

**Developing Young Learners' EFL Writing Skills through a Pen Pal Telecollaboration  
Exchange during the Covid-19 Pandemic in Two Rural Institutions in Boyacá**

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**Abstract**

In language learning contexts, telecollaboration is understood as an exchange between people from different populations through the use of electronic means in order to develop intercultural and linguistic communication skills with the purpose of exchanging knowledge. In telecollaboration, bilingual models are proposed for learning a foreign language, on the one hand, this can be between students of different cultures, and on the other hand between students with a common language in order to strengthen the learning of another language. This study looked to promote telecollaborative exchange among 16 elementary school students in Boyacá aged between 9 to 11 years old. Considering the age of the participants and their needs, we sought to develop one of the production skills, in this case, writing, considered by the participants as the most complex. The objective of this project was to explore and describe young learners' EFL writing skills development as they become involved in a telecollaboration exchange of personal letters during the pandemic between two institutions. The results showed a positive evolution in writing skills during the telecollaborative exchange as students expressed the emotions generated by the pandemic and their new friendship. This demonstrated that curiosity, motivation, diversity, confidence, and technological tools can transform foreign language learning in any context.

Key words: telecollaboration, writing skills, technological resources, pen pal exchange, pandemic, elementary schools.

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### **Introduction**

Learning a foreign language requires developing multiple skills according to the stage of the learner. Among those, there are four important abilities to cultivate in order to master during our language education: writing, reading, listening, and speaking. In the context of this study, writing had been the least worked skill in the schools according to students, and it was also regarded as a skill that demands more time and commitment. One of the reasons for these students' perceptions could be that in early stages, these young learners had been exposed more to listening and speaking activities than to writing exercises. For this reason, the spaces for writing had been limited and students had only focused on writing vocabulary correctly instead of writing as a means of communication. This project gave special emphasis to writing skills, and allowed participants to write their experiences during the lockdown using their knowledge of English language to express their ideas, highlighting the reality that the whole world had to face, which was the global Pandemic.

During the year in which the investigation was carried out, face-to-face education was transformed into virtual education due to the global pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Thus, schools had to create strategies to help students attend their classes through different technological means such as phone calls, video calls and asynchronous chat, among others. To reduce the impact of this unexpected event and to continue learning English, it was decided to carry out a pen pal project.

The aim of this project was to support the development of writing skills in students from two different school populations through a telecollaboration exchange of personal letters during the pandemic in Institution "J" and Institution "V". This study sought to answer the research

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question: How does a Pen Pal telecollaboration exchange between two elementary schools in Boyacá during the COVID-19 pandemic shape a group of third to fifth students' EFL writing development? Consequently, students started to write English letters to peers in another institution using electronic media through a telecollaboration framework.

Dooly & O'Dowd defined telecollaboration "as referring to the pedagogical processes and outcomes of engaging learners in different geographical locations in virtual contact together" (p. 9). This online pedagogical design can provide synchronous and/or asynchronous collaboration for learners and teachers. Thereby, the use of social media and social networking tools can enable quick connections with other individuals, communities or institutions. In this study, communication between populations was asynchronous because it was more convenient considering the limitations that students had due to the lack of resources or difficult access to the internet. It was expected that this collaboration among students supported their English practice to improve their writing ability.

This qualitative study employed the precepts of action research to answer the research question mentioned above. Likewise, surveys, interviews, journals, and student artifacts were used to analyze how the telecollaboration pedagogical design progressed and to understand how the pen pal experience influenced participants' EFL writing skills construction.

This proposal is distributed in six sections. The first one presents the description of the problem, it establishes the research question, the objectives, and the justification of this study. In the second section, the literature review that helped to guide the research is introduced. The third section describes the research design, the participants, the context, and the instruments to gather data. In the fourth section, there is a description of the pedagogical intervention. The fifth section

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describes the data analysis process and discusses the findings. Finally, the sixth section includes the conclusions of the research study, the pedagogical implications, and further research.

### **Problem statement**

In Colombia, one of the contexts where young students learn English is in rural schools. It is expected that EFL education can promote cultural, academic, social and professional opportunities for these students despite limitations in terms of resources that these schools may have. In Boyacá, some rural institutions have opened their doors to foreign language pre-service teachers from the Pedagogical and Technological University of Colombia (UPTC). Every year, work is done with these schools in Boyacá.

Looking retrospectively at the work that pre-service teachers have done with students from third to fifth grade, in two institutions in Boyacá: Institution “J” and Institution “V”, it has emerged that one of the skills that generates more difficulty is writing. One of the reasons why this limitation in writing has emerged is related to previous pedagogical experiences students had had because the teaching of English was focused on other skills, namely, speaking and listening. In addition, the initial diagnosis we conducted by means of a survey (see annex 1) showed that students in the target institutions lacked practice in writing and therefore they did not have much confidence when using this skill.

The development of language skills starts by initial exposure to oral language at an early age. Later on in the process, awareness of the sounds that make up the words contributes to the child's spontaneous approach to writing (Scott & Ytreberg, 1990). In the case of institutions “J” and “V” the students' average age was between 9 and 11 years, which implied an ideal stage to start developing writing skills in English. However, there had been too much of a delay to

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support these learners' writing skill development, since they had been exposed more time to oral production, and writing practices had been delayed. Consequently, the aforementioned limitations allowed us to infer that the English learners in this study faced a challenging task in mastering writing.

At the beginning of this study, institutions had to start virtual education because of the Sars Cov 2 virus. It means that students were unable to return to school or have close contact with their classmates or teachers due to the confinement. In this regard, Dubey et al. (2020) mention, "during a severe pandemic like COVID-19, community-based mitigation programs, such as the closing of schools, parks, and playgrounds will disrupt children's usual lifestyle and can potentially promote distress and confusion" (p. 782). As a consequence of this drastic change in the social life of the students, it was evident that some students experienced different emotions provoked by the confinement such as insecurity, fear, joy at having their family members with them. Finally, the students had to face the adversity they were experiencing while being educated from home, in a non-face-to-face environment, and with the technological resources, they could have at their disposal.

English was strongly affected by the aforementioned challenges and virtuality emerged to deaden communication between teachers and students in Ventaquemada and Jenesano institutions. Likewise, virtuality brought with it other challenges for students to gain access to the internet and its technological tools; thus, many students did not have adequate technology such as cell phones, computers, and quality internet to optimize communication. From all this arose a pen pal and telecollaboration project which had the objective of improving participants' writing

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skills using technological devices affordable for all participants. In response to these issues, the following research questions and objectives were formulated to guide this study.

### **Research question**

How does a Pen Pal telecollaboration exchange between two elementary schools in Boyacá during the COVID-19 pandemic shape a group of fourth and fifth-grade students' EFL writing development?

### **Research Subquestions**

How is writing characterized when participants are involved in a pen pal project during the pandemic?

What are participants' perceptions about a pen pal experience mediated by telecollaboration during the COVID-19 pandemic?

How did technological resources affect English writing during the pen pal telecollaboration project?

### **Objectives**

#### **Primary Objective**

To explore and describe young learners' EFL writing skills development as they become involved in a telecollaboration exchange of personal letters during the pandemic between institutions in Ventaquemada and Jenesano.

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### **Specific Objectives**

- To propose strategies to help students improve their writing skills in English language through letters by using WhatsApp and phone calls.
- To analyze students' perceptions and feelings about the use of letters in their EFL writing when they are telecollaborating through letters.
- To characterize the EFL writing that emerges as participants telecollaborated through letter exchanges.
- To analyze the effects of the technological resources in English writing during the pen pal telecollaboration project.

### **Justification**

The target institutions at Ventaquemada and Jenesano, where this study took place, were affected regarding foreign language learning due to challenges that arose with the pandemic and weaknesses in the written skills of the participants. This study sought to improve the weaknesses in English writing by using a pen pal exchange experience.

During this study, 18 students participated and some instruments were applied to get some relevant information from them. Instruments revealed a weakness in the written skill of participants, they affirmed throughout surveys that writing was the most difficult skill. Therefore, the project aimed at improving their weaker ability through a pen pal project by gradually progressing in each letter and creating a communicative context to exercise this skill. Students took advantage of available technological devices seeking to improve their communication in English using writings among peers.

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By tackling participants' limitations in their EFL writing skills this study aligns with the Colombian government's objective to strengthen English learning so that students can communicate in this foreign language. The Ministry of Education of Colombia (MEN) has established a program called "National Bilingualism Program" (2018-2022) that seeks to strengthen pedagogical practices and open more spaces for learning the foreign language through functional content for assertive communication in English (MEN, 2018).

The basic standards of competencies in foreign languages-English for Colombia propose that elementary school students from third through fifth grade need to understand and manage basic communicative functions at the writing level, for instance, providing personal information, answering questions, describing places and physiques, and telling short stories (MEN, 2006). Therefore, in response to the government's request, the project aimed to strengthen students' writing skills by involving students into practicing to expand their communication abilities in relation to the aforementioned language functions.

The relevance of this study is also related to the pandemic which resulted in some challenges for the target institutions. Firstly, the Ventaquemada institution was located in a rural area, and the Jenesano institution was located in a small town where their resources and ease of access to the Internet were limited, consequently, their access to education was sometimes restricted because of the technological limitations of both institutions. Secondly, the learning to use electronic media, students had not been exposed to a similar situation of studying at home, then a challenge was the adaptation and learning to use electronic media as an academic medium. Considering these challenges, the relevance of this study is also related to the options to bring educational opportunities to children, and opportunities that are adapted to their realities by using

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technology easily, and finally, that despite all these challenges, these children can continue to learn even in remote areas.

Considering that face-to-face education was replaced by virtual education, the Ministry of Education declared that the teaching-learning process between educators and students should be carried out through all possible means of communication, so students and relatives receive educational service at home and the institutions should look for alternatives to continue with the classes in a virtual way (MEN, 2020). As a consequence, students started to learn how to use technology to interact with other people in a different place, and to study from home to break the distance that Covid-19 has generated. Bearing in mind that not all students were in unequal conditions, it was decided to work with the resources that they had, mainly WhatsApp was the application determined for communication between students and teachers, another resource used was telephone calls in the case of students who did not have a stable internet connection. Furthermore, it can be said that indirectly the situation of the pandemic opens a space to learn to use phones and social networks meaningfully. Hence, this study had contributed to the EFL field by examining how teachers' pedagogical designs can take advantage of these doors open by the pandemic and generate meaningful English learning spaces.

In Colombia most of the studies found about telecollaboration have been focused only on exchanges between Colombian students and international students, for example, prospective English teachers re-examining language ideologies in telecollaboration a study of Viáfara (2019) and Online peer feedback between Colombian and New Zealand FL beginners. Hence, there is a need for students to explore studies of telecollaboration between students in different regions of Colombia to recognize diversity and multiculturalism, that is why this research is so relevant.

### **Literature Review**

This section focuses on the presentation of the theoretical constructs and review of some related studies that were the fundamental basis for the development of the research. The constructs that are discussed in this section are telecollaboration, pen pal projects, and EFL writing.

#### **Telecollaboration**

Telecollaboration means an Internet-based exchange between people from different locations, in a language learning context, and is also established in an institutional environment to expand language and intercultural communication abilities (Byram, 1997). In general, it is common that participants in this type of project are from different backgrounds, and also aim to develop language skills, as well as their intercultural communication skills through collaborative work that allows them to strengthen and exchange ideas to improve language related skills.

These types of internet-based collaborations provide authentic social interactions for students via technology. Depending on the type of technology tool that is integrated into course planning, students can communicate either synchronously or asynchronously with distant peers. In synchronous communication, students are virtually connecting in real-time (for example, live online chat and video conferencing), while in asynchronous communication, students are not communicating in real-time (for example, blogging, and email) (Healey, 2016). In this study, asynchronous computer communication was used, since the students created their letters on

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paper, and others through the computer, and they were receiving their response not immediately, but they received each letter through WhatsApp or email every week.

Exchanges may not necessarily be bilingual indeed, they can be monolingual, involving just one of the partners' languages or they can be multilingual, involving the sharing of more than two languages (Helm & Guth, 2010). This study focused on the bilingual model because the participants of this project communicated in English even when their native language was Spanish. They exchanged letters, which were the means of communication, additionally, these letters were written in English and could integrate other semiotic resources to support their limited English abilities and knowledge such as drawings or Spanish; that is, they had the option to express themselves in both languages and use other communication resources they felt comfortable with.

### *Telecollaboration in the EFL Classroom*

The literature about Telecollaboration in the EFL Classroom is mostly dedicated to international projects related to the classroom during second or foreign language learning, however, telecollaboration offers opportunities for various educational settings to support their interaction strategies which might include institutions in the same country. It also involves students dialoguing with their colleagues in different parts of the world through collaborative tasks and projects considering the foreign language as a target. Telecollaboration integrates technological tools as the main resource, but in addition, the role of the teacher is involved and it is essential for them to guide the students' process.

Part of a teacher's skill set in the 21st century is the ability to integrate and exploit technologies in the classroom. These electronic media have the potential to be powerful tools for

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developing students' intercultural competence, foreign language skills, and other transversal skills. But for this to happen, teachers are required to “reap the benefits of new ICT developments and adopt innovative and active pedagogies, based on participatory and project-based methods” (European Council & Commission 2015, p. 29). With this in mind, many foreign language educators have employed the potential of networked technologies to enhance and complement traditional communicative classroom activities, which are often seen as limited and excessively focused on information exchange (Greenfield, 2003).

According to O'Dowd (2007), the first reports of collaborative online project work between language students in different locations showed a variety in the ways to exchange knowledge. In 1920 Celestín Freinet invented a project in which his French students wrote articles in the newspaper. These journals were printed and exchanged with other students from the country, who also wrote in the newspaper and did the exchange. Later in the 1990s, the first publications about telecollaboration began to raise awareness in the world of foreign language education about the potential of online exchange for language teaching while taking specific learning into account. Cummins and Sayers (1995) reported about a clearinghouse for online exchange projects between classes of distant partners in the American continents and in Europe. These projects were focused on learning specific topics of a subject through a foreign language. Additionally, activities such as surveys of dual communities, scientific investigations, contrastive geography projects, and comparative studies of oral history and folklore were included. In the next pages we describe some telecollaboration projects in the EFL classroom.

“Prospective English teachers re-examining language ideologies in telecollaboration” was a project carried out by Viáfara (2016). The study involved participants from two

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Universities of Colombia and Spanish heritage learner in the U.S. The exchange provided participants opportunities to develop language and intercultural abilities. It also allowed students to explore their native-speakerism ideologies in order to rethink their self-perceptions about what being a native speaker means. In this vein, they shared their ideas about the stigmas that exist for non-speakers of a language in order to understand how complex language learning can become and also the whole linguistic culture around this process. From these important reflections, better understanding and acceptance of English language skills emerged in participants.

A project called: "Video conferencing and multimodal expression of voice: Children's conversations using Skype for second language development in a telecollaborative setting" by Austin et al (2017) aimed at knowing more about how the voice is experienced and expressed in a video conferencing environment in two groups of twelve kids from six to seven years of age. These participants were from England with Urdu or Punjabi as their mother tongue and Portugal with Portuguese native speakers. This study established several findings related to the importance of including other semiotic means such as gesture, intonation, gaze or objects, among others, to enrich communication. In addition, the participants searched for creative ways to make themselves understood and with the help of teachers, they found relevant topics to share with others and make conversations flow. Finally, the students were able to think and brainstorm together as a team about the proposed topics.

A study called EFL learners' perceptions about language learning and culture when using telecollaboration by Lizcano and Cabrera (2020) aimed to explore students' perceptions about the relationship between foreign language learning and culture when using telecollaboration with six

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sixth graders and two international peers from France and Sweden. The study showed that students recognized the importance of learning a foreign language for global communication, accepting the complexity of human beings and the recognition of diversity and singularity. In addition, this experience allowed them to express emotions and feelings to share their cultures, and to accept the differences they may have.

A project called: "Online peer feedback between Colombian and New Zealand foreign language beginners: a comparison and lessons learned" by Tolosa et al. (2015) sought to investigate aspects of the impact of an online peer tutoring program in 28 eleven years old kids from Auckland and 24, fifth to sixth graders from Bogotá, interacting for eight weeks. On one hand, some findings showed that the use of Spanish was frequent at the beginning but it was decreasing considerably during the process. On the other hand, the number of errors of Colombian students was greater than those from New Zealand students, and even incomprehensible sentences could be observed showing the low English level of Colombians. Finally, it was found that correction was very complex and the students preferred not to do it, highlighting how important a correct and concrete correction of errors can be for a student.

