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Section 4: Productivity in Language Teaching

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The Alchemistic Power to Transform Readers to Writers in the EFL Classroom

According to the National Institute for Statistics, Mexicans read almost four books per year on average (2018). This rate can be considered low if compared to the average number of books read in countries like India, Thailand or China. Another characteristic of Mexican readers is that they prefer to read textbooks, newspapers, webpages, forums or blogs. While most studies focus on reading and writing skills in students' mother tongue, very little has been written about the development of these skills on the part of Mexican foreign-language students. The aim of this talk is to analyze the perceptions of a group of undergraduate students of English about their own performance while attending an academic-reading-and-writing course.

It has been widely recognized that out of the four language skills, writing is the one that receives the least attention on the part of second language teachers. For Scrivener (2011), part of the problem lies in the fact that writing is an activity which is relegated from the classroom so that it can be done at home, away from any teacher supervision. Scrivener appeals to the benefits of "guided" or "process writing" as a bridge to overcome such a gap. "Process writing" is also mentioned by Harmer (2011), for whom the role of the teacher as a feedback provider is key. In the particular case of Mexico, recent studies (e.g. Gonzalez 2017) have pointed at the occurrence of three deficiencies in Mexican universities:

- too little time allotted, emphasis on language testing and certification,

- untrained teachers, and
- a lack of interest on the part of teachers to promote writing.

Within this context, some universities demand their EFL students to write a research paper as part of their graduation requirements.

The participants of this study were undergraduate students of English, enrolled in an academic-reading-and-writing course at a public university in southern Mexico. Two surveys were carried out during the data-collection period: one survey focused on students' reading habits, conducted at the beginning of the course; the other one collected students' perceptions of their own writing assessments at different moments of the course. The perceptions of "process writing" were supplemented with the analysis of the final products collected at the end of the semester. The course was complemented with the design of a supporting webpage where information accessible to students was posted and whose aim it was to reinforce some of the points explained during the course.

The analysis of the information collected confirms that the path to transform unskilled readers into potential writers requires a close follow-up on the part of teachers, whose tasks can be enhanced with the use of information and communication technologies.

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