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DIFFICULTIES THAT SIXTH, SEVENTH, EIGHTH SEMESTER LEMO STUDENTS
FACE WHEN WRITING ESSAYS

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF LANGUAGES FOR THE DEGREE OF
LICENCIATURA EN LENGUAS MODERNAS

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**DIFFICULTIES THAT SIXTH, SEVENTH, EIGHTH SEMESTER LEMO
STUDENTS FACE WHEN WRITING ESSAYS**

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DEDICATIONS

To the people I love most in my life:

One day I told myself that I would never give up if things went wrong, that although there were a lot of stones along the way, I had to arrive at my destination. I said that even when I felt that I could no longer carry on, I had to rest only to continue trying! And I did, I made it through the path!.

Thanks for being with me through thick and thin; especially, thanks to you, who always looks after me.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

1.1 introduction to the Problem

Academic writing was traditionally seen as a mechanical process. However, according to Oshima (1997), academic writing is an ordered activity that requires following more than one step. When someone tries to write something, first they have to think about what they want to communicate and how they are going to express it. Then, they write their ideas down, after they have finished their writing they read; they make changes and corrections. Belcher & Braine (1995) state that “academic writing is inherently a cognitive as well as a social process”; this means that it is a cognitive process because it involves a conscious mental process and it is social because it communicates, it has a message, and a purpose. Several authors have researched and written about academic writing. Some of them have focused on organizational structure such as classification and cause and effect type text, while others focus on writing texts such as reports and academic essays. Academic writing has different genres and one of the most useful tools in academic settings is academic essay. Academic essays have been regarded as useful tools used in academic settings to promote conceptual learning or as a part of evaluation. An essay is defined as “a written interpretation of experienced, what an essay communicates is not facts or information. There are many ways it can interpret, but the important thing is that it does interpret, not simply report” (Donald, Morrow, Warget, & Werner 1996). According to Oshima “An essay is a piece of writing that has more than one paragraph. It is divided into three parts: a beginning, middle, and an end”. In other words, an essay is a text in which the author expresses his point of view through argumentation trying to persuade the reader, it is

formed of three basic parts, the beginning is the introduction, the middle is called body, and the end is the conclusion.

Many researchers have focused on essays. One example is Norton (1990), who researched about what really counts in writing essays. This study uses objective measures from essays script to report on the interaction between students' strategies in writing essays and tutors' strategies in marking. A questionnaire was applied to psychology students about their essay writing strategies and the essays were submitted for analysis. The tutors who marked were interviewed. The result of this study shows that students' perceptions and teachers' perceptions of the most important criteria are not the same. Students were concerned with content, whereas tutors were more concerned with argument. Another example is Campbell, Smith & Brooker (1998). They researched about how undergraduate students conceptualized and undertook an essay writing task. Interviews were utilized with forty-six undergraduate students enrolled in either first or third year of a Bachelor of education. The structure of the essays was analyzed. The results suggest a developmental process in underlying conceptualization of both the body of knowledge forming the content of the essay, and the essay writing processes themselves.

There is a vast bibliography about essays, they define what an essay is but we do not know what people who use essays think about it, we do not know students' and teachers' perception about essays and the utility of an essay. Essays are so mentioned in Target Languages and the common text books used from 6 through 8 level of Target Language at the LEMO Faculty are based on the development of the writing skill and specifically in writing essays. One of the books used in the university is North Star Reading and Writing: intermediate (Barton, 2003). However, it is important to know if students use the

appropriate strategies in writing essays and to find out students' and teachers' perception about essays, in order to improve teaching writing. The analysis of the results could help teachers to create appropriate evaluation criteria to grade essays and to help students to develop the writing skill using students' argumentation.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to analyze teachers and students' perceptions about essays and the most common difficulties students face in writing essays in order to determine the factors that affect students writing so that this study may suggest hints to write better essays and show teachers that essays need to be applied frequently in classrooms. Another purpose is to suggest some changes in the evaluation criteria that teachers use to mark essays. In this case, the research is focused on essays of intermediate and advanced students at the department of the Lenguas Modernas (LEMO) at the Benemerita Universidad Autonoma de Puebla. The participants are students who study English as a foreign language in Target Language 6 to 8. This study will use descriptive method. Questionnaires will be applied to students and teachers who give Target Language Lessons, in order to get information to achieve the main purpose of this study.

1.3 Research Questions

This research addresses the following research questions.

- 1.- What are students' perceptions about an academic essay?
- 2.- Do students know what an academic essay is?

- 3.- What are students' perceptions about the structure of an essay?
- 4.- What are their views about the process of writing an essay?
- 5.- Are the teachers and students' expectations about essays the same?
- 6.- What is the most common difficulty in writing essays according to students?

1.4 Significance of the Study

The result of this research will serve as basis to more researchers about writing specially in writing academic essays. It will also help teachers to be aware about the most common problems in essays. In order to create workshops inside the classroom to develop writing skill. This research tries to show the importance of performing essays in academic contexts to make students competent in writing and create in students a critical thinking.

1.5 Key Terms

Essay. It is a written interpretation of experience. What an essay communicates is not facts or information but an interpretation of such facts of information. There are many ways it can be interpreted, but the important thing is that it does interpret, not simple reports” (Donald, Morrow, Wargetz & Werner, 1996, p.2).

Coherence. It comes from a Latin word that means the quality of sticking together. In a good paper, all the parts stick together; there are no gaps that readers cannot bridge. The basic aim of coherence is to help your reader see how you are making connections between your major ideas (Hashimoto & Kroll, 1982, p.85).

Cohesion. The concept of cohesion is a systematic one; it refers to relations of meaning that exist within the text, and that define it as a text. Cohesion occurs where the interpretation of some elements in the discourse is dependent on that of another. (Holliday & Hasan, 1993, p. 4).

Orthography. It is a set of rules for using a script in a particular language. Cook & Bassetti, 2005, p. 2).

Punctuation. It has two main often parallel, uses: to indicate grammatical features of the text (grammatical punctuation); to indicate phonological features of the text (correspondence punctuation, such as commas that indicate pausing and intonation patterns) (Cook & Bassett, 2005, p. 10-11).

Writing. It is a progressive activity. This means that when you first write something down, you have already been thinking about what you are going to say and how you are going to say it. Then after you have finished writing, you read over what you have written and make changes and corrections. Therefore, writing is never a one-step action; it is a process that has several steps (Oshima & Hogue, 1997, p. 2).

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to understand the importance of this research, it is crucial to discuss the theoretical bases of this study. This chapter provides essential concepts and elementary considerations about approaches to writing, the stages of writing, structure of an essay and types of essays.

2.1 Writing

In order to understand the importance of writing in academic settings, it is first important to provide a definition of writing. Dorn (2000, p. 3) defines writing as “organized thinking – as opposed to a random recording of thoughts with little recognition of which ones are more important to the purpose of communication”. In a similar way, Oshima & Hogue (1997, p. 2) state that writing is a progressive activity. This means that writing is formed by steps, to write something first you have already thought about what you are going to say and how you are going to say it. Using a wide definition, Coulmas (2003, p. 1) says that six meanings of writing can be distinguished: “1) a system of recording language by means of visible or tactile marks; 2) the activity of putting such as system to use; 3) the result of such activity, a text; 4) the particular form of such a result, a script style such as block letter writing; 5) artistic composition; 6) a professional occupation”. These definitions agree that writing is a complex and continuous activity. Finally, it is important to mention that writing is sometimes regarded as the forgotten skill because writing receives the least attention because it is at the bottom of the list of teachers’ priorities.

2.2 Approaches to Writing

The notion of approaches to writing are crucial in the development of this project, and it is then necessary to outline a definition of some approaches. An approach to writing is a way to see writing; there are different ways to see writing.

2.2.1 The Process Approach

Scott (1996, p. 37) provides a comprehensive definition of the process approach; he defines writing in the process approach as “an activity comprising multiple actions and strategies, prevalent in ESL composition instruction as in L1 composition instruction”. In this view, teachers focus on what students need to experience like the activities and strategies involved in each writing stage. Similarly, Raimes (1983, p. 10) states the process approach emphasis on the process of writing; she comments that in this approach students do not write on a given topic in a restricted time and give it for the teacher to correct. Instead, students examine a topic or subject through writing, showing the teacher and their classmates their drafts, and using what they wrote to think or discover new ideas. According to Raimes, teachers find that the writing process becomes a process of discovery for students. Finally, Richards (1990, p. 108) argues that “the process approach focuses on how writers create writing that has form and structure”. In sum, the process approach can be seen as a way or perspective to see writing, which deals with all the activities needed in the process of writing.

2.2.2 The Product Approach

Product approach is other way to see writing. Hairston 1982 cited in Ferris & Hedgcock 1998, p. 3 says that the product approach is also known as “the traditional paradigm” in U.S English Language Education. Ferris & Hedgcock (1998, p. 3) argue that this approach reflects a perspective in which students’ written texts are viewed as static representations of their knowledge and learning. In a similar way, Richards (1990, p. 106) states that the focus of product approach is “essentially on the ability to produce correct texts or products”. In these views, the strategies to select a topic and the changes made on it are not relevant, the only meaningful thing for teachers is the last product. Finally, Richard (cited in Kroll, 1990, p. 13) claims that the product approach emphasizes on “the composed product rather than composing process; the analysis of discourse into words, sentences and paragraphs, the classification of discourse into description, narration, exposition, and argument; the strong concern with usage (syntax, spelling, punctuation) and with style (economy, clarity, emphasis); the preoccupation with the informal essay and the research paper, and so on”. It can be concluded that the product approach considers writing as a guided product where the purpose is the final text (sentences, paragraphs, spelling, punctuation, and style are important aspects in the text).

