a culture. In this way, the members of a culture need

to recognize the form of a text to know the purpose, understand the text itself, and respond to it. Similarly, Hyland (2007) defines genre as “a group of texts which share similar discursal features that are easily identifiable by members of a community” (as cited in Chen & Su, 2012, p. 185). In brief, a genre is a type of written form that is addressed to a group of well-versed people in a discipline to understand the content and the communicative purpose of a text.

Genres are represented in several written forms according to the purpose. In this respect, Bazerman (2012) claimed that there exist different writing forms and all of them have a genre that corresponds to other disciplines; they serve different purposes and require different abilities, ways of expression, and production processes. Genres provide a vast repertoire of forms that dictate which actions are adequate for a specific circumstance (Bazerman, 2008). As there exist different genres that serve various purposes, they involve particular features that determine the form. In this regard, Marulanda et al. (2019) explained that genres possess different communicative purposes, specialized vocabulary, and discourse styles, to name a few. To illustrate the wide variety of genres, Sidaway (2006) “used the term ‘The magnificent seven’ to categorize genre into recount, narrative, explanation, information, report, procedure, discussion, and exposition” (as cited in Chen & Su, 2012, p. 185). In sum, writing can take several forms, processes, and styles depending on the communicative purpose that wants to be achieved.

When teaching writing, establishing a genre and purpose is imperative. In the first place, Widodo (2006) affirmed that genre helps students to understand the purpose (as cited in Chen & Su, 2012). Similarly, Mauludin (2017) & Yasuda (2018) asserted that students could create writing tasks with specific features according to the purpose when establishing a writing genre. In this way, Chen & Su (2012) claimed that when selecting a genre, students are more likely to recognize the social purpose of their writings; consequently, students learn

to identify characteristics of all the different genres, as well as other contexts and discourses (Gomez, 2011). In short, when teaching writing based on a genre approach, students have several learning advantages for understanding what they write.

The genre also allows students to recognize the linguistic resources they need to write a text. For example, Hyland (2007) exposed that genre not only helps to establish the context but also it helps to identify the discourse style and the organization of grammatical features (as cited in Chen & Su, 2012). Similarly, Chen & Su (2012) expressed that genre helps students to understand the content of what they write, the language used, and the vocabulary required for each genre. Additionally, Mauludin (2017) pointed out that in genre-based instruction, students might learn different genres and specific language use characteristics, such as grammatical patterns and common expressions. In other words, the genre is essential in creating a communicative text where students can identify each genre's language features. As a matter of fact, under the genre, students might create communicative writings using appropriate vocabulary and structures (Mauludin, 2017) so that students might also understand how language works (Gomez, 2011). To sum up, when it comes to teaching writing, by considering the wide variety of genres, students are more likely to understand what they write for and which linguistic expressions they need to achieve that goal.

The participation of writing teachers is also key to performing genre instruction. Mauludin (2017) explained that the teachers are the ones to introduce the structure of the different writing forms. Besides, Graham (2020) claimed that "students' writing improves when they acquire greater knowledge about writing through instruction on the functions and elements of different types of text, studying and emulating model text" (p.36). Furthermore, the author suggested that students should receive feedback from teachers to improve the quality of their text. That is, the role of teachers is essential in developing students' writing skills since teachers are in charge of introducing different kinds of writing forms and genres.

Overall, the genre plays a vital role in writing instruction, helping students to be aware of what they write, mainly to understand the purpose, the context, the audience, and how to organize a text (Widodo, 2006, as cited in Chen & Su, 2012). It also provides meaningful insights into how texts should be written and how it contributes to improving academic writing skills (Marulanda & Martínez, 2017) in the most common academic writing genres: narrative, expository, and argumentative (Chen & Su, 2012).

### **2.2.1 The Expository Genre in Academic Writing**

To better grasp the central theme of this research, it is necessary to glance at academic writing according to some theorists. First, as Carlino (2005) explained, academic writing is a high-writing culture, also understood as literacy, which implies a set of intellectual strategies to produce texts for professional and scientific communities. In this regard, Guemide et al. (2015) claimed that scholars and academics are the main participants in academic writing. Concisely, academic writing is required to communicate knowledge to different professional and scientific communities at the college level.

Academic writing implies recognizing society's role since students and scholars share knowledge within a community. In this respect, Ortiz (2015) suggested that it is vital for students to conceive academic writing as a process and a social practice that involves particular circumstances of production, communication, and circulation. In other words, based on this academic perspective, it is essential to consider the context and social conditions of discourse (Hernández, E. & Marín, M. L., 2018). Bazerman (2008) proposed a more profound understanding and affirmed that writing is a social process connected to perceptions and personal experiences. Hence, understanding that academic writing is a social practice created for social purposes increases its value and importance for the current academic demands.

Academic writing proficiency in English is required for tertiary levels. Furthermore, Marulanda et al. (2019) pointed out that academic writing proficiency in English is eager to meet higher educational demands and international quality standards of the twenty-first century. In this regard, due to globalization, Fierro & Martínez (2014) observed that the exchange of information among researchers is mainly written and published in English. Besides, the English language is a necessary tool to grow professionally (Fierro & Martínez, 2014). Therefore, academic writing proficiency in English happens to be an essential component of students' set of skills all over the world.

In this respect, the English language has been a means to communicate knowledge within the academic community over time. Astafurova et al. (2017) agreed with this fact as they stated that:

Rapid scientific progress and the industrial revolution in England in the eighteenth century have turned English into the language of academic writing (...) Fast technological developments of Great Britain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries made English the language of international communication, which, as the dominant one, was established in the academic writing of other world languages (p.280).

In other words, the empowerment of the English language over time has contributed to setting it as a lingua franca. It is nowadays the language to participate and share knowledge in the professional and scientific context. Consequently, academic writing proficiency in English is a central component that promotes integration into the international scientific community (Astafurova et al., 2017). For that reason, it can be understood that academic writing is to meet the international quality standards of the century (Marulanda et al., 2019). In short, English has been a means to communicate knowledge within the academic and scientific community.

