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ESCUELA DE DERECHO, EDUCACIÓN Y SOCIEDAD

**CARRERA DE PEDAGOGIA DE LOS IDIOMAS
NACIONALES Y EXTRANJEROS**

RESEARCH REPORT

**METHODOLOGICAL STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE COHESION AND
COHERENCE IN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' ENGLISH WRITING**

INFORME DE INVESTIGACIÓN:

**ESTRATEGIAS METODOLÓGICAS PARA MEJORAR LA COHESIÓN Y LA
COHERENCIA EN LA ESCRITURA EN INGLÉS DE LOS ESTUDIANTES
UNIVERSITARIOS**

PREVIO AL TÍTULO ACADÉMICO DE:

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LÍNEA DE INVESTIGACIÓN:

EDUCACIÓN, COMUNICACIÓN, CULTURA, SOCIEDAD Y VALORES

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COMITÉ EVALUADOR

COMO MIEMBROS DEL COMITÉ EVALUADOR DEL TRABAJO DE INTEGRACIÓN CURRICULAR DE LA PUCE ESMERALDAS, CERTIFICAMOS QUE HEMOS LEÍDO EL TRABAJO ELABORADO POR DANNA MICHELLE CASTILLO ANGULO, TITULADO *ESTRATEGIAS METODOLÓGICAS PARA MEJORAR LA COHESIÓN Y LA COHERENCIA EN LA ESCRITURA EN INGLÉS DE LOS ESTUDIANTES UNIVERSITARIOS*, Y SUGERIMOS SU APROBACIÓN POR CUMPLIR CON LOS REQUISITOS ESTABLECIDOS PARA LA OBTENCIÓN DEL TÍTULO DE LICENCIADA EN PEDAGOGÍA DE LOS IDIOMAS.

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La aprobación y aceptación final de este trabajo están condicionadas a la entrega, por parte del/la estudiante, de las copias finales del mismo. Por medio de la presente, certifico que he leído este trabajo elaborado bajo mi dirección y recomiendo que sea aceptado por cumplir con los requisitos exigidos para la obtención del grado correspondiente.

CERTIFICADO DEL DIRECTOR

Yo, Dr. Haydeé Ramírez Lozada, en calidad de directora de este trabajo, certifico haber revisado que el mismo cumple los requisitos de calidad, originalidad y presentación exigibles y que se han incorporado las sugerencias del tribunal al trabajo de grado.

Dr. Haydeé Ramírez Lozada, PhD

DECLARACIÓN DEL AUTOR

Yo, Danna Michelle Castillo Angulo, afirmo que la investigación contenida en el presente informe de investigación es única, auténtica y de carácter personal.

El contenido de este trabajo constituye una responsabilidad legal y académica legítima de la autora y de la PUCE Esmeraldas.

Danna Michelle Castillo Angulo
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DEDICATORIA

En primer lugar, dedico el presente trabajo a Dios, por brindarme la fortaleza, sabiduría, y perseverancia.

A mi familia, por su apoyo incondicional, por cada sacrificio, su paciencia infinita y por nunca soltar mi mano, incluso cuando el camino tenía sus obstáculos. Este logro también es suyo.

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Abstract

To propose methodological strategies that improve cohesion and coherence in university students' English writing, a quantitative and descriptive study was conducted with 15 sixth level students from the international business at an Ecuadorian university, with a B1 level of English proficiency. Data were collected through the application of a writing test and an analytic rubric. Afterward, the results were analyzed using frequency counts and arithmetic means supported by Microsoft Excel. The results showed that students' writing levels did not correspond to those expected at the university level. Several difficulties were identified, particularly in the use of cohesive devices, sentence and paragraph construction, vocabulary limitations, and linguistic interference. Consequently, the need for explicit and guided practical instruction based on constructivist approaches such as metacognition, the task-based learning (TBL), the PPP (presentation, practice, production) approach, and scaffolding was determined. In addition, techniques such as collaborative work and feedback were included.