2.2.3 The Communicative Approach

The communicative approach also known as functional-notional approach is another perspective to view writing. The communicative approach proposes that the writing tasks must be more realistic; Scott (1996, p. 146) states that students must be engaged in real life tasks, such as writing informal and formal letters. According to him, the focal points in the communicative approach are the purpose and the audience. Raimes (1983, p. 8) states that “the communicative approach stresses the purpose of a piece of writing and the audience for it. Writers are encouraged to behave like writers in real life and to ask themselves the crucial question about purpose and audience”. Similarly, Finocchiaro & Brumfit (1983, p.13) say that “a functional-notional approach concentrates on the purposes for which language is used. Any act of speech is functionally organized (that is, it is an attempt to do something) for a particular situation in relation to a particular topic”. That is, the text is written for a specific audience in order to achieve the text’s purpose. As a conclusion, the communicative approach sees writing as a way to send messages and the purpose and the audience are important aspects in this approach.

2.2.4 The ESP/ Genre Approach

English for Specific Purposes or Genre Approach is an important approach in writing, especially in Academic settings. Paltridge (2001, p. 2) states that in ESP or Genre work, “the genre refers to a class of communicative events, such as, for example, a seminar presentation, a university lecture, or an academic essay. In systematic genre work, a genre is more often referred to as a kind of text, such as a description, procedure, or exposition”;

also, he says that in new rhetoric work, genres are often described as events or social actions that help people interpret and create particular texts. In a similar way, Tribble (1996, p. 37) states that genre approach to writing is more socially oriented and focuses on the ways in which writers and texts need to interact with readers. In this approach, writing is seen as an essentially social activity in which texts are written to achieve a purpose, the assumption being that if the reader cannot recognize the purpose of a text, communication will not be successful". Finally, Richards & Renandya (2002, p. 321) say that "in the genre-based approach students must be able to write in different ways for different purposes". In fact, the ESP/Genre approach text is written to keep with a specific purpose so students need to be exposed to practice with various genres in addition to narrative ones.

2.3 Academic Writing

Academic writing is a cognitive and a social process, it requires students' knowledge; It is a complex activity that students develop in academic settings. Students share their writings and they develop composition through several drafts in classroom. In addition, this activity is developed in the whole teaching and learning environment.

2.3.1 Writing in Academic Settings

Writing is a complex activity required in academic settings. Williams (1998, p. 52) says that "classrooms become workshops in which students share their works with another and teachers regularly intervene as students develop compositions through several drafts".

In this view, the classroom is the appropriate place where students and teachers can establish a better relationship in order to achieve a written task. Another definition is according to McDonough & Shaw (1993, p. 8) who define setting “as the whole teaching and learning environment, in a wide sense: it is the factors falling under this heading which will determine whether the aims of a language program, defined with reference to the learners’ needs and characteristics are actually feasible and realistic”. Finally, Malamah (1987, cited in McDonough & Shaw, 1993, p. 10) describes setting in terms of three levels in an education System – the country, the school and the classroom. It can be concluded that Academic settings are the places where teachers and students perform an academic task.

2.4 Considerations in Academic Writing

As it was mentioned before, academic writing is a cognitive and a social process developed in a learning environment. Academic writing is develop in Academic settings so some elements must be considered in Academic writing to produce compositions, some of them are mentioned in the following paragraphs.

2.4.1 Coherence

One consideration that all writers have to take into account in academic writing is coherence. Richards (1990, p. 104) claims that “coherence refers to the overall semantic structure and unity of a text; it is a fundamental requirement of written discourse”. In a

similar way, Connor & Johns (1990, p. 197) state that “coherence is the quality that makes a text conform to a consistent world picture and is therefore summarizable and interpretable”. In this view, coherence is the agreement among sentences and paragraphs that make a text understandable. Similarly, Fawcet and Sandberg (1992, p. 40) state that there is coherence when the sentences are arranged in a clear, logical order and where the sentences are related like links in a chain”. Finally, Canal (cited in Richards, 1990, p. 104) points out that a text has coherence if it keeps with some conditions such as Development, continuity, ideas, balance, and completeness. Canal defines each condition as in the following way: Development: Presentation of ideas must be orderly and convey a sense of direction. Continuity: there must be consistency of facts, opinions, and writers’ perspectives, as well as reference to previously mentioned ideas. Newly introduced ideas must be relevant. Balance: A relative emphasis (main or supportive) must be accorded each idea. Completeness: the ideas presented must provide a sufficiently thorough discourse. In sum, coherence refers to the relationship among ideas. All the ideas in a text must be connected; the ideas must be written in order and one idea must support the others.

2.4.2 Cohesion

Cohesion is an important aspect in writing in order to a text must be qualified as a text. For that reason is important to define this term. Halliday & Hasan (cited in Richards 1990) consider cohesion as “the linking relationships that are explicitly expressed in the surface structure of the text”. That is, cohesion deals with the use of a variety of lexical and grammatical relationships between items within sentences in a text. Halliday and Hasan identify five types of cohesive ties: reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical. In a similar way, Tribble (1996, p. 157) says “that cohesion is the grammatical and lexical

relationships between the different elements of a text. These can include the direct types of relationships which exist between subjects and verbs, or the less direct relationships”. Using a brief definition, Connor & Johns (1990, p. 14) explain that “cohesion is the term for overt links on the textual surface”. Their definition is brief. However, it agrees with the main points that characterize cohesion. In sum, cohesion is the agreement between grammatical and lexical features; it makes a text interpretable.

2.4.3 Punctuation

Punctuation is another important aspect in writing that students need to manage in order to be competent in writing. Here the importance to define punctuation. Cook & Basetti (2005, p. 10-11) say that “punctuation has two main, often parallel uses: to indicate grammatical features of the text, grammatical punctuation; to indicate phonological features of the text correspondence punctuation, such as commas that indicate pausing and intonation patterns”. In other words, punctuation refers to the use of written marks used to clarify meanings or separate structure. Similarly, Johnson (1982, p. 56) suggests that “punctuation can be thought of as a means of indicating the pauses and changes of tone that are used in speech to help communicate the meaning of sentences”. It can be concluded that punctuation is important in writing because it makes a text understandable.

2.5 The Process of Writing

Writing is a process formed by different stages. The Writing process consists of three fundamental stages: the first one is prewriting, the second one is drafting, and the last one is revising; the three stages are described in the following paragraphs.

2.5.1 Prewriting

In order to understand the importance of writing in academic settings, it is the first importance to provide a definition for each stage in the process of writing. Prewriting is the first stage in this process. Fawcett & Sandberg (1992, p. 3) say that prewriting is “thinking and planning on paper , the writer thinks, lets his or her imagination run free, just down ideas, decides which ideas to use, and comes up with a plan for writing”. In other words, Murray (cited in Richards, 1990, p. 108) argues that this stage involves finding a topic and ideas about a specific topic, thinking about the topic and letting ideas interact, develop and organize themselves, taking into account the audience and the purpose of the writing task. He says that prewriting is also known as “Rehearsing”. In these views, prewriting is observed as the stage where writers start to generate ideas and develop a plan to achieve the writing task. In a further definition, Ross (1995, p. 8) remarks that prewriting is perhaps “the most complex stage” and for many writers “the most time consuming stage” of the writing process because it includes so many purposes. Moreover, Ross (1995) explains that in this stage writers discover or invent a subject for writing, they explore and learn about subjects or topics; they organize their thoughts and reach at least tentative conclusions; in this stage writers determine the best strategy for communicating with readers. In sum,

prewriting is the first stage in writing, it requires more than one activity and it uses different strategies to help writers to accomplish the beginning of the writing process.

2.5.1.1 Choosing a topic

The first step in the prewriting stage is finding or choosing a topic. Ross (1995, p. 74) claims that choosing a writing subject is the “the most difficult part of the writing process”; he says that choosing a topic involves finding a subject that will sustain writers’ interest during a focused thinking and writing process. In a similar way, Donald, Morroe, Wargetz & Werner (1996, p .4) argue that finding something to write about writers could be about “personal experiences or something writers have learned”, it must be interesting for writers. Finally, Troyka (1990, p. 19) states that choosing a topic calls for using “good judgment and making sound decisions”, and he emphasizes that writers write more effectively if the topic is suitable for college writing. This means that if the topic is suitable, it will be easier to develop and present in the writing task. As a conclusion, choosing or finding a topic (subject) is finding something to write about it using good judgment and making important decisions in order to hold writers’ interest.

2.5.1.1.1 Brainstorming

In the prewriting stage there are some techniques used to find or discover a topic. One of these techniques is brainstorming. Ede (1989, p. 77) defines it as “a simple but productive invention strategy”. In this strategy, writers list as quickly as possible all ideas and thoughts about a subject that occurs to the writers without censoring or stopping to

reflect on their ideas. In a similar way, Raimes (1983, p. 10) states that brainstorming means producing words, phrases, ideas as rapidly as possible, just as they occur to them, without concern for appropriateness, order, or accuracy. Furthermore, Raimes (1983) comments that brainstorming can be done out loud in a class or group, or individually in paper. Finally, Richards (1990, p. 112) says that “in brainstorming students rapidly exchange information about a topic or about something they have selected to read”. In fact, brainstorming is useful technique used to generate ideas to discover more details about a subject (topic). As writers produce associations, they make connections and generate more ideas.