Letter exchange was the center of the telecollaboration experience in the study reported along this document. The next pages discuss what pen pals are and how pen pal experiences function at the pedagogical level.

### **Pen Pal Projects in Education**

Pen Pals are those who regularly write to other people either by post or email. They seek their Pen pal according to their interests, hobbies, ages or occupations; however, there are those

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who search without any interest, only in order to know and learn new things. Pen Pals are from anywhere in the world, can be male or female and can speak any language. According to Sundman (2006), "writing letters in another language has advantages. You can learn different languages as you are communicating with native speakers of other language learners" (p. 128). In this way, students can exchange ideas and enrich their language and their vision of the world. For non expert speakers, this experience can motivate and benefit their learning while developing their interpersonal and communicative skills. Participants can also meet different cultures, which helps to expand knowledge and feel closer to their Pen pals.

Pen pals can interact any time which helps both parties to reflect on what they have received, or they are going to send, and thereby improve their written communication skills. According to Guth (2002), "no matter where the sender and receiver are located, if they are near or far, they can decide what to send (photos, videos, manuscripts or whatever) at any time" (p. 234). Likewise, today there are different means to communicate and there are many tools available to most people to interact from all corners of the world expanding the possibilities of interacting with different cultures. The emotional or intellectual value of this type of exchange is really satisfying because differences can complement peers' visions of the world. Finally, each participant in a pen pal experience is enriched when he or she shares about different cultures, it could be understood and internalized by the participants and (Farley, 1994, p. 41).

Watson et al. (2007) conducted an interesting project about Pen pals. The study involved 90 children from third to eighth graders in the United States and 85 fifth to seventh graders from Malawi. The findings included cultural aspects regarding Malawian kids' civil status as unmarried in their presentations which was an important cultural aspect but was not noted by

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kids from the United States. Hence, the study evidenced that maybe kids at an early age were getting married in Malawi. They talked about topics like: family, pets, food, religion, and hobbies; furthermore, kids tried to use similar patterns in their written style in order to avoid mistakes, for example: a U.S kid said: “My favorite animal is a snake” and his Pen pal answered: “My favorite animal is the sheep”. That happened with longer sentences and the same way vice-versa. Finally, the motivation and enthusiasm of all the students involved helped them improve their language and learn more about each other's cultures and it opened the possibility of including parents and other teachers to continue working with pen pals. It was a personalized activity because the instructors delivered the letters in person each week.

Larrotta and Chung (2020) worked on a Pen pal project which took place in Texas. The study sought to explore how foreign-born TESOL instructors supported adult immigrant learners' development of literacy through a pen pal project and what components of the pen pal project promoted the development of civic literacy skills. Six TESOL volunteers' instructors from Iraq, Egypt, Babylon, Israel, and Mexico and 14 ESL learners from Mexico, between 25 to 56 years old, were involved in this study. The activity was very personalized because the instructors delivered the letters in person and participants had to write more than one letter due to the difference in the number of peers. They found that building a good relationship between both parties was crucial to motivate and encourage them to improve their skills because EFL learners were emotionally comfortable. All participants learnt about other cultures, traditions, respect and tolerance by sharing different life experiences as individuals and as immigrants. Finally, the participants understood the value of reading, interpretation, participation, self-expression and

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confidence, and they all grew better as people, improved their writing skills and their communication with others.

Another Pen Pal project was conducted by Lin (2018), this study enrolled 26 midwestern girls in the United States and almost 40 Turkish pen-pals. This project was thought of as an intercultural process. This exchange was made through e-mail once a week for 14 weeks. Before the process started, students from the United States learned about the situation in Syria, the relation between Turkey and the U.S. and in the same way they were asked to collect more information about their cultures, system education, traditions, and difficult situations in each country. They understood the importance of knowing hard situations around the world as in the case of refugees in Turkey, how different both populations could be, their needs, social and political problems and some history. Reflection, empathy, and diversity were important outcomes of this intervention because in each exchange the students demonstrated tolerance towards differences. Likewise, they recognized their own environment without judging a person by their nationality or skin color, and most importantly all of this occurred while improving their English skills and using online technologies.

A Colombian research study designed by Suárez (2015) chose 14 seventh graders from Cali to start a Pen pal project through the internet page Pen Pal world. Students started by proposing some questions to the people they added as friends on the page. The intrigue of these students made them enjoy the process of this project, getting to know new cultures and habits. The students also began to value and accept the people of their country and city since they recognized the economic and social differences of the surrounding people. Also, participants' interest in knowing more about the new culture led them to continue communicating with their

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new friends even after the project ended. Finally, this project motivated the students to use English but also to recognize and accept how different they were from others. Acknowledging differences helped them learn to communicate ideas and empathize with the multiple situations that arise around the world.

### **Developing Children's Writing Skills in EFL**

Making a learner proficient in the use of English involves, among other aspects, his/her development of all the four basic language skills being: listening, reading, speaking and writing. Listening and reading are the receptive skills and they work as an input for the learners and gradually prepare the learners for the productive skills: speaking and writing. Among all four-skills, teaching writing seems to be the most challenging (Scott & Ytreberg 1990). More specifically, teaching writing to young learners can become a genuine challenge for teachers. However, writing is a skill which should be gradually practiced from an early age.

### ***Writing Challenges in the EFL Classroom***

Writing can become more difficult than normal because of those who teach how to write. Sometimes teachers make errors more important than content itself, creating spaces of frustration and denying students the possibility to express themselves freely. Another issue that complicates writing is that it is more difficult to express numerous emotions without using body language. This limitation in writing generates negative feelings during the writing process. In addition, the variety of written activities and how much a child can freely say through words should be the main aspects to help kids tackle the challenges of EFL writing to avoid the complexity of what it means to understand and improve this skill (Reid, 2001, p. 28-33).

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According to Richards and Renandya (2002), “writing is the most difficult skill for L2 learners, since they need to generate ideas, organize them and translate these ideas into readable text which can be very difficult for students” (p. 303). The writer must express the ideas in a coherent and legible way in his/her writing since the objective is that readers can understand while reading the text. Similarly, spelling also plays a dominant role in both literacy and writing. One of the most prominent challenges that EFL students have difficulties in spelling is the relationship between the spelling of the word and its pronunciation, as there is no correspondence between the sound and the way the word is spelled. In the English language, a single sound has several spellings, while the same spelling has several sounds, this is why some students find it very difficult to master the spelling and pronunciation. This is when the strategies and techniques of EFL teachers must begin as it is one of the challenges facing a learner of English as a foreign language.

Furthermore, it is relevant to highlight the transition from listening to writing because it is easier for children to recognize phonemes rather than graphemes. Such graphemes take more time to be analyzed and internalized by children and generate great confusion when expressing what they hear into words. For this reason, it can be heard “the question of when to start teaching children to write in English is closely linked to starting to teach them to read. In general, it's better to introduce English first by listening and speaking, then reading and writing last” (Reid, 2001, p. 4). After this transitional process from sounds to words, ideas and thoughts begin to be expressed in written form knowing how the words sound before putting them in writing. Finally, much work has been done to teach writing correctly and many ideas and principles have emerged that could help make this process easier and more effective.

*Pedagogical Principles and Techniques to Involve Young Learners in Writing*

For many people, writing has been the most important ability to learn a foreign language because as a production skill, it provides each person with the communication and thinking ability to use it effectively in life, according to O'Dowd (2017), over the last decades, the introduction of new techniques to help students become better writers in a foreign language has increased considerably. In 1970, English classes were based on grammar most of the time, and students copied fragments of texts with only minor modifications. By the 1980s, writing was limited to sentence structure, based on questions and answers. Then, in that same decade, writing in English was based on the "expressive approach". Subsequently, there was a writer-based approach in which the process was more important than the product which was aimed at writing for an audience. Hence, at the beginning of the 21st century, new pedagogies began to develop in the process of writing because traditional teacher-centered approaches were evolving into more learner-centered courses, and academic writing was seen as a social communicative act. However, writing must be taught correctly to avoid confusion or refusal to improve. There are several techniques and resources to support children's development of EFL writing skills such as pictures and drawings, for example.

As writing is a productive skill, pictures are one of the most effective sources, which are mainly a visual stimulus to motivate young learners to write. Wright (2003) points out the important role that pictures play to help teachers to teach writing. According to him, a picture can motivate learners to pay attention and take part in the lesson. It can bring the context of any situation into the classroom so that students can express their ideas, and most importantly

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pictures can be described in many ways that develop the learner's writing and organization skills as well.

Another strategy would be working in pairs or in small groups. This technique is remarkable because it can generate more confidence among them, and it can also bring more motivation since new ideas arise when writing collectively. According to Parupalli (2017), “the main concept of collaborative or cooperative work is to allow the learners to perform the given task in groups where they share their ideas among the members of their groups (p.8)”. Although writing is a skill that is developed personally, working in groups or pairs gives support to students while they learn the instructions given by the teacher. It is important that the child understands the instructions before going to the group to ensure that they understood individually and then if they have doubts, there can be support among the students.

In addition, the elaboration of creative texts is another strategy that motivates students. In this case, students can write about topics that interest them. In this way, children can feel proud of their work to the point that they want to be read. Following this idea, teachers can give a choice to the students, so that they can choose their own topics. Also, a noteworthy factor is to guide the children with easy instructions starting with brainstorming the topics they like best, so they can start with words and then give a story to these ideas, thus encouraging creativity and preventing children from feeling frustration at not knowing what to write. (Parupalli, 2017).

Finally, it is important in the writing process that as children begin to get used to writing and following the syntax of English, the teacher acts carefully when correcting the errors found. At the same time teachers should be alert while checking writing tasks, so they do not engage in

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excessive correction focused on children's English level because this may have a negative impact. Harmer (1998) also points out that "overcorrection could have a demotivating effect on the students" and suggests that "teachers can tell the students that for a particular piece of writing they corrected mistakes of particular aspects of language like- grammar, punctuation, spelling or organization" (p. 354). From teaching writing to correct it, the whole process is amalgamated which gradually develops the writing skill of second language learners.

### *Writing and New Technologies.*

The use of technology when teaching a foreign language is not new since tools such as tape recorders, videos, and language classrooms have been used since 1960, and they are still in use today. Around 1980, "Computer Assisted Language learning" (CALL) appeared, which Levy (1997) defines as "the search for and study of computer applications in language teaching and learning" (p. 334). This brought practices such as filling in spaces in texts, joining sentences and answering questions through the computer. The Internet is also an indispensable means to carry out many activities through technological tools. In the 90s, the term TELL (Technology Enhanced Language Learning) appeared responding to the possibilities offered by the Internet and communication technology for language learning, with some more innovative resources such as chats, videoconferencing in real time, and communicating with people from anywhere in the world.

Guerrero (2012), in his research called: The use of Skype as a synchronous communication tool between university students and native speakers, states that students were more motivated when conversing with native speakers using the language as a means of communication and leaving aside learning through grammar tests. The use of technological

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resources (internet, computer) has been recognized for increasing student motivation and favoring cooperation and collaboration among them, in this way, the use of these technological resources is more used to reinforce speaking and writing skills as a tool that combines idiomatic expressions, interaction, reflection, and collaborative work.

According to Reidngton (2011), "the computer in its many forms as a writing tool and a means of communication is changing the way we interact with information and with each other" (p. 238). This shows that written language plays an important role in current communication through different technological tools and also closes the gap for a fast and effective cultural exchange. Additionally, technology can improve all aspects of the writing process, allowing easy revision, multiple drafts and spell checking. Furthermore, increasingly sophisticated translation suggestions and grammar tips are available, which can be used with caution by advanced writers (Hanson-Smith & Rilling, 2007). In this way, writing skills are enhanced, enriching the vocabulary to be able to interact and exchange ideas more easily, also bearing in mind all these advantages when using technology as a resource to improve writing skills motivates students to learn in a way that is different from how they learned in previous years, and improving with the different platforms offered by the internet.

Access to the Internet brings the world into the classroom and helps the students to use the language in authentic contexts. Thanks to the great majority of online electronic resources, such as journals, library catalogs, topical databases, and search services in English, students can find resources that they can use easily to enhance their writing skill. Today, some language instructors use the internet in many creative ways. If the goal is to teach writing, "internet activities should be structured so that they bring about an increase in the types of writing

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processes and relationships essential to becoming a better writer” (Warschauer & Whittaker, 2002 p. 39).

### **Research Design**

This section explains what research approach and method was implemented in the study. In addition, this chapter provides specific information about the environment, population, participants, and how ethical issues were handled with parents. Finally, a description of the data collection instruments and procedures is provided.

### **Research Approach and Method**

For the development of this research study, we employed a qualitative approach. According to Flick et al. (2004), qualitative research is another way to describe the world from a different perspective, which is the perspective of participants. In this vein, this research study sought to explore participants' writing in English through letters exchanged within a telecollaboration framework. Our study matches the precepts of qualitative research because it was conducted in the natural setting of participants, the online environments that the school has promoted for their education during the pandemic. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), qualitative research involves an interpretive, and naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study participants in natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (p. 3). In order to answer our research questions, we considered the experiences told by our participants and our interpretations about the phenomenon under study taking into account constructs and subquestions that were established during the process.

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Action research, the method employed in this study, is understood as a research process that seeks to recognize the work of teacher-researchers integrate reflection and intellectual work in the analysis of the experiences acquired during the whole process (Best & Kahn, 2006). The fundamental aspect in action research is the reflective exploration that is done in pedagogical practice, not only to contribute to the resolution of a problem but for all teachers to reflect on their practice. What was explained above is supported by Best and Kahn's (1989) definition of what action research involves:

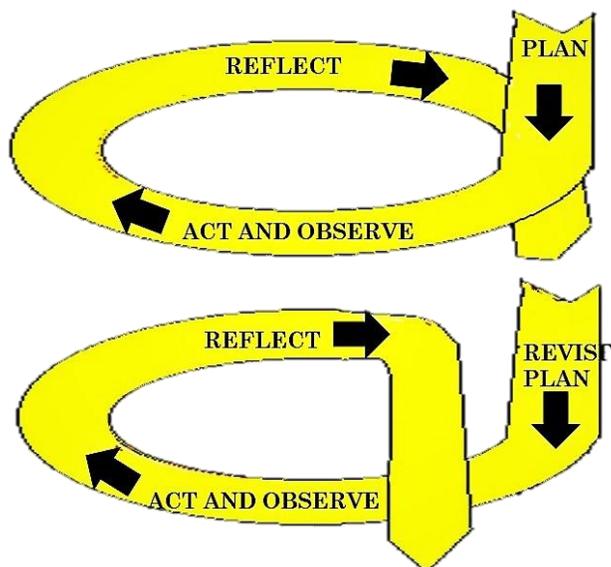
Action research is focused on immediate application, not on the development of the theory, nor upon general application. It has placed its emphasis on a problem, here and now, in a local setting. Its findings are to be evaluated in terms of local applicability, not in terms of universal validity. Its purpose is to improve school practices and at the same time, to improve the practitioners. The purpose of action research is to combine the research function with teachers' growth in such qualities as objectivity, skill in the research process, habits of thinking, ability to work harmoniously with others, and professional spirit (p.21).

Finally, taking into account the Kemmis and McTaggart (1998) model, we share a spiral to explain how action research was implemented (see figure 1). We adapted the following stages according to our study:

**Figure 1.**

*Action Research Spiral Model by Kemmis and McTaggart (1998)*

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***Plan***

Before going to school, it was thought about different questions and ideas that would help the project to develop students' English skills, taking into account the previous knowledge of the institutions given by other teachers.

***Act and observe***

On the first visit to the target context, it was possible to carry out a diagnosis through a focus group interview which identified the needs of the students regarding their English skills, the students' point of view of English learning, and their preferences in relation to the use of technology in English class. At the same time, the teachers observed the student's environment and the context they were involved in to make future decisions.

***Reflect***

Based on the focus group interview and the context of the situation, which did not allow face-to-face education, an intervention was planned through technological tools (WhatsApp,

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calls, videos, images) to develop the project, in this way, it was thought that the students would communicate their experiences during the pandemic in order to improve the production written in English through telecollaboration by using letters.

### ***Revised plan***

After collecting the data and reflecting on what teachers wanted to do, it was necessary to plan again taking into account the context, the resources of participants and point of view of each student to start developing the exchange from home with the guidance and necessary tools given by the teachers.