Keywords: *Academic writing, cohesion and coherence, methodological strategies, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Writing skills.*

Resumen

Para proponer estrategias metodológicas que mejoren la cohesión y la coherencia en la escritura en inglés de los estudiantes universitarios, se implementó un estudio cuantitativo y descriptivo con 15 estudiantes de sexto nivel de la carrera de negocios internacionales de una universidad ecuatoriana, con un dominio de inglés B1. Los datos se recopilaron mediante una prueba de escritura y una rúbrica. Después, fueron analizados a través de recuentos de frecuencia y media aritmética en Excel. Los resultados evidenciaron que los niveles de escritura no correspondían a los esperados para el nivel universitario e identificaron dificultades en el uso de conectores, la construcción de oraciones y párrafos, limitaciones en vocabulario e interferencia lingüística. En consecuencia, se determinó la necesidad de una instrucción explícita y práctica guiada basadas en enfoques constructivistas como la metacognición, el aprendizaje basado en tareas, el enfoque PPP y el andamiaje. Además de técnicas como el trabajo y retroalimentación colaborativa.

***Palabras clave:** Escritura académica, cohesión y coherencia, Estrategias metodológicas, inglés como lengua extranjera, habilidades de escritura.*

Introduction

The process of teaching and learning English as a foreign language is known to involve numerous challenges. Among the linguistic skills developed in this process, writing is one of the most important as it allows students to prove their mastery of the language. However, it is the least addressed and developed one. Macrotrends (2022) asserts that Ecuador's literacy rate has fallen to 93.95%. Approximately 800,000 citizens cannot read or write properly, especially university students, who do not feel capable of writing academically because of their poor skill development.

Olson (2025), states that “writing is a representation of sentences, words, syllables, and phonemes in a totally different way than oral communication” (par. 4). This is a distinct language with its own unique grammatical structure and usage conventions. Within its dimensions, Cueva & Ochoa (2025) point out “coherence is the ability of the text to function as a semantic-pragmatic whole. It lies in the connection of what the writer wants to express and what the reader can know” (p.5).

On the other hand, De Beaugrande & Dressler (1981; as cited in Checa Abata & Cando Guanoluisa, 2024), emphasize that “cohesion is related to the way in which the components of the surface text, or the exact words that people see or hear, are connected to each other within a sequence” (p.25). Meanwhile, it was stated by Checa Abata & Cando Guanoluisa (2024) that cohesion is related to the way in which text meaning and its grammar are connected.

Writing letters, emails, essays, and reports in English are the major difficulties that university students face daily. As a result, they demonstrate poor written expressions for their level of education. In addition, presenting documents with disorganized ideas, weak connections

between paragraphs, grammatical errors, and punctuation mistakes. In this sense, the idea of designing methodological strategies takes on greater importance.

As a set of procedures and resources that teachers use to help students learn effectively, strategies can guide the writing process (Rios et al., 2024). They allow students to learn to plan and organize texts. Their application would improve language use and strengthen dimensions such as coherence and cohesion. Therefore, it is essential to address the subsequent doubt: What methodological strategies can improve coherence and cohesion in the English writing of university students?

The general objective of this research was to propose methodological strategies to improve cohesion and coherence in university students' writing. To accomplish this, it was necessary to diagnose students to identify the main difficulties they face in English writing according to The Common European Framework (CEFR). Then, it analyzed the most common problems related to coherence and cohesion in written texts. Finally, it explored different approaches and techniques appropriate to students' needs.

Writing

As stated by Olson (2025), writing as a process is defined as the stages a writer proceeds through to produce something in its final written form. This process is influenced by the content, the type of writing, and the medium used. It gives control on how to approach each text and how to change details when things are not going well. For him, the writing process is recursive, as writers reread and rewrite repeatedly while they work toward completion. For this, the writing strategies are a necessary group of techniques and procedures that writers use to plan, write, and revise their texts to achieve coherent and effective communication.

Cohesion and Coherence in Writing

According to Halliday & Hasan (1976; as cited in Alfonso & Obert, 2020) cohesion can be understood as the lexical and grammatical associations that facilitate the interpretation and comprehension of written texts which are known as the semantic relationships. The textual cohesion model developed by Halliday and Hasan provided a theoretical framework for understanding these connections, demonstrating that the cohesion of a composition is achieved through the integration of its different components. This finding is a combined whole that differs from the individual statements that second language students are more familiar with.

In contrast, the concept of textual coherence can be traced back to the notion that the clarity and effectiveness of a given composition is directly proportional to the existence of a well-defined semantic relationship and logical structure between its respective sections. As asserted by De Beaugrande & Dressler (1981; cited in Alfonso & Obert, 2020) the coherence of a composition is a crucial aspect of textuality, since it functions to structure the ideas logically.