Academic writing in English encompasses particular features that make it appropriate to share scientific knowledge. Astafurova et al. (2017) identified that academic writing is essential in professional and scientific communities because it entails organization, structure, and language expertise. In addition, academic writing requires high literacy skills such as researching, reading, synthesizing, and analyzing information (Irving, 2010). In this way, “academic writing can take many forms: journal articles, textbooks, dissertations, groups project reports, etc.” (Guemide et al., 2015, p.3). As seen, academic writing implies developing a high level of writing expertise that allows communicating knowledge with other scholars and academics.

On the other hand, students are also expected to develop specific language skills and discourse conventions that characterize academic writing. For instance, Marulanda et al. (2019) also emphasized that undergraduate students must demonstrate high writing skills, including grammatical and lexical accuracy in English. Similarly, Bailey (2015) showed that academic writing involves learning special conventions such as style, referencing, format, specialized vocabulary, and skills development to use language accurately and effectively. As explained by Olson (2012): “All disciplines possess, as we say, *a literature*, and to participate, one must know the literature” (p.38). Since academic writing is a way to communicate knowledge, it is essential to master language skills to write academically. Thus, assistance and guidance from teachers are necessary as if students were learning a new language (Nuñez, 2011).

Having the ability to communicate through different academic genres is a requirement for every undergraduate student. In this respect, Marulanda & Martínez (2017) argued that at a higher educational level, the argumentative and expository genres are the most required in academic writing since both of them involve high literacy skills to synthesize information. That is to say, the complexity of the argumentative and expository genres relies on the level

of literacy skills that undergraduate students should have to communicate knowledge when writing an academic text. In brief, recognizing the importance and purpose of each academic genre is fundamental to sharing knowledge.

On this basis, the expository genre serves an objective purpose in the educational context. According to Álvarez & Ramírez (2010), the purpose of the expository text is to show in detail the origin of a problem through objective information. Additionally, Setyowati & Sukmawan (2015) argued that the expository genre is “a kind of writing that is used to explain, describe, and inform” (p.48). Put another way, the expository genre aims to transmit information about a subject matter through a text. In sum, the expository genre is vital because it allows students to communicate objective knowledge and information about a topic in the academic context.

According to some theorists, the expository genre involves specific characteristics when writing a text. On the one hand, Álvarez & Ramírez (2010) exposed that to write an expository text, it is necessary to use linguistic and no linguistic resources to make explicit the structural organization, the cohesion of elements, and an appropriate verbalization. Similarly, Johnson (2016) affirmed that this type of text involves formal language, specialized vocabulary, and various concepts. Furthermore, Gacho (2022) explained that expository texts involve rhetorical features such as the awareness of the circumstances under which the text is created. That is to say, the audience for which it is written, the purpose, and the register, among others. In general, specialized language features are essential for expository texts in that they allow writers to transmit information addressed to particular audiences.

On the other hand, Álvarez & Ramírez (2010) exposed that this type of text involves one specific structure. In this regard, Klingner et al. (2007) explained that the structure of an expository text refers to the form a text is organized to guide the reader to connect ideas and

understand essential information. To better understand the concept of the structure of expository texts, Englert et al. (2009) divided it into two different levels: the local and global levels. The local level is the part where writers construct meanings by creating main and supporting ideas. In contrast, the structures are crucial to assembling, synthesizing, and ordering information at the global level. In other words, meanings are created at the local level. In contrast, at the global level, the structure of a text is essential to organize the information. In short, it can be understood that the concept of structure is a fundamental characteristic of writing an expository text.

Notwithstanding, several factors constrain the writing process of an expository text. Englert et al. (2009) claimed that teachers commonly lack the knowledge to guide students through the composition and comprehension of expository texts. Additionally, Klingner et al. (2007) expressed that teachers usually consider students' learning problems the main obstacle when writing expository texts. In fact, students are only familiarized with other rhetorical styles but not with specialized vocabulary and structures of expository texts (Englert et al., 2009). Finally, the lack of support from teachers might constrain students' knowledge about text structures and the organization of information into a text based on a purpose and a learning goal (Klingner et al., 2007, Englert et al., 2009). All in all, the previous factors are just a small portion of other factors that limit the writing process.

Finally, students' writing skills and knowledge might improve through teaching based on the writing process of expository texts. In this respect, Graham (2020) claimed that "students' writing is further strengthened by teaching them how to plan, draft, revise, and regulate the process of writing and by supporting these processes with clear and specific goals for writing, helping students gather and organize possible writing content" (p. 36). Regarding expository texts, Englert et al. (2009) stated that "unless students know how to identify, represent, synthesize, and organize expository ideas, they will have difficulties when

they are asked to comprehend or write expository texts” (p.147). Therefore, it is imperative to understand its purpose, identify its characteristics, and structure to write intelligible academic texts. As stated by Mazur-Palandre et al. (2012): “expository texts are a school-situated type of text” (p.427). That is to say, teachers’ support and knowledge are decisive in enhancing students’ writing skills when it comes to writing expository texts. As expressed above, the expository genre is essential for academic writing to share knowledge at the college level. In this way, paragraph construction is fundamental for accomplishing this task. Therefore, the next section will be dedicated to analyzing the paragraph’s definition, elements, and relevance for expository texts in academic writing.