### ***Act and observe***

The initial intention of the letters was to promote the production of written language and the use of technological tools (WhatsApp, phone calls). At this stage, the students received the support material for the creation of their writings. The first step was the knowledge about the structure of the letter. Then, professors taught the support material, the structure and vocabulary required for each week. The evidence was sent and received via WhatsApp, in this way the teachers analyzed them to see weaknesses to improve and act as mediators in the learning process.

### ***Reflect***

The aim of this stage was to provide spaces for researchers to analyze the information collected through the proposed instruments (journals, interviews, student artifacts and surveys), in this way all the information collected with the aforementioned instruments was studied in order to answer the research question and sub-questions and improve the pedagogical strategy.

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**Context**

In this project, two different public institutions participated: Institution “J” which included preschool and primary school sites, with approximately 200 students. This institution is located in Boyacá. Some of the students enrolled in this institution live mostly in the nearby town and others in the rural area near the town. The other institution is called Institution “V” located in a rural area in Boyacá. There were approximately 32 students in this school. This school has a system called “Escuela Nueva”, which implies a multi-grade classroom approach with two teachers, one for preschoolers, second and fifth graders, and the other one for first, third and fourth graders. Due to the pandemic the context of students changed and they had to study from home being WhatsApp and phone calls the main tools to keep assertive communication. For some students, it was possible to set the class time at specific hours, but for some others, it was necessary to set individual classes taking into account the disposition of the parents due to their corresponding job and resources.

This project was carried out in the PPIP (Práctica Pedagógica Investigativa y de Profundización) which is organized by the faculty of education at UPTC to provide teaching services in different institutions of Boyacá. In this specific case, being pre-service teachers affiliated to the B. Ed in foreign languages, the objective was to teach English and French in the target institutions. We used a methodology guided by the basic standards of competence in foreign languages presented by the Colombian government, complying with weekly planning and reaching these populations who welcome preservice teachers from the university. The official practicum lasted about four months and then pre-service teachers with the approval of the

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target institutions (see annex 2) continued working with students for two more months in their practicum in order to complete their data collection process.

### **Population and Participants**

The population of this project comes from the department of Boyacá in Colombia, where two institutions were part of this process, one located in Jenesano and the other in Ventaquemada. The first one, located in downtown Jenesano, will be called "J" in this study and constitutes a more urban context due to its location. The second one, the Ventaquemada institution that will be called "V" is immersed in the rural area which is located in a headquarter. Both institutions seek to educate students from the villages and towns providing the same opportunities for them to receive a quality education.

Considering the context of both institutions we can find some differences. On the one hand, the institution "V" has a total of 32 students from kindergarten to fifth grade, which has an "Escuela Nueva" methodology, that is, students work simultaneously with peers from different grades which highlights the collaborative work among them. Also, these children showed a taste for farming skills since their parents were farmers in the sector finally, their backgrounds corresponded to medium-low socio-economic contexts. On the other hand, the institution "J" has an integrated methodology that divides students by grades according to their level and has 200 elementary students from kindergarten to fifth grade, here it was noted that most of the students lived in the town where the children participated in different extracurricular and social activities. In general, their parents worked in the town or in the nearby city of Tunja. Finally, their backgrounds corresponded to medium socioeconomic strata, and it was evident that these students had more economic and social opportunities than the population from Ventaquemada.

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For the implementation of the project, the process started with 49 students in total from both institutions, 9 in Ventaquemada and 40 in Jenesano. The number of students in Jenesano was reduced because not all students had the permission of their parents due to the academic load they already had with the school. Likewise, it was decided to start with 18 students in total, that is 9 in each institution, and in this way, pairs were established between students from both populations. At the end of the project, we ended with 16 students in total, since 1 student from each institution left the project for reasons of quitting school. The criterion for deciding the sample groups was based on the age of the students because they had already been exposed to listening skills and it was possible to continue to encourage the written skills in them. Finally, the ages of the students ranged from 9 to 11 years old, being 9 girls and 7 boys. Half of them came from rural sectors and the other half from urban areas.

Concerning the role of the conductors of this study, it is necessary to mention that the teachers were both pre-service teachers and researchers developing the last teaching practicum and at the same time applying the research project.

### **Ethical Issues.**

In regards to ethical considerations, the institutions where the project took place were assigned by the University (UPTC) during the teaching practicum. In these schools, Ventaquemada and Jenesano, the teachers were in charge of the area of English and French, so students and parents were familiar with this type of project and teaching practices. Bearing in mind that the teaching practice was virtual due to the pandemic, it was decided to make an informative video about the project for all students and parents. Then, in order to acquire parental permission and resolve doubts that may arise about the project, parents were asked to

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sign a consent form (see annex 3). Also, calls were made to parents to achieve closer contact with them and ensure that they had received the information, and know if they agreed with their children's participation.

### **Data Collection Instruments and Procedures.**

As action research, this study used four instruments to gather data and subsequently answer the research questions guiding it: questionnaires, interviews, journals for researchers, and students' artifacts.

#### *Survey*

Surveys are defined by Check and Schutt (2012) as "the collection of information from a sample of individuals through their responses to questions" (p. 160). This data collection instrument can provide answers and viewpoints from students. During the study process, questionnaires were administered in order to know the experiences of the students with the telecollaboration pen pal experience and to know the opinion of the students regarding their progress in EFL writing. The questionnaires were used to identify the individual impressions and feelings of the students in relation to the process, and their impact during interaction with peers.

In this research study, two questionnaires were administered in order to obtain an answer in relation to the research question: How does a Pen Pal telecollaboration exchange between two elementary schools in Boyacá during the COVID-19 pandemic shape a group of third to fifth students' EFL writing development? These surveys were sent to eighteen students. These instruments included closed-ended and open-ended questions. The first survey (see annex 4) was sent through WhatsApp in a Google format which was easier for students and teachers to handle.

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In this way, two questionnaires were applied, one at the beginning, another one in the middle of the project, and the last one almost at the end of the project.

The survey number one addressed students' perceptions of their writing progress with the telecollaboration project and the challenges they encountered in writing letters. This survey sought to know how students were working with the technology and if they mastered these devices for their classes. Also, we wanted to know if the students felt motivated by the acquisition of their writing skills and their new friend. Finally, survey number two (see annex 5) explored the most intimate perceptions of the telecollaborative project, from how they prepared to write their letters to how they felt about the exchange. They were also asked about the impact that the project had on their writing, their motivation to improve with each delivery, and their preferences in discovering online tools. It is also important to note that for the last two surveys 16 students responded since during the process two students withdrew from the project and school.

### *Teacher journals*

A teacher journal is an instrument used by researchers to record facts to be analyzed and interpreted in order to save valuable information every school day. In this sense, the journal is a tool that allows us to systematize experiences and then analyze the results. According to Bashan and Holsblat (2017), journals work as tools to examine and evaluate the strategies during the research (p.45). It is also a space to reflect on the research process, taking into account that while it is being carried out, there are situations in which solutions or alternatives must be sought to achieve the purpose of the project. It is well understood that journals provide significant insights that sometimes cannot be noticed by the application of other data collection instruments.

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The journals were an instrument in which the teachers highlighted feelings, emotions, weaknesses, and strengths in students' learning and the English writing progress of each participant. Also, different experiences, doubts, tutorials, stories were also noted and encountered during the project. In this way, these findings helped us to answer our research question in relation to the process of students during the exchange of letters through telecollaboration. Journals were written taking into account three aspects: Pen Pal letters, writing skills in English and the use of technology by students. Finally, this journal form (see annex 6) was carried out weekly by both teachers. Each teacher registered what she considered to be possible answers for the established questions and objectives. The journals were carried out during the time the experience took place.

### *Interviews*

According to Parsad (2012), “interviewing is a very systematic method by which a person enters deeply into the life of even a stranger and can bring out needed information and data for the research purpose” (p. 24). The idea of employing interviews with the students was to listen to their voices about their opinions and feelings at the end of the project process. Besides the perceptions of the participants were a remarkable factor to explore their experiences during the project related to the letters, their use of online communication tools, the ability to write in English, and the motivation that students found writing to someone in English.

The interviews were unstructured and semi-structured. On one hand, Minichiello (1990) defines unstructured interviews as interviews in which neither the question nor the answer categories are predetermined. They rely on social interaction between the researcher and informant to extract information. This kind of interview seems to be more suitable for children,

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since these interviews can really explore the students' interests, without the limitation of pre-set questions and considering spontaneity as a factor to interview children. Ten students from both institutions answered the unstructured questions. On the other hand, semi-structured interviews according to Bernard (1988) are best used when you won't get more than one chance to interview someone and when you will be sending several interviewers out into the field to collect data and the questions let a discussion flow about the topic. Likewise, this type of interview was for parents (see annex 7) who were indirectly involved in the project, and who provided us with additional information to corroborate students' answers. The interviewed parents were 10 in total, 5 per institution, and the average time of conversation was 15 minutes each one. There were 10 parents interviewed in total, 5 per institution, and the average conversation time was 15 minutes each. Teachers communicated with parents through phone calls and recorded zoom meetings with prior parental consent.

### *Students' artifacts*

The progress of students was analyzed through their letters. As Merriam and Tisdell, (2016) state "artifacts are usually three-dimensional physical "things" or objects in the environment that represent some form of communication that is meaningful to participants and/or the setting" (p.162). The artifacts are anything that can provide evidence of education and experiences found by the students during the process, also those artifacts consisted of the letters (see annex 8) developed along with the project. This instrument allowed the researcher to make a critical analysis of how effective the English learning process could be after using the support material designed and based on the students' own interests and their degree of appropriateness.

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The artifacts of the students were the way that researchers had to look and analyze the weekly English writing process of each student since each teacher analyzed aspects such as the sentence order, vocabulary, coherence, and cohesion of ideas and the support from other semiotic media for written communication. These aspects were of great relevance because they could reveal the strengths and shortcomings in students' skills, and thus provide help to the student to improve their writing in English. A total of 144 letters and 16 videos were received from all students during the 10 weeks of the project. These letters were stored by week and institution for organization and later analysis.

### **Pedagogical design**

Telecollaboration proposes bilingual models between learners from two different cultures, but this concept also includes monolingual exchanges between learners who adopt a second language learning in common. This type of exchange has two modalities. On one hand, the synchronous one highlights the participation of students at the same time, and here it is important the use of immediate communication tools such as video calls, text messages, phone calls. On the other hand, the asynchronous type describes the communication of students at different times, here the response is not immediate and highlights the means of communication such as email, letters, text messages. This study describes the telecollaborative development of two institutions in Boyacá, institution "J" and "V". The project was led by two teachers, one in each institution. The aforementioned characteristics implied that between these teachers there was joint work to address the same study model, which involved the same methodology, lesson

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plans, and support material. To implement the telecollaboration project between the two populations, the exchange was done in an asynchronous way, considering the context and the resources of both institutions; that is to say, the students communicated through letters that were answered weekly by their peers.

### **Experience Organization**

This research was carried out in the teaching practice of two pre-service teachers. It is important to note that not all students participated in the telecollaboration study. At the beginning of the project there were nine students in institution "V" and forty students in institution "J". The difference in the number of students was based on the Escuela Nueva model of institution "V" that implied fewer students. In institution "J" the number of participants was reduced due to the fact that not all parents agreed to participate because their children had an excessive course load from school. However, in order to have the same population in both institutions, nine students from institution "J" were randomly selected and the remaining students did letter exchanges among themselves without being part of the project. Finally, to choose the pairs between both populations it was decided to haphazardly select one participant from each institution.

Another important aspect in the organization of the research was the methodology implemented regarding the support material to make the letters since it was easier for students to understand the writings with a vocabulary that has already been learned and which their peers were also using. In this way the teachers used workshops to choose the topics to be used in the letters, then students studied the topic during their classes and practiced taking it to a real context through the exchange of letters. In addition, to strengthen and give more support to the students,

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the teachers sent support material and at the beginning a model letter, which was gradually eliminated when the students began to show more independence.

Taking into account the logistics of this project, there were times when students could not send the letter due to external factors, so the teachers had planned schedules to contact students by cell phone in case they did not receive a response by WhatsApp. During the whole process, participants exchanged nine letters and a farewell video in week ten to get to know each other and thus finish the telecollaboration project.

### **Pedagogical Implementation**

The teachers initiated an observation stage at the institutions: "J" school in Jenesano and institution "V" in Ventaquemada. Starting the teaching practicum and upon meeting the populations, it was decided to implement a first survey in which the students answered questions about the use of technological tools at home, and at school. They were also asked about their English skills, which was the most difficult for them, and which one was the easiest. As a result, it was found that the students reported having more difficulty in their written ability in English. In this way, it was decided to design a project that helped students improve this skill through the use of technological tools.

Initially, it was proposed to work using as many technological tools as possible in each institution in order to improve students' writing with the resources that the school could have, but at the beginning of the practice in these schools, an outbreak of a virus called SARS cov-2 started. This situation kept people in quarantine for three months. Consequently, students and teachers began to study and work at home; however, the teaching practicum continued through

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the WhatsApp platform and telephone calls because some students did not have good access to the internet. Then by changing the conditions of the practice and students, it was decided to implement a telecollaboration project through letters.

The pedagogical design was conducted through some stages. First, students learned the structure of the letters as Header (date, salutation or greeting), body, conclusion, closing: (Name and postscript) using support material (see annex 9). Besides, the students would write a letter for an unknown kid to start communicating between them. Each child chose a nickname to maintain their anonymity until almost the end of the activity to generate a little mystery and fun to the process. Second, students received support material weekly to complement the workshops that they were going to receive in the schools (see annex 10). In this way, they talked about personal information such as feelings, appearance, their houses, family, clothes, food and they provided more information about their lives. Each student sent their letters weekly to their respective teacher to review their content. Thus, teachers helped students with corrections if it was necessary. This exchange of letters was done through WhatsApp because the survey showed that 90% of students had access to this media and knew how to use it. Most of the topics had been worked together with the workshops which were sent to the children for their activities. Finally, the theme of the letters was chosen based on the implemented workshops in the English class and organized depending on the students' needs. The table below shows the themes of the letters worked on in relation to the themes seen in the English class (see table 1)

**Table 1***Workshops and Letter Topics*

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<b>Week</b>	<b>Letter</b>	<b>Workshop Theme</b>	<b>Letter Activity</b>
1	1	Self-introduction	Who am I? How to do a letter
2	2	Emotions	This quarantine makes me feel
3	3	My daily routine	I want to tell you what I do every day.
4	4	Places' description	The place where I live
I	5	Physical description	How do I look?
6	6	Clothes	I wear
7	7	Meals	I like to eat I do not like to eat
8	8	Professions	I would like to be
9	9	Questions	Questions and answers about me.
10	Video	Talking about myself and introducing myself to my peer	Goodbye, my friend.

### Data Analysis

This research has employed some principles based on 'thematic coding' for the analysis of data. According to Gibbs (2007), "coding is a way of indexing or categorizing the text in order to establish a framework of thematic ideas about it" (p38). Coding is to identify key phrases in the instruments and to organize ideas about the data collected with the aim of giving answers to

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the research question; thus, codes are gathered, listed, named, and organized in groups. As pointed out by Braun, Clark, and Weate (2016), there are six phases of coding: data familiarization, coding, theme development, revision, refinement, and naming. These phases were adopted in this research as an accessible guide to analyzing qualitative data.

According to the phases previously named for the data analysis procedure, we started by getting familiarized with all the data gathered as surveys, letters, journals, and interviews. It was necessary to upload the collected documents into ATLAS.ti, which is a software used for qualitative data analysis; then, the information was read several times. First, the journals were coded. At this point, relevant lines or fragments were underlined and they were selected looking for possible answers to the main question. Also, tools from the aforementioned software were also used to name those codes. Subsequently, when the first instrument was coded, it was necessary to read all the codes carefully to group them taking into account common topics. By establishing familiar topics, we organized codes. The same procedure was carried out with all the instruments.

After all the initial codification was completed for every single instrument, we stopped to compare and to contrast codes across all of them. This helped us make big families of similar codes considering all the instruments. As this process took place, we also reduced codes by eliminating those which were repeated. Finally, we gave an appropriate name to each family of codes.