2.5.1.1.2 Free Writing

Free writing is another technique used in the prewriting stage. Fawcett & Sandberg (1992, p. 5) observe free writing as “an excellent method that many writers use to warm up and get ideas”. In this view, writers try to write so fast that ideas cannot flow without comments from writers’ inner critic. Similarly, Troyka (1990, p. 26) says that “free writing is writing nonstop”. It means writing down whatever comes into mind without stopping to worry about spelling or if ideas are good or not. Finally, Ross (1995, p. 9) says that “free writing is writing nonstop”. This means writing down whatever comes into mind without stopping to worry about spelling or if ideas are good or not. Finally, Ross (1995, p. 9) says that “during a free writing writers write whatever comes into their minds without stopping to edit either their thoughts on the writing”. Ross (1990) asserts that even if it seems to make sense, at the end of the session writers read back and determine the main idea or the

dominant impression. It can be concluded that free writing is an effective technique to show writers what the main impression is to start writing.

2.5.1.1.3 Clustering

Clustering is other technique frequently used to find a topic in classrooms. Fawcett & Sandberg (1992, p. 9) observe clustering as “a method” to get ideas onto paper. He explains how this technique is performed. First, writers write an idea or topic in the center of a paper. Then they write their ideas down, branching out from the center, and when one idea suggests other details and examples, writers write these around it in “a cluster”. In a similar way, Richards (1990, p. 112) states that clustering is an “instructional activity” in which writer writes a topic in the middle of a page and organizes related words and concepts in clusters around the central concept. Finally, Troyka (1990, p. 31) claims that clustering is much like brainstorming, but is “more visual and less linear”. According to Troyka, clustering frees writers to think more creatively, to associate ideas more easily. Some authors use other names to call this technique. While Richards (1990) says that clustering is also known as “mapping or webbing”, so he calls it “word mapping”. In sum, clustering is defined as a technique or method used to organize writers’ ideas, it is like a map where ideas are related.

2.5.2 Drafting

Drafting is the second stage in the writing process and this stage is as important as prewriting stage. Troyka (1990, p. 51) claims that “drafting means getting ideas onto paper in sentences and paragraphs”. Moreover, it remarks the idea that the final product of the writing process is the result of a number versions, each successively closer to what the writer intends to communicate to readers in a clear way. Similarly, Richards (1990, p. 109) declares that “drafting involves getting ideas onto paper in rough form. The writer sketches out an idea, examines it, and follows it through for while – perhaps letting it follow its own course”. In fact, drafting gives writer the opportunity to write the first draft in order to get close to the final text. Ross (1995, p. 12) states that in this stage the author frames his main idea and select the best way to capture readers’ attention. In this view, the topic is divided in subtopics in order to make the text understandable and writers set details and examples in order to support subtopics. It can be concluded that drafting is producing words on paper or on a computer that adapt the initial plan for the writing task.

2.5.3 Revising

Revising is third stage in the writing process. Ross (1995, p .13) states that “revising is the reworking of ideas and the rearrangement of fairly large chunks of writing or thinking”. In addition, Ross comments that in this stage writer reconsiders the most effective ways to communicate with the reader. Troyka (1990, p. 51) states that “revising means taking a draft from its preliminary to its final version by evaluating, adding, cutting, moving material, editing, and proofreading”. In a similar way, Richards (1990, p. 109) say

that “revising involves evaluating what has been written and making deletions or additions as necessary”. In this view, revising is the last opportunity to make changes (additions or deletions) on the text. Finally, Fawcett & Sandberg (1992, p. 260) explain that in the revising stage writer reads his draft slowly and carefully to himself. As he reads, he underlines trouble spots, draw arrows, and write in the margins, if necessary, to straighten out problems. In sum, revising is the writing stage where writers make changes in order to find the best way to write the text; writers decide if the text requires more or less information.

2.5.4 Editing

Editing is the final stage of the writing process. Editing is extremely important to the overall effectiveness of a piece of writing. Ross (1995, p. 13) claims that editing is the final step before writer declares a piece of writing “done”. It is the last opportunity to polish phrasing and refine word choice, to catch grammatical and spelling errors, and to make sure that the finished writing looks good on the page. Furthermore, editing occurs at a more minute level than revising. Similarly, Troyka (1990, p. 73) states that “editing focuses more on presentation than on meaning”. For instance, when a writer edits, he checks the technical correctness of his writing. In other words, writer pays attention to correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, and to correct use of capital letters, numbers, italics, and abbreviations. Finally, Tribble (1996, p. 159) argues that editing is the final stage in the writing process. During editing, writers try to correct surface problems in their texts”. It can

then be concluded that editing focuses on sentence level concerns such as punctuation, spelling, agreement between subjects and verbs, and check the format of the paper.

2.6 The Essay and its Parts

In order to understand the importance of an essay. It is essential to provide a definition of what an essay is. Ross (1995, p. 133) states that “an essay (from the French word essay “to attempt”) is a relatively short notification prose work of limited scope, intended to prove a particular point or to illustrate or interpret a specific subject”. Moreover, an essay includes many different kinds of writing and accommodates many different purposes. For instance, the writer’s primary purpose could be report to explain or persuade the reader. According to Donald (1996, p. 2) an essay is “a written interpretation of experience”. They emphasize that what an essay communicates is not facts or information but an interpretation of such facts or information. The important thing is that it does interpret, not simply report. Finally, Fawcett & Sandberg (1992, p. 238) define the essay as “a group of paragraphs about one subject. In many ways, an essay is like a paragraph in extended, fuller form. Just as the paragraphs have a topic sentence, body, and conclusion, so too the essay has an introduction, body, and conclusion”. In sum, an essay is a nonfiction text, it is a written interpretation structured by three main parts: introduction, body, and conclusion; its aim is to prove a particular point or to interpret a subject.

2.6.1 Title

The title is the first element of an essay. Trzeciak (1994, p. 5) states that “titles give factual information and can be understood easily by the specialist”. As a matter of fact, the

language of the title may be figurative and therefore potentially misleading. In this view, the title gives some clues for readers; they tell readers what the text is going to talk about. In a similar way, Swales & Feak (1994, p. 205) argue that “the title should indicate the topic of the study, and should be self- explanatory to readers in the chosen area”. They point out that successful titles should stir the readers. Finally, Donald (1996, p. 21) claim that titles should stir the readers’ interest by suggesting the subject of the essay and the attitude of its author”. It can be concluded that the title must suggest the topic of the text and should be attractive for readers.

2.6.2 Introduction

The introduction is the first part of an essay. Trzeciak & Mackay (1994, p. 63) say that the introductory paragraph or section should provide a clear introduction to the content of an essay. It should introduce the central idea or main purpose of writing. Moreover, a good introduction will serve as a focus and stimulus to readers, encouraging them to continue reading; According to Trzeciak & Mackay (1994, p. 63) the length of the introduction is in proportion to the rest of the essay. For example, the length may range from a single paragraph to a complete section in itself. Similarly, Donald (1996, p. 18) states that the introduction to an essay focuses the reader’s attention on the reason for telling it: the purpose of the writing, the general truth beyond the actual experience. In other words, the significance of the essay. In this view, the introduction must engage readers’ attention to continue reading; it includes the purpose of the writing. Finally, Fawcett & Sandberg say that “the introduction begins the essay and prepares the reader for what will

follow. The introduction contains the thesis statement”. In sum, the introduction is the beginning of an essay; it contains the purpose of the essay named thesis statement.

2.6.2.1 Thesis Statement

The thesis statement is located in the introduction paragraph. It is the main idea of the whole essay. Fawcett and Sandberg (1992, p. 243) define thesis statement as “the writers’ central point: the main idea or opinion that the rest of the essay will support and discuss”. In addition, Fawcett & Sandberg (1992, p. 238) say that the thesis statement is in the introduction and it sets forth the main idea of the entire essay. In a similar way, Troyka (1990, p. 38) states that a thesis statement is “the central message of an essay”. He also suggests that an effective thesis statement prepares the readers for the essence of what the writer discuss in an essay. Donald et al. (1996, p. 8) claims that the main idea in an essay is expressed in a thesis sentence, usually the last sentence in an introductory paragraph. Finally, Ross (1995, p. 82) defines thesis statement as the central idea; moreover, he says that the thesis statement is presented at the end of the opening paragraph. It can be concluded that the thesis statement is the writers’ main point or the opinion that will be supported in the rest of the essay; it is usually placed in the last sentence of the introductory paragraph.

2.6.3 Body

The body is the second part of an essay. Donald (1996, p. 19) define the body as “paragraphs which support the topic sentences. Body includes quotations, anecdotes, examples, or comparisons to support or prove the statement made in the topic sentence”. In

a similar way, Fawcett and Sandberg (1992, p. 238) observe that “the body of the essay, like the body of a paragraph, is the longest part. Every paragraph in the body of the essay must support and explain the thesis statement” Trzeciak and Mackay (1994, p. 64) say that the body of an essay develops the key ideas and issues presented in the introduction in a logical and coherent manner. Main points should be presented in separate paragraphs and should be pertinent to the main purpose of the essay”. In sum, the body can be seen as the longest part of an essay, it is formed by one or more paragraphs and each body paragraph contains a main idea called topic sentence. The topic sentence supports thesis statement, whereas the topic sentence is supported by supporting sentences.