### **2.3. The Paragraph Construction in Expository Texts: A Semantic Perspective**

Throughout the history of writing education, several paragraph definitions have been presented. First and foremost, Stern (1976) explained the origin of the theory of paragraph construction first proposed by a Scottish logician called Alexander Bain. Bain conceived the paragraph as “a deductive system, a collection of sentences animated by unity of purpose, a purpose announced in an opening topic statement and developed through a logically ordered sequence of statements that iterate or illustrate the same idea (p.457). Some other theorists, notably Oshima & Hogue (2007), claimed that “a paragraph is a group of related statements that a writer develops about a subject” (p.3). Similarly, a more recent group of researchers, Wali & Qayum (2020), affirmed that a paragraph is a set of connected sentences that develop one idea. In short, a paragraph is a system of related sentences that work together to develop the main idea. In turn, a paragraph is a fundamental element for the structure and organization of sentences within an expository text.

The paragraph is an essential element for the structure of an expository text. Álvarez & Ramírez (2010) further agreed that the paragraph is a linguistic resource in charge of contributing to the organization of a text. Similarly, Setyowati & Sukmawan (2015) affirmed

that expository texts “explain one topic and can be developed with various patterns or combinations of paragraph developments” (p.48). Put differently, the paragraph is an essential element of the structure of an expository text to develop a topic through the organization of ideas into a group of connected sentences.

The paragraph construction involves a combination of three fundamental sentences. Oshima & Hogue (2007) and Marulanda et al. (2019) exposed that a paragraph should include the topic, supporting, and concluding sentences. First, the topic sentence explains in advance the paragraph. That is to say, the topic sentence introduces the main idea of the whole paragraph. Second, the supporting sentences give examples to clarify the topic. Expressed differently, they contribute to developing the topic sentence with more information about it. Finally, the concluding sentences summarize the given information or rephrase the topic sentence to close the paragraph. From a general perspective, a paragraph is formed by one single idea, point, or topic stated in the first sentence, and the rest of the sentences support its development (Álvarez & Ramírez, 2010, Oshima & Hogue, 2007). In other words, a paragraph is in charge of expressing, guiding, and controlling one idea through the topic sentence, while the supporting ideas contribute to developing the information. Finally, Wali & Qayum (2020) concluded that the simple pattern of the topic sentence, supporting sentences, and concluding sentences will help readers to understand the information. As seen, paragraph construction involves a combination of sentences such as the topic sentence, the supporting sentences, and the concluding sentence that contribute to the organization and structure of an expository text.

Furthermore, expository paragraphs also involve distinguishing semantic characteristics. According to Zinsser (2012), the paragraph should be unified, coherent, and adequately developed:

It is unified in that every sentence and every idea relates to the main idea stated in the topic sentence. It is coherent in that the sentences and ideas are arranged logically, and the relationships among them are made clear by using effective transitions. Finally, the paragraph is adequately developed in presenting a short but persuasive argument supporting its main idea (p.173).

Similarly, Wali & Qayum (2020) also elaborated on three semantic characteristics of an expository paragraph: coherence, cohesion, and unity. First, the writer's role is to explain a topic by giving examples and organizing the supporting sentences in a logical order. Consequently, a paragraph is coherent when the supporting sentences follow a logical order. The second characteristic of an expository paragraph is cohesion. The cohesion appears when all the supporting sentences are related to each other to support the topic sentence. Finally, unity is the third essential characteristic of an expository paragraph. A paragraph has unity when all the supporting sentences are connected to the topic sentence. In other words, the supporting sentences of an expository paragraph should be directly related to the topic sentence. In sum, when writing an expository paragraph, the topic sentence and supporting sentences should include three main semantic characteristics for its construction: coherence, cohesion, and unity.

Nevertheless, there exists a possibility of writing a sentence that deviates from the main topic. In this regard, Zinsser (2012) argued that a well-constructed paragraph should avoid digressions. A paragraph should be unified in that it develops one idea and should not move away from the main subject. In this respect, Wali & Qayum (2020) affirmed that "if a paragraph has a sentence, which is not related to the topic sentence, it is an irrelevant sentence and it has to be omitted" (p.49). Put differently, the topic sentence and the supporting sentences must be related to unite the same idea so that digressions can be avoided when writing an expository paragraph.

Based on the previous information, the writer has to develop several writing abilities to write well-developed paragraphs within an expository text. Bell and Burnaby (1984) stated that the writer must demonstrate the ability to have control of the sentences showing a: “control of content, spelling, and letter formation, and beyond the sentence structure and integrate information into a cohesive and coherent paragraph and text” (as cited in Ghufron, 2016, p.38). Put differently, writers are to control several variables to clearly express their content through well-formed sentences and paragraphs. Marulanda et al. (2019) argued that well-constructed paragraphs are required to create an assertive composition. Moreover, Harmer (2001) exposed that writing is a skill that students need to develop. For this reason, students should know punctuation rules and how to construct a paragraph (as cited in Ghufron, 2016, p.38). In this way, the organization of contents might enhance the writings and the quality of texts. Therefore, helping students develop an awareness of the organization of their meanings and thoughts based on the structure of both the expository text and the paragraph construction might improve their writing abilities to create coherent, cohesive, and unified sentences.

### **2.3.1 The Topic Sentence in Expository Texts**

The topic sentence plays a pivotal role in the paragraph construction of expository texts. Following Marulanda et al. (2019), expository texts always have an introductory paragraph that contains a topic sentence and affirmed that: “the most important sentence in the introductory paragraph is the topic sentence, which states the main subject of the whole essay” (p.39). That means that the topic sentence of the first paragraph of an expository text is responsible for stating the main idea of the whole text. Nevertheless, the topic sentence is not only fundamental in the introductory paragraph but also in the rest of the paragraphs of expository texts. To illustrate this point, Sheehy & Wray (2019) affirmed that reading the first

sentence of each paragraph of an article gives an idea of the main points of the whole text. In sum, the topic sentence is a fundamental element in constructing all the paragraphs of an expository text.