Methodological Strategies

Methodological strategies are essential to the development of English writing skills as they provide structure and support during the learning process. The meaningful use of languages is promoted through authentic activities with Task-Based Learning, while the organization of ideas is fostered from guided practice to independent production by the Presentation-Practice-Production approach (PPP) (Pratista, 2023). Likewise, scaffolding provides students with support that encourages them to become more independent.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages or also known as CEFR has been perceived as the principal tool to assess and classify learners' level of language

proficiency, there are different levels that demonstrate the capabilities that you should have in order to be in that level, the requirements for each level are in Table 1.

Table 1

CEFR Writing Proficiency Chart in Writing

Advanced	<p>A student capable of producing coherent, sophisticated texts with exceptional eloquence and a style that is proper and effective. The composition has a logical structure for helping the reader to recognize specific points, represents and advanced C2 level.</p> <p>Written expression skills at level C1 include the ability to produce coherent, organized, and comprehensive compositions on advanced and specific topics. Demonstrate key concepts with relevant situations and a concluding summary, as appropriate.</p>
Intermediate	<p>Students who reach level B2 in writing can produce coherent, and detailed compositions on a variety of themes. They also know how to incorporate information and arguments from other sources.</p> <p>At level B1, they possess the capability to compose simple texts on familiar themes or presenting basic facts and concepts. In addition, they can structure sentences to form coherent texts.</p>
Beginner	<p>Students who reach level A2 in writing demonstrate their ability to construct simple sentences using connecting words such as and, but or because.</p> <p>At beginner level A1, they can describe personal information. This could be hobbies, family, places or pets. They can also use simple words, expressions and phrases.</p>

Note. Writing Proficiency Chart according to the CEFR (English with Cambridge, 2021).

Cognitive Development

Our mind carries out cognitive development, a process that involves thinking, remembering, solving problems and making decisions at specific times. McLeod (2025) thought

that this whole process reflects the brain just getting better at dealing with stuff as it grows. Piaget's theory of constructivism relates to this development. He proposed the ideas that by acting as little scientists, it is through this that people construct their meaningful knowledge (McLeod, 2025). At the same time, four stages were essential for building understanding.

In the initial phase, people learn about the world around them through stimulation of taste, sight, hearing, and touch. The brain processes all the information it receives easily. Later, this evolves through the development of language and symbolic thinking (Pakpahan & Saragih, 2022). Then, people begin to reason about meaningful situations, differentiating and relating aspects and ordering them according to their needs. Finally, the development of complex thinking takes center stages, since it allows people to formulate hypotheses and reflect on their complications.

Constructivist and Student-Centered Approaches in ELT

Ronquillo et al. (2023), as well as Venkadeswaran & Ramanathan (2024), posit constructivism as a theoretical framework that challenges conventional banking education or traditional education, which is often perceived as a transmission of knowledge. Thus, the construction of this approach is derived from individuals' personal experiences. One of the greatest exponents of this was Vygotsky. He emphasized his sociocultural ideas, which interaction and environment go hand in hand (Piergiuseppe & Salvatore, 2021). At an early age, people awaken a sense of curiosity about everything they see, touch, taste, and hear, receiving information through stimuli. So, interaction is essential for gathering knowledge that is important. In this way, it is confirmed that when students start primary school, they are not empty of knowledge.

Conversely, Piaget (1964) stated the acquisition of knowledge is a process that occurs through the adaptation of people to their environment, as well as through the progression of cognitive development over time (McLeod, 2025). It has been demonstrated that students undergo an evolution in their intellectual structures when faced with unfamiliar circumstances, thereby establishing a more abstract conception of life. Ausubel (1968), advanced the concept of meaningful learning as a process in which new knowledge is integrated with existing cognitive frameworks, resulting in a reconfiguration of cognitive structures (Ronquillo et al., 2023).

Metacognition Theory

According to Gross (2023), the concept of metacognition was first theorized by Flavell in 1976. Basically, the concept refers to an individual's capacity for self-reflection which enables them to understand their own cognitive processes and use them to get a purpose (Flavell, 1979; Sun & Zhang, 2022). A considerable number of authors agreed with this position, regarding the importance of acquiring the ability to learn, the utilization of proper strategies, and the timing of their implementation. Chandra (2022) and Parlan (2024) reached a consensus that metacognition is a beneficial device for improving autonomy and learning in pupils. So, the development of this concept can demonstrate a positive impact on many students' abilities.