The data analysis process was verified through triangulation. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) describe various types of triangulation for the purpose of assisting internal validity. This is a way of assuring the validity of research through various means. In the case of this study, one of them

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was the use of multiple data collection methods called methodological triangulation in which some instruments were employed such as journals, interviews, surveys, and students' artifacts. Using different points of view regarding the coding process was the second means we employed for triangulation. In our case, this was researcher triangulation since all the information was coded by two investigators separately and then the data was grouped collectively to discuss the organization of final findings.

The aforementioned data analysis process, which was based on processing the information gathered and employing thematic coding and triangulation of data, resulting in answers to the main research question guiding this study: *How does a Pen Pal telecollaboration exchange between two elementary schools in Boyacá during the COVID-19 pandemic shape a group of fourth and fifth students' EFL writing development?* and the 3 research sub-questions: *How is EFL writing characterized when participants are involved in a pen pal telecollaboration project during the pandemic? What are participants' perceptions about a pen pal experience mediated by telecollaboration during the COVID-19 pandemic? How did technological resources affect participants' EFL writing during the pen pal telecollaboration project?* From this analytical process, the following categories and subcategories emerged that respond to the main question and the sub-questions, which are observed in the following table (*see table 2*).

**Table 2**

*Sub questions, Categories & Subcategories*

SUB QUESTIONS	CATEGORIES	SUBCATEGORIES
<b>How is writing characterized when</b>	A gradual endeavor encouraged	An emerging skill based on inspiring contextual resources.

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<b>participants are involved in a pen pal project during the pandemic?</b>	by resources that in turn trigger new skills.	A process-based experience: from a repetitive to a more self—managed practice.
		A source of English communicative skills and pedagogical by-products.
<b>What are participants' perceptions about a pen pal experience mediated by telecollaboration during the COVID-19 pandemic?</b>	An experience to make new friends while expressing one's own feelings by writing in English	An evolving opportunity to make new life discovering connections through English writing during the pandemic
		A quandary of emotions triggered by letter exchange and diverse expectations
<b>How did technological resources affect English writing during the pen pal telecollaboration project?</b>	Challenges for letter exchange and identity-based available choices configuring online experiences.	Technological issues that complicated students' successful writing in English during the exchange.
		The internet as an essential medium involving technology preferences during the pandemic

**First Category: A Gradual Endeavour Encouraged by Resources that in Turn Trigger New Skills.**

This category responds to the research sub-question: *How is writing characterized when participants are involved in a pen pal project during the pandemic?* Bearing in mind this sub-question, we proceeded to answer it, thinking about the different characteristics we found in participants' English writing during the data analysis. It is relevant to highlight that students

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exhibited a *gradual endeavor* during their writing process. Some of them navigated from the type of writing characterized as the product of following a parallel model set by the teacher to the type of writing showing progress as they gained more confidence and produced more sentences freely and creatively.

The fact that some students developed their writing skills following this process was also related to the fact that they employed certain resources which were related to the inspirations that participants had to write. Various resources propelled students' involvement in their writing process. Some of these resources included students' environment, the need to communicate their own ideas, the curiosity towards a new language to negotiate meanings, drawings to add significance to their writing in English, and their use of the mother tongue. Likewise, their teachers and parents were predominant resources to inspire their writing, since they guided students and nourished new ideas to write in English.

We also discovered that students not only improved their writing skills, but they also indirectly used the skills of reading during the telecollaboration pen pal experience. In this sense, the exchange of letters in English involved the indirect use of reading abilities, since the students had to read the letter and understand it in order to respond to their fellow students. It was also found that some students taught their families the knowledge they learned during this writing process. All the various findings this 1st category exposes (A gradual endeavor encouraged by resources that in turn trigger new skills) are related to what is quoted by Caballeros, et al. (2014): "writing implies the evolution of a series of knowledge built from interaction with other readers or writers and with the text itself and with the environment and situations in which learning takes place" (p 214). Considering this information, during the project some students demonstrated an

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evolution related to their skills in writing in English since the continuous interaction with their peers allowed not only their writing skills to be more fluent, but also reading in English, additionally, the environment was very important because it was carried out in times of pandemic and parents were involved in this telecollaboration process guiding and providing technological support to their children. Finally, to deepen some aspects mentioned in this category, the following subcategories will be discussed. We will start with the first subcategory called: *An emerging skill based on inspiring contextual resources*.

### ***First Subcategory: An Emerging Skill Based on Inspiring Contextual Resources.***

This<sup>1</sup> subcategory describes the contextual resources that were at the time support, inspiration, and guide for students to achieve the process of writing in English. These diverse resources varied according to the context of the participants through their writing process. During the data analysis, the following specific resources were found: *Real context and identity, the need to communicate and express their own ideas, the curiosity towards a new language to negotiate meanings, drawings to add significance to their writing in English, and their use of the mother tongue*. Likewise, *their teachers and parents* were predominant resources, since they guided students and inspired new ideas to write in English. These resources will be mentioned in detail in the following paragraphs.

Home-school teaching because of the pandemic allowed students to be more independent in terms of learning, with educators and parents becoming resources that guided and encouraged

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this section, some abbreviations were used: 'Int' meaning Interview. The Interviews were made in Spanish, short excerpts translated and transcribed in English.

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participants behind this process. Firstly, the teachers were guides, not only regarding the teaching of writing in English but also providing academic and emotional accompaniment while monitoring each student's process. Secondly, parents highlighted their help and commitment to their children's learning, in such a way that they were an inspirational resource for the students. Data shows that as participants progressed, they learned how to acquire more independence supported by teachers and parents. In this sense, a participant manifested that:

*With the support material and the teacher's instructions, I already knew what to do, so then I stopped asking the teacher how I should do it, I would see the letters model and support material again and then I said: oh! I already know what to do that. Also, sometimes my mother helped me with ideas in Spanish and with ideas to decorate the letter. (Int, November 28th, 2020. Guardian of life).*

In addition, teachers maintained a pedagogical strategy to guide the student through a gradual release of responsibility which consisted of: Explaining the topic, providing support material and a guiding example for all students, but also extra tutorials (calls, conversations by chat, or video calls). All of this sought to increase individual work while students wrote letters to a new friend.

It was also found that the teacher's role was not only as an academic guide and support during the process but an emotional accompaniment to the participants because they had never participated in a similar project before and for them it was a great challenge, so they showed fear and insecurity. *"I did not want to participate in the project because I had never studied English, I was very afraid of not understanding, but the teacher told me that here I could learn little by little and that I am intelligent"* (Int, December 2nd, 2020. Ariel). The previous interview excerpt

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evidenced this student's insecurity, but also how the teacher's accompaniment was essential to motivate him to learn step by step and this allowed him the opportunity to try and gain confidence along the way. Likewise, parents were an important complement. As it was mentioned in the testimony of "Guardian of life" above, his mother helped him, not directly to write in English, but indirectly by supporting his learning with ideas and accompaniment.

Parental involvement was also appreciated because the technology was provided by them; besides, it was found that some parents were also curious to receive the letter addressed to their child; they felt they were part of the project: "...*When I received the letter on my cell phone, I did not understand anything, I was curious because I never studied English, ...I helped her with ideas in Spanish and reminded her about the commitment with the letters*" (Int, December 2nd, 2020. Lisa's mother). For many parents, English was new in their lives, however, when observing the process of learning English in their children, they were curious, to the point of being involved, providing ideas in Spanish, and supervising the work to be delivered on time.

Curiosity was another resource that supported the motivation of the participants because this was an innovative project for them. Students wanted to know more about their peer's lives while using English. In this regard, Vygotsky (1978) explains that learning is a socially constructed process that takes place through the social interaction of students, and their environment. Considering this perspective, the students built learning through social interaction with their peers during the pandemic. One of those means for social interaction was the second language. Within such a context, it can be said that curiosity increased and therefore promoted the development of language in terms of linguistic, sociocultural, and pragmatic aspects. For

## DEVELOPING YOUNG LEARNERS' EFL WRITING SKILLS

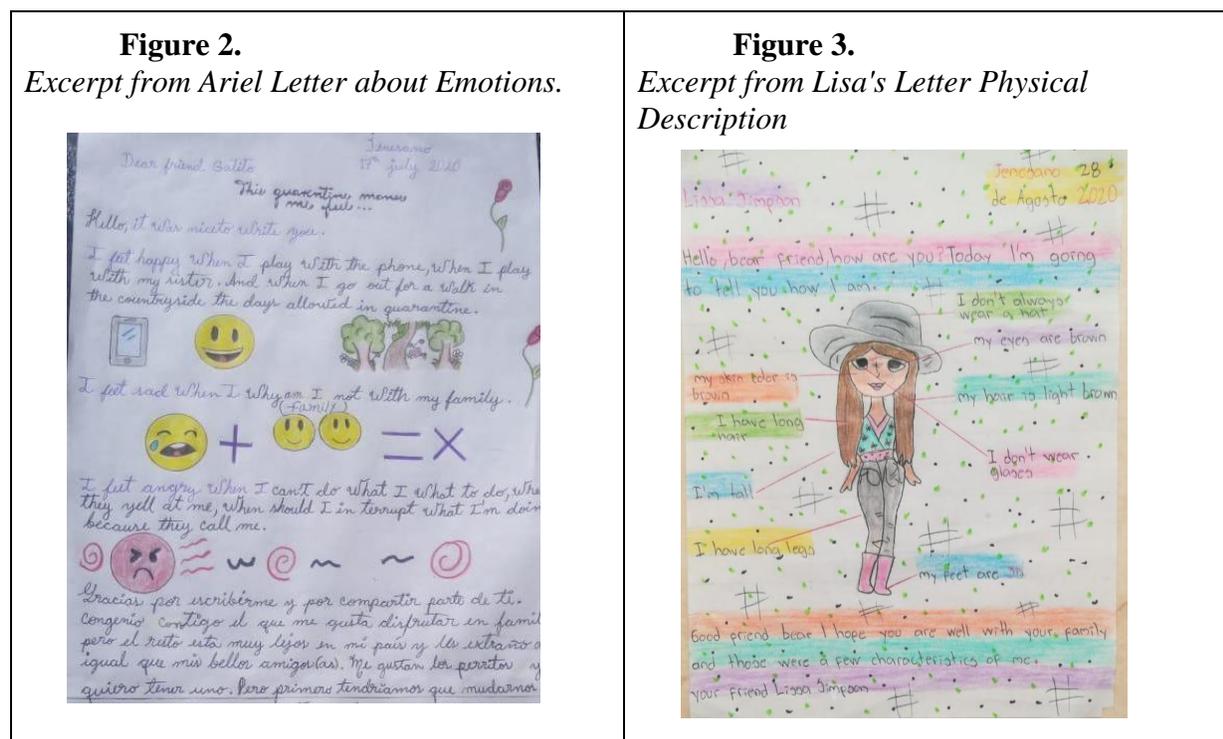
instance, their interest in their pen pals guided their need to include new vocabulary to express themselves and to learn grammar rules to write the letters. Simultaneously, their curiosity to understand the letters resulted in their acquisition of new vocabulary from their peers' communications. All in all, curiosity to know more about their unknown peers and to make new connections encouraged them to learn to communicate in another language.

To facilitate the English learning process, students used compensation aids to communicate like drawings and Spanish. These aids helped the participants to express ideas that could not be clear because they did not have a wide knowledge of English, so the students added these resources as a complement. Tarone (1980) describes how speakers use conscious compensation strategies to handle dilemmas that take place when they have trouble with the transmission of thoughts due to language limitations or knowledge (p. 417-431). This means that students in our inquiry supported themselves in their written English communication efforts by using different aids to be understood in each letter delivery and these aids reflected their desire to communicate with their peers in a fluid and accurate way.

Since English was a new language, a compensation aid such as drawings was welcomed by participants. This visual resource occurred with more intensity bearing in mind students had limited knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary, and they could expand their meaning-making possibilities through its use. In this regard, emphasizing that drawings have been used throughout history, Srinivas (2019) explained that "to signify different things that are connected to their everyday lives, the ancient people used to draw different paintings and methods and they used to convey their messages through images, pictures, and figures" (p. 141). Data showed that

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the aesthetics of letters produced by participants, drawings, and colors seemed to help readers and writers to better understand new words. In specific cases, some writers talked about feelings by drawing a sad, happy, or angry face or by describing themselves drawing their appearance with the aim of associating what they wrote with a picture, as in the following letters (see figures 2 and 3).



Students<sup>2</sup> also used Spanish as another compensation aid to facilitate communication for a better understanding in the exchange. By using Spanish students were freer to express their thoughts in order to get closer to their new friend and thus confidently write their concerns and wishes. In this case, L1 was included to complement and demonstrate different feelings. This is reflected by the following excerpt from a teacher's rubric about what the student wrote in her letter

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this section, some abbreviations were used: 'R' meaning rubric and L1 meaning Mother tongue

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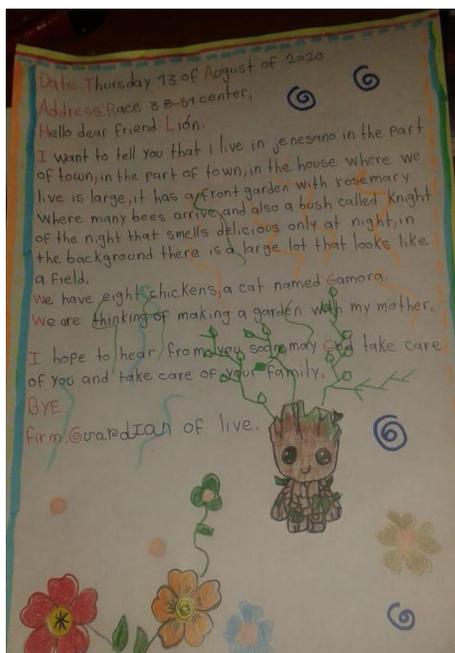
*“Ice cream expressed some other feelings using Spanish and put some drawings to complement her letter”* (R, July 8th, 2020, Ice cream). A study carried out by Schweers (1999), which sought to determine the importance of the use of Spanish in EFL, showed that most students participating asserted that Spanish would be useful to explain difficult concepts and check for comprehension of the topic or to define new vocabulary items. Some students also affirmed that by using Spanish they felt less lost and it was better to understand the new language (p. 6-13). Considering the above, in this research Spanish was crucial to encourage students to communicate feelings and wishes about their time in quarantine, as to complement the ideas they expressed while writing in English.

Real context and identity were also remarkable resources in the letter's exchange. Both groups of participants were totally different. Jenesano's students had a higher level of English and had more resources. In contrast, the Ventaquemada students had less English proficiency and limited resources, but all students impinged their special touch in the letters. Different personalities can be seen reflected in the letters, in the case of “Guardian of life” (see figure 4) his letters always had the fictional character "Groot" and the letter was made entirely in English adding also colors and flowers. The same thing happened to “Lisa Simpson” (see figure 5) after a couple of letter exchanges started calling her friend “Bear friend” instead of “dear friend” and she drew a bear for her friend next to the T.V character Lisa Simpson in some of her letters. After describing findings in relation to *“An emerging skill based on inspiring contextual resources”* the next section will focus on *“A process-based experience: from a repetitive to a more self—managed practice”*.

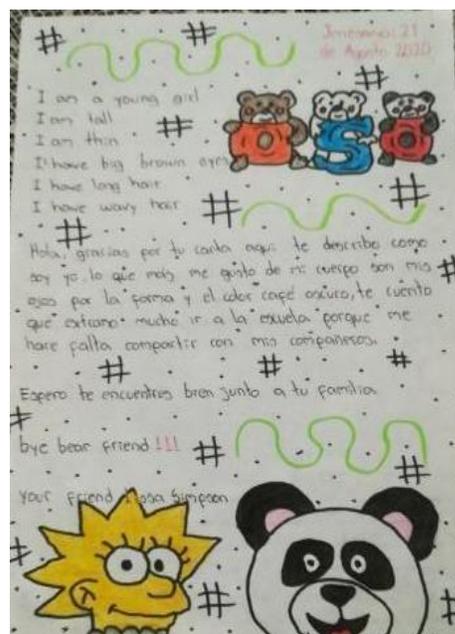
## DEVELOPING YOUNG LEARNERS' EFL WRITING SKILLS

**Figure 4.**

*Excerpt from Guardian of life's Letter with The Character "Groot"*

**Figure 5.**

*Excerpt from Lisa's Letter with a Bear and the TV's Character Lisa S*



***Second subcategory: A process-based experience: from a repetitive to a more self—managed practice.***

This subcategory describes how participants' learning process evolved, starting from a repetitive parallel model guided by the teachers to a more independent practice in which students exhibited more autonomy in their writing. Starting the Pen Pal project students began to receive support to write based on model letters. In the beginning, it was observed in the first letters that most of the participants copied the same prompts and vocabulary from the model letter provided, however, as the project progressed several issues challenged participants' dependency on model letters. To begin with, every week the process became more demanding and the students did not

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always receive the guiding letter. Besides, students also wanted to express additional information to their peers which caused a need for new vocabulary, consequently, they began to learn the grammatical order of the sentences. Finally, the teacher motivated them to create their own phrases with the acquired vocabulary. Despite the prior encouraging situations, which triggered independence in writing, participants' insecurity and frustration emerged in some students due to grammatical errors that the teacher found when giving feedback. Notwithstanding, their involvement in a gradual weekly process seemed to motivate them to learn from their mistakes. The following paragraphs discuss the prior issues in detail.