On this basis, every paragraph has a topic sentence that serves a significant function. In this regard, Zinsser (2012) stated that the main idea of a paragraph is always written directly in the topic sentence. Correspondingly, Wali & Qayum (2020) expressed that the topic sentence functions as an introduction to the topic of a paragraph. By way of explanation, the topic sentence is the most fundamental element in constructing a paragraph since it provides an idea about the contents of the paragraph (Oshima & Hogue, 2007). Expressed differently, the topic sentence is in charge of anticipating the reader the contents of a paragraph. In sum, the topic sentence is fundamental in that it is responsible for stating the main idea of a paragraph.

In this context, the topic sentence has a specific position in a paragraph. Oshima & Hogue (2007) further claimed that “the topic sentence is usually the first sentence in a paragraph” (p.40). Similarly, Sheehy & Wray (2019) stated that the topic sentence is the opening sentence of a paragraph since it aims to inform the reader what they are about to read. In that sense, the writer guides the reader through the text when they write a topic sentence at the beginning of a paragraph (Oshima & Hogue, 2007). In other words, placing the topic sentence at the beginning of a paragraph helps the writer organize the contents and the reader to understand the main idea.

There are several characteristics to consider when writing a topic sentence. First of all, Oshima & Hogue (2007) stated that the topic sentence has to be composed of two integral parts: a topic and a controlling idea. The topic is the main subject of the paragraph, while the controlling idea regulates the information of the paragraph. For example, the topic might be a word or a phrase that introduces the main subject of the paragraph, whereas the controlling

idea limits the topic (Wali & Qayum, 2020). Second, the topic sentence should be neither too general nor too specific (Oshima & Hogue, 2007). Finally, when writing a topic sentence, Wali & Qayum (2020) claimed that it is possible to use descriptive adjectives before a noun and the words *several* and *many*. In this way, the writer might be able to develop the topic through supporting sentences.

Finally, the topic sentence can be considered a semantic component in a paragraph. Based on the premise that a paragraph is “a unit of thought” (Zinsser, 2012, p. 172), a writer divides and organizes thoughts into writing units, that is, paragraphs. In this respect, Álvarez & Ramírez (2010) affirmed that a paragraph is a unit of writing and meaning; that is, the paragraph is the unit of a text that possesses a meaning. Consequently, it can be inferred that the topic sentence is a semantic element that helps organize meanings along the paragraph. Furthermore, as the previous section explains, the topic sentence contributes to writing cohesive, coherent, and unified paragraphs (Zinsser, 2012; Wali & Qayum, 2020). Therefore, it can be inferred that the topic sentence is a semantic component in a text.

Overall, the creation of expository texts involves the awareness of several factors. First of all, based on Bereiter & Scardamalia's (1987) findings, the approach under which texts are created affects their construction. In this case, the process approach best explains the construction of expository texts from a cognitive perspective. It can be understood that writing changes depending on the writing skills, intended goals, and the available knowledge of the writer about the topic and the genre. In this sense, the genre is another factor that contributes to the creation of expository texts since it establishes the purpose of the writing task due to students writing differently according to the tasks required. In this way, the genre determines the semantic and communicative dimensions under which the writer composes an expository text.

As seen, the paragraph is a fundamental part of the structure and organization of ideas within an expository text. Since a paragraph is a unit of writing and thought, the topic sentence represents the most fundamental element. It possesses a semantic function that guides, controls, and organizes the writer's meanings through sentences along the paragraph. Therefore, it is imperative to have solid bases and knowledge to write expository paragraphs. In this way, students might be able to transform their knowledge into meaningful expository texts. Ghufron (2016) concluded that "the writer should be equipped with knowledge of correct spelling, punctuation, grammar, diction, thesis statement, topic sentences, and cohesive links within a paragraph, and global organization of texts" (p.38). Graham (2019) further concluded that the more students are exposed to writing exercises, the better they get at turning ideas into sentences. Finally, as Grabe & Kaplan (1996) asserted, writing, particularly the more complex composing skill valued in the academy, involves training, instruction, practice, experience, and purpose" (p.6).

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **3.1 Research Questions**

The present research explores the semantic dimension of writing through the concept of the topic sentence as an organizational component in constructing paragraphs. Based on the findings of some theorists, notably Oshima & Hogue (2007), Marulanda et al. (2019), and Wali & Madani (2020), regarding the role of the topic sentence in paragraph construction, this research aims to find out how students use the topic sentence to control and guide the contents of paragraphs when writing the literature review of their thesis advances. Therefore, the following question was addressed:

1. How do students use the topic sentence to organize ideas within a paragraph?

### **3.2 Participants & Setting**

The participants of the present research were five seventh-semester students currently taking Research Seminar I as part of the Bachelor of Arts in English Language Teaching (BA ELT) program at the Languages School at the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (BUAP). It is worth mentioning that according to the BA program in ELT, students are to take a workshop in Academic Writing and a course in Research Methodology in the sixth semester before Research Seminar I. By the time students reach the seventh semester, they are already familiarized with academic writing. In this way, they will be able to write a thesis dissertation by the end of their degree.

The research setting was Research Seminar I, where ELT students start writing their thesis dissertations. In Seminar I students are expected to write the first two chapters of their dissertations. This research focuses mainly on the second chapter, which corresponds to the literature review where the expository genre is present throughout the chapter. In addition, this seminar aims to teach students to write a thesis dissertation that is to be defended at the end of the bachelor's program.

### **3.3 Data Collection Method & Procedure**

Involving agreement and permission from seventh-semester BA ELT students in Research Seminar I, only five expository texts samples were collected. According to Hyland (2015), one of the main data collection methods for writing research are texts. Therefore, this research was inclined toward data collection through text samples. Under this data collection method, Hyland (2015) further explained that writing can be analyzed depending on the selected focus. In this case, the genre was the main focus to select and analyze the texts. Being writing itself the major source of data collection, on account of the genre approach it is possible to analyze text samples in order to see how language is used in context (Hyland, 2015). In other words, the expository texts samples were the major source of data collection since they provided a general but deep understanding of the language use of a particular group of students within a specific writing context.

