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The impact of Cambridge KEY writing guidelines on 10th graders writing performance

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Resumen:

Aunque el desarrollo de la escritura se fomenta a través de estrategias y directrices, hay algunas escuelas que no adaptan esas estrategias o directrices para desarrollar las habilidades de escritura de los estudiantes, y este es el caso de una escuela pública en Ecuador. Dado que esta escuela pública no contaba con directrices de escritura estandarizadas para la enseñanza, se propuso aplicar las Directrices de Escritura de Cambridge Key en la escuela, y, por lo tanto, el estudio tiene como objetivo determinar los efectos de la implementación de las directrices de escritura de Cambridge KEY en el dominio de la escritura de estudiantes de décimo grado. El estudio se llevó a cabo en una escuela primaria rural pública ubicada en Cuenca, Ecuador. Entre los participantes, nueve eran mujeres y diez eran hombres, pertenecientes al décimo grado. Este estudio adaptó un diseño cuasi-experimental sin grupo de control. Los datos se recopilaron a través de un pretest y un posttest, que consistieron en una tarea de escritura de un correo electrónico de nivel A2. Después de recopilar los datos, se analizaron a través de la prueba de rangos con signo de Wilcoxon para datos no distribuidos normalmente. El análisis estadístico muestra que los estudiantes en realidad tuvieron una mejora en su desempeño de escritura después de ser enseñados y evaluados a través de las directrices y rúbrica de escritura de Cambridge Key. A un nivel más específico, también mejoraron en términos de contenido, logro comunicativo, lenguaje y organización. Por lo tanto, se sugiere la aplicación de la directriz de escritura de Cambridge para enseñar a escribir en las aulas de nivel A2.

Palabras claves: Pautas de escritura Cambridge, rendimiento de escritura, rúbricas Cambridge, estudiantes ecuatorianos de inglés como lengua extranjera de nivel A2

Abstract:

Although the development of writing is fostered through strategies and guidelines, there are some schools that do not adapt those strategies or guidelines in order to develop the writing skills of students, and this is the case of one public school in Ecuador. Since this public school did not count on writing guidelines standard to teach, it was proposed to apply the Cambridge Key Writing Guidelines in the school, and hence the study aims to determine the effects of implementing the Cambridge KEY writing guidelines on the writing proficiency of 10th graders. The study was conducted in a public rural elementary school located in Cuenca, Ecuador. Among the participants, nine of them were females and ten were males, belonging to the tenth grade. This study adapted a quasi-experimental design without a control group. The data was collected through a pretest and posttest, which consisted of an A2 email writing task. After collecting the data, it was analyzed through the Wilcoxon signed-rank test for non-normally distributed data. The statistical analysis shows that students actually had an improvement in their writing performance after being taught and assessed through the Cambridge Key writing guidelines and rubric. At a more specific level, they also improved in terms of content, communicative achievement, language, and organization. Therefore, the application of the Cambridge writing guideline is suggested to teach writing in classrooms at the A2 level.

Keywords: Cambridge writing guidelines, writing performance, Cambridge rubrics, A2 Ecuadorian EFL students

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1. INTRODUCTION

Research Context

Writing is a fundamental skill that serves as a cornerstone of communication and expression in any language. Its importance transcends linguistic boundaries, playing a pivotal role in academic, professional, and personal contexts. In their 2019 article, Steve Graham and Karen R. Harris emphasize the multifaceted role of writing, stating that "writers use this versatile skill to learn new ideas, persuade others, record information, create imaginary worlds, express feelings, entertain, and reflect." According to the Ministry of Education (2016), the development of writing proficiency empowers Ecuadorian learners to navigate the complexities of a globalized world and engage meaningfully with diverse communities.

The teaching of writing poses multifaceted challenges for educators. Rashid and Hui (2022) state that “because instructors do not grasp their students’ issues, they offer little writing advice.” (p.2) Another challenge is the lack of concrete guidelines that can guide students in their writing process. Rashid and Hui (2022) reiterate that students’ written work frequently displays flaws, particularly in the structures and concepts they convey. While the value of cultivating writing skills is widely recognized, instructors grapple with various obstacles in their efforts to effectively impart this essential skill to students. According to Liang and Fung (2021), these challenges range from addressing language proficiency disparities and cultural differences to fostering creativity and critical thinking in written expression.

One particular context where these challenges are evident is in Ecuador. Students’ lack of clear guidance to improve their writing skills poses a significant challenge within the educational system (Rieckmann et al, 2022) and this is compounded by a pronounced deficiency in English proficiency among students, a well-recognized challenge in Ecuadorian education. “The abysmal level of English proficiency in Ecuador according to the EF English Proficiency Index has become a habitual reference point when

discussing English learning in Ecuador" (De Angelis, 2022). This deficiency not only affects students' ability to communicate effectively in English but also has significant implications for their academic and professional prospects.

In this context, writing skills emerge as a particularly critical area of concern, as they are fundamental to success across various academic subjects and future career paths. The English curriculum of the Ministry of Education describes the need to prepare Ecuadorians for a globalized world (Ministerio de Educación, 2016). Thus, the need to effectively prepare students in writing at their current level arises.

Problem Statement

Writing instruction poses significant challenges in a public school with approximately 290 students, including 19 in the 10th grade. The English curriculum relies on modules created by the Ministry of Education, which primarily emphasize reading comprehension rather than writing development. These modules require students to read passages and answer related questions but lack structured guidance for developing writing skills. In addition, the content being taught is repetitive and limited in variety, apart from that, there are also time constraints where students are only receiving three hours of English instruction per week. This is the reason as to why the teachers are only able to cover three of the six modules per school year. Thus, this leads to students not receiving the writing instruction they need in order to develop the necessary skills to produce coherent and well-structured written work.

With the absence of clear, well-structured writing guidelines, the issue worsens. Despite the teacher's best efforts to plan engaging lessons while also accommodating for the students' special needs, the Ecuadorian curriculum fails to produce any sort of guidance for writing instruction. As a result, the students do not receive consistent feedback on their writings, that could be used to help them improve. Without

having set clear criterion for writing, students will continue to struggle developing their writing proficiency skills as they are unaware of what a clear and well-organized writing should appear as.

The consequences of inadequate writing instruction are evident in student performance. The consequences of not having adequate writing instruction are evident when considering the students grades on previous writing tasks. Without having clear guidelines students will struggle to organize ideas, maintain coherence with their responses and demonstrate their proficiency. AlMawarni (2020) found that students often struggled in achieving the level of writing proficiency required as well as their critical thinking skills. Similarly, in a study conducted by Syafii (2019), it was noted that English teachers are prioritizing teaching grammar instead of teaching the writing process. This has led students to solely rely on teachers' explanations during class rather than develop their own writing skills. A negative effect from these challenges, are the low writing test scores and the numerous amounts of students that need to take a remedial exam to be able to pass the subject and move on to the next school year as documented in the grade records. Implementing structured writing guidelines, such as those provided by the Cambridge framework, could address these issues effectively. The Cambridge guidelines establish clear expectations for writing tasks, enabling students to understand how to structure their work properly. Additionally, feedback based on these guidelines would help students identify specific areas for improvement, fostering their writing development over time. By incorporating standardized writing instruction, students could enhance their writing proficiency, better prepare for academic challenges, and improve their overall language skills.

Importance of the study

The absence of structured writing guidelines negatively impacts students' ability to develop their writing skills effectively. Without clear benchmarks, students struggle to understand writing expectations, leading to disorganized and underdeveloped compositions. Research by Beh and Ganapathy (2021)

highlights the necessity of integrating cognitive tools and task-oriented strategies to scaffold writing instruction effectively. Despite the Ecuadorian curriculum's inclusion of writing guidelines, their practical implementation remains insufficient. Ensuring these guidelines are incorporated into instruction is crucial for helping students reach the A2 proficiency level.