Antecedents

Recently, Lumines (2025), studied cognitive writing strategies in 15 university students, finding that metacognitive engagement improves coherence and clarity. Although grammatical appreciation problems persist, she suggested a combination of language instruction with strategy training. In South Africa, Komane (2025) studied grammatical errors in 10th-grade students and determined that linguistic interference, low motivation, and insufficient teaching time cause errors in punctuation, word order, and verb tenses, suggesting increased writing practice. On the other hand, in Vietnam, 80 essays by university students were examined. Showing frequent and incorrect use of lexical cohesion and cohesive devices. The authors recommended explicit instruction, constant feedback, and peer review activities to strengthen coherence (Diep & Le, 2024).

In Ecuador, Arias & Daquilema (2024), through error analysis of 36 A1 level compositions, identified that the prevalent errors were in capitalization, sentence structure, spelling and commas/punctuation. Therefore, English writing is highly difficult for students. In 2021, at UIN FAS Bengkulu, essays from 29 students were analyzed. While references and conjunctions were found to be adequate, coherence was deemed to be present, but both aspects needed reinforcement (Riswanto, 2021). In Albania, Enesi (2022) analyzed 100 essays by first-year students at Aleksandër University and found frequent errors in grammar, verb tenses, and prepositions. He considered the importance of error analysis for providing feedback on teaching.

In Ghana, Sekwo (2020) analyzed 60 essays from second-year students at the Bimbilla EPCE using a mixed-methods approach. She found that problems with the use of cohesive devices decreased from intralinguistic limitations, interference, and developmental errors, and proposed improved teacher awareness and feedback. In Indonesia, the writing of 390 students

from 13 schools in Langke Rembong was studied. A quantitative descriptive analysis revealed that most texts were poorly cohesive and incoherent, indicating low levels of proficiency (Gunas, 2020).

Methodological Framework

The current research was carried out at an Ecuadorian university with Spanish-native speaker students. In this university, English is given as a Foreign Language in each degree. The population involved in this research consisted of 63 students from the International Business major. However, the sample consisted of 15 sixth-level students selected for convenience, based on their availability and willingness to participate. The group was around 20 years old and included both male and female students, with an intermediate B1 level of English according to the CEFR.

The research was based on a quantitative approach, as numerical data obtained through a writing test were collected. It was also descriptive in type, since it allowed for the identification and description of the most frequent errors present in students' written English. Likewise, given that the analysis focused only on classifying these errors using the designed instrument, without applying pedagogical strategies in real time, the study had a descriptive scope.

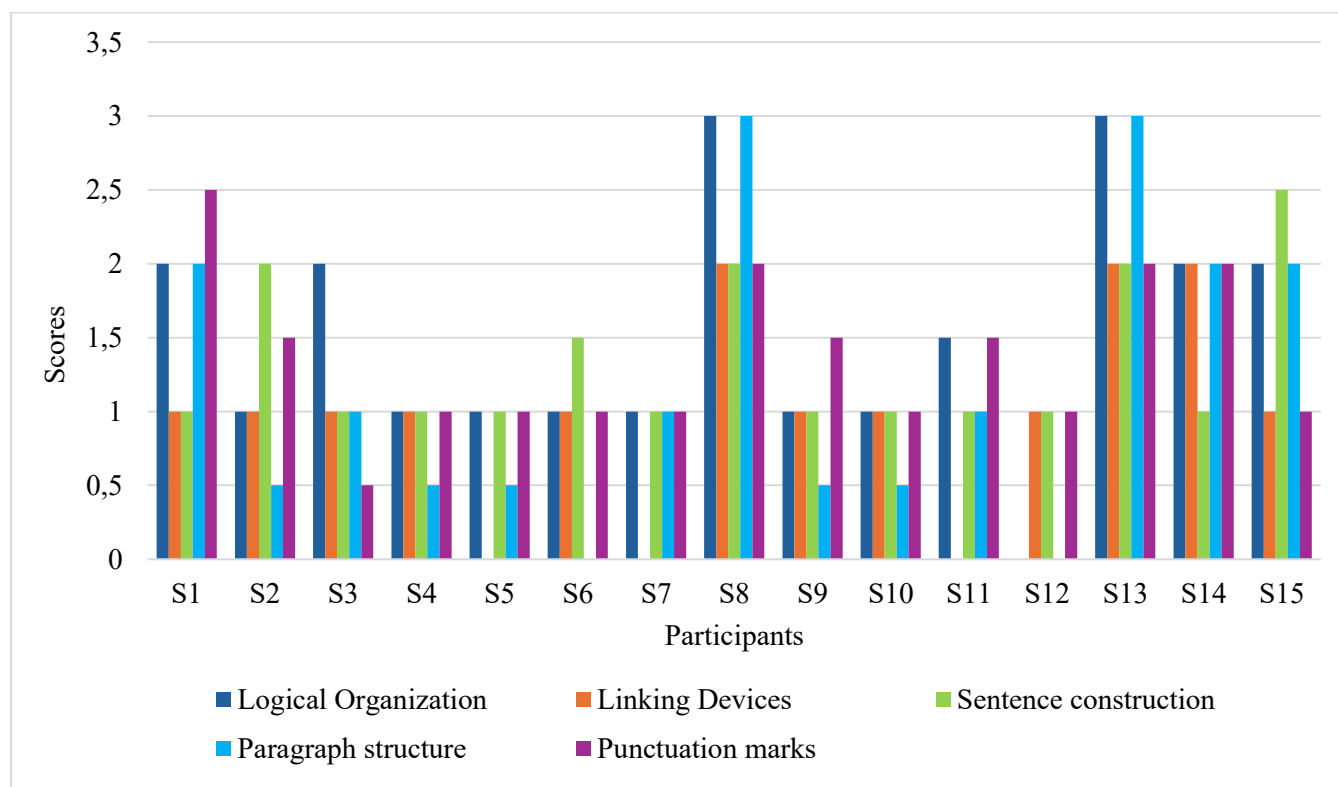
To obtain data, techniques based on systematic observation and documentary analysis of students' written work were used. In addition, there were two instruments to carry them out. The writing test provided evidence of students' written performance. Also, it was accompanied by a rubric designed to grade the tests. Finally, frequency counts were used to determine the recurrence of each error, and the arithmetic mean was used to recognize general trends in written performance.