### **3.4 Data Analysis & Procedure**

A genre analysis was performed to shed light on the students' choices to construct a paragraph of an expository text. In consequence, the genre analysis of the five collected samples formed five case studies. In this regard, Biba (2013) claimed that "case studies have been largely used in the social sciences and have been found to be especially valuable in practice-oriented fields (such as education, management, public administration, and social work" (p.29). In the words of Thomas (2021), within the study of a case, it is possible to make generalizations that contribute to comparing similar cases. Therefore, five samples of expository texts were chosen since "representativeness is strengthened if several texts are analysed" (Hyland, 2015, p.10).

The first paragraph of the five samples was subject to analysis. To start the analysis, it was necessary to design a chart to study the paragraphs closely; in this way, it was possible to analyze the structure and the contents. The chart contained a brief questionnaire about the

paragraph construction and the topic sentence, plus a final section with additional comments based on a semantic perspective. Each question was answered according to what was observed in the first paragraph of the five samples of students' literature review. The text samples set the parameters for the analysis providing vital semantic concepts to create the questionnaire, such as coherence, cohesion, and unity, explained by Zinsser (2012) and Wali & Madani (2020). Similarly, as part of the analysis, the concept of the topic sentence and its connection with the supporting sentences explained by Oshima & Hogue (2007) and Marulanda et al. (2019) were contrasted with the samples. Finally, once all the questions were gathered in the chart and answered one by one, individual analysis of each sample was obtained.

## Chapter 4: Findings

### 4.1 Case 1: “ADHD children characteristics”

*“Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a worldwide health problem that commonly affects children. According to Parekh (2017), an estimated 8.4 percent of children have this disorder. On the other hand, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported a 5.5 % prevalence of ADHD in children worldwide. Moreover, it was also informed that in Mexico, an estimated 1.5 million children under the age of 14 suffer it (as cited in DGCS, UNAM, n.d.). In this sense, there is a high probability that primary English teachers meet students with this disorder in their classrooms”.*

#### 4.1.1 The Role of Topic Sentence in the Paragraph Construction

The first paragraph of the literature review of this thesis contains seven lines divided into five sentences. The paragraph seems to have a structure that includes a topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a concluding sentence, as explained by Oshima & Hogue (2007) and Marulanda et al. (2019). The topic sentence is the first sentence of the paragraph (signaled in italics), whereas the supporting sentences can be found in the second, third, and fourth place. Finally, the concluding sentence is located in the fifth sentence at the end of the paragraph.

The topic sentence possesses a subject which is Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and a controlling idea that limits the information about the subject, in this case, is a worldwide problem that commonly affects children. In this regard, it seems that the topic sentence introduces the main idea of the whole paragraph; however, when reading the first supporting sentence, it can be understood that the subject changes to the percentages of ADHD in children. That is, the topic sentence is expected to introduce the characteristics of ADHD in children. In brief, the topic sentence introduces another subject different from the contents of the paragraph stated in the supporting sentences.

In sum, the paragraph seems to have only two of three semantic characteristics explained by Zinsser (2012) and Wali & Madani (2020). First, the paragraph has coherence in

that all the supporting sentences follow a logical order and use transitions appropriately. Similarly, the paragraph has cohesion in that all the supporting sentences are related to each other; however, they are not related directly to the topic sentence. Therefore, it can be understood that the paragraph has no unity due to the supporting sentences are not connected to the topic sentence.

As a final comment, the student seemed clear about what he wanted to express through the topic sentence; however, the contents stated in the supporting sentences were different. The subject of the sentence that would be expected should introduce or prepare the reader to know the percentages. In this case, the student would only have to change the topic sentence to adjust it to his content. The following example might be one alternative topic sentence: *“Several rates all over the world point out that children are the most affected by ADHD.”*

#### **4.2 Case 2: “Parents’ Role in Online Learning”**

*“During the COVID- 19 pandemic, parents’ involvement in the learning process has become a normal fact. As a result, (Bahamani et al., 2020) it has also given a tough routine to parents working from home and simultaneously taking the responsibility that their children’s learning process continues seamlessly during COVID-19. This situation has given another alternative in education, not as a normal class but a series of tasks sent on a platform and carried out by parents. This situation makes parents become teachers or instructors of learning”.*

##### **4.2.1 The Role of Topic Sentence in the Paragraph Construction**

The first paragraph of the literature review of this thesis contains seven lines divided into four sentences. The paragraph seems to have a structure that includes a topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a concluding sentence, as explained by Oshima & Hogue (2007) and Marulanda et al. (2019). The topic sentence is located in the first sentence of the paragraph (signaled in italics), whereas the supporting sentences can be found in the second and third place. Finally, the concluding sentence is located in the fourth sentence at the end of

the paragraph.

The topic sentence contains a subject which is *parents' involvement in the learning process* and a controlling idea that limits the topic, which is *during COVID-19*. In this regard, it seems that the topic sentence introduces the main idea of the whole paragraph; however, the first supporting sentence is not connected to the topic sentence. In the first place, the supporting sentence begins with the discursive marker 'as a result', as if it were talking about the consequence of a fact without having developed the topic. Second, the supporting sentence does not explain why parents' role in their children's learning process has become a fact. In perspective, it just adds extra information, yet it does not develop the topic.

In sum, the paragraph does not seem to have the three semantic characteristics explained by Zinsser (2012) and Wali & Madani (2020). First, the paragraph does not have coherence due to no logical order presented since the first supporting sentence. The supporting sentence states the consequences of a problem that has not been developed. Additionally, the paragraph does not have cohesion because it seems that the supporting sentences are not connected, and it seems they introduce new topics or situations. Finally, the paragraph is not united because all the sentences are not connected.

As a final remark, the topic sentence seems to have the potential to develop a well-constructed paragraph. The subject and the controlling idea are clear in that they introduce the possible contents to read along with the supporting sentences. It might be convenient to add extra information to develop the topic to explain why the topic sentence is a fact, according to the author. In this way, considering the structure and the semantic characteristics, it would be possible to create a well-constructed paragraph.