In order to improve students' writing proficiency, it is essential to implement structured writing guidelines. A study from Finn et al. (2020) showed the effect of structured feedback and how it is able to shape the students' progress in their writing development. As it is known, insufficient feedback will impede students from refining their abilities. Providing explicit guidelines and feedback will provide students the opportunity to improve their writing.

The guidelines from Cambridge KEY English can be used to assess writing proficiency from students while ensuring accurate and consistent feedback. According to Cambridge (2024), their guidelines allow for clear goals for the students to reach. By including these internationally recognized standards, students will be able to receive the guidance and feedback needed for writing development.

As Cambridge has been globally recognized as having great standards for English education, they have enhanced the credibility of educational programs that utilize their standards. Syafii (2019) proves the importance of having well-defined writing prompts and rubrics for assessment purposes. However, in the context of the current research they are lacking, which could be a reason as to why students do not achieve the A2 level required by the Ministry of Education. This study aims to implement the Cambridge Key guidelines and rubrics to improve the writing performance of 10th-grade students, ensuring they receive the necessary support to develop their writing skills effectively.

In this regard, the following research questions were proposed:

Main research question

What is the impact of the Cambridge Writing guidelines on the writing performance of A2 EFL students in an Ecuadorian public school?

General Objective

To determine the impact of the Cambridge Writing guidelines on the writing performance of A2 EFL students in an Ecuadorian public school

Specific objectives

1. To assess A2 EFL students' performance in content of writing tasks before and after the application of the Cambridge Writing guidelines through a pretest and posttest
2. To assess A2 EFL students' performance in organization of writing tasks before and after the application of the Cambridge Writing guidelines through a pretest and posttest
3. To assess A2 EFL students' performance in language in writing tasks before and after the application of the Cambridge Writing guidelines through a pretest and posttest
4. To evaluate A2 EFL students' overall writing performance before and after the application of the Cambridge Writing guidelines through a pretest and posttest.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In education, the development of proficient writing skills holds paramount importance for academic success and future endeavors. However, many students and teachers may encounter obstacles in honing their writing abilities due to the lack of comprehensive writing guidelines. Recognizing the significance of this issue, this literature review explores various aspects related to the development of writing skills, through the use of writing guidelines, with a particular focus on the Cambridge Key Writing guidelines. By delving into existing research and scholarly discourse, this review seeks to provide insights into the potential benefits of

implementing Cambridge guidelines in educational settings, contributing to a deeper understanding of effective pedagogical practices to foster writing skills among students.

2.1. Previous Studies

Ai-hua Chen (2022) had conducted a study in Taiwan in Providence University, in which she investigated how incorporating writing strategy training into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class would impact the learners' strategy use and writing performance. The study involved having two groups of adult EFL learners: the first is an experimental group that had received explicit writing strategy instruction given by EFL teachers over 14 weeks. The second group in this study were not shifted from their normal education, they continued to follow the standard curriculum without any form for training that would enhance their writing ability. As such, the mixed-methods approach was chosen to gather quantitative data through questionnaires as well as pre and posttests within the intervention period. This study also gathered qualitative data from reflective journals that were created by the experimental group that would show how the EFL learners felt throughout the process. The study followed up with significant improvements as its results, in the use of writing strategies and writing proficiency compared to the control group that did not reach these levels. As such, the conclusion that was reached was that explicit writing instruction can indeed enhance learners' writing performance. A follow up recommendation from the study is for other educators to apply a process-based approach in writing instruction for EFL students.

Dávila and Espinoza (2019) conducted a research study that has the main focus of finding out the effects from the implementation of sentence structures when teaching academic writing to university level, Ecuadorian EFL students. 30 B2 level students from an Ecuadorian university participated in this study. The study is based on a mixed-methods approach that incorporates data that is both quantitative and qualitative used to understand the impact of sentence structures on the student's writing ability. Dávila and Espinoza's

intervention plan focused on providing these B2 students with predetermined sentence structures to help them create well-organized academic essays. The results from this study showed that the students who were actively taught with the sentence structures performed better in the areas of sentence coherence, grammatical accuracy, variety in sentence types and text organization in their academic writings.

The 2014 study named: *The Impact of Cambridge English Examinations on Institutional Change*, by Rozzi et al., explored how the Cambridge English exams had affected four language schools within Argentina. The study purely used qualitative methods, including interviews with head teachers and staff, and analysis of the institutions documents to be able to understand how these exams were created and their influence on English practices. The findings revealed that while the exams had led to improvements in English teaching standards, the adaptation process was different across institutions. Teachers were able to note increased motivation amongst the students, yet there existed challenges, such as preparing younger students for exams while balancing the curriculum. The study concluded that by incorporating the use of Cambridge exams, it can promote changes but it also requires time and support from the school so that they can align with their institutional goals.

The studies done by Chen (2022), Dávila and Espinoza (2019), and Rozzi et al. (2014) were able to provide valuable insights into both writing instruction and the role of structured methodologies within EFL classes. Chen's research provided information on the effectiveness of explicit writing strategy instruction in being able to improve their learners' writing proficiency, which supports the idea of the effectiveness that the structured approach used in this thesis, brings. Similarly, Dávila and Espinoza's (2019) study emphasizes how sentence structures helped their students develop coherence and fluency skills and abilities in academic writing. Their findings aligned with the need for organized instruction in Cambridge A2 writing tasks, reiterating the level of importance scaffolding techniques have when trying to improve student's writing

development. Additionally, Rozzi et al. (2014) proved the impact of Cambridge exams on institutional practices, demonstrating that these exams have influence on the curriculum design and instructional approaches. This further proves the necessity of structured frameworks, such as those implemented in this thesis, to support students' writing development.

Although the researches addressed previously are focused on writing and suggested solutions, no studies have specifically focused on the application of Cambridge A2 guidelines in Ecuadorian EFL classrooms, particularly for teaching email writing. While some explore strategy instruction and institutional changes related to using the Cambridge assessments, a study that focuses on using the Cambridge guidelines still does not exist in Ecuador. This thesis' goal is to fill in the gap by providing a study based on the use of the Cambridge guidelines to meet needs of EFL learners in Ecuador. By doing so, it contributes to the local educational practices and discussions on how effective implementing writing instruction from Cambridge can be in Ecuador.

2.2. Conceptual Framework

This research is primarily based on the constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes how active engagement, social interaction, and meaningful context are of the utmost importance in a learning setting. According to two constructivists, Piaget (1972) and Vygotsky (1987), learners are able to construct knowledge primarily through experiences and interactions, building upon knowledge already attained in the past to be able to develop deeper understanding. In this context, the Cambridge A2 guidelines align with constructivism, as they allow students to engage in authentic writing tasks, such as responding to email prompts, this in turn builds upon their knowledge about emails.

Effective writing instruction relies on clear guidelines and structured feedback in order to support student development in writing. Constructivism points out how the role of social interaction is crucial, as

well as having teacher feedback and guided discussions with them for the co-construction of knowledge and the overall refinement of writing skills (Palincsar, 1998). This research is based on the idea that students' writing performance will improve when they are actively participating within the learning process. Through the use of guided practices and scaffolding strategies from the teachers, students can learn how they should organize their ideas, how to apply grammatical structures, and how to express their thoughts clearly. One of Constructivism's main views is that mistakes can be opportunities for learning, and feedback is used not only to be able to correct errors but to encourage the person to reflect in order to gain a deeper understanding of writing conventions. The rubrics that are from Cambridge do much more than just give a grade, it allows clear feedback to be provided as it's based on the evaluation criteria, and it help students understand their writing performance in a structured way. These rubrics contain three key aspects, they are: content, organization, and language use, providing targeted feedback in each specific area and information on who to attain a higher level.

By there being focus on the authentic tasks from Cambridge and collaborative learning environments, this framework supports the hypothesis that having students engaging in meaningful, writing tasks will enhance their linguistic ability to produce coherent, well-structured texts. The emphasis that this study is making on learner-centered activities and reflective practice ensures that the students will be more willing to focus on writing strategies and progressively develop their confidence as writers.