Results

As demonstrated in Figure 1, the variation among students indicates a lack of uniform development in writing skills. Findings reveal a correlation between high scores in logical organization and paragraph structure and students' ability to demonstrate a fundamental comprehension of the composition of written English. This phenomenon is certainly the product of one or more of two factors. Firstly, there may be explicit instructions. Secondly, there may have been repeated exposure to guided writing tasks. However, weaker and more inconsistent performance in the use of connectors and punctuation reveals difficulties in achieving cohesion and accuracy, which are essential for fluent and coherent writing. This suggests that students face challenges in specific aspects of writing.

Figure 1

Students' Performance in Writing Test Criterion Related to Cohesion and Coherence



Note. Data obtained from a diagnostic writing assessment. Own elaboration.

Concerning Table 2, the findings suggest a comparatively reduced level of performance in written expression, since no aspect that was evaluated managed to attain the anticipated score of 3 points. The relatively higher score for logical organization of ideas (1.50) proposes that students show a basic ability to order ideas coherently. Nonetheless, this skill remains insufficient for effective written communication. By contrast, the lowest scores in the use of connectors (1.00) and paragraph structure (1.17) reveal significant difficulties in developing cohesive and well-structured texts. These findings identify these areas as the group's main weaknesses. Although sentence construction (1.33) and punctuation use (1.37) demonstrated slightly improved performance, these results still reflect limited control over grammatical accuracy and writing standards.

Table 2

Averages by Criterion for The Academic Writing Test

Criterion	Average Score (out of 3)
Logical Organization	1.50
Linking Devices	1.00
Sentence Construction	1.33
Paragraph Structure	1.17
Punctuation Marks	1.37