2.6.3.1 The Topic Sentence

In order to understand a body paragraph is constructed and it is important to provide a definition of topic sentence and support sentence. Donald et al. (1996, p. 16) define the topic sentence as a sentence that presents a subject and a controlling idea, which is developed by adequate, relevant, and specific detail. Each paragraph in the body has a topic sentence and each topic sentence in the essay supports the thesis statement. Furthermore, Donald et al. (1996, p. 1) maintain that a topic sentence includes a subject and an attitude that expresses what you think or feel about the subject. Similarly, Troyka (1990, p. 87) states that the sentence that contains the main idea of a paragraph is called the topic sentence and that a topic sentence tells readers what the paragraph is going to talk about. It can then be concluded that the topic sentence is the main idea of each paragraph in the body and it supports the thesis statement.

2.6.3.2 The Support Sentence

Support sentences are as important as the topic sentence. Zwier and Benett (2006, p. 2) say that “supporting ideas show why the main idea of an essay or paragraph is true”. In this view, the support sentence gives enough information or details in order to prove that the topic sentence is truth or to convince readers about your arguments. In addition, Zwier and Benett (2006, p. 3) claim that “support sentences give a further explanation or examples to clarify a supporting detail”. In a similar way, Donald et al. (1996, p. 16) state that each subtopic sentence in the paragraph “supports the topic sentence”. In other words, support sentences are relevant details used to interpret the topic sentence. In sum, support sentences are relevant details used to interpret the topic sentence. In sum, support sentences are supporting ideas or relevant details that show readers the importance of the topic sentence.

2.6.4 Conclusion

Conclusion is the last part of an essay and it is also an elemental. In order to understand best the importance of the conclusion, it is then necessary define “conclusion”. Donald, et al. (1996, p. 239) say that the conclusion is “a necessary part of an essay”. They argue that conclusion is the last thing writers put in the readers’ minds; it has to be strong, interesting, and convincing. In this view, conclusion is regarded as the last opportunity to persuade readers about the subject, it must be satisfy readers. Similarly, Fawcett and Sandberg (1992, p. 239) say that “the conclusion signals the end of the essay and leaves the reader with a final thought”. Using a broad concept, Trzeciak and Mackay (1994, p.64)

state that the conclusion should signal readers that the text is finished and should leave them with the clear impression that the purpose of the essay has been achieved. Furthermore, Trzeciak and Mackay (1994, p. 64) imply that the most common types of conclusion may include: a summary of the main points, concluding statements drawn from the points made in the main body, and recommendations of action to be taken. It can then be concluded that the conclusion is the last part in an essay. It is like a summary of the main points exposed in the essay; it must be convincing and interesting.

2.7 Types of Essays

In writing Academic Essays there are different types of essays. The notions of the different types of essays are crucial in the development of this project, and it is necessary to define some types of essays such as chronological essay, cause effect, comparison-contrast essay, and argumentative essay.

2.7.1 Chronological Essay

Chronological essay is only one type of essay used in classrooms. Ross (1995, p.136-137) states that the chronological essay is the description of a process that is used to demonstrate the understanding of the process of something and generally, its function or significance, through a clear articulation of it to a reader with a functional need to know. For instance, according to Ross (1995, p.136-137), the process writer's job is to recreate the process in language, to explain it accurately enough for the reader to achieve a clear

understanding of it, or to articulate a clear set of instructions with which the reader can reproduce a specific result. Using a brief concept, Donald, et al. (1996, p.55) state that chronological order describes the process in the exact sequence that is to be followed”. In this view, the main characteristic of this essay is describing a process but in the exact sequence it occurs. In sum, the chronological essay recreates the process of an issue, in order to demonstrate how the process takes place through steps.

2.7.2 Cause-effect Essay

Another type of essay used in classrooms is cause-effect essay. Donald et al (1996, p.261) observe cause and effect essay as “understanding the causes of some event or situation”. Moreover, they argue that understanding the situations’ causes is one of the most important abilities humans have. In a similar way, Ross (1995, p.340) claims that in a cause-effect essay the writer analyzes the effects of an event, or both its causes and its effects in terms of their negative impacts”. In other words, cause-effect essay shows readers causes and effects of an event emphasis the positive or the negative effect. It can be concluded that the cause-effect essay analyzes the effects of a situation in order to clarify an issue.

2.7.3 Comparison-contrast Essay

Another type of essay very common in academic settings is the comparison-contrast essay. Ross (1995, p.140) defines comparison contrast essay as one of the most natural ways of clarifying ideas. It examines similarities and differences between two similar things. That is, the aim of this essay is to help readers to understand similarities and differences of two subjects. In a similar way, Donald et al. (1996, p.152) observe

comparing and contrasting as a method of development. It points out similarities (or dissimilarities) in two things. While an essay shows similarities, comparison occurs and when it shows similarities contrast takes place. Finally, Fawcett and Sandberg (1992, p.114) argue that in comparison-contrast essay, comparison and contrast is to examine the ways in which person, places, or things are different and comparing them is to examine the ways in which they are similar. In sum, comparison-contrast essay is used to clarify and examine the ways in which two subjects, topics, things, or issues are different or similar.

2.7.4 Argumentative Essay

The argumentative essay is another type of essay used in classrooms. In order to understand what an argumentative essay is, it is necessary define what an argumentative essay is. Ross (1995, p.401) states that in argumentative writing, “the higher goal is to promote discussion and an exchange of views and creative ideas”, in an attempt to resolve the complex questions and difficult issues writers face personally and collectively. In this view, argument is defined as a way to promote discussion in order to exchange ideas about a specific topic. According to Jacobus (1998, p.101), argument is defined as “an instrument of reasoning used to change opinion and create consensus”. Furthermore, arguments are controlled, and in the case of written arguments, it must present cases carefully enough to permit a reader to think through a position and perhaps move to a new opinion. Finally, Donald et al. (1996, p.298) state that “an argument is a structure of facts and ideas logically arranged to arrive at a conclusion”. It can then be concluded that an argumentative essay contains facts and ideas used to get a conclusion.

2.8 Assessing Academic Writing

Following the outline of this research, it is necessary to define assessing academic writing in order to measure the quality of a paper. Williams (1998,p.258) states that Assessing students' papers is one of the more important things teachers do because teachers' decisions about students' papers affect students' lives sometimes significantly. Assessment involves comparison on two levels: the standard set by other students in the class and some pre-established standard of good writing. In a similar way, Ferris and Hedgcock (1998,p.227) observe that writing assessment is "pedagogical" because assessment informs teachers of their own effectiveness, as reflected in their students' increasing proficiency and their achievement of pragmatic and individual writing goals. In other words, assessment has a pedagogical function; it contributes to writers' learning processes and the improvement of their measurable writing skills. Using a more complex concept, Paltridge, Harbon, Hirsh, Shen, Stevenson, Phakiti, and Woodrow (2009,p.139) say that assessing academic writing is a "systematic process" of obtaining information about individual students' writing ability for academic purposes and then evaluating the quality of writing for decision-making purposes. It involves multi-faceted elements of testing theory, decision-making processes, politically and ethically related acts, and expectation of other stakeholders. It is not simply a matter of assessing a score or grade to a student's writing. It can then be concluded that assessing academic writing is a systematic process of obtaining information about students' performance in writing to help them to increase their proficiency.

2.8.1 Reliability

The notion of validity and reliability are crucial to understand best the characteristics of assessment, and it is then necessary to outline a definition of both. Spandel and Stiggings (1997, p. 38) say that reliability is “the degree of consistency depends on the specificity of the scoring criteria and the quality of the rater training”. In this view, reliability concerns not only with the scoring criteria, with the rater training, too. In a similar way, Williams (1998, p. 264) says that “reliability in assessment is related to the consistency of the comparison to the pre-established standard”. Finally, Scott (1996, p.105) says that the degree to which different raters would agree about the quality of a text is called inter-rater reliability. The term intra-rater reliability describes the degree to which the same rater would be consistent in assessing the quality of a text. In sum, reliability refers to the extent to which assessment is consistent.

2.8.2 Validity

Validity is an important aspect to take into account in writing assessment. Williams (1998, p.262) says that validity in assessment is the match between what is being taught and what is being evaluated. In this view, assessment is qualified as validity when the assessment is focused on what aspects were taught. In a similar way, Spandel & Stiggings (1997, p.39) state that a good assessment of writing is also said to have “validity”, the closest possible connection with the knowledge or skills teachers wish to assess. Finally, Lincoln & Guba (1985, cited in McDonough, 1997, p63) say that validity is essentially to do with credibility. In sum, validity refers to the action to evaluate only what things were taught.

2.8.3 Feedback

In the context of teaching writing, feedback is as important as assessment. Thus, it is important to provide a definition of feedback. Nicol and Macfarlane (cited in Paltridge et al, 1990, p. 119) claim that “feedback is information about a student’s present state of learning and performance”. It is a way in which teachers can help students gain control of types of writing. In this view, feedback includes all information about students’ learning. Similarly, Ur (1996, p.242) defines feedback as information that is given to the learner about his or her performance of learning task, usually with the objective of improving this performance. Feedback has two main distinguishable components: assessment and correction. That is, information about how well or badly students have performed or specific information on aspects of students’ performance. Finally, Anderson, Brophy and Vygotsky (cited in Hyland and Hyland, 2006, p. 1) state that feedback is widely seen in education as crucial for both encouraging and consolidating learning. It can then be concluded that feedback is information about students’ performance of learning given students with the purpose of improving students’ performance.

This chapter showed all the theory needed to understand the main purpose of this research. The next chapter will present the methodology used to carry out this research.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The methodology used to carry out this research is descriptive. Taking into account the purpose of this study which is to find the difficulties students face when they write essays, it is necessary knowing the students and teachers perceptions about essays so the data will be collected through questionnaires. In this case, two questionnaires will be applied.