This research, developed in times of pandemic, implied that students and teachers adapted to the use of support material (videos and a model letter) for the explanation of the topics. These circumstances required students to become somewhat independent. The videos made by the teachers explained the topics about grammar and language forms, likewise, the model letter was a guide for students during the creation of letters. It is important to note that model letters were stopped to encourage freer writing. In this way, the students learned to use this support material on their own. During homeschool, as the teacher was not in the classroom to check that the students completed their homework, they needed to be independent in terms of their learning. Thus, students began to learn how to use the support material and the creation of letters little by little while they adapted to the rhythm of the class.

When starting the project, at first, the participants were focused on learning the language forms and recognizing them in the letters they received and sent. As the students progressed, they evidenced the need to acquire more language to express themselves meaningfully in English, so

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students' interest in learning a new language made writing and reading letters easier, as evidenced by "Lisa" in the following excerpt: "I asked the teacher: How do you say this word? because I wanted to tell it to my friend...after that, I already knew how to write and read it and I understood it in the letter" (Int, December 8th, 2020, Lisa). Considering the previous excerpt, it is evident that the need to express themselves in English led the participants to search for new vocabulary. Additionally, "Lisa" showed that she felt more confident in reading and writing English by having access to more vocabulary.

As the participants learned a new language, their needs increased in such a way that they wanted to include more information for their peers. Bearing in mind that they managed to identify and write language forms in the letters they received and sent, they became involved in writing simple sentences. With the support material, they were taught about word order in sentences and other structural aspects to maintain coherence and cohesion in their writings. This can be seen in one of the researchers' journals: "Student 'Ariel' asks for an extra tutorial the first few weeks for help in creating letters, then she receives feedback and corrects her own mistakes" (J<sup>3</sup>, August 05th, 2020, Julieth). In the previous excerpt, the student raised questions and asked for feedback to her letters before sending them, so that she could maintain confidence in the quality of her job or could know if it needed some changes.

To begin to write freely, participants moved a bit beyond the given model and changed some relevant words to provide individual and personal information. This was demonstrated by one of the participants, "Gatito", who was faithful to the structure presented by the teacher as we can see in the following examples (figure 6). Then, "Gatito" showed for the last weeks more

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<sup>3</sup> Throughout this section, some abbreviations were used: 'J' meaning Journal

## DEVELOPING YOUNG LEARNERS' EFL WRITING SKILLS

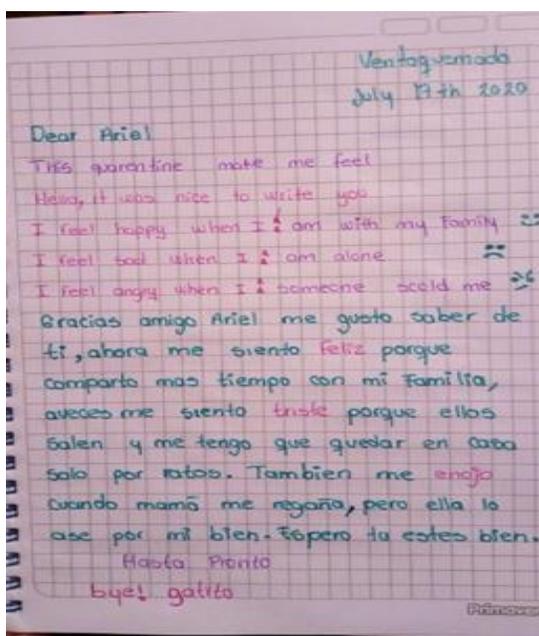
autonomous progress, considering that the teachers no longer sent a model letter (figure 7). As the process moved forward and students gained confidence in their writing in English, it seems they wanted to take it to another level by leaving aside some of the compensation aids such as Spanish, that initially supported and complemented the letters. This is the case of “Lisa Simpson”, who started with simple sentences in English while making more use of Spanish (figure 8) and then decided to write only in English as you can see in (figure 9). After describing findings in relation to the evolution of students regarding their writing and communication skills the next section will focus on different skills which emerged in the research.

**Figure 6.**

*Excerpt from Gatito's Following the Structure Presented by the Teacher*

**Figure 7.**

*Excerpt from Gatito's demonstrating freer writing without the help of the form letter.*



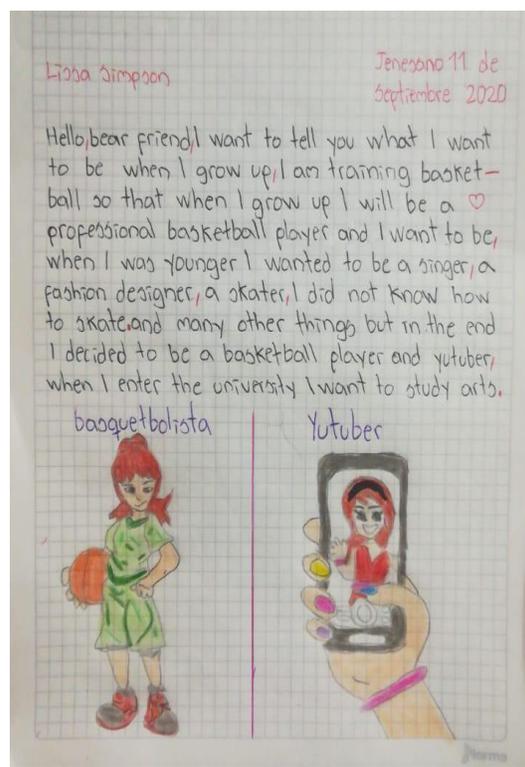
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**Figure 8.**

*Excerpt from Lisa's Letter Using English and Spanish.*

**Figure 9.**

*Excerpt from Lisa's Letter Using Just English*



***Third Subcategory: A source of English communicative skills and pedagogical by-product.***

This subcategory illustrates other skills, different from writing that seemed to be stimulated within the context of the Pen Pal telecollaboration experience. We found that participants engaged in the ability to read, interpreting letters with the aim to respond to their peers according to the message received. In the same way, taking into account the teacher's support, students had to work on the ability to speak when required by the educator in tutorials by cell phone or video calls. Regarding pedagogical by-products, the students also wanted to teach English to their relatives when it was required either to have their support, advice or to explain issues to younger relatives.

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This entire process of learning, interpreting, and teaching generated in the students a taste for the language and the topics worked in the project.

This research was focused on student's writing but indirectly this was not the only skill worked by students. In the case of reading and speaking, which students seem to develop at the same time, students used those skills, especially in tutorials. When students needed help due to lack of resources, the teacher asked them to read in English what they wanted to express to their peers. It can be seen in Johana's journal: "This week I helped two students (Ice cream and Lion) to write their letters. I asked them to tell me in English what they wanted to express and I corrected some things about their pronunciation" (J, August 05th, 2020, Johana). Sometimes in tutorials, students not only expressed what they wanted to write to their peers but also started to read the letters to reinforce the work done.

In addition, the project led participants to become "English teachers" for people around them. In the case of Gatito's mother, she expressed: "...Every Friday my son asked me if the letter had already arrived because he felt excited, I wanted to help him but I did not know anything about English, but he taught me many things in this new Language..." (Int, December 20th 2020, Gatito's mother) or the case of Guardian of life he said "I have a little sister, after my tutorials or classes I used to teach her everything that I had learned with my teacher. I also liked to imitate the teacher so that my sister could learn better" (Int November 18th, 2020 Guardian of life). Students were progressively improving their writing skills but also their ability to teach and work as a team with their family taking advantage of the circumstances in the confinement. The next lines will discuss the second category "An experience to make new friends while expressing one's own feelings by writing in English".

**Second Category: An Experience to Make New Friends while Expressing One's Own Feelings by Writing in English.**

This category answers the sub-question: *What are participants' perceptions about a pen pal experience mediated by telecollaboration during the COVID-19 pandemic?*

As an answer to that sub-question, the category: *"An experience to make new friends while expressing their feelings by writing in English"* describes the social and emotional experiences that students lived during the telecollaboration process, taking into account each student's perception of the pandemic as the context of the project.

The context in which the project was developed coincided with the quarantine proposed established by the government due to the pandemic. According to Frank and Grady (2020), "the COVID-19 pandemic has altered the daily lives of the global population profoundly in a very short period. To contain the spread of the virus, many countries introduced serious social restrictions including lockdown" (p. 35). In Colombia the mandatory quarantine began on March 24th, then parks, shopping malls, schools, and others closed, to avoid massive contagion. Regarding the education sector, the government implemented online classes from students' homes. Consequently, children had to adapt to learn from a virtual medium, without the company of their classmates and teachers. According to Sylva (1994), "school closures could have had serious psychosocial effects on children because school is not only a place for children to learn but also offers opportunities for interaction with friends and for psychological comfort" (p. 135). This pandemic situation caused different emotions in the students such as fear, sadness, happiness, and nostalgia since each student perceived the situation differently.

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According to Luger (2020), "loneliness in lockdown is common for kids separated from their friends. But all children will not be emotionally rattled by the pandemic equally—or even at all; COVID-19 will affect them to different degrees and in different ways" (p.8). During the data analysis, there were different responses from the students related to the feelings that being locked up caused to them. On the one hand, Lisa said: "I feel sad because I can't go to school and I'm at home alone because my parents work, they leave me the cell phone but I have to play alone" (Int, December 1st, 2020, Lisa). In this case, due to her family situation, Lisa feels sad and lonely, she showed that she missed her school and her companions. On the other hand, Guardian of life said: "I was afraid of the pandemic at first, but I did not feel sad because I am with my mother and my little sister and we play a lot, it does not affect me to study at home" (Int, November 28th, 2020, Guardian of life). He is a child who has all his family at home and he had the support of his relatives. These two examples show that each student has a different perception and reaction to the pandemic lockdowns, which varies according to students' family environment.

Sharing feelings with another person during the pandemic through letters could be a way to seek support regarding those emotions. In this project, the participants shared their emotions and parts of their lives with other children they did not know, in order to communicate in another language. This type of practice was also common during quarantine. For example, according to Brown (2020), Legacy Healthcare started the project "Love Letters" for residents of nursing homes, who for quarantine reasons were losing visitors. These residents received letters from volunteers who decided to write to them. Results showed that there was a lot of gratitude and the feeling of being loved by another person. This pen pal practice can also be observed in prisons,

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places with people who have anxiety and depression problems, so pen pal programs have been implemented to mitigate the feeling of loneliness.

Our Pen Pal project took place in the middle of the pandemic and that seemed to influence their views regarding their pen pal telecollaboration English writing practices. Data shows that this pen pal telecollaboration experience, not only engaged kids in their development of English writing and the other skills described above but that participants perceived it as a distraction during times of a pandemic concerning the novelty of meeting a new person. In order to deepen some aspects mentioned in the prior discussion, the first subcategory will be described below.

***First Subcategory: An Evolving Opportunity to Make New Life Discovering Connections through English Writing.***

This first subcategory is focused on opportunities to make new connections between participants. This Project was not only classwork required by the teachers but a chance for the students to get to know the environment and culture of a new person who, although located in the same state, might experience different life situations. The connections that this study triggered brought excitement to many students because they were intrigued by who their Pen Pal behind a curious nickname could be. Sometimes the students asked the teachers who the classmate was or what he looked like before describing themselves: “Yiraf asked me today about her peer, she wanted to know if it was a girl or a boy, I told her that the next time we would know more about the physical appearance of the person behind the letters” (J, August 29th, 2020, Johana). Some questions posed by students led them to choose topics based on their wishes to let the project

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flow propelled by their confidence. Also, big enthusiasm was perceived by parents each week as demonstrated in an interview when Bear's mother said:

*My son was asking me since Wednesday if the letter had already arrived and when it arrived, he told me to take him to his aunt's home because she had an internet connection there and a cousin of him also helped a lot, if we couldn't go to my sister's house, he and I looked up the words in the dictionary or the translator when we learned how to use it. In the same way, he got very nervous about his partner's response but ready for the next delivery. I think he liked the activity a lot for learning English in a different way. (I, November 22th, 2020. Bear's mother).*

The aforementioned excitement helped students show that both students and parents saw the exchange of letters not only as an opportunity to make friends but also to learn English.

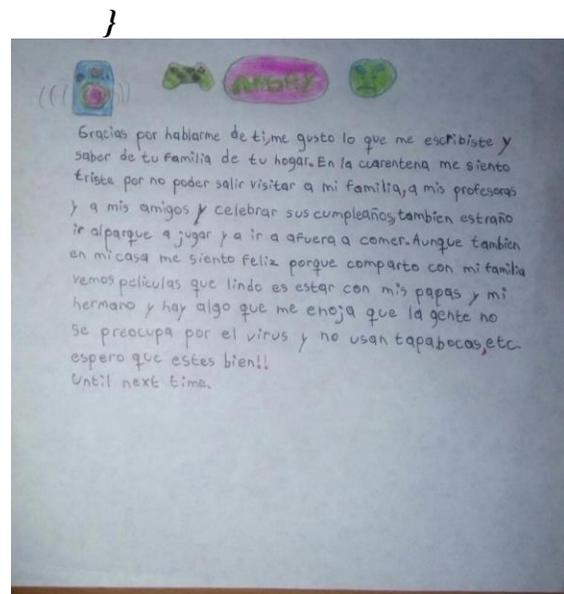
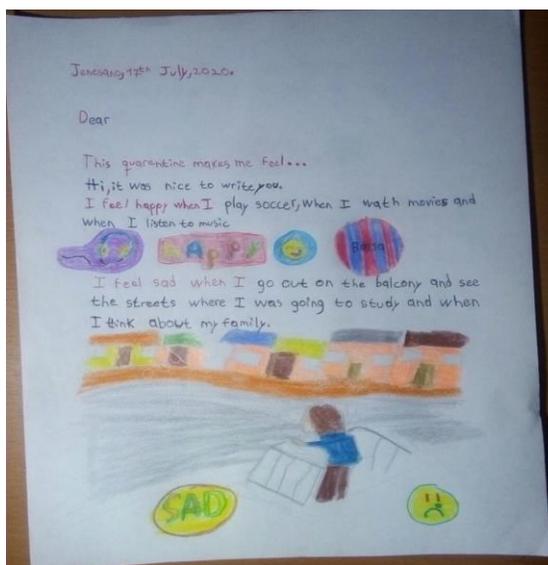
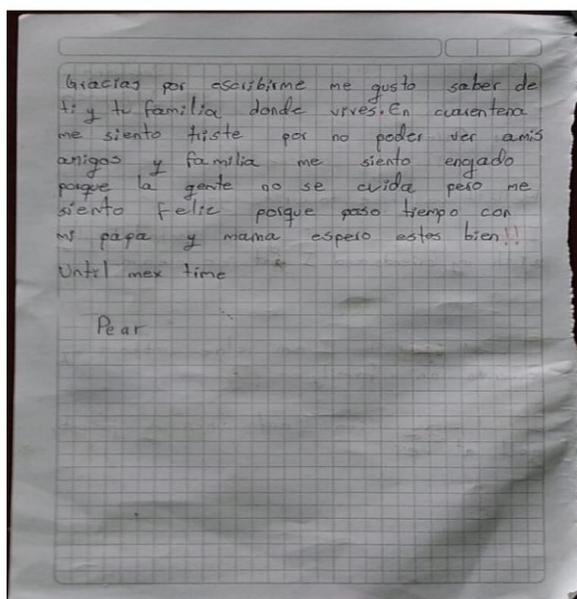
Likewise, participants also expressed to the teacher how good they felt talking to a new friend like in this excerpt from a journal: "Today Pear told me that she was very happy to make a new friend and learn English as her cousin who speaks English" (J. August 5th, 2020. Johana). The students show that they like to exchange information with another person they do not know, but at the same time, they feel that this helps them to improve their English skills. Meeting new people and starting conversations was motivating for participants, and this dynamic created a feeling of friendship that allowed them a fun opportunity to learn English through a new friend.