### 4.3 Case 3: “Definition of Culture”

*“Culture is such a confusing concept which does not have a specific definition, but a variety of them related to different aspects of the human society. According to Kluckkohn (1951 cited in Lebrón, 2007 p.126), culture is made up of “patterned ways of thinking, feeling and reacting”. Nieto (2002, p. 139 cited in Martin, 2007, p. 5) included “values, traditions, social and political relationships” on the list of characteristics that are part of the culture. All these characteristics “influence a human group’s response to its environment” (Hosftede, 2016, p.24). Some authors such as Mead (2002, cited in Brumann, 1999, p.4) and Guiso, Sapienza & Zingales (2006) pointed out that culture is transmitted through generations.*

-second paragraph:

Lebrón (2007) said culture is “the unique characteristic of a social group” and set social groups apart. Swindler (1986) explained that culture “Consists of symbolic vehicles of meaning, including beliefs, ritual practices, art forms, and ceremonies, as well as informal cultural practices such as language, gossip, stories, and rituals of daily life.”. Mullholland gives importance to the “values and beliefs” of the different social groups (1991 cited in Belshek, 2006, p.3”).

#### 4.3.1 The Paragraph Construction & The Topic Sentence

The first paragraph of the literature review of this thesis contains nine lines divided into five sentences. The paragraph seems to have a structure that includes a topic sentence and supporting sentences, as explained by Oshima & Hogue (2007) and Marulanda et al. (2019). The topic sentence is in the first sentence of the paragraph (signaled in italics), whereas the supporting sentences can be found in the second, third, and fourth places. Finally, it seems that the paragraph does not close the topic with a concluding sentence; instead, it adds a fifth supporting sentence.

The topic sentence possesses a topic which is *the concept of culture*, and a controlling idea that limits the topic is stated by the phrase *a variety of them are related to different aspects of the human society*. It is essential to highlight that the topic sentence uses the keyword 'variety' to indicate it will provide several definitions. Furthermore, it also introduces the main idea of the whole paragraph, and it is connected to the first supporting sentence, found in the second sentence. Regarding the third, fourth, and fifth sentences, they

continue providing definitions of the concept of culture. Finally, it is imperative to mention that the paragraph does not seem to have a concluding sentence and continues its development in the second paragraph.

In sum, it can be understood that the paragraph has the three semantic characteristics explained by Zinsser (2012) and Wali & Madani (2020). First, the paragraph is coherent in that all the supporting sentences follow a logical order. For example, the first supporting sentence is located in the second sentence of the paragraph. In contrast, the second supporting sentence is located in the fifth sentence at the end of the paragraph. Second, the paragraph is also cohesive in that all the supporting sentences are related to each other to support the topic sentence. Indeed, all the supporting sentences are definitions of the concept of culture and its characteristics. Finally, the paragraph has unity in that all the supporting sentences are connected to the topic sentence.

As a final comment, the student seemed clear about what he wanted to express through the topic sentence. The supporting sentences exposed definitions and characteristics of the same subject according to different authors. Although the information flow continued in the second paragraph, the student continued providing examples to support the topic sentence. It might be inferred that the student's criteria to construct a paragraph might be based on a specific number of supporting sentences in a paragraph since he started a second paragraph under the same topic sentence.

#### **4.4 Case 4: “Teacher-Student Relationship”**

-First paragraph:

*“The scholar environment is formed by many aspects, one of the most important ones is the teacher-student relationship. This relationship may be one of the factors that determine the students’ success or failure in their academic and even interpersonal scholar life.”*

-Second paragraph:

“Even though as far as teacher-student relationship concern, there is not a specific definition, it can be interpreted as the way how a professor and their learners are related,

and it includes many aspects besides the intellectual one. For example the social and even the affecting relation. Nevertheless, authors who had studied this topic, clearly remark their importance, for example, Pianta (1999 quoted in Baker, Grant & Morlock 2008) states that “positive teacher-student relationships provide children with the emotional security necessary to engage fully in learning activities and scaffold the development of social, behavioral, and self-regulatory competencies needed in the school environment.” (p.4)”

#### **4.4.1 The Role of the Topic Sentence in the Paragraph Construction**

The first paragraph of the literature review of this thesis contains three lines divided into two sentences. This paragraph seems only to have a topic sentence and one supporting sentence, as explained by Oshima & Hogue (2007) and Marulanda et al. (2019). The topic sentence seems to introduce the main idea of the whole paragraph due to it specifies that the teacher-student relationship is one of the most critical aspects of the scholarly environment. The first supporting sentence adds more information about the importance of the topic sentence; however, there are no more supporting sentences to develop the main idea. Finally, it is imperative to mention that the paragraph does not seem to have a concluding sentence and continues its development in the second paragraph. Since it only has two sentences, it seems it does not have the necessary number of sentences nor a complete structure to be a paragraph. Therefore, it is hard to affirm that this paragraph has coherence, cohesion, and unity, according to Zinsser (2012) and Wali & Madani (2020).

As a final comment, it is essential to mention that the problem with this paragraph is not related to its extension but to the supporting sentences. Put differently, since the topic sentence plays an essential role within a paragraph, it allows developing one idea through the supporting sentences. In this case, the development of the paragraph continued in the second paragraph. Thus, it might be inferred that the student’s criteria did not consider the development of ideas nor the number of sentences to construct paragraphs.