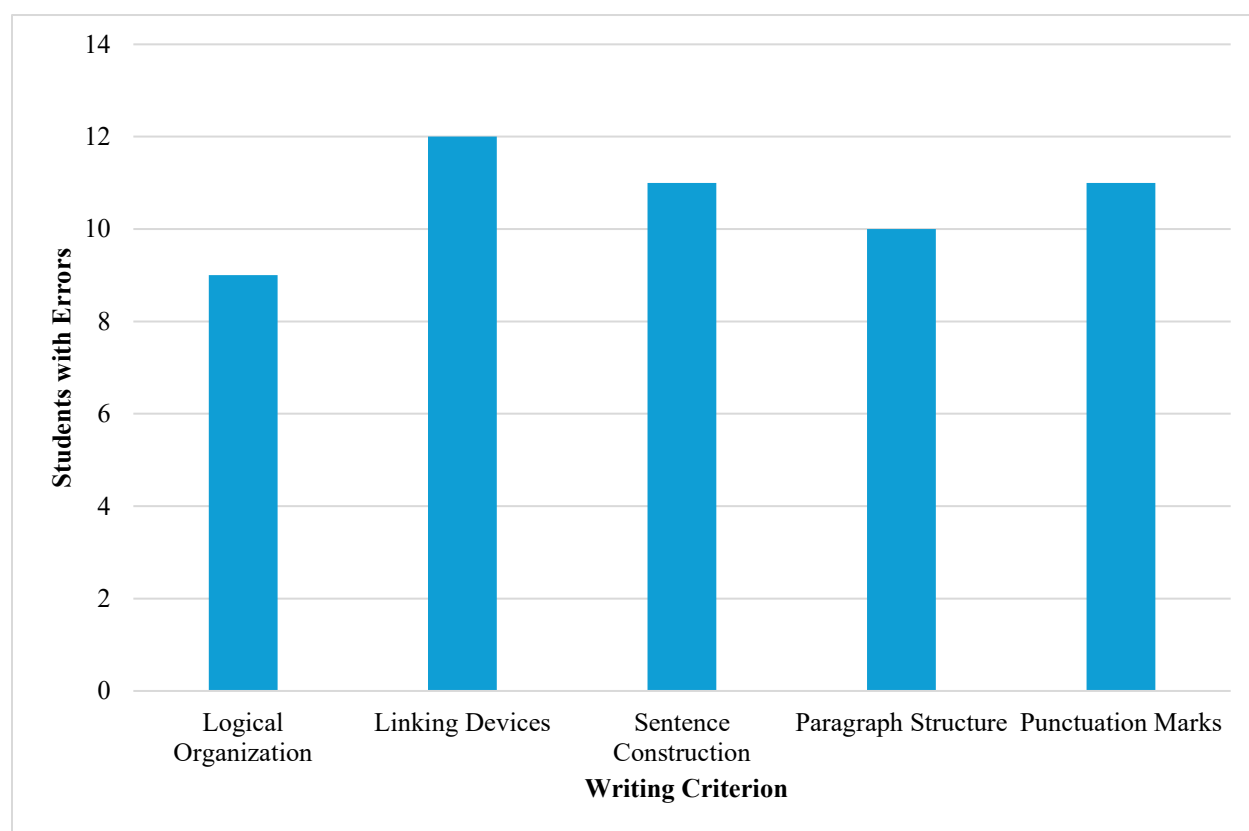
Note. Mean scores derived from the previous figure. Own elaboration.

As illustrated in Figure 2, there was a clear delineation between the distribution of errors made by students relating to fundamental criteria, with an evident concentration in specific areas

that demand advanced cognitive and linguistic processing. The high incidence of errors concerning the use of connectors indicates that students struggle to establish connections between ideas, which in turn weakens the textual cohesion. Similarly, problems with sentence construction and paragraph structure indicate that students have difficulty putting them into compositions that make sense. These problems reflect the fact that they do not use grammar properly, which makes their writing unclear. Also, this can make it hard for them with a “B1 level of English” to create abstract compositions that require reflection and deeper analysis. In contrast, punctuation errors seem to have less of an effect, as they are more related to accuracy.

Figure 2

Students' Error Frequency by Writing Criterion



Note. Data derived from the diagnostic writing test administered to the students. Own elaboration.

As illustrated in Table 3, the results of the written test analysis demonstrate the presence of difficulties that go beyond quantitative scores. Linguistic interference from the students' native language was evident, in sentence construction, resulting in subject-verb agreement errors and literal translations. Moreover, poor vocabulary limited the development of ideas and affected their organization. Most of the students showed insufficient use of connectors. Also, several texts had incomplete paragraphs, with short sentences and frequent punctuation and comma errors.

Table 3

Identified Writing Error Types by Criterion

Criterion	Types of Errors	Examples
Logical Organization	Ideas do not follow a logical sequence; incomplete ideas; insufficient development.	"Communication is the first objective that a correct international business, I'm my case."
Linking Devices	Limited or no use of connectors: connectors used incorrectly	"In the bussiness context, the communication is esential (...) In the cultural context."
Sentence Construction	Errors in agreement, grammar, subject + verb + complement structure; mother tongue interference.	"many companies works", "persons is from countries and cultural differen", "it do not help a lot".
Paragraph Structure	Incomplete paragraphs; lack of topic sentences; disorganized ideas.	"Communication is related to working with people, but sometimes the work is more about rules than culture, the companies are important."

Punctuation	Missing punctuation; improper use of	“My career needs good comunicación so the
Marks	commas and periods.	company can grow but grow is not easy.”