Finally, the idea of making new friends and sharing experiences helped them improve their skills to connect and have fluent conversations, and also students raised a quandary of emotions triggered by letter exchange and diverse expectations during the quarantine that would be described better in the following section.

*Second Subcategory: A Quandary of Emotions Triggered by Letter Exchange and Diverse Expectations during the Quarantine.*

Regarding the emotional sphere, the telecollaboration pen pal project revealed feelings that participants embraced. These emotions were the result of the complex pandemic scenario and the experience of making new acquaintances through the Pen Pal project. The context of the pandemic affected the children emotionally, which depended on certain aspects such as the accompaniment of a relative during quarantine, concerns about the situation of the spread of the virus, and missing their school life including their classmates and teachers. In the letters received it was observed that many students wrote about their feelings when they were locked up during the confinement (see figure 10). On one hand, in this letter, "Toto" expressed in his mother tongue the feeling of sadness caused by his inability to share experiences with his classmates and teachers, but also, he claimed he was feeling well at home with his family because they were healthy. On the other hand, in a different letter, Toto expressed in English (see figure 11) that observing the streets he used to walk to school made him sad, consequently, Toto received an answer from his Pen Pal "Pear", who replied (see figure 12) that she was happy to receive his letter and expressed that her emotions became more intense because of the confinement; however, she highlighted that it was important to have a routine to avoid feeling bad.

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**Figure 10.***Toto's Letter Written in Spanish***Figure 11.***Toto's Letter Written in English.***Figure 12***Excerpt from the Reply to "Pear's" Letter Written in Spanish.*

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In the previous communications, it can be seen that the students used both English and Spanish to express themselves, especially to write about the quarantine situation. In this way, they created a link between them because both participants were living the same experience from different places. This shows how, from the beginning, there were feelings on one side of fear; of not knowing how to express themselves in English; and on the other hand, emotions and great expectations of meeting someone through letters as evidenced by the example below “This week Lisa continually asked for the response to her peer's letter, she expressed great excitement and interest in knowing more about him, every week she inquires for her letter without exception”. (J, August 29th, 2020, Julieth). Some students found the project to be a fun way to entertain and accompany them while they were at home. Pen Pals created a friendship from a distance in which experiences and feelings were shared through letters.

Finally, the emotions provoked by the expectations of making a new friend and by the confinement situation implied an adaptation process during the study. The process began with fear and expectations, but over time the participants found a peer with whom to share their experiences and feelings caused by the confinement situation. They also learned that there are people from other places who felt the same and that through letters they can be supported. After describing findings in relation to “A quandary of emotions triggered by letter exchange and diverse expectations during the quarantine”, the next section will focus on “*Challenges for letter exchange and identity-based available choices configuring online experiences*”.

### **Third Category: Challenges for Letter Exchange and Identity-Based Available Choices Configuring Online Experiences.**

This category responds to the research sub-question: How did technological resources affect English writing during the pen pal telecollaboration project? This section is related to the difficulty that students had with the technological tools they used to develop their writing skills and the identity-based available choices that configured their online experiences. Concerning the 1<sup>st</sup> angle of this category, the students struggled at first because at the beginning of the experience most of them used technology for communication, but then, because of the pandemic, they have to use it to navigate the different tools offered in order to learn. Sometimes parents did not have an Internet connection or they simply could not communicate with teachers. Also, for many people, quality Internet access was really difficult because of different reasons. Lack of resources was a major obstacle to submitting homework because the mobile data was very limited. Also, some parents struggled because their cell phones were out of signal most of the time and it was hard to deliver assignments on time. In addition, in some households there was only one mobile device for several students or the device that was there did not have the necessary technology to be able to carry out the proposed activities or navigate the different tools offered by the Internet.

Talking about the identity-based available choices configuring online experiences, it was found that the internet offered several possibilities and tools that have contributed positively to the development of letter writing in the case of the participants in this project. As mentioned by Pacheco (2005), "The World Wide Web certainly triggers communication. It is one of the most

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exciting pedagogical resources in use today. It encompasses a significant and unlimited number of educational materials that remodels teaching methodology by incorporating Web-based learning” (p.19). This quote mentions that students can take advantage of technology due to its extensive online possibilities. The students also chose the most suitable tools for them depending on their resources, and in this way, they elaborated their letters taking advantage of what the internet offered them. The teachers also gave the participants freedom as long as the activity was delivered as requested. This allowed the students to discover different tools independently and to complement their writing positively.

However, for many students and parents, technological tools, such as the cell phone camera, WhatsApp, and phone calls were essential to developing their activities. Likewise, all participants in this project had access to some resources regardless of whether they had devices in their houses or through a close relative with the instruments. These tools and the ones previously mentioned were a great help to continue the learning process due to the multiple opportunities, resources, and material that the online platforms provide. In this sense, Lakewael (2017) mentions that “the Internet is a media to help teachers and students to get materials, enrich teachers’ pedagogy when selecting the material and methods in English learning, and engage the students in creating a new English learning experience” (p. 261). This means that the Internet acts positively on students' English learning when they immerse themselves in a new experience. In the project, the participants were creative regarding their letters as they used different tools to do a great job pushing themselves to deliver a better letter each time which was reflected by comparing the first and last letters. In addition, technological issues that complicated students' successful writing and the internet as an essential medium involving technology

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preferences will be described in depth in the following subcategories. In order to deepen some aspects mentioned in the prior discussion, the first subcategory will be described below.

***First Subcategory: Technological Issues that Complicated Students' Successful Writing in English during the exchange.***

This first subcategory describes the technological problems that students had while learning to write in English during the telecollaboration exchange. These challenges sometimes did not allow them to perform their writing activities satisfactorily. During confinement, internet use increased and it is presumed that it was aimed at compensating for the lack of direct communication in real life during the quarantine. In the educational field, the internet was the replacement of the school space. Through the internet, students gained access to the learning provided by the teachers; however, not all students had satisfactory access to the internet, either due to signal problems, or lack of money to access it. Additionally, some students faced other problems such as not having the necessary technological tools (cell phone or computer) when receiving their letters.

During the project, some of the difficulties mentioned above were found, especially in the students from Ventaquemada school, since most of them were living in the countryside where cell phone signals were weak. This limitation implied that students could not communicate on time with their peers or teachers. Likewise, other students did not have the economic resources to add mobile data on the cell phone continuously. Taking into account these technological issues, it was necessary to propose alternative solutions for these students. These alternatives were adapted to their specific connectivity conditions to avoid affecting their learning of writing in English.

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Students' awareness of these technological problems was evident: "Yes, it affected me not having the internet because I couldn't check the support material or ask the teacher. ...sometimes I sent the letter late, and sometimes there was no signal when the teacher called me to explain" (Int, December 1st, 2020, Pear). Students realized that these coverage problems were uncomfortable for them at the time of letters exchange since it caused delays in the deliveries to their pen pals. Similarly, students who did not have these problems understood that it was normal and that many times these delays were due to issues with the Internet signal. "Sometimes I was very excited about the letter but I did not receive it in time because my partner did not have an internet connection, so I had to wait a little longer". (Int, November 28th, 2020. Guardian of life).

It is important to note that one of the most used platforms by students and teachers was WhatsApp because they could maintain asynchronous communication. This means of communication consumes less data for students and is a more effective solution for those with connectivity problems. This possibility made online communication more accessible to all students; however, taking into account that students could not always connect due to the problems mentioned above, teachers resorted to creating a schedule with each student in case they had a technological problem during the week. In this specific schedule, the teacher called the student to explain the topics and/or support their letter writing according to what the student communicated during the call. It is important to note that the parents' schedule was also taken into account since the participants were between 9-11 years old, so the cell phones used were their parents', and the calls were made to their parents' cell phones.

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The context of the pandemic produced some inequalities that were noticeable during the project; mainly the limited access to connectivity was observed. Nonetheless, we did not want to put these students aside, then we offered them more options, in this way they could learn equally. "I thank the teacher who was patient with us calling and texting so that my daughter could turn in her homework and learn English" (Int, November 28th, 2020. Aracne's mother). Parents were also present in this process of helping those with more difficulties since it was a process made between the student, the teacher, and the parents to ensure that the student received and shared information and letters through different alternatives.

After describing findings in relation to "*Technological issues that complicate students' successful writing in English*", the next section will focus on "*The internet as an essential medium involving technology preferences during the pandemic*".

### ***Second Subcategory: The Internet as an Essential Medium Involving Technology Preferences during the Pandemic***

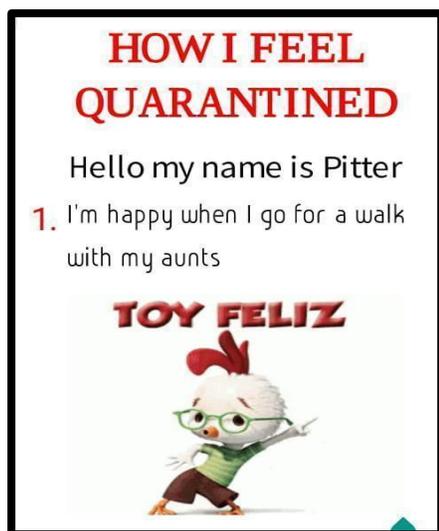
This subcategory discusses the preferences of students while they use technology to develop the project. In this way, the technological means provided the students with important help to carry out the exchange. They chose the applications and programs of preference that complemented their own learning process. Over time the students began to use different tools such as the translator or the online English dictionary. For example, in the case of Lion, she stated: "At first I used the dictionary but my sister taught me to use the translator and I realized that it was faster and better to write letters ...."

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But technology not only helped kids in their written production but also to decorate letters with drawings, pictures, or colors. This is illustrated by Pitter's letter (see figure 13). Pitter employed PowerPoint slides where he used different fonts, colors, and funny images. In this way, the peculiar style of each participant, both regarding the aesthetics of letters and the written production, was seen in relation to his/her personal touch. This could be reflected in Julieth's Journal, she wrote: "Pitter today asked me if he could send his letters using PowerPoint slides and send them through email. He told me that he just got a new computer and he is trying to discover new tools" (J, July 08th, 2020, Julieth). It seems that discovering new tools motivated this particular student to express himself creatively. The web browser was a tool used frequently by participants who had computer and internet connection because from there they could find more interesting tools such as email, translators, many English-Spanish dictionaries, PowerPoint slides, among others.

**Figure 12**

*Pitter's Letter Using PowerPoint Slides*



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Curiosity to know more about their classmates led participants to search the Internet in order to understand what their classmates' environment was like. In the case of Aracne, she said: "One day I looked for Ventaquemada town on the internet because I wanted to know more about my partner, but it was difficult because Tigre lived in the countryside. I realized that because later in a letter he described his context" (Int, December 8th, 2020. Aracne). Even if she did not find the information she was looking for, her curiosity led her to surf the net and take advantage of the resources that the internet offered her.

Furthermore, the students accommodated themselves to various tools such as WhatsApp, this tool allows an inexpensive and simple communication way. In which any person can send audios, images, videos, and documents. This could be observed every Monday when the support material was sent to the students through videos and images or at the end of the week when the participants had to take a photo of their writing and then send it to their teacher. For images and audio, data consumption is minimal, and facilitated communication between students and teachers when resources were limited. For this reason, the sending of letters was possible most of the time through this medium.

The dictionary was also one of the tools used by most of the students in the project. Also, there was the translator which was also used by several students and some learned to use it in the middle of their process. Another tool was the web browser that helped them with some doubts. Next, it was found that PowerPoint presentations provided them with a lot of interesting visual material, and finally, some of them used email to send the evidence of their work done at home. Also, each student showed likes and dislikes in their personal life and sweet anecdotes to send a

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tender letter to their new friend. The project revealed interesting conclusions, pedagogical implications, and relevant topics for future research which will be described in depth in the following section.

### **Conclusions**

This section provides an explicit answer to the questions and subquestions formulated to guide this study. In relation to subquestion number one about the characteristics of participants' writing when they were involved in a Pen pal telecollaboration project during the pandemic, the following answers were established.

The 1st characteristic that we identified was that writing was not an isolated process; it was a process supported by different actors and means. The teachers were a constant guide for the participants, they monitored the whole process and gave emotional and technical support to the students when it was necessary by giving students tutorials by chat or phone. Likewise, the students had to take advantage of the classroom and tutoring spaces with the teachers in order to create, correct, and send an understandable and pleasant letter. The previous dynamics help participants to maintain cohesion and coherence in what they wanted to express through their letters to their peers.

Furthermore, their writing was also characterized by the new environment in which they were involved due to the pandemic since they had to be at home all the time. The authority figures they had at home were their relatives who in most cases did not know the English

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language, but they started to learn this new language to be a helpful source to their children. The parents also helped in the writing process by accompanying their kids in the project as if they were part of it and supporting their children with inspiration and ideas for writing their letters.

One more characteristic of the students was an emerging and very useful skill in their home-based learning environment. This skill was teaching, used in two specific cases: The first case was when there were younger family members at home and the project participant wanted to teach them something new or help them with their English homework. The second case was when their parents were involved in the Pen pal project and in order to work as a team, it was necessary for everyone to have the necessary knowledge of English. Finally, the students could reinforce what they had learned in their foreign language class and their parents, siblings or cousins acquired new knowledge about the language.

The writing was also characterized by the curiosity that participants imbued in the process because of their new mystery friend. At first, students did not know what their friends looked like or what their voices sounded like, and they wanted to know more about the person they were talking to. From this, questions arose about their gender, appearance, environment, or age; as the project progressed and they already knew some relevant information about their peers, they began to question their lifestyle, routines, hobbies, and how they were feeling in their confinement guided by the curiosity that the differences and anonymity generated in them.

Another important characteristic of writing was the impact of the context and identity of the participants through their letters. The diversity of ideas, experiences, adventures, daily routine, and colorful letters were attractive and motivating for recipients as each student was

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different and unique. Likewise, participants started to challenge themselves to improve, not only in terms of form, but the appeal of the letters, their content, and the language used to express themselves.

Finally, during the process of learning to write in English, it was found that this skill was not the only one that worked during the project. Indirectly participants use reading and speaking skills. In the first case, they received letters from their classmates weekly, and to continue “the conversation” in the letter they exercised their reading skills. Speaking was also found in situations when the teachers called their students by phone to help them with the letter writing, and tutoring sessions in which they were requested to give their ideas in English.

Concerning subquestion number two about the participants' perceptions related to a pen pal experience mediated by telecollaboration during the COVID-19 pandemic, the following answers were established.

The students' perception of the pen pal project was very positive with some of them expressing excitement about meeting new and different people. The pen pal project also served as a means for them to unburden and talk about their experiences during confinement and studying from home. Some of these stories reflected a lot of emotions and feelings, highlighting the sadness of not being able to see their friends and the excitement of meeting a new person through letters.

Other students held different perceptions and emotions about the pen pal project. In the beginning, fear and nervousness arose because of all the exchange's expectations which made some of them also felt unsure of themselves, and of their English knowledge. Then, when the

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exchange began, many students felt happy, excited, and intrigued due to the activity itself. Hence, students showed from fear and insecurity to self-confidence in the emotional aspect through trust in their peers when expressing their personal experiences.

In relation to subquestion number three about how technological resources affect negatively and positively English writing during the pen pal telecollaboration project, the following answers were established.

Lack of technological resources affected English writing because some students were living in rural areas where access to different resources was very limited or their conditions were not optimal. The aforementioned limitations were due to the lack of mobile signal originated by their remote location, and by the lack of electronic devices because some families do not have the necessary economic resources or they do not see much use for devices without signal. This situation prevented the students from accessing the knowledge, building opportunities provided by their teachers, and their response letters suffered delays.

The lack of quality internet was the main resource that generated a negative impact on the whole exchange and on their English writing. This affectation happened because when we wanted to contact the students or parents through the WhatsApp chat, teachers did not receive an answer until some days later. Nonetheless, when the teachers sent support material or videos explaining the subject, the students had many problems with the downloads and visualization. Finally, it was complicated for some students to discover and use tools, offered by the internet as an aid in their writing process.