2.3. Common European Framework of References (CEFR)

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is a document that contains frameworks that needs to be followed to attain mastery within a language. Originally created by the Council of Europe, the CEFR became the global standard for language teaching and assessment (Savski, & Prabjandee, 2022). Its use reached across many continents, including nations such as Japan, China, Taiwan,

Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, Peru, Uruguay, and Ecuador that have adopted its principles and methodologies to shape their own language education system and practices (Franz & Teo, 2017). The reason as to why these nations are using the CEFR, is in part due to the comprehensive framework for language proficiency assessment it contains as well as its emphasis on communicative competence (Council of Europe, 2022).

The CEFR's integration with the Ecuadorian curriculum has created significant benefits in language education. Since the CEFR provides standardized benchmarks for all language proficiency levels, the Ecuadorian curriculum has adapted to it, now being based on the international language qualifications when it comes to learning a language. Thus, the Ministry of Education (2016) aligned their curriculum with the CEFR, in order to have clear guidelines set for students learning a language at each educational level. With this in Ecuador's curriculum, English students can receive clearer learning objectives and improved forms of assessment practices. Furthermore, the CEFR has promoted students to achieve communicative competence through the use of linguistic diversity and international communication (Council of Europe, 2020). However, the CEFR frameworks still require educators to take into consideration the local contexts, the culture diversity of the students, resources in the classroom and the educator's training (Alvarez & Guevara, 2021). Being able to use the CEFR while these issues are present is challenging, but essential if educators are to provide meaningful and effective education to their students.

Ecuador's education with the inclusion of the CEFR is shown to be also aligned with the constructivist theory, this is due to the emphasis made on learner-centered, active engagement and developing communication competence found in the CEFR. In constructivism, knowledge is gained through experience and interaction (Vygotsky, 1978), which is directly linked to CEFR-based methodologies in which there is focus on authentic language use, collaborative learning, and scaffolding strategies. Due to

Ecuador's integration of the CEFR, students no longer rely on habitual memorization. Its focus is shifted now to promote meaningful communication and self-regulated learning. This provides learners with an opportunity to develop linguistic competency through interaction with other learners and with the use of guided instruction. (Council of Europe, 2020). Moreover, the CEFR-aligned rubrics and assessment criteria serve as a scaffolding tool that teachers are able to use in order to guide students in their language development, this is because teachers can provide constructive feedback to their students, through the refinement of metacognitive awareness and skill refinement (Alvarez & Guevara, 2021). This approach reinforces the constructivist view that learning is a social and reflective process, where feedback and reflection play a very essential role in the development of the four language skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening).

2.4. English as a Foreign Language Curriculum in Ecuador

Ecuador's EFL curriculum is fully based on the CEFR framework, which has become the standard for English teaching and proficiency assessment in the country (Ministry of Education of Ecuador, 2016). This framework has divided language proficiency into six levels (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, and C2), while defining what learners are able to accomplish in the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, at each stage (Council of Europe, 2001).

The national curriculum mandates that all students must reach the A2 level by the end of secondary education, while students in "bachillerato" are expected to achieve B1 (Ministerio de Educación, 2016). A2 learners should be able to understand and communicate in simple terms about routine situations, such as describing everyday activities and being able to exchange basic information with another person (Council of Europe, 2018). To support the students to reach these proficiency goals, the curriculum integrates communicative language teaching (CLT) and task-based language learning (TBL), which make emphasis on

real-world communication instead of grammatical drills (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Research suggests that these approaches are able to improve students' ability to use English in real or authentic contexts (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004).

From a constructivist viewpoint, the CEFR is providing a framework that is encouraging scaffolded learning, this permits students to build their language skills through the use of meaningful interaction (Bruner, 1983). Constructivism views learning as an active process in which students construct knowledge based on the prior experiences they have had as well as with real-world applications (Vygotsky, 1978). The Ecuadorian curriculum incorporates constructivist principles into the classrooms by promoting student-centered learning, and encourage the use of authentic communicative tasks, collaboration with classmates/peers, and utilization of problem-solving skills in English. Additionally, the CEFR-aligned curriculum encourages the use of formative assessment practices, this enables students to be able to self-monitor their progress while also being able to adjust the learning strategies accordingly (Council of Europe, 2018; Little, 2009).

However, while Ecuador's curriculum is actively promoting communicative and student-centered approaches, many classrooms are still relying on the same traditional teacher-centered methods, this limits students from having opportunities for active engagement (Cárdenas et al., 2020; Pesántez et al., 2024). The curriculum must also address the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds the students have while being able to promote both language and content learning (Ministry of Education, 2016). According to Calle et al. (2020), the curriculum's design has a significant influence in the teaching methods, content selection, and the overall educational experience of students.

Thus, Ecuador's adoption of the CEFR into the English curriculum establishes a structured approach to English learning with clear proficiency targets to aim for and methodological guidelines. However, being

able to ensure this alignment follows the constructivist principles requires ongoing improvements in classroom practice, teacher training, and resource allocation to foster a more dynamic and interactive language learning environment.

2.5. Curriculum Approach

The Cambridge English: Key (KET) exam makes emphasis on structured and incremental learning, aligned with the need for a well-defined curriculum that supports the English learners' skill development over time. This exam includes basic writing tasks, such as writing short messages and email writing prompts, including them within the exam ensures that the students that pass are able to develop foundational writing skills (Cambridge Assessment English, 2020). As it is known, using explicit instruction in writing that focuses on grammar, vocabulary, and text organization assists students in improving their overall writing skills. Graham and Perin (2007) found that explicitly teaching these elements in the classroom leads to better writing quality. Likewise, Hyland (2003) highlights that incorporating different types of writing tasks, from creative pieces to analytical essays, helps students develop a broader range of writing abilities.

This structured approach works hand in hand with the Ecuadorian curriculum as it helps by providing clarity and consistency in the framework and guidelines, allowing educators to focus on progressively improving the students' skill-building abilities. By establishing clear learning objectives and assessment criteria, guideline like from the Cambridge KEY exam will help standardize instruction and ensure students receive exposure to essential writing strategies. Additionally, the use of formative assessment strategies, such as peer review and teacher feedback, support the students by allowing them to reflect and continue improving (Black & Wiliam, 1998).

However, Ecuador having experience with EFL curriculum implementation has shown that there are many challenges that can affect the successful integration of these guidelines. The common issues that

persist in EFL classes included overcrowded classroom and limited resources specifically technological tools have limited the effectiveness EFL programs can have. (Intriago et al., 2019) The previously mentioned factors can be impactful when an Educator is implementing Cambridge guidelines if a solution is not present. Since Ecuador's EFL curriculum is aligned with the CEFR framework, being able to incorporate the Cambridge KEY could further enhance educational instructional while promoting active learning.

2.6. Challenges in English as a Foreign Language Curriculum Implementation

Firstly, it must be made clear that being able to implement the EFL curriculum could bring positive effects, but there are challenges that hinder it from being the most effective it can be. Even with initiatives being taken, such as attempting to increase the number of instructional hours for English and introducing English into primary education (González, 2019), there were issues that were prohibiting their success in giving students better English education. The critical issue is that there is a shortage of qualified English teachers that do not have the necessary language proficiency nor the pedagogical skills to be able to effectively teach an English class (Calle et al., 2020). This problem is made worse as there are not many opportunities for teachers to receive professional development, this in turn leaves teachers ill-prepared to the requirements of the curriculum (Intriago et al., 2019)

Secondly, the other issue is not having suitable teaching materials or resources on hand, which results in educators and learners to not work as optimally as they should. Thus, many schools, particularly those that are located in the rural area, are without up-to-date textbooks, visual aids and technological tools that are crucial for effective language instruction to take place. (Calle et al., 2020). Besides the resource gap impeding the Educators use of the curriculum, it has an effect on students' engagement and learning outcomes. Lastly, large class sizes are a common issue found in most Ecuadorian school and this makes it a challenge for teachers to give individualized attention and implement interactive activities, which are known

as key aspects of any language acquisition class (Intriago et al., 2019). The issue with overcrowded classrooms is that the students are not given the number of opportunities they require to practice and develop their English language skills.