3.1 Subjects

The study was carried out in the department of Lenguas Modernas at The Licenciatura en Lenguas Modernas (LEMO), in Puebla. The participants of this study were forty five Mexican Students from different states in Target Language VI, VII, VIII, fifteen students from Target Language VI, fifteen from Target Language VII, and the others fifteen from Target Language VIII; they were studying English as their Target Language. This is a Public University where students are males and females. Their ages range from twenty to thirty years old. The other participants were 3 English teachers, they were males and they were teaching one from Target Language VI, other from Target Language VII, and the last one from Target Language VIII.

3.2 Instruments

The instruments used to collect data in this study were two questionnaires; one for students and the other one for teachers. The two questionnaires were designed. Students'

questionnaire consisted of three parts, the first two parts are Likert scales and the last one is Open- Directed Questions. The first part has ten statements that students have to answer with “Never”, “Rarely”, “Often”, and “Always”, the statements are based on writing essays; in other words they refer to how frequently students have troubles, how difficult is joining paragraphs, if they know teachers’ evaluation criteria, about feedback, and teachers’ requirements. The second part has eleven elements of an essay and students have to write how difficult they find those elements, they have to answer with “Very Easy”, “Easy”, “Quite easy”, “Neither”, “Quite difficult”, “Difficult”, and “Very difficult”. The last part as it was mentioned before, has three open directed questions based on students’ experience writing essays.

The questionnaire applied to teachers was designed, too. It has three parts. The two first parts are Likert scales and the last part is multiple choice. The first part has six statements that teachers have to indicate how frequently they do the statements. The statements are based on teachers’ experience; some statements ask teachers how frequently they ask students to write essays, if they give an example first, if they give feedback, and what kind of feedback they give oral or written. Teachers have to answer with “Never”, “Rarely”, “Often”, and “Always”. The second part has the same eleven elements in students’ questionnaires, here teachers have to indicate how important they find the elements according to their evaluation criteria, they have to answer using the words “very important”, “important”, “average”, “slightly important”, and “not important”. Finally, the last part of teachers’ questionnaire has two questions, they have multiple choice, each question has four answers “A”, “B”, “C”, “D”, the first question asks about the purpose of an essay and the second one asks about the most common problem students show, and there is a last

statement were it ask teacher about any comment regarding essays. The purpose of these questionnaires is to explore students' and teachers' perceptions about essays; in order to provide effective hints to improve writing an essay.

3.3 Procedure

First of all, two instruments were designed and applied, students' questionnaires were applied to fifteen students and teachers' questionnaire were applied to four teachers to see if the statements were clear and understandable, after they answered the questionnaires, they were interviewed to see in which statements they had problems and make changes. Afterwards, some changes were made in some statements. Second, teachers' questionnaires were administered to three teacher one from Target Language VI, the other teacher from Target Language VII, and the last one was a teacher from Target Language VIII; the students questionnaire was applied to forty five students, fifteen from Target Language VI, the other fifteen students from Target Language VII, and the last fifteen students from Target Language VIII. Finally, the questionnaires were collected and the data was entered in Excel for analysis. The questions were quantified and represented in graphs to illustrate the findings. These results are shown in Chapter IV.

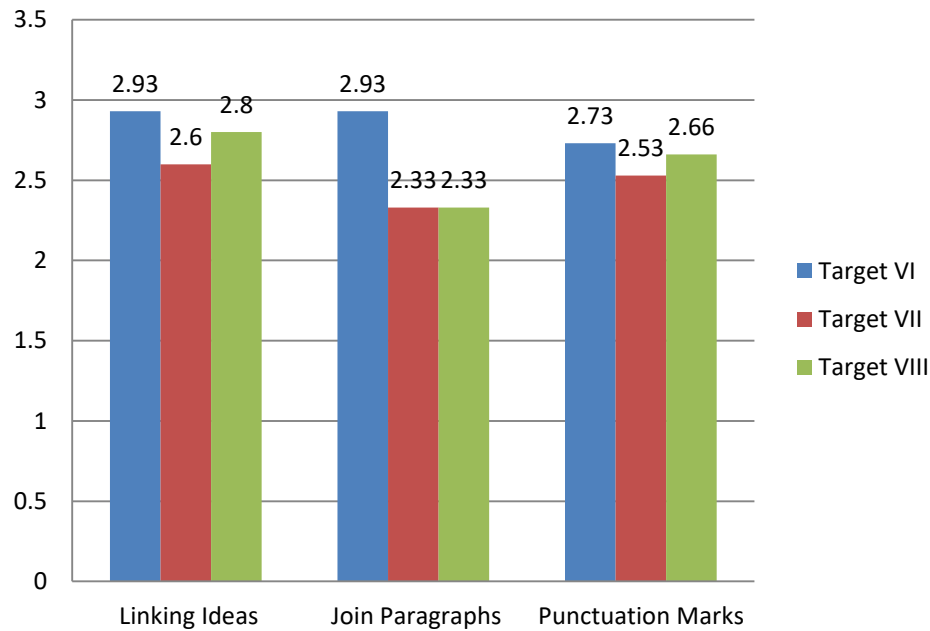
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

In this chapter, the results of the questionnaires administered to forty-five students and three teachers in the language department “LEMO” are presented and discussed. The data is presented in graphs. The first four graphs show the results of students’ questionnaire, whereas the rest of graphs represent the result of teachers’ questionnaire.

4.1 Students’ Difficulties with Linking a Paragraph

In order to determine the main problems students face in writing essays, it was relevant to determine if students have problems in writing and if the problems are the same for the three levels of Target Language. This graph shows the three levels used to carry out this research; these levels are Target Language VI, VII, and VIII. This graph represents the result of each level of Target Language. The blue color represents Target Language VI, red color represents Target Language VII, and green color represents Target Language VIII. The issues showed in this graph are three, the first one is the frequency of troubles students have in linking their ideas, the second one is how difficult is for students joining paragraphs, and the third one is the appropriately use of punctuation marks. In linking ideas students from Target Language VI have an average of 2.93, students from Target Language VII have an average of 2.6 and students from target VIII have an average of 2.8; these averages mean that students often have problems with linking ideas. In joining paragraphs, students from Target Language VI have an average of 2.93 and students from Target Language VII and VIII have an average of 2.33. In the use of punctuation mark students from Target Language VI have an average of 2.73, students from Target Language VII have an average of 2.53, and students from Target Language VIII have an average of 2.6

Figure 1: Students' Difficulties with Linking Ideas, Joining a Paragraph and Punctuation.



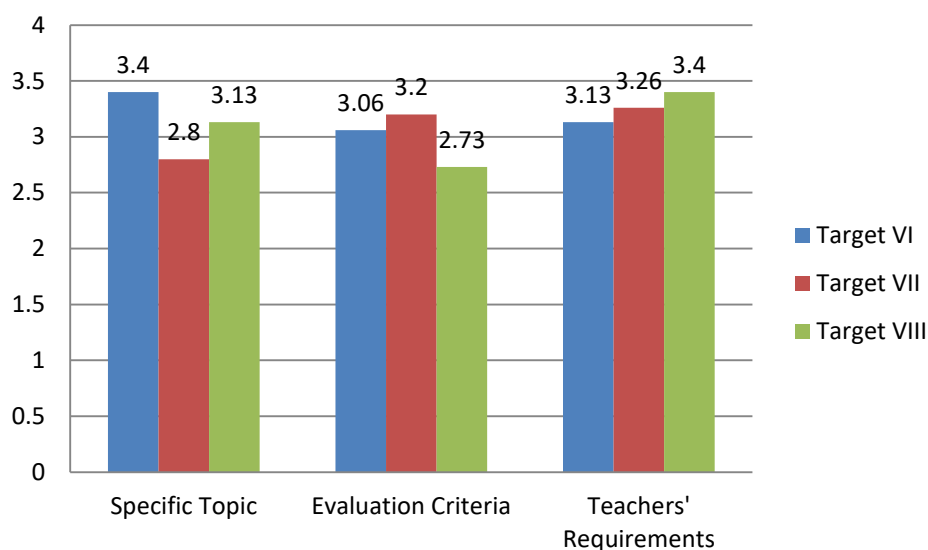
According to the results, students from the three levels of Target Language have often problems with linking ideas, joining paragraphs, and the appropriately use of punctuation marks. Students are in the average of 2.3 to 2.93. Students from Target Language VI, VII, and VIII often have problem in linking ideas. In joining paragraphs, students from Target Language VI often have problem while students from Target Language VII and VIII rarely have problems in joining paragraphs. Students from Target Language VII rarely have problems in using punctuation marks while students from Target Language VI and VIII have problems with the use of punctuation marks. Students from Target Language VI had more trouble in linking ideas, joining paragraphs, and the use of punctuation marks; it could be because they are not advanced students and their language proficiency could be the factor that affects them. However, this does not happen with students from Target Language VIII; supposedly, they have the highest level in English so

that they must have fewer problems in writing but it was not the case. Students from Target Language VII have fewer problems than students from Target Language VIII.

4.2 Students' Opinions about Teachers' Assessment

The following graph is about students' opinions about teachers' assessment. It is divided in three parts, and each part has three bars. The first part represents when teachers give a specific topic, the second part shows teachers' evaluations criteria, and the third one represents if students take into account all teachers requirements. In the first part the average for students from Target Language VI is 3.4, the average for students from Target Language VII is 2.8, and the average for students from Target Language VIII is 3.13; It means that teachers often gives students a specific topic to write essays. The average in the second part named evaluation criteria is 3.06 for students from Target Language VI, for students from Target Language VII is 3.2, and for students from Target Language VIII is 2.733. The last part of this graph is teachers' requirements, it has an average of 3.13 for students from Target Language VI, for students from Target Language VII the average is 3.26, and the average for students from Target Language VIII is 3.4.

