

## A comparative study on the challenges of developing the writing skill: english language and nahuatl language

### Un estudio comparativo sobre los retos al desarrollar la habilidad escrita: lengua inglesa y lengua náhuatl

ROMÁN, Edgar †\*, RODRÍGUEZ, Verónica, MARTÍNEZ, Jorge and MATA, Karla

*Universidad Veracruzana, Faculty of Languages and Language Center Campus Xalapa, Mexico.*

ID 1<sup>st</sup> Author: *Edgar, Román* / **ORC ID:** 0000-0003-1027-5457

ID 1<sup>st</sup> Co-author: *Verónica, Rodríguez* / **ORC ID:** 0000-0003-2599-3697

ID 2<sup>nd</sup> Co-author: *Jorge, Martínez* / **ORC ID:** 0000-0002-8696-2088

ID 3<sup>rd</sup> Co-author: *Karla, Mata* / **ORC ID:** 0000-0003-1354-3250

**DOI:** 10.35429/EJS.2021.14.8.16.25

Received January 25, 2021; Accepted June 30, 2021

#### Abstract

The aim of this research work is to detect challenges that English and Nahuatl learners face when developing writing skills during first level in order to suggest strategies for implementing in future studies. The importance of comparing both languages is because Nahuatl is considered as an endangered language and English has significant pedagogy for the teaching-learning process. Therefore, it is expected that some methodologies can complement each other. The following results were obtained using a qualitative case study since it is allowed to explore and identify different factors that have the same purpose. In this case, there was a comparison between English and Nahuatl learners to determine the main challenges in both situations. Hence, 2 groups were selected for being observed and interviewed: an English class and a Nahuatl class. In addition, this research was designed for being carried out online due to the Covid-19 situation that is being lived currently.

#### Resumen

El propósito de este estudio es detectar los retos que enfrentan los aprendices de inglés y náhuatl al desarrollar la habilidad escrita durante el primer nivel a fin de sugerir estrategias para implementar en futuros trabajos. La importancia de comparar ambas lenguas es porque el náhuatl es considerado en peligro de extinción y el inglés tiene pedagogía esencial en el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje. Por lo que se espera que algunas metodologías se complementen entre sí. Los resultados siguientes se obtuvieron usando un estudio de caso cualitativo ya que permite explorar e identificar diferentes factores que tienen el mismo propósito. En este caso, hubo una comparación entre aprendices de inglés y náhuatl para determinar los principales retos en ambas situaciones. Por lo tanto, 2 grupos fueron seleccionados para ser observados y entrevistados: una clase de inglés y una clase de náhuatl. Además, este estudio se diseñó para hacerse en línea debido a la situación del Covid-19 que se vive actualmente.

**English, Nahuatl, Writing, Culture, Indigenous**

**Inglés, Náhuatl, Escritura, Cultura, Indígena**

**Citation:** ROMÁN, Edgar, RODRÍGUEZ, Verónica, MARTÍNEZ, Jorge and MATA, Karla. A comparative study on the challenges of developing the writing skill: english language and nahuatl language. ECORFAN Journal-Spain. 2021. 8-14:16-25.

\* Correspondence to Author (Email: romaned.teach@gmail.com)

† Researcher contributing first author.

## Introduction

Knowing a second language is required for having more opportunities at work or academic activities mainly.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, learning a second language in Mexico has become an essential part of the current generations of Mexican people. In Mexico, the most common second language to learn is the English language (EL). The British Council (2015) has concluded that the teaching-learning English process is noticeable in Mexican education, owing to this fact, the EL has started to be part of the basic levels of Mexican education. In addition, the EL has become important in most of the countries around the world since this language is used for administrative, cultural, religious, scientific, and sportive aspects as a trade for its convenience. On the other hand, the most spoken language in Mexico, apart from Spanish, is the Nahuatl language (NL) with over 1,500,000 speakers according to the Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI, 2010). Even though this language is not taught in the schools of the country, it has begun to become popular among language learners.

In most of the cases, people study a second language for a personal purpose. For instance, academic acquisition, social impact, economic benefit, or intercultural knowledge. Regarding academic acquisition, the fact of knowing a second language enhances learners to obtain more information. Social impact refers to communicating in two different languages without interferences, for example in social media. Knowing a second language also allows people to improve wages because tasks in other languages are recurrent. In addition, it is easier to get a job if a person knows a second language. On the contrary, some people learn a language because they enjoy learning cultures and a language is part of it. Nevertheless, learning a second language is not as easy as it seems. There are some challenges that learners deal with during the process. For instance, grammatical rules are not pleased by everyone either in their first language. Mohammed (2018) recognises cultural differences from the mother tongue into the target language as one of the main difficulties when learning a second language. Some expressions are not considered at teaching structures of the language. Some challenges also depend on the level and the age of the learner.

Some authors such as Tavakoli (2016)<sup>2</sup> express that the non-use of the target language out of the classroom is a disadvantage for succeeding in the process of learning a second language. They assume that non-English countries deal with some challenges which limit the English learning process. For instance, students are not exposed to English out of the classroom due to immersion in the first-language environment. To achieve an adequate level of both Nahuatl and English languages it is necessary to succeed in the main skills: reading, listening, writing, and speaking, at the same time grammar and vocabulary are being acquired. Learning a language also involves cultural aspects that some learners do not consider. Notwithstanding, what the reason is, it is important to have in mind the challenges that a learner could present to find the most convenient way for achieving the objective.