2.7. Teaching Writing in EFL Classrooms

To start, writing is known as a communication tool that people use to convey ideas, feelings, opinions, etc. As Harmer (2004) shared, writing is a way for individuals to convey personal expressions, while Abbas (2006) instead shares that writing skills provide a way for effective communication to exist with others. The importance of writing extends beyond being able to share personal expression, it is also of crucial importance for academic and professional success. According to Ariyanti (2020), writing skills are essential for achieving academic success and securing future career opportunities, proving that there is a need for effective instructional strategies in EFL classrooms.

Teaching writing in an EFL classroom requires a structured approach that helps learners develop coherence, organization, and accuracy in their writing. One effective method is the process writing approach, which emphasizes prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing (Seow, 2002). This approach encourages students to view writing as a recursive process rather than a one-time activity, enabling continuous improvement. Another effective strategy is genre-based instruction, where learners analyze model texts and practice writing within specific genres, such as emails, narratives, or argumentative essays (Hyland, 2007). This helps students understand the specific features and structures of different text types.

In addition, scaffolding techniques such as guided writing, sentence starters, and graphic organizers help learners structure their ideas before composing full texts (Vygotsky, 1978). These tools are used to provide support during the early stages of writing, as time passes students would gradually reduce the use of this assistance and become more proficient without it. Collaborative writing activities, including peer

feedback and group brainstorming, are also able to enhance students' ability to critique and refine their own work, which allows them to build up their confidence and gradually improve their writing skills (Storch, 2013).

Moreover, being able to integrate technology, such as digital writing tools and online platforms where feedback can be provided, allows learners to receive additional support and opportunities for revision apart from asking the teacher. Hyland and Hyland (2019) highlight that technology can offer real-time feedback and facilitate students in their writing process, which in turn will enhance both accuracy and creativity within the students' writing.

Another strategy that can be used in teaching environments for writing, is blended learning. This strategy is a combination of both, traditional face-to-face classes and online activities to further the learning process. Hassan et al (2021) conducted a study that resulted in being able to prove that learning had sizeable positive effects on ESL learners' writing skills in Malaysia, since it was providing flexible learning environments and access to diverse resources. Furthermore, the writing performance, motivation and engagement in learning the writing process is a result from using blended learning.

To wrap up, utilizing prewriting techniques such as, brainstorming and using mind maps can assist students in planning out their ideas and organizing them before they begin to write their actual written response. Guided practice methods, including scaffolding and collaborative writing, also provide structured support for the students and it enables them to be able to develop their writing skills progressively. Cumming (2001) discussed the importance of these strategies in second language writing development, as they noted that these strategies assist learners and permits them to navigate the complexities of writing in a completely new or different language.

2.8. The Use of Guidelines in Teaching Writing

Over time it has been shown that the use of structured writing guidelines, such as those found in the Cambridge KEY A2, provide a framework that is both clear and easy to follow for improving students' writing abilities. These guidelines emphasize specific criteria, such as organization, coherence, and linguistic accuracy, which are the main aspects needed for developing strong writing skills. He and Wang (2021) point out that students with exposure to structured writing frameworks allow them to outperform other students that are relying on unstructured methods, specifically with the organization in their ideas and production of cohesive texts.

The benefits when it comes to having structured guidelines, is their ability to promote critical thinking since students learn to analyze writing prompts, plan their responses, and structure their ideas logically. Hyland (2019) clarifies that this process of structured reflection on their writing is what allows learners to be able to do both understand a task and produce a coherent response. It is a skill that is particularly relevant for many real-life writing scenarios. The use of these guidelines provides students with a step-by-step process, which not only enhances their technical writing abilities but also promotes deeper engagement from the students with the task.

Furthermore, it is well-known that feedback has a crucial role when it comes to the effectiveness of using structured writing frameworks. Ferris (2014) proved that detailed feedback, when linked with rubrics like those that are provided by Cambridge, are what help students identify their strengths and areas for improvement in writing tasks. This process aligns with constructivist principles, where the extra support that is gained from feedback adds to their already existing knowledge which is what allows students to create improved writings.

Moreover, the use of structured frameworks allowed for personalized feedback, this allowed teachers and educators to addresses the specific learner needs. Graham and Perin (2007) came to the conclusion, that with the use of explicit instruction aimed directly at grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure, educators are able to ensure that learners are able to develop both confidence and competence within their writings. Additionally, the use of formative feedback and scaffolding can play a crucial role when enhancing the writing proficiency of learners. Hyland and Hyland (2019) emphasize that providing constructive, individualized feedback helps students identify specific areas for improvement while fostering self-regulation and autonomy in their learning process. This aligns with constructivist principles, as learners build upon prior knowledge through guided support, ultimately refining their writing skills and reinforcing the connection between structured instruction and student progress.

Structured writing tasks enhance students' writing skills by mirroring real-world applications, making learning more meaningful. Authentic learning increases motivation and deepens understanding (Herrington & Oliver, 2000). Writing tasks like emails and reports help students see the relevance of their work beyond the classroom (Hyland, 2007). Additionally, considering audience and purpose is essential for effective communication in academic and professional settings (Flower & Hayes, 1981). Research also shows that real-world writing instruction fosters critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Graham & Perin, 2007). This approach better prepares students for future writing demands.

While structured writing guidelines offer many benefits, their implementation in EFL classrooms comes with notable challenges and drawbacks. These factors range from large class sizes, limited resources within the class, and varying levels of teaching experience that can hinder the effective use of the EFL guidelines in Ecuador (Intriago et al., 2019). Additionally, students' diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds necessitated adaptable teaching strategies that catered to different learning needs (Graves & Garton, 2017).

To overcome these challenges, it is crucial to provide teachers with continuous training and support, this is to ensure that they are fully prepared with the necessary skills and knowledge to be able to implement the guidelines effectively. Moreover, with the incorporation of technological tools to collaborative learning, educators could enhance the writing process students will go through and make it more accessible for them (Pandey et al., 2021)

Rubrics specifically for writing have a vital role within EFL classes since they already establish clear criteria that educators can use to assess students written work. “They standardize the assessment process, ensuring consistency and fairness in grading, while offering detailed feedback crucial for students' development as writers” (Andrade, 2019). As the writing rubric breaks down the writing process into components such as content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics, this allows teachers to show consistency in grading to their students (Panadero & Jonsson, 2020).

While implementing rubrics, educators can inform their students about what they are expected to accomplish for each writing assignment, leading to them having an improved result in their written work. Huang and Wu (2019) found that while using rubrics in classes, students show significant improvements, specifically when it comes to self-assessing and revising their own work, this leads to a better overall writing quality. The KEY writing rubric from Cambridge can be used to set clear criteria in order for students to achieve success while assisting students in reaching a deeper understanding of what effective writing practices they may need to use in their written work.

2.9 Cambridge Key Guidelines for Writing Skills

The Cambridge A2 KEY guidelines are used as a structured approach to offer assistance to students in need of developing writing skills. (Cambridge, 2021). Writing tasks within Cambridge include writing stories and emails. While in the writing process, teachers encourage students to take into consideration three

key parts of an email. These parts are, knowing who the sender and the recipient are, the message that is being sent, and the number of words that are required in the task.

Teachers can go further by integrating these writing tasks into the curriculum and teach them the correct grammar and vocabulary that their students can use. With this, teachers are also able to provide clear and detailed feedback that is based on Cambridge's KEY rubric, strengthening their areas of strength and highlighting which areas are in need of improvement. The use of structured instruction ensures that students meet Cambridge KEY writing standards, which is particularly pertinent to this study.