Figure 2: Students' Opinions about Teachers' Assessment

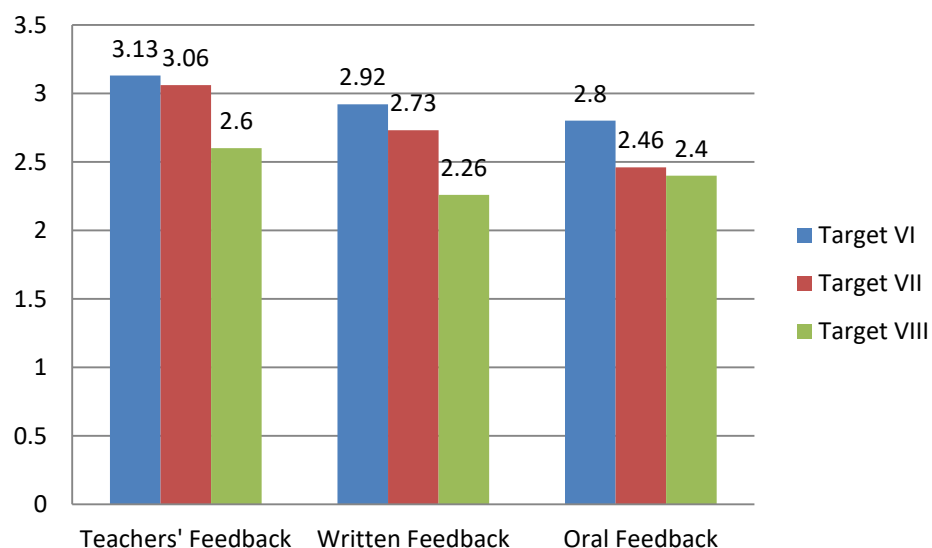


These results show that teachers “often” give a specific topic in the three levels. In evaluation criteria teachers “often” give the evaluation criteria. According to the teachers’ requirements, students “often” take into account all teachers requirements. As the figure shows, students from Target Language VIII have the opportunity to select a topic when teachers ask them to write essays; on the other hand, students with low level are not able to write about a free topic, they need more teachers’ guide like students from Target Language VI. In Target Language VIII teachers do not give students the evaluation criteria; this could be because students from Target Language VIII have more experience about it so teachers think that students know the requirements and they do not need to mention them.

4.3 Students' Opinions about Teachers' Feedback

In this section, the results of each Target Language are represented and described. The results show how frequently students receive feedback and the kind of teachers' feedback. The feedback used in classrooms could be written and oral. The graph is divided in three parts: teachers' feedback, written feedback, and oral feedback. According to teachers' feedback, the average for students from Target Language VI is 3.13, for students from Target Language VII the average is 3.06, and the average for students from Target Language VIII is 2.6. In the second part of the graph which is "written feedback" the average for students from Target Language VI is 2.92, 2.73 is the average of students from Target Language VII, students from Target Language VIII has an average of 2.26. The last part of this graph is oral feedback, it has an average of 2.8 for students from Target Language VI, the average gotten in Target Language VII is 2.46, and the average of students from Target Language VIII is 2.4. These results are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Students' Opinions about Teachers' Feedback



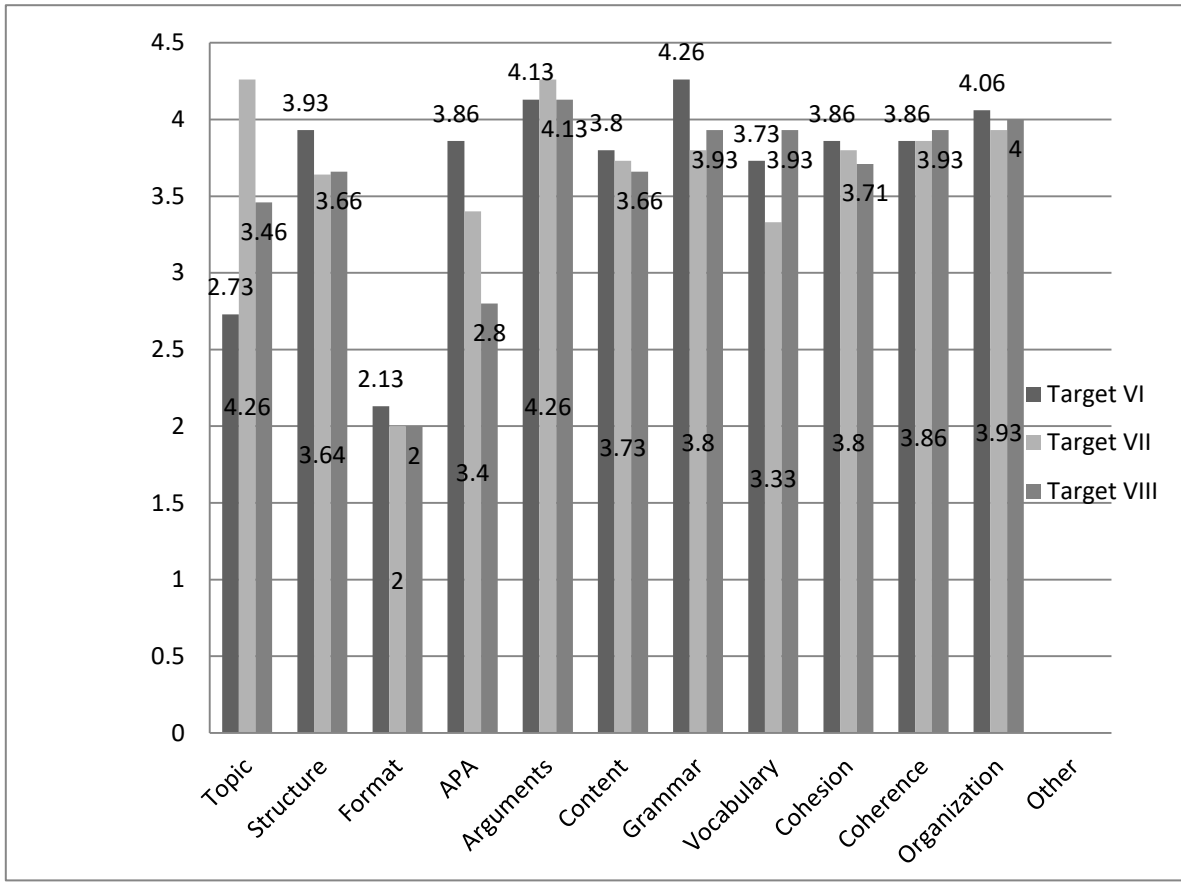
As it can be seen, the feedback used in Target Language classrooms is not the same for the three levels of Target Language VI, VII, and VIII. Students from Target Language VI receive more feedback than the other levels of Target Language; this could be because they have more problems in writing. Students from Target Language VI has an average of 3.13 in teachers' feedback, 2.92 in written feedback, and 2.8 in oral feedback; the average means that they "often" receive teachers' feedback and the kind of feedback they receive is "often" written and oral. Students from Target Language VII have an average of 3.06 in teachers' feedback, 2.73 in written feedback, and 2.46 in oral feedback; this means that they "often" receive feedback and the kind of feedback they receive is "often" written and "rarely" oral feedback. Students from Target Language VIII had an average of 2.6 in teachers' feedback, 2.26 in written feedback, and 2.4 in oral feedback, this means that they "often" receive feedback and the kind of feedback they receive is "rarely" oral and "rarely" written feedback; this implies that sometimes teachers only give a grade. The most common feedback used in Target Language VI is the written. In Target Language VII the most common feedback is written. However, in Target Language VIII the most common feedback is oral and they do not receive a lot of feedback as students from the other levels of Target Languages.

4.4 Students' Opinions about Essays' Elements

This graph shows how easy or difficult students find some essay's elements. Their perceptions about these elements are displayed in each bar. The graph is divided in twelve parts, each part has an element; the elements of an essay are topic, structure, format, APA,

arguments, content, grammar, vocabulary, cohesion, coherence, organization, and other (if students add other element). The average of topic is 2.73 for students from Target Language VI, 4.26 for students from Target Language VII, and 3.46 for students from Target Language VIII. The average for structure is 3.93 for students from Target Language VI, 3.64 is the average for students from Target Language VII, and 3.66 for students from Target Language VIII. According to format (letter size, capital letters, and space) it has an average of 2.13 for students from Target Language VI and an average of 2 for students of the levels of Target Language VII, VIII. The APA has an average of 3.86 for students from Target Language VI, the average of students from Target Language VII is 3.4, and 2.8 for students of Target Language VIII. The next part is arguments, it has an average of 4.13 for the level VI, 4.26 for level VII, and 4.13 for students from Target Language VIII. Content has an average of 3.8 for student from Target Language VI, 3.73 for students from Target Language VII, 3.66 for students from Target Language VIII. Grammar has an average of 4.26 for students from Target Language VI, students from Target Language VII have an average of 3.8, and students from target VIII have an average of 3.93. Vocabulary has an average of 3.73 for students from Target Language VI, students from Target Language VII has an average of 3.33, and students from Target Language VIII has an average of 3.93. Cohesion has an average of 3.86 for students from Target Language VI, 3.8 for students from Target Language VII, 3.71 for students from Target Language VIII. In coherence, students from Target Language VI and VII have an average of 3.86 and students from Target Language VIII has an average of 3.93. Organization has an average of 4.06 for students from Target Language VI, students from Target Language VII have an average of 3.93, and students from target VIII have an average of 4.