Note. Based on students’ written responses in the diagnostic writing test. Own elaboration.

Figure 3 presents three important proposals that consist of a set of writing strategies based on pedagogical methodology, supported by metacognition approach, TBL, PPP, and scaffolding method. Students engage in authentic writing tasks, reflect on their own processes, receive guided support from the teacher, and gradually produce coherent and cohesive paragraphs, using visual and interactive resources. The first proposal is “The Paragraph Pizza” and its purpose is to help students organize coherent ideas within a paragraph. Using an analogy based on food, students can better understand the structure of a text, in which different parts represent specific elements, such as introduction, main and supporting ideas, and conclusions. The interpretation of the provided information can be easily put into practice by making connections between abstract writing concepts and something visual and familiar to students.

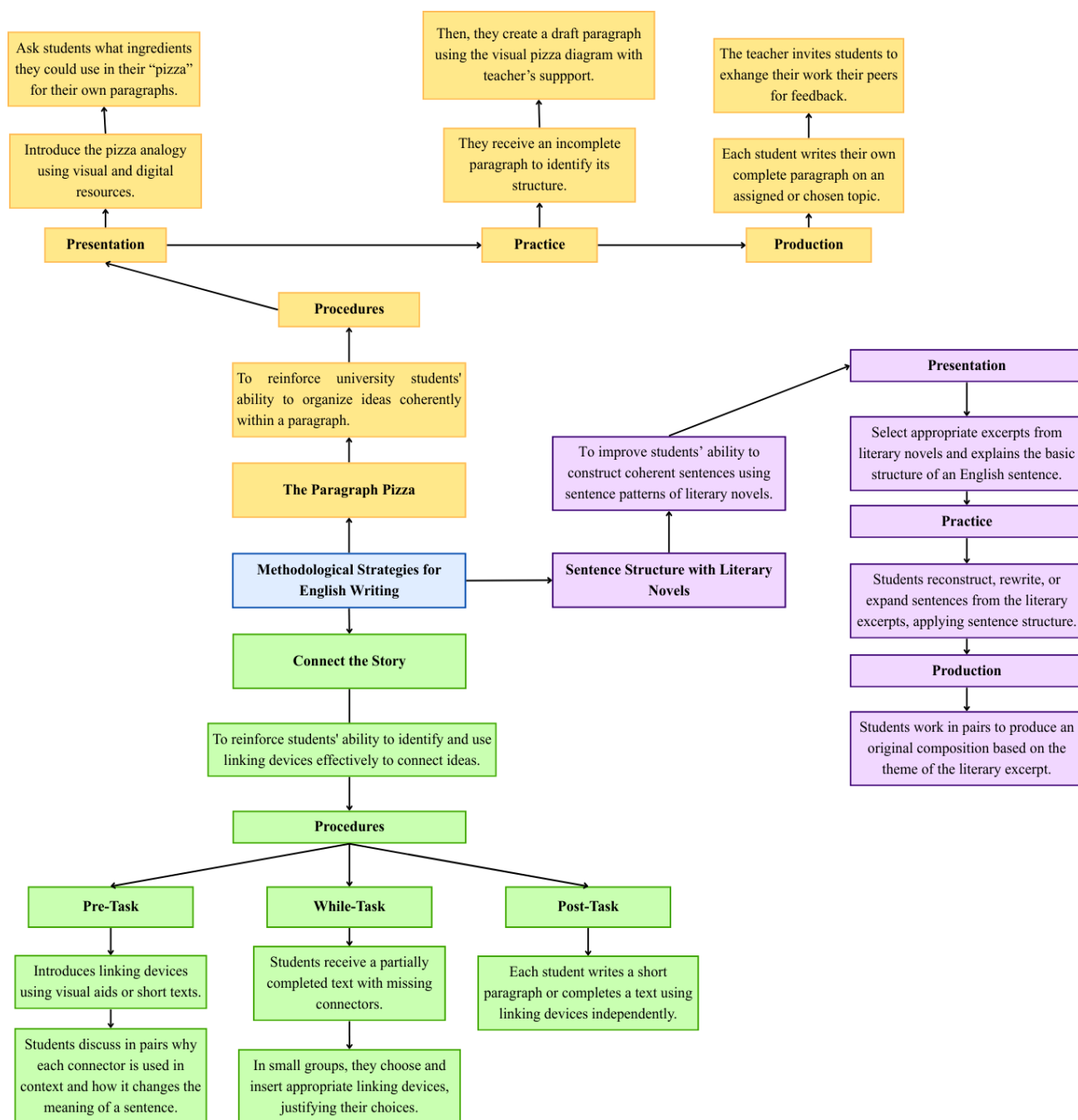
The second strategy is to focus on the ability to construct coherent and grammatically correct sentences improved by the syntactic structure in literary novels, as students are exposed to authentic literary language. The idea behind this second proposal is that literary texts provide real examples of syntactic patterns for students to analyze and incorporate into their own compositions. Therefore, this proposal can promote the practice of not only writing coherence but also reading skills.