In order for these guidelines to be able to be implemented in an effective manner, teachers need to focus on target instruction and having students consistently practice. There are several studies that prove that students are likely to achieve their learning goals if writing tasks are incorporated into their education (Tuttle, 2021). Students' exposure to the Cambridge writing tasks can allow them to be aware of the expectations they need to reach in order to proceed to the next level in their language learning experience. Furthermore, the students will gradually improve the use of their grammar, vocabulary and organizational skills. As Hasan (2022) found, rubric-based feedback significantly improved the writing skills of EFL students, as it provided clear expectations and provided learners with an opportunity to monitor their progress over time.

2.10. Cambridge KEY Writing Rubric

Based on standardized criteria aligned with the CEFR, the Cambridge Key writing rubric evaluates the writing skills of 10th-graders at the level of A2. In accordance with *Assessing Writing for Cambridge English Qualifications: A Guide for Teachers* by Cambridge (2024), the rubric assesses three main areas:

- **Content**: Addresses all task requirements comprehensively and provides all necessary information.
- **Organization**: Examines the logical flow of ideas, paragraph structure, and transitional language.

- **Language**: Evaluates the range and accuracy of vocabulary and grammar.

In studies, it has been demonstrated that using a rubric enhances student performance because it provides clear and structured guidelines. Based on Tuttle's 2021 research, the explicit criteria help students develop key writing components such as coherence, clarity, and linguistic accuracy, ultimately improving their overall performance. Moreover, Reddy (2007) notes that the rubric's transparency demystifies the grading process, fostering student confidence and promoting self-assessment. This structured approach also benefits teachers, as it enables them to diagnose student difficulties more effectively and tailor instruction to address specific weaknesses (Reddy & Andrade, 2019).

Successful implementation of the rubric, however, requires significant teacher training and a focus on ensuring student engagement (Ramirez & Lopez, 2022). Despite the fact that the rubric provides clear expectations, students may initially find its detailed criteria overwhelming, particularly if they have limited writing experience (Taylor et al., 2024). This can be mitigated by presenting the rubric as a formative learning tool, guiding students to use it for self-evaluation and revision rather than merely for assessment. When used effectively, the rubric supports a structured yet flexible writing process, reinforcing essential writing skills in a way that encourages long-term learning.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research approach and design

The study examines the effects of implementing Cambridge KEY writing guidelines on 10th graders' writing performance and as a result, it has been planned and conducted according to the quantitative approach. This aims to gain insight into social phenomena and to obtain meaningful conclusions from the collected data (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, it was possible to determine the impact of Cambridge writing

guidelines on students' writing abilities based on numerical statistics and patterns. Essentially, this technique tests hypotheses and makes general statements about a population based on a sample of that population.

Furthermore, the study was conducted using a quasi-experimental design without a control group. This quasi-experimental design was crucial to the study since it studies the effectiveness of the invention and its power to produce the effect under study, establishing the cause-and-effect relationship between a dependent and independent variable using a non-random method to assign groups (Costantini & Higginson, 2007). Alongside that, the quasi-experimental also includes a pretest and post-test design. Stratton (2019) notes that this design involves measuring a group of individuals before and after an intervention in order to determine whether it had a beneficial effect.

3.2. Participants and Setting

This study was conducted in a public rural school where students had only three hours of English instruction per week. The school where the participants were located had two classes each morning and afternoon. In the mornings, elementary children attended class, whilst in the afternoons, middle schoolers attended class from 12:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. Students were only taught until the 10th grade, after which they had to locate another school to complete their senior years. In addition, there were two English teachers who worked in the morning and afternoon shifts, respectively. Despite the fact that it was a small school, these teachers had access to all school facilities in order to teach, but since it was a small school, they shared them with other subject teachers.

In this regard, the population of the study consisted of eighteen middle schoolers in tenth grade. The students ranged in age from fourteen to fifteen years old. A mixed group of nine female and ten male participants shared similar characteristics, such as low socioeconomic status, Spanish as their native language, and mixed educational background. However, based on the levels of proficiency branching

approach used in the EFL curriculum and the CEFR, their proficiency level was lower than expected. In other words, since they are in 10th grade, their writing performance should be at the level of A2; however, this is not the case. This was demonstrated by the results of the pretest of this study, which indicated that their scores were below the standard expected based on the Cambridge rubric.

3.3. Sample Population

Accordingly, convenience sampling was used in this study, which involved selecting individuals with particular characteristics relevant to the study (Mackey & Gass, 2005). To put it another way, the students were selected based on their availability and similar characteristics, such as their proficiency level, age, and educational background. Therefore, 18 of the nineteen students in the class were selected for participation in the study. However, a learner with intellectual disability level 2 was not included in the statistical analysis due to a lack of inclusive instruction from the researchers. Although this student attended the classes given, he was not included in the statistical analysis since there was no accuracy in determining whether or not the instruction was being applied effectively to that one student in order to not compromise the reliability of the data to be collected.

3.4. Operationalization of variables

In this research, the independent variable was Cambridge guidelines and the dependent variable was student's writing performance in terms of content, organization, and language use. These variables are operationalized as follows:

	Variable	Conceptual definition	Operational definition
Independent	Cambridge KEY guidelines	A set of principles and standards used to guide and access the writing performance of A2-level EFL learners.	The implementation of specific Cambridge KEY writing tasks and scoring rubrics, which are used to evaluate students' performance in writing tasks. The tasks include email writings and other short written responses aligned with A2-level standards, as outlined in the Cambridge exam. As part of the rubric, three criteria are included: organization, content, and language usage.
Dependent	10th grade students writing performance	Writing performance is the ability to produce structured, coherent and accurate writings. It encompasses the effective communication of ideas, organization, cohesive arguments and use of language forms.	The student's writing performance is assessed through pre-test and post-test writing tasks, graded using the Cambridge KEY rubric. Performance is measure based on the key components such as content, organization and language use with scores ranging between 0-5 reflecting improvements or changes after the application of the guidelines

3.5. Techniques and instruments

In this study, the data was collected using testing, which, as outlined by Mawardi (2008), enables systematic feedback or data collection concerning particular traits, educational or physical characteristics. Through the use of a pre- and post-testing technique, it was possible to determine if students were improving their writing skills or not. As Taufik et al. (2019) state, pre- and post-tests are used to determine whether there have been any changes as a result of the implementation. This means that the grades of the students helped in determining if there had been an improvement during the writing process.

As well, the instruments used throughout this study were Cambridge grading rubrics and Cambridge writing prompts. With regard to Cambridge rubrics, they did not need to undergo a validation procedure since Cambridge Press University had already validated them. The Cambridge rubric used was called Analytical rubric. It evaluates multiple performance scales that focus on one criterion at a time. In this regard, the rubric was divided into four categories, with content, communication achievement, organization, and language at the top and numbers one through five at the bottom. One being below the expected level,

and five being at or exceeding the expected level, in this case A2. On that account, this was used for the grading portion of the pre- and post-tests.

A second instrument used was the Cambridge email writing task. These tasks were taken from Cambridge guiding books and were selected based on the topics that they were reviewing in class, as they were already familiar with them. The writing tasks provided the participants with instructions and three prompts which they had to use to develop their writing. As Cambridge email writing tasks are authentic materials, they were selected over the other writing task options provided by Cambridge guidelines. For the purpose of teaching students how to reply to or write an email in an everyday situation. Making it meaningful and useful in students' learning. This instrument has reliability, validity and practicality since it has gone through a piloting process that helped notice if it is appropriate for tenth grade students.

3.6. Phases of research

In the course of the research, four phases were involved. During the first phase of the intervention, the school authority and parents are required to sign a consent form and the pretest and posttest are piloted. Furthermore, the second phase involved administering the pre-test. In the third phase, the intervention was implemented. Lastly, the posttest was applied in the fourth phase.