#### 4.5 Case 5: “ Learning English in a Primary Public School in Mexico: A Case Study”

-Introductory paragraph:

“We need to have a clear understanding of this phenomenon to consider different aspects of the English teaching-learning process and how these influence it. In addition, it is necessary to take into account the conditions in which teaching English in public education in Mexico is performed. Even though all the people involved try to do their best, there is a lot to do in order to accomplish the goal. Despite the fact that these are good intentions, most of the programs have worked differently due to various factors. Although English as a foreign language (EFL) has been present in Mexican public education for many years, a lot of problems have prevailed (Basurto Santos, 2010). The problems have affected mainly students’ advance in their English learning, the next points would give us a more complete overview of public education positions and conditions:

-First paragraph:

“As a result of the reason that has just been mentioned before, in Puebla the PNIEB pilot stage began in November 2009, serving 22 schools with 19 advisers. Two years later the PNIEB was already operating in 148 schools, attended by 163 teachers, and the projection for 2012 in 400 schools. The schools where the PNIEB began were located in and around the capital, including state and federal elementary and preschool schools. 10% of these schools had space for teaching English (Sayer, 2012: 127).”

-Second paragraph:

“The main purpose of the (PENIEB) Programa Nacional de Inglés en Educación Básica by its initials in Spanish, and (NEPBE) National English Program for Basic Education by its initials in English is teaching English from the third grade of kindergarten to the third grade of secondary school in order to students gain the knowledge to participate in social practices of oral and written language with native and non-native speakers of English through specific activities with the language.”

##### 4.5.1 *The Role of Topic Sentence in the Paragraph Construction*

The first paragraph of the literature review of this collaborative thesis (two students) contains six lines divided into four sentences. The paragraph seems to have a structure that includes a topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a concluding sentence, as explained by Oshima & Hogue (2007) and Marulanda et al. (2019). The first sentence of the paragraph is believed to be the topic sentence, whereas the second and third sentences are, apparently, supporting sentences. Finally, it seems that the paragraph does not close the topic with a concluding sentence; instead, it adds a fourth supporting sentence.

Regarding the first sentence of the paragraph, it cannot be considered a topic sentence since it begins as a transitional sentence connected to the previous introductory paragraph of the literature review. Besides, it might be clear what subject it refers to, but it does not possess a controlling idea. Furthermore, this first sentence cannot develop through the supporting sentences because it is a fact. Consequently, the supporting sentences continue to provide more facts in chronological order about what seems to be the subject (PNIEB). In brief, since there is not a clear topic sentence, the subject of the paragraph is inferred along the paragraph because it was not established from the beginning. Put differently, the first sentence of the paragraph is instead a supporting sentence than a topic sentence. Finally, it is also paramount to remark that the paragraph does not seem to have a concluding sentence, so it continues its development in the second paragraph, written in only one sentence.

In sum, the paragraph appears to have only two of three semantic characteristics explained by Zinsser (2012) and Wali & Madani (2020). First, the paragraph might be coherent because all the supporting sentences follow a logical order. The paragraph might be cohesive in that all the supporting sentences refer to the same subject; however, they are not related directly to the topic sentence since there is not one. Therefore, it can be understood that the paragraph has no unity due to the supporting sentences are not connected to the topic sentence.

As a final comment, the students seemed clear about what they wanted to expose in the paragraph; however, they needed a strong topic sentence to develop the contents or facts in the supporting sentences. The topic sentence that is expected to be written should introduce or prepare the reader to know the facts about the subject. In this case, the students would only have to write a topic sentence and re-adjust their contents. The following example might be one alternative topic sentence: *“The Programa Nacional de Ingles en Educación Básica (PNIEB) was proposed as one of the plans to implement English education in Puebla.”*

## 4.6 Discussion

The analysis of the results showed that students did not seem familiar with the structure of an expository paragraph. The analysis of the samples showed students' paragraphs did not display the structure of an expository paragraph. Principally, in most cases, the topic sentences of the paragraphs presented a disconnection from the supporting sentences, and the development of ideas seemed to fail. It can be inferred that students have different criteria for constructing expository texts. For example, the length of the paragraph and the number of sentences vary from student to student. However, in most cases, the paragraphs did present the pattern of a topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a concluding sentence. Whereas in some others, the paragraphs did not have concluding sentences. This first observation suggests that students do not know the structure of an expository paragraph. Consequently, the paragraphs of their literature review in their thesis advances do not follow any structure.

A second observation is related to the students' lack of knowledge about the role of the topic sentence in expository paragraphs. The analysis also showed that every student utilizes the topic sentences differently. In most cases, the first sentence of the paragraphs seemed to introduce the main idea. Nonetheless, while reading the whole paragraph, it was possible to understand that the topic sentence was not connected to the supporting sentences. That is to say, the topic sentence had little to no relation to the development of the subject through supporting sentences. For example, in one case, the student wrote a fact in the topic sentence and did not develop it through the supporting sentences. Similarly, in another case, the topic sentence was used as a transitional sentence connected to the previous paragraph. According to the literature, only transitional sentences should be placed in the last line of a paragraph because they also function as concluding sentences to close paragraphs and

introduce the following paragraph. In sum, most of the topic sentences found in the paragraphs did not work as an introduction to the contents or as an organizational component.

On the other hand, out of the five samples, only one case presented an appropriate topic sentence connected to the supporting sentences. This particular case suggested that the student's criteria or knowledge allowed him to write down ideas in an organized way. Nevertheless, it was observed that the student did not close the paragraph and started a second one by writing a supporting sentence in the very first line of the paragraph instead of writing a new topic sentence. This precedent suggests that the student criteria do not always work the same way.

Finally, the semantic characteristics found in the students' paragraphs were another revealing point. The analysis showed that some paragraphs lack coherence, cohesion, and unity. Some other paragraphs only displayed one or two semantic characteristics. Since the topic sentence plays a semantic role and greatly contributes to achieving coherence, cohesion, and unity in the construction of the paragraphs, it is believed that each topic sentence, or the lack of it, affects the semantic dimension of paragraphs differently. That means the students' paragraphs might be solely the union of syntactic structures that lack connection; consequently, the paragraphs are syntactic units without meaning.