Figure 4: Students' Opinions about Essays' Elements



As the figure shows, students argue that the topic is “quite easy” for Target Language VI and VIII, for Target Language VII topic is considered as “neither”. Structure is considered as “neither” by the three levels. Most students think that “format” is the easiest element in writing essays. The average of format is 2.1 and 2, it means that students state that format is “easy”. APA is considered “quite easy” for students from Target Language VII & VIII and as “neither” for students from Target Language VI. Arguments, grammar, and organization are considered as “neither”.

4.5 Students' Perceptions about Essays

Students' answers about what they do when teachers ask them to write essays were similar. According to students' opinions, the first thing they do in writing essays is thinking about the topic and then they try to write all ideas came their minds, others argue that they try to find a topic sentence and a thesis statement to start writing, and some others claim that they look for information about the topic to know more about it, in order to write an appropriate essay, others said that they try to see what they feel about the topic to start writing, and others said that they look at teachers' requirements to start writing.

4.6 The Amount of Essays Students Use to Write

Essays are so useful in Target Language classes. Students should practice writing essays to be accustomed to writing different types of essays; however, there is not an exactly amount of essays to make students skillful in writing essays. According to students' answers, they write few essays in their Target Language classes. In Target Language VI they said that they wrote between 1 to 8 essays, in Target Language VII they wrote between 1 essay to 10, and in Target Language VIII they wrote between 1 to 5 essays. Only few students said that they wrote more than 8 essays.

4.7 Teachers' Perceptions about the Frequency they Ask Students to Write Essays

This graph is about teachers' perception about the frequency they ask to write essays. The graph has only one bar, this bar represents the average of three teachers' answers from the three levels of Target Language. The bar represents the statement number

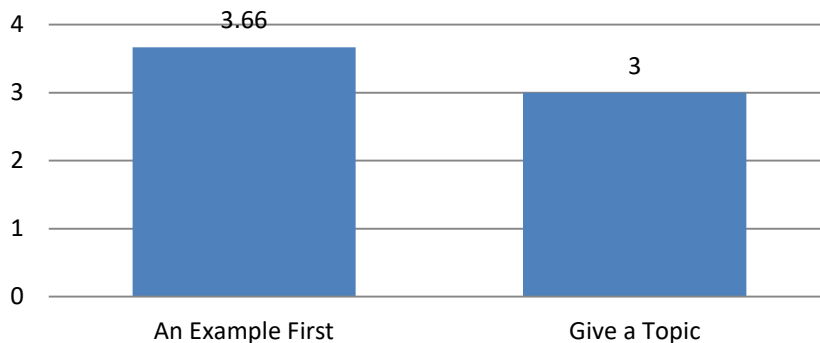
1 which indicates how frequently teachers use essays in their Target Language class. The average indicates that teachers often ask students to write essays.

Essays are so useful in Target Language classes; however, teachers do not ask always students to write it. Teachers from these three levels argue that they use essays, if they use essays in their classes is because essays give students some benefits. Essays help students to improve their writing and they express their ideas and thoughts.

4.8 Teaching Writing

The following graph has two bars; the first bar means how frequently they give students an example first and the second bar represents if teachers give students a specific topic. The first bar has an average of 3.66, this means that teachers always give an example first when they teach writing essays. The second bar has an average of 3, which means that teachers often give the topic of an essay.

Figure 6: Teaching Writing

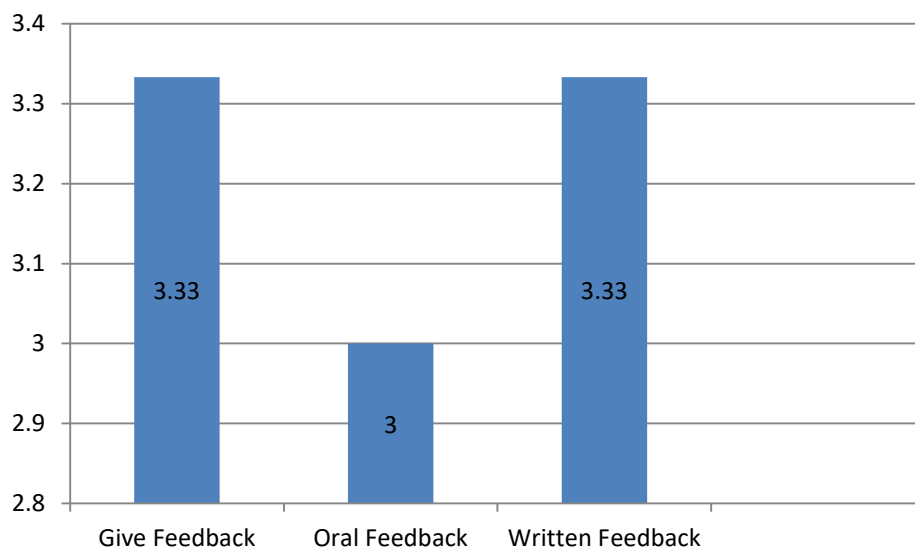


Writing is not easy, so students need help to start writing. Teachers always use examples when they ask to write essays, it is a way to show students how an essay is, the essential elements that an essay has, and of course it gives students a clear idea about what teachers want. Some students have difficulties choosing a topic so teachers argue that they often give a topic. It could be easier for teachers because if they give the topic they know what students are going to do. However, if students choose the topic, teachers do not have idea about what students are going to write, it is more complicated for them. It takes more time to read and grade an essay.

4.9 Teachers' Perceptions about their Feedback

The feedback used in classrooms could be written and oral. The two kinds of feedback are useful in writing. For some students one feedback is better than the other. Teachers use these types of feedback in their classes. This graph has three bars; the first one represents if teachers give students feedback, and the second one represents how frequently teachers give oral feedback, and the third one represents how frequently they give written feedback. The first bar has an average of 3.3, the second bar has an average of 3, and last bar has an average of 3.3; the average means that teachers often give feedback and the feedback used in their classrooms is often oral and written.

Figure 7: Teachers' Perceptions about their Feedback



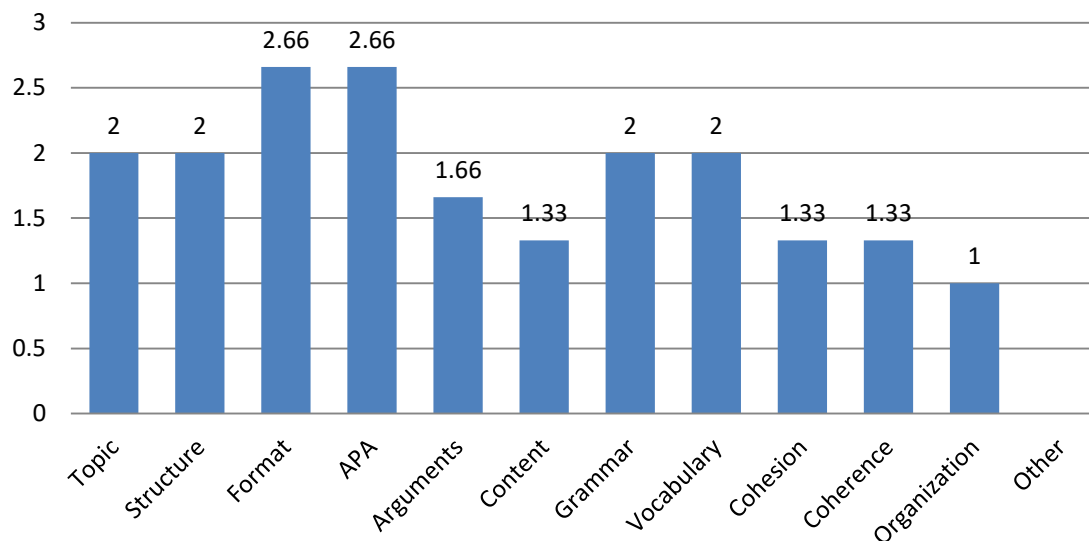
These results show that teachers do not always give feedback so that they give only a grade. The most appropriate when teachers ask to write essays is receiving feedback. Feedback is quite useful for students because this is the students' opportunity to see their mistakes and improve their writing. Like essays are used to practice writing, it could be reasonable that the feedback used is written feedback; however, teachers do not only use written, feedback they use oral feedback, too.

4.10 Teachers' Opinions about the Importance of Essays' Elements

The following graph has eleven bars. Each bar represents an element of an essay. The elements of an essay are topic, structure, format, APA, arguments, content, grammar, vocabulary, cohesion, and coherence. The average of the first bar named topic has an average of 2, the average of structure is 2, the average of format is 2.66, the average of APA is 2.66, the average of argument is 1.66, the average of content is 1.33, the average of

grammar and vocabulary are 2, cohesion and coherence have an average of 1.33, and organization has an average of 1.

Figure 8: Teachers' Opinions about the Importance of Essays' Elements



The elements of an essay do not have the same relevance for teachers. Teachers give a grade of importance for each element. The most important element for teachers is organization; it has an average of 1. Teachers say that content, arguments, cohesion, and coherence are important elements in an essay but not as important as organization. The next elements in an essay are topic, structure, grammar, and vocabulary; they are considered as important elements of course not as important as the elements before mentioned. Finally, APA and Format are average. All the elements are important in writing essays; however, according to the teachers some of them are more important than others.