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The writing was also positively affected by technology. Students who were able to access some tools found aids to strengthen their learning process. One of them was that they were able to access some online dictionaries and translators that expanded their vocabulary and sentences in their writing. Their processing also improved because they could have tutorials all the time to correct their writing and improve it through chats and video calls. One of the students found that making their letters using PowerPoint was easier and more fun. Finally, the participants found in the resources certain independence and identity that was reflected in each of their submissions.

### **Pedagogical implications for Pedagogical Practice.**

Based on the answers that we obtained through our research process, we would like to express some considerations which we expect can support the efforts of teachers working in similar projects.

The first set of implications is related to the role of some stakeholders in children's learning in this type of telecollaboration pen pal projects. In this research, it was found that parents played an important role in supporting the children during the process, not only with academic but also emotional assistance. In view of this, we believe that parental involvement is significant for the children, and should be fostered by the parents, teachers, and the institution itself. Participants' learning process is facilitated when they receive help, ideas, support, and motivation to write their letters.

As this research was conducted in times of pandemic, face-to-face contact with the students was not allowed so, the ideal was that students and teachers could share the same space

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in order to solve doubts at the moment and also giving kids easy and clear instructions the previous fact could make the relationship between the student and the teacher to be strengthened with respect and trust in order to develop all the activities in the best possible way.

Another important aspect regarding the role of teachers involves their teamwork. Collaborative work between teachers provides a broad vision of the perception of students, as well as the transfer of knowledge and skills that happens when working with others, which is a potential source of support and learning. This research study was guided by the joint work of two teachers because the exchange took place between two different institutions. It was relevant that both teachers maintained the same topics, vocabulary, and grammar, which facilitated the comprehension of the letters, both for reading and writing because the topics and words of the letters were already known by the participants. Likewise, teachers' teamwork is meaningful to guide and manage the writing process to create the letters and to guarantee positive results and avoid confusion in students, for example, teamwork ensured that teachers were synchronized in the organization of curricular elements such as selection of topics, language practice

The second set of implications is related to social, affective, and subjective aspects influencing students' involvement in these types of experiences. To begin with, the emotions and the engagement that the students had, were one of the most remarkable findings because participants found accompaniment and interest on the part of their peers in the exchange of letters. The curiosity to know a new friend allowed the students to exchange more deeply their feelings about their context and circumstances. In this type of cultural exchange project, it is

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crucial to motivate students to express their emotions and feelings through their writings in order to strengthen friendship and confidence.

In addition, one more finding was the challenges the students had to improve their written communication in English, which arose from the curiosity to meet a new friend from another context. Likewise, In this way, the students learned and understood the differences that exist in the community. It is a relevant aspect to promote interculturality and diversity among individuals in the same country because those exchanges enriched students' perspectives about other people in the same and different environments.

The independence and personal preferences of the students, as fundamental pillars for their success in their telecollaboration letter exchange experience, were interesting findings. Each student chose the most convenient and suitable tool for their own work depending on their resources and profile. It is fundamental to give students freedom and autonomy, in such a way that each participant can explore different aids at their disposal. This can increase their chances to deliver quality activities that are motivating for all of those involved in the experience.

In this project, we also found some evidence about learning and the use of indirect skills learned during the research, such as teaching. This inspiration was generated because they wanted to transmit what they learned to their relatives in order to demonstrate their knowledge and to imitate the role of the teacher. It is relevant to encourage students to use their diverse skills to implement in their context what they have learned about English.

Another implication is related to the connection that was established between English and Spanish, students used both languages to be able to express and communicate their ideas and

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feelings. One of the implications that we can elucidate here is about the relevance of allowing kids to use Spanish or other semiotic means as drawings to express what they feel when they do not have a good English level.

Regarding the use of technological tools for new research, it is recommended that students carry out this telecollaborative exchange with the teacher's supervision. The continuous accompaniment of a responsible adult, e.g., teacher or parent, is necessary for the project to be successful due to the dangers that exist when being online. In addition, it is important to use a secure electronic platform, so that communication is exclusive among students being part of the experience. If any institution does not have the necessary means to carry out synchronous exchange through video calls, the asynchronous medium can be used through letters and the exchange can be mediated by both teachers.

### **For Further Research**

During this study, we detected students' curiosity leading to their discovery of more information about their pen pals and we examined intercultural communicative competence. They learn from their peers' customs, experiences, habits, which caused more interest and fascination at the moment of exchanging letters. In a further study, intercultural pen pal telecollaboration could be an interesting way to investigate how students get involved in a different reality in the same country accepting the differences that exist around with other students while learning a new language.

The telecollaboration between two different populations during the EFL learning process allowed the students to reacquaint themselves with their own context, in order to confront them

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with the new cultural knowledge they were exposed to. In this way, it was found that children were motivated to learn more about their context in order to be able to teach it and also to receive new knowledge from their peers while learning English. Considering these institutions were rural and that this type of project is carried out with electronic tools, it would be possible to deepen projects that involve populations from other departments of Colombia or students from another country, in this way the intercultural exchange between the two populations while learning English would be observed in a more remarkable way.

We also found that Spanish played an important role in letter writing because it helped to complement some ideas that students could not express in English and explain the new topics. Likewise, students felt confidence and comfort when they were writing letters because they place a short fragment in their mother tongue telling experiences to their peers. Also, Spanish helped them to better understand instructions in the activities that were proposed. For this reason, a future research study could analyze how the mother tongue can be used to add and complement some ideas, in the case of instructions and small spaces to write in Spanish; at least initially so that participants feel comfortable as the project develops and gradually increases in difficulty.

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## Annexes

## Annex 1

## Diagnosis survey

UNIVERSIDAD PEDAGÓGICA Y TECNOLÓGICA DE COLOMBIA  
FACULTAD DE CIENCIAS DE LA EDUCACIÓN  
ESCUELA DE IDIOMAS  
LICENCIATURA EN LENGUAS EXTRANJERAS  
ENCUESTA

Esta encuesta tiene el fin de conocer los recursos tecnológicos que tiene el estudiante y los sentimientos que puedan generar estudiar en casa durante el confinamiento a causa de la pandemia del Covid-19.

¿Con qué elementos electrónicos cuentas para comunicarte con tus profesores? Escoge los que utilices en casa

a) Celular  
b) Computador  
c) Tableta  
d) impresora

¿Que tipo de internet utilizas para desarrollar las actividades escolares?

a) wifi  
b) datos  
c) ninguno

¿Sabes usar WhatsApp?

¿Te gusta usar las el WhatsApp para comunicarte?

¿Te gustaría recibir cartas de un compañero de otra escuela?

¿Has escrito una carta alguna vez?

¿Te gusta escribir cartas?

Si tuvieras la oportunidad de escribir cartas a una persona que está lejos de ti, ¿cómo te gustaría que fueran esas cartas?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## DEVELOPING YOUNG LEARNERS' EFL WRITING SKILLS

¿Te gusta escribir en inglés?

Sí  No

¿Cómo te parece escribir en inglés?

a) fácil  
b) Normal  
c) Difícil

¿Cómo te consideras escribiendo en inglés?

Malo Regular Bueno Excelente

¿Cómo te has sentido estando en casa durante el confinamiento? Justifica la respuesta que escogiste.

a) Bien, ¿porque? \_\_\_\_\_  
b) Mal, ¿Porque? \_\_\_\_\_  
c) Normal, ¿porque? \_\_\_\_\_

¿Cómo te has sentido estudiando desde casa?

a) Bien  
b) triste  
c) aburrido  
d) molesto  
e) feliz

¿Qué es lo que más extrañas del colegio?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

¿Hablas con tus compañeros de clase frecuentemente?

Sí  No

¿Con quién estás viviendo actualmente?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Annex 2***Institution consent form*

Tunja, Septiembre 2020

Rectora:

Doris Nelly Bernal Niño

Institución Educativa Técnica Puente de Piedra

Cordial saludo

Me dirijo a usted atentamente con el fin de comentarle sobre una iniciativa que comenzó al iniciar la práctica educativa de la UPTC en la sede San José del Gacal. En ésta práctica se desarrolló un proyecto de intercambio de cartas con la institución 20 de Julio en Jenesano Boyacá. La presente es para solicitar su permiso con el fin de seguir trabajando con los 7 estudiantes seleccionados para el proyecto. De la misma manera me comprometo a seguir apoyando los talleres propuestos en la institución con todos los estudiantes de la sede, resolviendo sus dudas y explicando los talleres.

Agradezco la atención prestada y quedo atenta su respuesta

Atentamente:

Johana Lisseth Santana Alarcón

Estudiante de Lenguas extranjeras

Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia

## DEVELOPING YOUNG LEARNERS' EFL WRITING SKILLS

**Annex 3***Parents' consent form***FORMATO DE CONSENTIMIENTO**

La presente para saludarlos y comunicarles que su hijo (a), estudiante de la institución educativa puente de Piedra en San José del Gacal ha estado trabajando en un intercambio de cartas desde hace varios meses con los estudiantes de la institución 20 de Julio en Jenesano Boyacá como parte de la práctica pedagógica de la UPTC con el fin de ayudar a mejorar el inglés de inglés de los estudiantes. El proyecto lo realizamos Julieth Alejandra Torres Beltrán y yo Johana Lisseth Santana Alarcón estudiantes de la Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia para realizar la monografía como opción de grado. la información obtenida será confidencial y no se usará para ningún otro propósito fuera de los de esta investigación. Sus respuestas serán codificadas usando un nickname que podrá ser escogido por el participante.

Hago constar que Yo \_\_\_\_\_, identificado con cédula de ciudadanía \_\_\_\_\_ en calidad de padres / tutores legales del / la menor de edad \_\_\_\_\_, he leído y entendido *el procedimiento general del presente estudio, beneficios del* y en conocimiento de todo ello y de las medidas que se adoptarán para la *protección de los datos personales* de los / las participantes según la normativa vigente, otorgo mi consentimiento para la participación del / la citado/a menor en la actual investigación.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma Acudiente

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma Participante

CC.: \_\_\_\_\_

T.I. \_\_\_\_\_

**Annex 4***First survey applied*

**Preguntas**

1. ¿Qué tan importante crees que es escribir en inglés? \*

Muy importante

No muy importante

No importante

2. ¿Crees que este intercambio de cartas te ayuda a escribir mejor en inglés? \*

Si

No

3. ¿por qué crees que este intercambio de cartas te ayuda (o no te ayuda) a escribir mejor en inglés? \*

Tu respuesta \_\_\_\_\_

4. ¿Cómo te has sentido con el envío de cartas a otros compañeros? \*

Me gusta mucho

Me gusta

Me gusta un poco

5. ¿Cómo te ha parecido escribir cartas en inglés? \*

Muy fácil

Fácil

Complicado

6. ¿Has entendido las cartas que te ha enviado tu compañero? \*

- Si, las he entendido perfectamente
- Si, las he entendido un poco
- No, hay cosas que no entiendo

7. ¿Te gusta recibir las cartas semanalmente de tu compañero mediante WhatsApp? \*

- Si
- No

8. ¿Por qué te gusta (o no te gusta) recibir las cartas semanalmente de tu compañero mediante WhatsApp? \*

Tu respuesta \_\_\_\_\_

9. ¿Crees que el material de apoyo (Videos explicativos e imágenes) te ayuda con la creación de las cartas? \*

- Sí
- No

## DEVELOPING YOUNG LEARNERS' EFL WRITING SKILLS

10. ¿Cómo te has sentido participando en el Proyecto de intercambio de cartas con un compañero? \*

- Bien
- Normal
- Mal

11. ¿Sientes que las cartas te motivan a escribir en inglés? \*

- Si
- No

12. ¿Sientes que las cartas te motivan (o no te motivan) a escribir en inglés? \*

Tu respuesta \_\_\_\_\_

13. ¿Cómo te ha ido utilizando el Internet para intercambiar las cartas? \*

- Bien
- ...

**Annex 5***Second survey applied*

**Proyecto de las cartas**

Estudiantes de Jenesano y Ventaquemada

1. ¿Cómo te has sentido participando en el Proyecto de intercambio de cartas con un compañero? \*

Bien

Mal

Normal

2. ¿Cómo te preparas para el intercambio de cartas? \*

Tu respuesta \_\_\_\_\_

3. ¿Qué es lo que más te gusta del envío de cartas? \*

Tu respuesta \_\_\_\_\_

## DEVELOPING YOUNG LEARNERS' EFL WRITING SKILLS

4. ¿Qué sientes cuando recibes tus cartas? \*

Tu respuesta \_\_\_\_\_

5. ¿Qué es lo que más te gusta del envío de cartas? \*

Tu respuesta \_\_\_\_\_

## DEVELOPING YOUNG LEARNERS' EFL WRITING SKILLS

6. ¿Crees que este intercambio de cartas te ha ayudado a escribir mejor en inglés? \*

Sí

No

Explicanos tu respuesta anterior

Tu respuesta \_\_\_\_\_

7. ¿Sientes que las cartas te dan más ganas escribir en inglés? \*

Sí

No

8. ¿Has aprendido cosas nuevas de tus compañeros? \*

Tu respuesta \_\_\_\_\_

## DEVELOPING YOUNG LEARNERS' EFL WRITING SKILLS

9. ¿Qué más te gustaría saber de tu compañero? \*

Tu respuesta

---

10. ¿De qué tema te gustaría hablar en próximas cartas? \*

Tu respuesta

---

11. ¿Cómo te ha ido utilizando el Internet para intercambiar las cartas? \*

- Bien
- Mal

Explicanos tu respuesta anterior

Tu respuesta

---

12. ¿Qué herramientas utilizas para la creación de las cartas que envías? \*

- Traductor
- Diccionario
- Material de Apoyo
- Otros ¿Cuáles?