3.6.1. First phase

This study was conducted in a rural area with all the necessary facilities for the education of students. To begin with, permission was requested from the school on the first day of the intervention. The school principal signed a consent letter authorizing the study to take place at the school (See annex A). Following that week, the second week, once the school's principal had approved and expressed his willingness to assist with the research, permission was sought from parents to participate in the study. In a meeting with parents,

the class teacher and researchers asked them verbally for permission to allow students to take part. As soon as the parents agreed, the study began.

In the third week, the piloting process was conducted by a fourth-semester class at the Universidad Nacional de Educación UNAE. Having no other students of their age available, these students were selected as participants. However, these participants had similar characteristics to the public-school participants, such as their level of proficiency. The piloting process started with providing instructions about the email writing task and giving them the paper. Afterwards, students got into doing the test. Due to the fact that learners were already familiar with the format of the test, they had no questions about it during the process, making it easier. No introduction was needed for the participants to follow Cambridge guidelines, and since the posttest was also being piloted, their familiarity was beneficial for the process. Moreover, the completion of the test took 20 minutes of a given class period. Afterwards, papers were collected and graded according to the Cambridge rubric by other teachers to avoid bias.

3.6.2. Second phase

On the fourth week, after the piloting procedure, the pre-test was administered to the participants without the presence of the researchers (See annex B). Due to the students' unfamiliarity with the researchers and in an effort to avoid creating a stressful environment for them, it was decided to do it in such a way that they could develop their tests in a stress-free environment. In this case, the chosen writing test centered around the topic of running, and it served as a pre-test for students at the A2-level since they were familiar with that topic. The exam was well-suited to their level of English proficiency, making it an ideal test to gauge their initial writing abilities. To ensure unbiased results, learners had no prior knowledge of the Cambridge guidelines. Using the Cambridge rubric (See annex C), another teacher graded the participants'

tests using the Cambridge rubric in order to ensure biased results. In this regard, the results were stored for future comparison with the post-test results.

3.6.3. Third phase: application of the treatment proposal

The goal of the third phase was to focus on the application of the treatment proposal which is the implementing Cambridge writing guidelines on students' performance in email tasks (See annex D). This phase had a duration of 16 weeks, and consisted of interventions that were focused on improving the students' writing skills. The interventions were prepared in order to provide students with opportunities for them to engage with real-life email writing topics such as birthday party invitations, shopping, and sports, based on their likes, leading to a more meaningful learning experiences and enhanced motivation (Weir, 2013). The focus on the intervention was primarily on the key components of email writing. This includes content, organization, and language use or vocabulary, which overall is of crucial importance for both academic and personal success.

The intervention in total required 32 instructional hours in the 16 weeks. In order to accomplish this, the 32 hours were divided into four key sections: content, organization, language, testing, and practice. Each section was designed to progressively enhance students' writing skills through structured lessons and activities that made them use the recently learned information in order to complete. A detailed plan breakdown for the implementation is as followed:

During the first four intervention classes that date from September 13 to September 27, the focus was on building a foundation for email writing. This was to ensure that students had a strong grasp of the content-related aspects in an email. With the baseline of the students' knowledge already established thanks to the pre-test, students were introduced to the Cambridge KEY writing guidelines. The classes focused on the students learning about the purpose, structure, and expectations when writing an email writing. The

students practiced by analyzing prompts and using techniques such as highlighting, and identifying keywords to extract key details from the prompt that they will need to take into account before writing. Following this, lessons on email structure were conducted, where students learned about the essential components: greeting, body, and closing, and how they differ in formal and informal contexts. They engaged in activities where they deconstructed sample emails and identified their structural elements. Vocabulary instruction was also introduced, the class was focused on teaching commonly used words and phrases in email writing. Lessons incorporated practical exercises where students inserted new vocabulary into writing samples and were taught the difference between formal and informal vocabulary. Afterwards, grammar instruction was taught especially for present simple and past simple tenses, which they were learning. This ensured that the students could construct grammatically correct emails. Throughout this phase, key exam mock tests were conducted which allowed students to apply their skills in realistic writing scenarios.

The next four intervention periods were from October 8 to October 25, the focus was now moving to improve students' ability to organize their thoughts within an email in an effective manner. The lessons emphasized structuring information logically, sequencing ideas in a chronological order or based on importance, while also using linking words such as "and," "but," "so," and "because" to improve cohesion between ideas. Brainstorming activities were conducted in order to help students generate ideas before writing, as such they were also introduced to graphic organizers and bullet points as tools and strategies for structuring their thoughts when they are having trouble on what they want to write. Additionally, students were taught how to adjust tone and style in email writing, this was done by analyzing examples of formal and informal emails, identifying differences in language use, and expressions. As we wanted students to be more exposed to other peer review activities, we encouraged students to highlight and categorize common phrases used in both types of emails. They practiced reading their email drafts aloud from their seats and

their classmates would evaluate them whether their messages were clear and structured. Finally, self-reviews were conducted in order to teach students how to critically analyze their writing for coherence and logical flow.

In these four interventions from November 8 to November 25, the classes were now concentrated on having the students refine their use of language skills to enhance clarity, variety, and appropriateness within their email writings. The lessons focused on sentence structure, and encouraged the students to construct clear and concise emails while avoiding redundant sentences that would hinder the message of the email from getting through. Students analyzed complex and ambiguous sentences and would rewrite in their own way for improved clarity. Lessons on vocabulary expansion were taught and introduced synonyms and varied sentence structures, this helped students make their writings more engaging and dynamic. A thesaurus activity was done in order to help students identify alternative words to replace the commonly overused ones. In addition, students learned topic-specific vocabulary for email themes such as for travelling, for school, and sports, practicing their application through role-playing exercises. Another key component of this phase was the importance of politeness and clarity in email communication. Students learned how to phrase requests and responses in a cordial manner while using expressions like "Could you please...?" and "I would appreciate it if..." They engaged in exercises where they transformed too direct or impolite statements into professional and courteous language, ensuring that their email writing was respectful and of the appropriate tone.

For the final four interventions that were from December 6 to December 20, the interventions were focused on reinforcing everything the students have learned through practice with email exam prompts and reviews of past topics that were seen in the intervention. During these classes, no new content was taught, this allowed for the students to be able to use the skills they had developed throughout the entirety of the

intervention. The timed email tasks mimicked the conditions of how the real test would be, because of this, students were able to keep practicing, build confidence and improve their ability to manage time during the post-test. Individualized feedback was provided after the email writing and it focused on the areas for improvement and the strengths in the students' writing. To review key concepts that were taught since the beginning of the implementation, a final session included a quiz game covering all the topics taught during the intervention. The quiz game reinforced learning in a fun and interactive way and allowed for students to use their critical thinking skills. Finally, students completed the post-test, that was similar to the pre-test, allowing for a comparative assessment to take place. To ensure unbiased grading, a different teacher with a C2 level of English education and extensive knowledge on the use of the Cambridge guidelines and rubric, graded the emails. For a comprehensive overview of the sixteen-week intervention and the detailed lesson plans, see Appendix E.

3.6.4. Fourth phase

In accordance with the intervention procedure, after 32 hours of instruction had been completed, a post-test was conducted (See annex F). The post-test was similar to the pre-test in format, with email prompts and instructions based on the Cambridge KEY exam. While the structure remained the same, the specific topic and names within the prompts were changed to avoid repetition; for instance, the topic was changed from running to swimming. In this way, the post-test was able to measure improvement without being biased by memorization or familiarity. To ensure an impartial grading process, another teacher graded the participants again using the Cambridge rubric with the objective of analyzing and comparing results from the pre-test.

3.7. DATA ANALYSIS

To determine the impact of implementing the Cambridge Key writing guidelines on students' writing performance and, hence, answer this study's research question, the scores obtained from the pretest and posttest were, first, analyzed separately and then compared.