Finally, the third proposal, designed under the name “Connect the Story”, is a task-based writing proposal that focuses on identifying and using connectors to improve textual cohesion. Teachers aim to help students understand meaning between ideas and paragraphs. To do this, students must participate in collaborative tasks where they select and justify the proper

connectors in a composition, promoting critical thinking and interaction among peers. It is important to mention that this proposal can be combined with the previous one, since, with literary texts, students can analyze how authors use connectors authentically.

Figure 3

Proposed Methodological Strategies for English Writing



Note. The diagram was developed based on the study findings and theoretical framework. Own elaboration.

Discussion

The objective of this research was to propose methodological strategies to improve cohesion and coherence in university students' writing. According to the test results, participants had serious difficulties writing texts. Although some students, as shown in Figure 1, understand the basics of organizing ideas, writing skills are unequal and insufficient at the university level.

The logical organization of ideas obtained better results compared to other criteria, suggesting that some students know the general structure for forming a text. However, effective writing was not reflected, because connectors and paragraph structure had the lowest levels of performance (Table 2). Students did not manage the necessary linguistic resources. They showed interference from their native language and limited vocabulary (Table 3). This demonstrates that organizing ideas does not guarantee total coherence.

The findings coincide with studies from different contexts. Gunas (2020) and Diep & Le (2024) reported that students produce texts with poor cohesion due to the inappropriate use of connectors, which coincides with the low results obtained in this criterion. Similarly, Arias Arroyo & Daquilema Chorlango (2024) identified frequent errors in sentence construction, punctuation, and comma usage among Ecuadorian students, reinforcing the idea that these difficulties are persistent.

Likewise, the presence of linguistic interference and grammatical errors in this study supports the findings of Enesi (2022) and Sekwo (2020), who point out that intralinguistic limitations and lack of feedback directly affect cohesion and coherence in academic writing.

These results indicate that writing should not be taught implicitly or assumed to be an acquired skill, but rather requires explicit instruction, clear examples, guided practice, and constant feedback to maintain the continuity of ideas in the text.

Another point is that this study did not address student motivation, while Komane (2025) identifies it as a factor that influences writing performance. Therefore, incorporating this variable into future research could provide a more complete understanding of the difficulties in academic writing. Finally, teachers need to incorporate methodological strategies that truly address the issues. The proposals shown in Figure 3 are consistent with the idea of Lumines (2025). Ultimately, metacognition responds directly to the weaknesses detected, encouraging students to write gradually, reflect on their process, and receive constant support until they achieve better compositions.

Conclusions

The proposal of methodological strategies for the improvement of the cohesion and coherence of English writing among university students was made possible by this research. The basis of this proposal was an analysis of their actual needs. The initial assessment revealed that students were experiencing significant difficulties. These findings confirmed the necessity of conducting a diagnostic assessment aligned with the criterion of The Common European framework (CEFR) to understand students' writing performance levels and specific weaknesses.

The successful results demonstrated that the applied test was an effective and proper tool for identifying recurring patterns in students' compositions. The information generated from this analysis not only allowed for the recognition of specific difficulties but also the identification of interesting variables that can be used as references for designing future investigations to improve coherence and cohesion texts. In this sense, this research takes on special relevance in the city of Esmeraldas, where it is necessary to strengthen the development of academic writing in English at the university level, considering current educational demands.

Finally, the research revealed the real need to implement structured teaching strategies based on a constructivist approach, integrating metacognition to promote students' awareness of their own writing process, task-based learning to encourage meaningful use of the skill through real tasks, scaffolding to provide support according to students' progress, and the PPP approach to ensure a clear and organized sequence in the process. For that reason, it is through the teacher that students will improve. The aim is to encourage teachers to act as guides and facilitators of learning. This can help students to work better and produce more coherent compositions. Then, it will enable them to write independently.

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