As seen, the diverse ways students understand the topic sentence suggests that there might be a tendency in the way students construct their paragraphs. The five thesis advances analyzed showed that the structure of most paragraphs differed from the structure of an expository text. That suggests that students are unfamiliar with the genre and ignore its structure. Based on the analysis of results, every student constructs paragraphs based on their own criteria having little to no knowledge about the structure of the expository genre. In sum, it seems that they are not familiarized with the writing process of an expository text, its structure, and the construction of expository paragraphs.

## 4.7 Conclusions

This research discussed the importance of the topic sentence in the paragraph construction of expository texts. It was possible to have a complete understanding through a broad approach that included the cognitive, communicative, and semantic dimensions of writing. The conclusions reached based on the literature helped to connect those writing dimensions to the concepts that involve the expository genre, the construction of expository paragraphs, and the topic sentence. Additionally, the analysis of the results shed light on further conclusions regarding the writing instruction students receive and their apprenticeship.

The cognitive dimension contributed to holding the perspective that writing is a process that involves mental resources to solve a problem. Under this perspective, the organization of ideas during the writing process is more significant than the final product. On this basis, a well-stated topic sentence and structured paragraphs are fundamental in organizing ideas when drafting a text. In brief, the cognitive dimension of writing stands for the process approach as it prioritizes the process of the mind and the organization of ideas when writing a text.

The communicative dimension of writing is represented through the writing genres. The genre is a means for writers to share knowledge with readers through specific discursive features, vocabulary, and structures that belong to a particular field. Put differently, the genre allows the writer to be aware of the topic, the context, the text type, the structure of the text, the discourse, and the audience to whom the text is addressed. Each existent genre serves different purposes; therefore, the paragraph construction in every genre is distinct. In the expository genre, paragraphs have a specific structure. Expository paragraphs follow a pattern of three key sentences, the topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a concluding sentence. Through the topic sentence, the writer helps the reader understand the main idea of

a paragraph, whereas, through the supporting sentences, the writer provides more information and summarizes the main points of the paragraph in the concluding sentence. In a nutshell, genres play a pivotal role in the communicative dimension of writing. In the expository genre, constructing paragraphs with a topic sentence is crucial to shaping a communicative space between the writer and the reader.

Finally, the semantic dimension contributes to having a complete understanding of the topic sentence. The topic sentence is the most important sentence in a paragraph since it provides a general idea of the contents. In this way, the topic sentence and its relationship with all sentences are indispensable to constructing a coherent, cohesive, and unified paragraph. Furthermore, the topic sentence facilitates the communication of meanings between the writer and the reader. That is, the readers create meanings from what the writers state in the topic sentence. The way the writer uses the sentences and constructs paragraphs will influence, to a great extent, the reader's understanding. In sum, the semantic dimension of writing allows us to understand the importance of the topic sentence in paragraph construction.

Upon further analysis, it can be concluded that the cognitive, communicative, and semantic dimensions of writing do not seem to be considered when it comes to teaching to write expository texts. The writing instruction students receive does not emphasize the importance of the cognitive dimension related to the process approach under which students organize their ideas in different stages of the process. The lack of a communicative dimension in the students' instruction makes them write without knowing the purpose of their texts and not consider the audience. Finally, the lack of a semantic perspective in the writing instruction makes students pursue grammatical accuracy instead of communicating coherent, cohesive, and unified meanings through structured compositions. As a result, students tend to write their thesis with little to no knowledge about those writing dimensions.

Based on the current academic writing instruction, the syntactic dimension of writing appears to be the only one that students consider when writing expository texts. Moreover, since the product approach predominates in the classroom, the syntactic dimension of writing only focuses on improving the grammatical aspects of the target language. Consequently, students grow up unfamiliar with the structure of the expository genre, the construction of expository paragraphs, and the importance of the topic sentence. Therefore, a complete writing instruction that integrates the cognitive, communicative, and semantic dimensions might be an applicable pedagogical method in the classroom to teach students how to write an expository text with clear topic sentences and structured paragraphs.

#### **4.8 Future Directions**

In light of the above, this research has identified two future directions. The first direction is related to the writing approaches. The students must identify the writing approach under which they are learning to write. By doing so, students might be able to differentiate the purposes of each writing approach. Since the product approach predominates in the classroom, further analysis might be required to reconsider if it is the most suitable approach for writing expository texts at the college level.

The second future direction is implementing a broader focus on writing instruction. A shift in the current approach that includes the cognitive, communicative, and semantic dimensions may contribute to achieving complete and efficient writing instruction. Similarly, it might contribute to prioritizing the writer's knowledge and experiences over their grammar proficiency. In this way, exploring the importance of the writing approaches, the role of writing genres, paragraph construction, and the topic sentence might be the starting point to achieving the academic writing proficiency required in tertiary education levels and meeting international quality standards.

## 4.9 Limitations

There were two significant limitations during this research triggered by external factors. The first one is related to the qualitative nature of this research. The results showed a tendency among five students from Research Seminar I in the way they write expository texts. However, since this study performed a qualitative analysis of the results, a quantitative analysis might be decisive to know if the results apply to students from other groups, academic writing subjects, and writing teachers. As Hyland (2015) asserted that: “much writing research combines several methods, often both quantitative and qualitative, to gain a more complete picture of a complex reality. In fact, the concept of triangulation, or the use of multiple sources of data, or approaches, can bring greater plausibility to the interpretation of results” (p. 5). Therefore, a quantitative study on a large scale might be needed to test the tendency among students from the Languages School.

The second limitation is related to the global disease outbreak caused by COVID-19. Most of the information gathered in this research belongs to online scientific communities since printed materials were unavailable since university libraries were closed indefinitely. Additionally, the writing process of the present thesis and the data collection process were performed in two different stages before and after the pandemic. First, the data collection and the analysis of the results were performed until global sanitary restrictions were lifted periodically. If presented the opportunity to gather more information from printed materials and free access to Languages School facilities, this research would have included more subjects in the study.

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