To begin, the data were input and organized through SPSS (Version 25). Then, descriptive statistics served to explore the typical behavior of the data. The values of the mean, median, mode, and standard deviation (SD) of the pretest and posttest were calculated and displayed in Table 2. Next, the distribution of data was analyzed. The Shapiro-Wilk test was performed to determine the distribution. Mishra et al. (2005) states that this test is suitable to determine the distribution of a sample size under 50 participants. The results indicated that the data was non-normally distributed ($p<.05$), so a non-parametric test was selected.

The Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test, a non-parametric test, was applied to determine whether a difference existed between the participants' pretest and posttest scores. The differences were studied in terms of writing performance in each Cambridge KEY rubric criterion and overall writing performance. To determine statistical significance, a level of 5% was considered and the null (H0) and alternative (H1) hypotheses in Table 1 were established. Consequently, the H0 was rejected and H1 was accepted when the resulting *p*-value was < .05.

Table 1

Hypotheses for Rubric Criteria and Overall Writing Performance

Parameter	Type	Hypothesis
Content	H0	There is no statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest writing performance of A2 students regarding content.
	H1	There is a statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest writing performance of A2 students regarding content.
Organization	H0	There is no statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest writing performance of A2 students regarding organization.
	H1	There is a statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest writing performance of A2 students regarding organization.
Language Use	H0	There is no statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest writing performance of A2 students regarding language use.
	H1	There is a statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest writing performance of A2 students regarding language use.
	H0	There is no statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores of A2 students regarding their overall writing performance.

Overall Writing Performance	H1	There is a statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores of A2 students regarding their overall writing performance.

4. RESULTS/ DISCUSSION

4.1 Behavior of the pretest and posttest scores in the treatment group

Table 2 displays the typical behavior of data around measures of central tendency and dispersion. Considering the writing performance was graded out of 15 points, the average overall score in the pretest was lower than in the posttest by nearly 50%. Similarly, the scores of the pretest presented more variability (SD= 2.93) compared to the posttest, meaning their behavior in grades was not as homogenous as in the posttest (SD=1.90).

Table 2

Behavior of the Pretest and Posttest Scores

	N	Mean	Median	Mode	SD
Pretest	18	7.33	7	7	2.93
Posttest	18	13.11	13	15	1.90

4.2 Comparison of the pretest and posttest scores of each Cambridge KEY rubric criterion in the treatment group

Table 3 shows that students presented a significant change ($p < .05$) in their writing performance under each criterion assessed by the Cambridge KEY rubric after comparing the obtained scores of the pretest and posttest. Hence, the results of the Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test demonstrated that students benefited from the implementation of the Cambridge Writing Guidelines regarding content, organization, and language use.

Table 3

Comparison of the Pretest and Posttest Scores: Each Rubric Criterion

Criterion	Mean difference Posttest - Pretest	Z	p-value	Effect size (r)
Content	1.95	-3.67	.00	- .86
Organization	2.6	-3.78	.00	- .89
Language Use	1.78	-3.34	.00	- .78

4.3 Comparison of the pretest and posttest scores of the overall writing performance in the treatment group

Table 4 presents that there was a significant difference between the scores of the pretest and posttest ($p < .05$, $r = - .77$) when considering writing performance as a whole. After analyzing the results from the Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test, it was noticed that the application of the Cambridge Writing Guidelines had a large and positive impact on A2 students' overall writing performance.

Table 4

Comparison of the Pretest and Posttest Scores: Overall Writing Performance

	N	Mean	SD	Z	p-value	Effect size (r)
Pretest	18	7.33	2.93	-3.62	.00	- .77
Posttest	18	13.11	1.90			

4.4 Discussion

The results of this study align with findings from the previous research regarding the effectiveness of explicit writing instruction. Ai-hua Chen (2022) found that incorporating writing strategy training was able to lead to significant improvements in EFL learners' writing performance. Similarly, this study demonstrated notable progress in students' writing abilities across content, organization, and language use after implementing the Cambridge Writing Guidelines. The observed effect sizes in this study (ranging from -0.77 to -0.89) indicate strong improvements, reinforcing Chen's argument that explicit instruction enhances strategic awareness and proficiency. However, while Chen's study focused on strategy training, this study emphasized structural guidance through rubric-based assessment, which suggests that different instructional methods can also yield comparable improvements in writing proficiency. The difference in instructional approach may explain why this study found particularly strong improvements in organization (mean difference = 2.6), as students were provided with clear structural expectations from the beginning.

In contrast to Dávila and Espinoza (2019), who found that sentence structure formulas helped B2-level students improve coherence and grammatical accuracy, this study targeted A2-level learners using a rubric-based approach. The results from this research revealed that students were able to progress a sizeable amount, specifically in the organization area of the Cambridge KEY guidelines (r = -0.89). This result supports Dávila and Espinoza's conclusions from their research study as it that proved that structured writing instruction was of great benefit to EFL students as well as how effective the rubric-based approach was in their study. A possible reason this was the end result could be due to the emphasis made on teaching linking words and the structure for an A2 leveled email, within the implementation period. Additionally, the overall low scores in the pretest (M = 7.33) when being compared to Dávila and Espinoza's study, suggests that A2 students may have benefitted more from the implementation of the guidelines than B2 students.

The results from this study can relate to that of Rozzi et al (2014), that had the goal of measuring the impact of Cambridge exams on institutional change. Their study concluded that they were able to observe improvements in the post-test implementation of the Cambridge exam. Although their study aimed at balancing exam preparation with the curriculum needs, this study can suggest that using a structured approach, in this case, Cambridge writing guidelines, can be integrated into an existing curriculum without overwhelming the students. The effect observed (-0.77) in overall writing performance indicates that structured guidance can drive meaningful progress within a relatively short instructional period. However, the variability in students' individual progress, as seen in the standard deviations of the pretest (SD = 2.93) and posttest (SD = 1.90), suggests that while explicit guidance is beneficial, some students may require additional support to fully internalize writing strategies.

Overall, the results of this study confirm that structured writing instruction, particularly when aligned with a well-defined rubric, significantly enhances EFL students' writing performance. The similarities with previous studies reinforce the importance of explicit guidance in writing, while the differences suggest that A2 learners may benefit more from holistic structural frameworks rather than isolated formulaic strategies. Future research could explore how a combination of rubric-based instruction and strategic writing training might further optimize writing proficiency at various CEFR levels.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Having analyzed and discussed the quantitative results of this study, the following conclusions can be reached.

- Interestingly, Cambridge Key writing guidelines were found to positively impact the writing performance of public school A2 level students. It appears that the students' writing skills improved as a result of following a well-structured guide when teaching writing. The consistency of practice

and the use of an instrument to grade students' writing performance enabled students to demonstrate their skills in writing more effectively.

- Moreover, students performed well on all rubric criteria, including organization, communication achievement, language and content. According to the pretest, students scored low on each of the criteria due to their lack of prior knowledge regarding how to construct a well-structured piece of writing. They were taught writing without any guidelines. Students however, improved after the Cambridge Key Writing Guidelines were implemented, primarily due to the lesson interventions that were conducted to teach learners how to write using the guidelines.
- In this regard, after the intervention and introduction of the guidelines and rubric, students' writing skills have improved in general. Resulting in improved performance during the post-test and receiving the desired results. Furthermore, it is necessary to develop their understanding of writing organization and vocabulary, ensuring that they are aware that writing involves brainstorming, planning, and selecting the appropriate words. These guidelines provide an effective and beneficial educational approach that promotes writing production, critical thinking, and organizational skills.
- Lastly, as with any research project, the present study has some limitations. As a result of the small sample size used in the study, findings cannot be generalized to all public schools. Secondly, there was no control group in the study; in this regard, having another group that did not receive any treatment might have provided researchers with a better indication of whether any observed changes were the result of experimental manipulation rather than external factors. Finally, this study was limited to testing students' performance rather than their perception of the guidelines.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations become relevant.