4.11 Teachers' Opinions about Essays

The following graph has one bar. This bar represents teachers' opinions about essays, in other words the main purpose of using essays. The average of this bar is 2.6 which means that the main purpose of using essays is to improve students' writing skill.

According to the results gained through the instruments used to carry out this research the main purpose of using essays in their classes is to improve students' writing skill. Teacher from Target Language VII said that the purpose of using essays in class is to practice and develop what they learned in class. The Teacher from Target Language VI said that essays are not only to practice writing, they are used to develop critical thinking. He argues that when he asks students to write essays, they have the chance to express themselves in English in a way they have time to think what they are going to say; the teacher from Target Language VIII argues that essays are used to practice the writing skill and to practice applications such as CV's.

4.12 Teachers' Opinions about the Most Common Problem Students Have

This graph is about teachers' opinions about the most common problem students have in writing essays. The graph is formed by only one bar, which represents the most common problem students face in writing essays. The average of this bar is 3, which means that all teachers consider that linking ideas is the most common problem. The results are shown in figure 8.

Teachers from the three levels of Target Language argue that students have more difficulties in linking ideas. Linking ideas is very important in writing because it makes a text understandable; it is a fundamental requirement of written discourse. The teacher from Target Language VII argues that students do not have only problems in linking ideas they have problems in punctuation, too.

In this chapter all the results found were presented and described. The next chapter will draw some conclusions about the research, some implications for the language classroom, and will present some suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter the summary of the results are presented. The implications of the study, its main limitations, and some directions for further researches are also provided.

5.1 Conclusions

The purpose of the present research was to analyze the most common difficulties students face in writing essays. For achieving the purpose of this research the method used was survey, it involves collecting data in order to answer questions. The data was collected through the use of two questionnaires. The two instruments were designed and administered; one for students and the other one for their teachers. Once the data was collected, the results show that students have difficulties in the process of writing essays since they select a topic. For students from Target Language VII, finding a topic is more difficult than for the other levels. The most difficult aspects to write essays are grammar, organization, and argumentation, they are more complex aspects, and it requires students' thoughts and beliefs.

According to students' perceptions about what an essay is, students know the elements of an essay and they have a clear idea about what they have to write in an essay; however, they have difficulties writing it. As it was mentioned before, students have problems in writing. Teachers said that the most common problem students have in writing essays is linking ideas and punctuation marks. Students said that the most difficult aspect for them it is linking ideas, joining paragraphs, and punctuation marks. According to students, they said that the most difficult aspect for them is grammar and writing arguments. Students from Target Language VI the most difficult aspect is grammar, for

Target Language VII the most difficult is finding a topic, for Target Language VIII the most difficult aspect is writing arguments. According to teachers, they say that the most important aspect is organization; essays need to have a logical sequence, the other ones are arguments, content, cohesion, and coherence are important but not as organization. They argue that all aspects are important for them.

Teachers believe that the purpose of using essays in Target Languages is to improve the writing skill and to develop critical thinking; it gives time to think what they want to say. According to students, the purpose of using essays is to practice grammar, vocabulary, and to express their thoughts.

5.2 Implications

The results about this research show that essays are quite useful to develop critical thinking and to practice and develop what students learned in class so if essays are so useful to help students develop writing skill, teachers must ask students to write more essays because essay writing is difficult to develop. Students must be skillful with writing skill so in academic settings students develop this skill through Essays. Teachers cannot use only one or two essays during a course so probably teachers have to decide at the very least a number of essays per course. Another important implication of this study is that, not all elements have the same relevance for teachers so it seems they must create an evaluation criterion for the different target languages, which must be used for all teachers at The LEMO. Teachers may probably create workshops only to practice writing essays about different topics to the different levels. Finally, teachers should pay more attention to the

common problems students have in writing, providing exercises to practice and improve their writing.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

The research tries to find students weaknesses in writing essays with the purpose of improving the writing skill. However, the methodology used to carry out this research was a limitation to get the main purpose. This research is based on students' and teachers' perceptions and sometimes opinions are different of the reality. An ethnographic research could be used because it occurs in a naturalistic setting, studying students' and teachers' behaviors as it occurs, another method could be descriptive research trough the collections of essays to find students' difficulties. Another limitation is that this research is based on two instruments applied only to three groups, fifteen students in each group and three teachers. However, students' answers and teachers' answers from other groups and levels may be different. The results can vary according teachers' believes about writing and about teachers' experience. It is clear that there are different types of essays and different approaches about writing so students' answers were according to the kinds of essays they know.

5.4 Directions for Further Research

As stated before, this research only presents an overview of students and teachers' perceptions regarding essays, thus, it leaves other issues to be considered in future research.

First of all, the methodology used in this research could be complemented with a descriptive research; in other words, collecting data through essays, it is a more realistic way to find students weaknesses in writing essays. Second, an ethnographic research could be used to check if students and teachers' perceptions are alike of what really happens in the classroom. Third, an evaluation criteria could be design to grade essays according to the different students' level (beginners, intermediate, or advance). Fourth, feedback is important to improve students' perform in their academic life so another research can be based on feedback. Finally, there are different degrees and each one needs to develop writing but in a different way so another research can focus on what kind of essays are better for the different degrees.

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APPENDIX ONE: STUDENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE

The purpose of this questionnaire is to research the perceptions students have about essays; in order to provide effective hints to improve writing an essay.

Instructions: Please indicate how frequently you do the following statements. Do this by circling the letters according to your opinion about each statement.

N=Never R=Rarely O=Often A=Always

When I write an essay...

- | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1) I have trouble with linking my ideas. | N | R | O | A |
| 2) I find difficult to join the paragraphs. | N | R | O | A |
| 3) I use appropriately punctuation marks. | N | R | O | A |
| 4) My teacher gives me a specific topic. | N | R | O | A |
| 5) My teacher gives me an evaluation criteria. | N | R | O | A |
| 6) I take into account all teacher's requirements. | N | R | O | A |
| 7) If I find gaps in teacher's requirements I add more information. | N | R | O | A |
| 8) My teacher gives me feedback. | N | R | O | A |
| 9) My teacher's feedback is written. | N | R | O | A |
| 10) My teacher's feedback is oral. | N | R | O | A |

II. Please indicate the extent of the difficulty with the following aspects when writing an essay. Do this by circling the letters according to your opinion about each aspect.

How easy or difficult you find the following aspects in writing essays.

VE=very easy E=easy QE=quite easy N=neither QD= quite difficult D=difficult
VD=very difficult

Topic (selection). VE E QE N QD

D VD

Structure (Parts of an essay). VE E QE N QD

D VD

Format (Letter size, capital letter, and space).

VE E QE N QD

D VD

APA.

VE E QE N QD

D VD

Arguments.

VE E QE N QD

D VD

Content.

VE E QE N QD

D VD

Grammar.

VE E QE N QD

D VD

Vocabulary.

VE E QE N QD

D VD

Cohesion.

VE E QE N QD

D VD

Coherence.

VE E QE N QD

D VD

Organization (Logical sequence).

VE E QE N QD

D VD

Other _____

III. Answer the following questions considering your own experience in writing.

- 1) What is the first thing you do in writing an essay?

2) How many essays did you write in your last target language course?

3) What do you think the purpose of writing an essay is?

Thank you!

APPENDIX TWO: TEACHERS' QUESTIONNAIRE

The purpose of this questionnaire is to get data about perceptions that teachers have about writing essays; in order to carry out a research project and provide hints to improve writing an essay.

Instructions: Please indicate how frequently you do the following statements. Do this by circling the letters according to your opinion about each statement.

N=Never R=Rarely O=Often A=Always

- | | | | |
|--|----------|----------|--|
| 1) I ask students to write essays in my English Target language class. | N | R | |
| O A | | | |
| 2) When I ask students to write Essays, I give an example first. | N | R | |
| O A | | | |
| 3) When I ask students to write an essay, I give the topic. | N | R | |
| O A | | | |
| 4) When I check students' essays, I give them feedback. | N | R | |
| O A | | | |
| 5) My feedback is oral. | N | | |
| R O A | | | |
| 6) My feedback is written. | N | | |
| R O A | | | |

II. Please indicate how important you find the following aspects when evaluating an essay. Do this by circling the letters according to your opinion about each aspect.

VI= very impoortant I=important A=average SI=slightly important
NI=not important

- | | | | |
|---|-----------|----------|--|
| Topic (selection) | VI | I | |
| A SI NI | | | |
| Structure (Parts of an essay) | VI | I | |
| A SI NI | | | |
| Format (Letter size, capital letter, and space) | VI | I | |
| A SI NI | | | |

APA				VI	I
A	SI	NI			
Arguments				VI	I
A	SI	NI			
Content				VI	I
A	SI	NI			
Grammar				VI	I
A	SI	NI			
Vocabulary				VI	I
A	SI	NI			
Cohesion				VI	I
A	SI	NI			
Coherence				VI	I
A	SI	NI			
Organization (Logical sequence)				VI	I
A	SI	NI			
Other	<hr/>				
	<hr/>				
	<hr/>				

III. Answer the following questions considering your experience in writing.

- 1) What is the purpose of using Essays in English Target language class?
 - A) To develop students' ability in writing essays.
 - B) To improve students' writing skill.
 - C) To evaluate students.
 - D) Other.

- 2) When you check essays, what is the most common problem students have in writing essays?
 - A) Punctuation.

- B) Spelling
- C) Linking ideas.
- D) Essay's structure.

Any comment regarding essay writing.

Thank you!