## DEVELOPING YOUNG LEARNERS' EFL WRITING SKILLS

## Annex 6

## Teacher's journal form

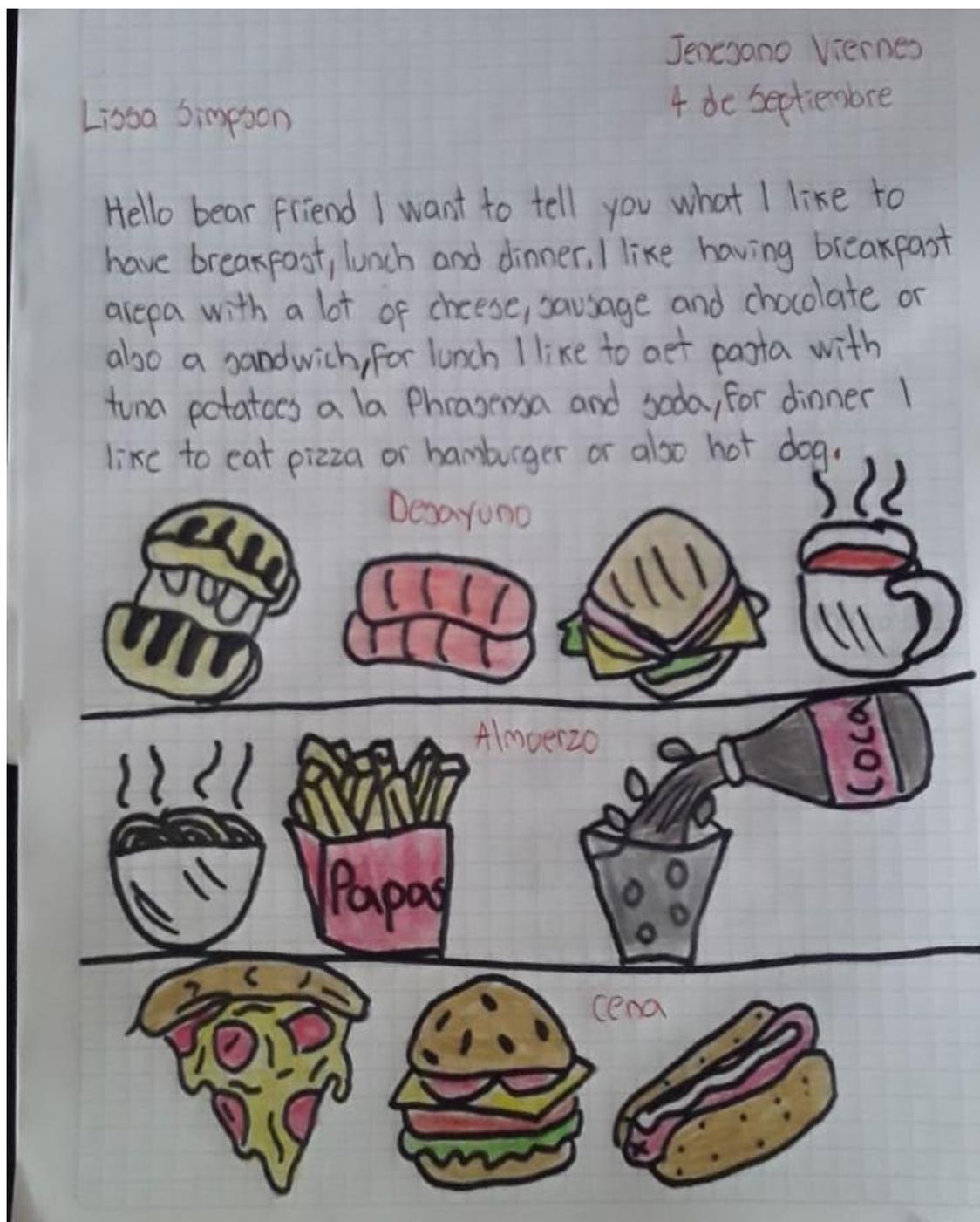
JOURNAL		
Researcher	Julieth Torres Beltrán	
Objective	To observe the influence that letters have on students taking into account writing skills, technological resources, and letters.	
Situation	Sending letters during the quarantine	
Place/space	Studying at home	
Applied technique	Pen Pal correspondence by asynchronous medium.	
Population	Researcher teachers Students from "Institución Educativa Técnica Puente de piedra" campus San José del Gacal in Ventaquemada located in a rural area and "Institución Técnico Comercial Jenesano 20 de Julio" in Jenesano	
	Description	Reflection
Pen Pal letters	<p>This week the project of the letters began, the calls made the previous week and the informative video that was sent for the students who would participate in the project. It was a great help to us and for them, since this week the students were waiting for the letters and for the supporting material to get started. In the support material we sent them, they were taught to make a letter step by step, in total there were six steps for the students to have an order and a guide, some students (very few) did not follow the instructions, so they made a letter without greeting, or closing or address... so I asked them to guide themselves with the video and the example that I did, in addition to my help provided through the chat while they wrote their letter, in this way the students were created their letter following the instructions.</p>	<p>Regarding the mood of the students related to the letters they were very excited to write their letter and to be able to draw and decorate it the way they want. Valeska, Sara and Juan were asking me about the other partners from Ventaquemada, they were exciting to write them, since they wanted to know their real names, their age, so I answered them that all those questions will be answered by the letters.</p>
Writing skills	<p>The students had a step by step guide of what to write, which helped them a lot, in the part of the body of the letter they had to write their personal data, in the example that I gave them I put my data, so it worked for them be guided and put their age, their anonymous name, their place of residence, their tastes, and in the case when they thought of writing something additional in English they asked me about new vocabulary or they looked directly in the dictionary, Juan Diego, Valeska and Maria de los Angeles asked me to check them the letter before decorating it to guarantee that it was well written, in the other hand Sara and Zaira sent it to me with some errors, so I sent them a feedback so they would take it into account.</p> <p>In their first letter what I found was that they learnt how to create a letter taking into account the steps, and how to introduce themselves with those sentences: "My name is ___" "I live in ___" "I study in ___"</p>	<p>In the other hand, some students were worried because they said they don't know much English, so it would be terrible, Valeska, a girl from Venezuela said that where she lived, she never studied English before, even her mom call me to said the same thing, nevertheless, the good aspect of this, it is that Valeska wanted to participate so I tried to reassure them and that the idea was to learn step by step with my help.</p> <p>For the few students who did not follow in the footsteps of the letter (Anderson and Alejandro) such as the greeting, the farewell, they were asked to fix it because although they can write in Spanish and draw what they want, and in English following the theme, so The idea is that they know the parts of the letter, and that is what this first session was about, setting the instructions for creating a letter.</p> <p>I think that writing a letter can be difficult and more so when it is in English, so when we think about creating the support material, we think</p>
1. Electronic media used by students.	<p>The use of technological tools studying from home is totally necessary, so the way in which teachers communicate with students is through WhatsApp, with a few students the phone call is used to explain the support material, or to help them with ideas of what else they can write, there are very few cases but they are students who ask me for my revision before to complete the letter as: Valeska and Zaira. After they write the letter, they take a picture of it and send it to me by WhatsApp, and one student (Anderson) preferred to send it to me by email, which is fine with me, since Anderson wanted to create his letter on power point and create a cartoon of himself, so he made it in his computer and he asked me for my email, because he was learning to send emails.</p>	

**Annex 7***Parents' interview***Entrevista para padres de familia Semi estructurada**

1. ¿Cuál es su opinión del proyecto de las cartas?
2. ¿Cuál fue el acompañamiento a su hijo/a durante la creación de las cartas?
3. ¿Cómo le parece el proceso de escritura en inglés que tuvo su hijo al escribir las cartas a su compañero?
4. ¿Qué papel cree que jugó la utilización de los medios tecnológicos en este intercambio?
5. ¿Cómo cree que la plataforma WhatsApp, la cual se usó para enviar y recibir cartas pudo haber influenciado el proceso del proyecto?
6. ¿Cree usted que el intercambio de cartas a través de Whatsapp tuvo que ver con el aprendizaje de Inglés de sus hijos?
7. ¿Recuerda algún momento o situación durante el intercambio de cartas que para usted haya sido significativo durante el proyecto?

## Annex 8

Students' letters, Lissa's letter



## DEVELOPING YOUNG LEARNERS' EFL WRITING SKILLS

## Ariel's letter

Jesúsano  
17<sup>th</sup> July 2020

Dear friend Galito

This quarantine makes  
me feel...

Hello, it was nice to write you.

I feel happy when I play with the phone, when I play with my sister. And when I go out for a walk in the countryside the days allowed in quarantine.

I feel sad when I <sup>(family)</sup> why am I not with my family.

 +   = X

I feel angry when I can't do what I want to do, when they yell at me, when they interrupt what I'm doing because they call me.

Gracias por escribirme y por compartir parte de ti. Congeniar contigo es lo que me gusta disfrutar en familia pero el resto está muy lejos en mi país y los extraño al igual que mis bellas amigas(as). Me gustan los perros y quiero tener uno. Pero primero tendríamos que mudarnos a otro lugar con espacio. Te cuento que en este tiempo de cuarentena, he hecho muchas manualidades y soy feliz al jugar ellas como mi caja registradora que yo mismo hice, también me hace feliz el jugar con mi teléfono celular, cuando se me permite. También es cierto que me pone molesto, algunas veces, el que no pueda salir libremente y el no hacer cosas que deseo hacer.

Espero que estes muy bien !!!

Until next time

Ariel

## DEVELOPING YOUNG LEARNERS' EFL WRITING SKILLS

## Gatito's letter

Ventquemada  
10th / July / 2020

Dear friend:

My nickname is gatito  
I am 9 years old  
I study in San Jose  
del Casal school  
I live in ventquemada




\* \* \* \* \*

\* A mi me gusta compartir  
\*  
\* con mi familia y salir a  
\* pasear.  
\*  
\* Me encanta montar  
\*  
\* bicicleta y tengo  
\*  
\* un perrito llamado  
\*  
\* ROKY  
\* \* \* \* \*

I Hope to see you soon!  
gatito

## DEVELOPING YOUNG LEARNERS' EFL WRITING SKILLS

## Yiraf's letter

DEAR Ana Ven Toquemada  
September 18<sup>th</sup> 2020

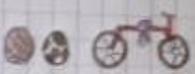
Do you have any pets?  
 If I have his name is Peter Pan.



What is your favorite subject in school? My favorite subject is maths.



What is your favorite game or sport to play? My favorite sports are basketball, bicycle and soccer.



What's your favorite zoo animal? My favorite animal in the zoo is the giraffe.



GIRAFFE

What's your biggest dream in life? I would like to be a doctor or teacher.



Hola, amiga. Espero que te encuentres bien, ya nos quedan pocos días para seguir hablando. Quiero saber que preguntas has degado para Responder. Cuidate tu y tu familia. Hope to see you soon! Bye, bye!

Yiraf.

## DEVELOPING YOUNG LEARNERS' EFL WRITING SKILLS

## Annex 9

## Support material, Sample letter sent by the teacher 1

Jenesano  
7<sup>th</sup> August

Dear friend:

... I want to tell you what I do everyday!!! ..

- ★ I get up at 6:00 am
- ★ I brush my teeth at 6:30 am
- ★ I send activities for students at 7:00 am
- ★ I have breakfast at 8:00 am
- ★ I work out at 9:00 am
- ★ I take a shower at 11:00 am
- ★ I cook my lunch at 12:00 pm
- ★ I have lunch at 1:30 pm
- ★ I study english at 2:30 pm
- ★ I prepare material for students at 4:00 pm
- ★ I have dinner at 7:00 pm
- ★ I share time with my family at 8:00 pm
- ★ I go to bed at 11 pm.

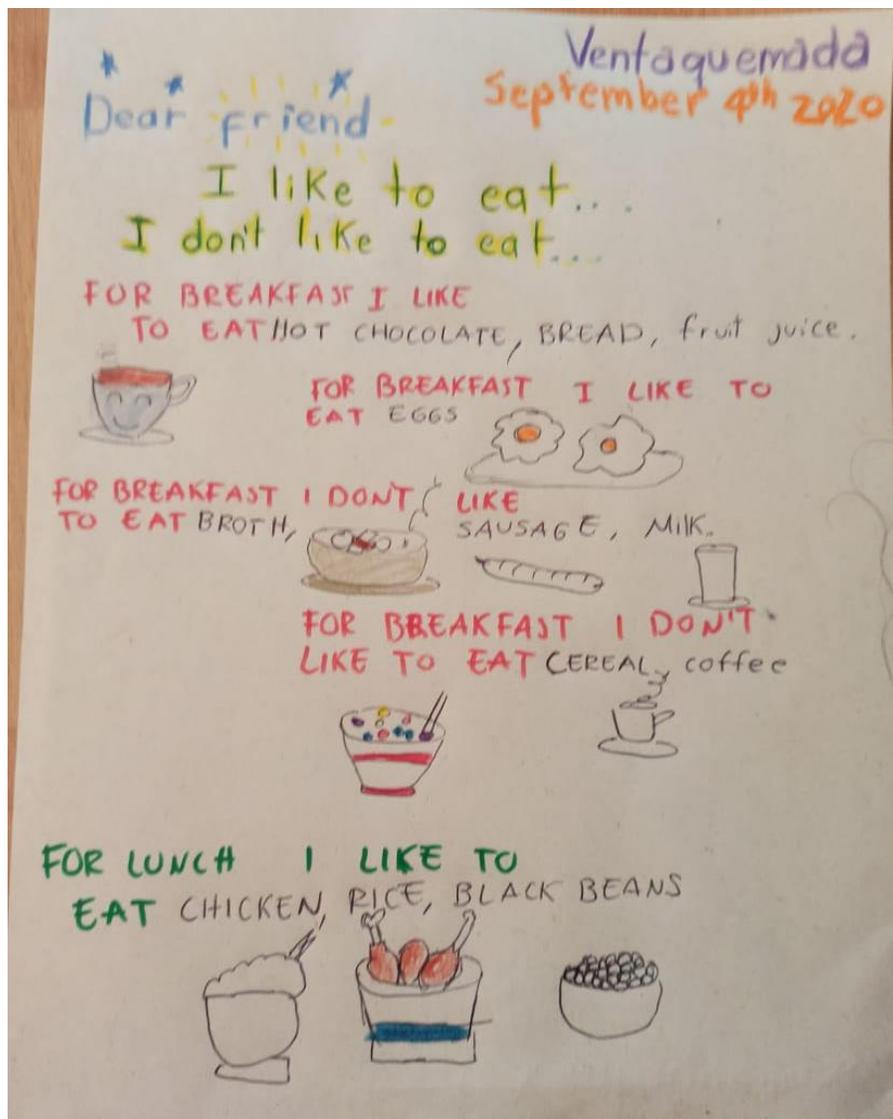
Hello friend! Estoy muy feliz por haber recibido tu carta, me gustó saber lo que te hace feliz, triste y enojado, a veces cuando estamos encerrados las emociones son más intensas y no sentimos mal o nos molestan cosas simples, sin embargo es bueno tener una rutina para evitar sentirnos mal con nosotros o nuestra familia. A mi me distrae estudiar y hablar con mis amigos.

Hope to see you soon

Unicornia 

## DEVELOPING YOUNG LEARNERS' EFL WRITING SKILLS

Sample letter sent by the teacher 2



DEVELOPING YOUNG LEARNERS' EFL WRITING SKILLS

Video sent by the teacher



PowerPoint slides send by the teacher



## DEVELOPING YOUNG LEARNERS' EFL WRITING SKILLS

## Annex 10

*Activities proposed by the institution*

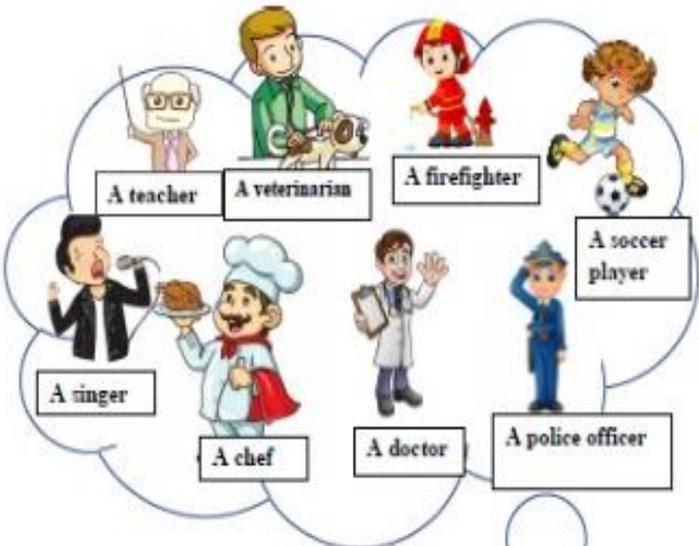

**INSTITUCIÓN EDUCATIVA TÉCNICA FUERTE DE PIEDRA**  
**VENTAQUEMADA - BOYACÁ**  
 Res 2010 del 21 de Octubre de 2008. CANT. 2535000055  
 NIT 900070966-3 Celular: 310496045 y 310490762  
**APRENDIENDO EN CASA**

**TALLER 5**

**DOCENTE:** Johana Lisseth Santana    **ÁREA:** INGLÉS    **GRADO:** TERCERO  
**PERIODO:** 2    **TEMA:** Profesiones  
**OBJETIVO:** Reconocer el vocabulario de las profesiones y expresar la profesión que me gustaría tener.

**1. Observe the picture and read the vocabulary.**  
 Observa la imagen y aprende las palabras.

**What would you like to be?**



A teacher    A veterinarian    A firefighter    A soccer player  
 A singer    A chef    A doctor    A police officer

I would like to be ....

## DEVELOPING YOUNG LEARNERS' EFL WRITING SKILLS

**2. Write the appropriate profession .**

Escribe la profesión apropiada

I would like to be a firefighter 

I would like to be a \_\_\_\_\_ 

I would like to be a \_\_\_\_\_ 

I would like to be a \_\_\_\_\_ 

I would like to be a \_\_\_\_\_ 

**3. Make a line to match the profession with the activity that he performs.**

Haz una línea para unir la profesión con la actividad que el desempeña.

 I want to make delicious food 

 I want to teach to children. 

 I want to play with a ball. 

 I want to help sick people. 

 I want to put out the fire 



INSTITUCIÓN EDUCATIVA TÉCNICA PUERTE DE PIEDRA  
VENTAQUEMADA - BOYACÁ

Res 2010 del 21 de Octubre de 2008 DANE 25351000155  
NIT 900070955-3 Celular: 3102495345 y 3102492062

#### 4. Complete the sentences- Completa las oraciones

I would like to be a doctor because I want to help sick people

I would like to be a \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to be a \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to be a \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to be a \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_



I would like to be a teacher because I  
want to teach to children  
now you 🙋, what would you like to  
be?

5. Draw yourself. Then,  
answer the question  
picking one of the  
professions above  
Dibujate a ti mismo.  
Luego, responde la  
pregunta eligiendo una de  
las profesiones de arriba.

I would like to be  
a \_\_\_\_\_ because I  
want to \_\_\_\_\_.