- The Cambridge writing guidelines should be provided to public school teachers regardless of the level at which they are teaching writing. These guidelines proved to be beneficial to students' writing skills. When students are taught with appropriate guidance, structure, and practice, they are able to become more skilled in writing and boost their level of confidence toward that particular topic as writing is one of the skills that most learners struggle with.
- Furthermore, it is recommended that the Cambridge rubrics be used in conjunction with the Cambridge writing guidelines when grading since these rubrics also help teachers determine where students need additional practice and assistance. This will be beneficial for both students and teachers when it comes to giving and receiving clear and precise feedback. As observed throughout the study, students were evaluated using Cambridge rubrics, which helped them identify areas for improvement in their writing skills.
- Furthermore, although this study was conducted with a small population, it is recommended that the study be conducted with a larger sample size. In this way, the reliability of the study will be increased since we will know if other public schools could benefit from Cambridge writing guidelines. Enhancing students' writing skills and demonstrating that Cambridge writing guidelines should be implemented in all public schools throughout the country, and in this sense, learners will receive an appropriate education.
- As a final point, there are only a limited number of Cambridge-related studies conducted in Ecuador, which limits the number of references available for this study and highlights a gap in the existing literature. Therefore, we recommend conducting more Cambridge studies in Ecuador in order to provide a stronger foundation for future research, support evidence-based educational practices, and contribute to the academic development of the region. Contributing to the enrichment of the local

academic landscape and the adaptation of successful educational strategies from Cambridge to the Ecuadorian context, fostering a more robust and globally connected educational system.

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8. APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
School Consent Form

UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL DE EDUCACIÓN

El estudio se llevará a cabo a lo largo de cinco meses, involucrando 19 estudiantes de Decimo en la [redacted] Se utilizará el método cuantitativo para recopilar datos, que incluirán pruebas de conocimiento de escritura e implementación de la guía de Cambridge en la clase.

Solicitamos respetuosamente su consentimiento para llevar a cabo este estudio e la [redacted] Este proyecto no solo contribuirá al campo de educación, sino que beneficiará a los estudiantes participantes al brindarles una experiencia provechosa y motivadora.

Además, nos comprometemos a cumplir con todas las regulaciones y requisitos éticos pertinentes y a garantizar la confidencialidad de los datos recopilados.

Agradecemos su atención y quedamos a su disposición para cualquier aclaración adicional que desee tenga sobre este proyecto.

Esperando su favorable acogida y autorización.

Atentamente,

Joseline Stefan Barros Chuchuca

Brandon Sebastian Rengel Fajardo

Autorizado

Si _X_ No____

Firma:

Magíster Gerardo Granda

DIRECTOR DE LA [redacted]

Sello

APPENDIX B
Pretest

Exam task



2 Your English friend Jo goes running every day. You want to go running with Jo.
Write an email to Jo:

- say when you want to run with Jo
- ask what time Jo goes running
- offer to show Jo a nice place to go running.

Write **25 words** or more.

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13-09-2024

Exam task



3 **Your English friend Jo goes running every day. You want to go running with Jo.**
Write an email to Jo:

- **say when you want to run with Jo**
- **ask what time Jo goes running**
- **offer to show Jo a nice place to go running.**

Write **25 words** or more.

From britney.maza@icloud.com
To: jo.english@gmail.com
I hope you are doing!
I like to go running with you at 6:00 o'clock in the morning at Paraiso park. It is beatiful, it is big for running.
I want to invite you to go runnig with me.
Good bye! I hope to see you.

C O L 9/15
3 1 5

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APPENDIX C
Cambridge Grading Rubric

Assessment of Writing scale

Band	Content	Organisation	Language
5	All content is relevant to the task. Target reader is fully informed.	Text is connected and coherent, using basic linking words and a limited number of cohesive devices.	Uses everyday vocabulary generally appropriately, while occasionally overusing certain lexis. Uses simple grammatical forms with a good degree of control. While errors are noticeable, meaning can still be determined.
4	*Performance shares features of Bands 3 and 5.*		
3	Minor irrelevances and/or omissions may be present. Target reader is on the whole informed.	Text is connected using basic, high-frequency linking words.	Uses basic vocabulary reasonably appropriately. Uses simple grammatical forms with some degree of control. Errors may impede meaning at times.
2	*Performance shares features of Bands 1 and 3.*		
1	Irrelevances and misinterpretation of task may be present. Target reader is minimally informed.	Production unlikely to be connected, though punctuation and simple connectors (i.e. 'and') may on occasion be used.	Produces basic vocabulary of isolated words and phrases. Produces few simple grammatical forms with only limited control.
0	Content is totally irrelevant. Target reader is not informed.	*Performance below Band 1.*	

APPENDIX D
Class Interventions




FIND THE FORMAL WORDS AND PHRASES!


COMMON INFORMAL
VOCABULARY IN EMAILS

APPENDIX E
Lesson Plans

Lesson plan 3

Group:	10th grade students	**Time:**	12:00 pm
Date:	September 20, 2024	**Duration:**	2 hours
Level:	A2	**# of Students:**	19
Topic:	Parts of an Email		
Skill:	Writing		
Aims:	• To teach students the structure of emails in formal and informal contexts.		
Objectives (Expected Learning Outcomes):	• Students will understand and identify the parts of an email (greeting, body, closing). • Students will practice writing effective email openings and closings.		
Teaching Strategy/ Model/Approach	• Direct instruction • Guided practice		
Assessment Methods:	Formative assessment		
Teaching / Learning Materials:	• Sample emails • Cambridge KEY email writing prompts		
Feedback Methods:	Peer review and teacher feedback on sample emails		

Lesson Plan Link: https://unaeedu-my.sharepoint.com/:f:/g/personal/bsrengel_unae_edu_ec/ElzAVLrV2OVPjJfCSFswluwBXxTuf_fS7tTY9ghbunwdjA?e=2josNg

APPENDIX F
Post-test

Exam task



Your English friend Jo goes swimming every day. You want to go swimming with Jo. **Write an email to Jo:**

- say when you want to swim with Jo
- ask what time Jo goes swimming
- offer to show Jo a nice place to go swimming.

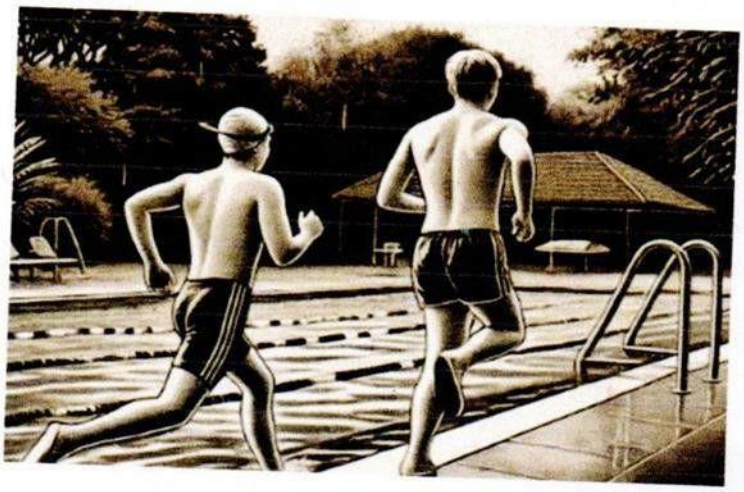
Write **25 words** or more.

.....

.....

.....

Exam task



Your English friend Matt goes swimming every day. You want to go swimming with Matt. Write an email to Matt:

- **say when you want to swim with Matt** → Cuando quiere
- **ask what time Matt goes swimming** → A que hora
- **offer to show Matt a nice place to go swimming.** → Ofrecer un lugar bonito para nadar

Write **25 words** or more.

Hi Matt,
Hope you're well! I would like to invite you to swim. We can go on next Sunday at 8:00 in the morning. or what time is it good for you? We can go to Yunguilla This is a beautiful place! There are many pools there. Let me now if you're coming.
See you later,
Britney

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