## Literature Review

### Challenges on writing in the English language

The writing skill is considered the most difficult skill to develop because of its complexity. In particular, the acquisition of grammar and vocabulary are some aspects to learn gradually. Consequently, English learners face some challenges during the process. Al-Gharabally (2015) examines the idea of assigning writings as homework instead of a class activity, considering that solitary tasks do not imply the needed process. In addition, learners from lower levels require guidance with spelling, vocabulary, grammar, and written expression. As a result, it is difficult to get feedback opportunely because most of the corrections do not explain the reason for the committed mistakes. Furthermore, classes in the classroom tend to focus on the speaking skill rather than the writing skill because the writing skill is the last skill to be produced.

Regarding vocabulary, Huy (2015) claims that the lack of vocabulary is the main reason why students do not improve their writing skills. Most of the learners are expected to learn vocabulary as they acquire the target language; nevertheless, the writing skill requires a high range of vocabulary in order to carry out the tasks anticipated. Additionally, writing skills are usually used for academic aspects; therefore, it is required to learn academic vocabulary.

<sup>1</sup>The importance of comparing both languages it is also for detecting the treatment that indigenous people receive compared to foreign people in Mexico. Arteaga (2020) emphasize the fact that people who belong to an ethnic group are the most susceptible to be discriminated.

<sup>2</sup> Among other authors mentioned in the references.

Nevertheless, this kind of vocabulary could be more difficult to acquire. It is well known that grammar is the basis of any language. Consequently, it is not easy to learn. Moses and Mohammed (2019) conclude that grammar is one of the most challenging requisites of the EL to develop. They add the importance of grammar at the acquisition of any language since grammar involves structures of words and sentences for carrying out activities referring to the writing skill.

### How to overcome these difficulties

Mohite (2015) emphasizes the importance of a teacher in the writing skill. In other words, it is essential to have guidance from a knowledgeable person on the topic. Even though the writing skill is not practiced at all in the classroom, some authors, specifically Al-Gharabally (2015), suggests the use of symbols when marking learners written work. In consequence, students can have an idea about the committed mistakes. Therefore, learners could find it easier to correct the mistakes on their own.

Another strategy to solve the challenges when developing the writing skill in the EL is to use the translation from the mother tongue to the target language. Dagiliené (2012) explores the use of translation as a tool in the writing skill since the transfer of a text from one language into another is employed. It is commonly practiced in the first levels of English learning and it is used for comparing some aspects of grammar in both languages such as syntax and morphology. Additionally, it is important to have academic knowledge in the writing skill in the first language in order to succeed in the translation of the writing skill from the first language into the EL. An advantage of this strategy is that the EL is considered to have a solid grammar referring to academic aspects.

Celik (2019) emphasizes reading skill as a significant element for improving the writing skill. He says that input is acquired at the same time students develop reading skills. This approach consists of transferring structures based on what others have written. The process is inevitable because the writing skill goes hand in hand with the reading skill since the purpose of writing is to be read. However, this proposal can be taken into account as a specific strategy for acquiring all the elements when producing the writing skill. In general, readings model language patterns that students must learn in order to produce their texts.

### Difficulties when learning writing in Nahuatl

One of the purposes of the Mexican conquest of the 16th century was to impose the Spanish culture over Nahuatl culture, including the language. Therefore, Nahuatl speakers were forced to hide their culture and the language stopped its development. Due to this fact, Nahuatl is considered as a spoken language only. Furthermore, communities, where Nahuatl is spoken as a first or as their only language, are remote in places where social programs such as education are not taken into consideration at all by the government. It can be concluded that the lack of interest in indigenous communities contributes to lack of educational improvement regarding academic language (Aldaya, 2020). This may be one of the reasons why indigenous people cannot read or write. Olko and Sullivan (2015) compare two variants of the Nahuatl Language in aspects of grammar and vocabulary: The Classical Nahuatl (mind-sixteenth century) and Modern Huastecan Nahuatl. Nevertheless, the challenge that learners face is that there are around 44 variants of Nahuatl according to Pharao (2013) based on INALI, the Mexican National Institute of Indigenous Languages. Words can be written in different forms; for instance, for the word “sun” is acceptable tonal, tonali, tonalli, tonalti, tonaltli, etc.; the word “tortilla” is written as taxcal, taxkal, taxkali, taxcali, taxkalli, tlaxkali, tlaxcalli, etc. The NL does not use some letters of the Spanish alphabet; however, writers have adapted some words taken from Spanish to every respective variant; “horse” is written as cawayo, cawallo, cauayo, cahuayo, caballo. Even though the letter B does not exist in the NL, some variants accept the spelling including the letter B.

### How to overcome these difficulties

Considering that there is a set of variants in the NL, it is significant to select only one of them in order to focus on that specific variant of the language. De Felice (2012) confirms the importance of making a choice when learning the NL in order to facilitate the process. According to the Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas (INALI) some of the most common varieties to study are the Nahuatl from the sierra noroeste from Puebla, Nahuatl from noroeste central, Nahuatl from Istmo, Nahuatl from the Huasteca Veracruzana, Nahuatl from the Huasteca Potosina, as well as the classical Nahuatl.

The use of the mother tongue (Spanish) is a strategy for the teaching-learning process of the NL since Nahuatl is taught from Spanish perspective. This means that translation is used as a tool for improving the writing skill in the target language. Martínez (2012)<sup>3</sup> encourage Nahuatl learners to use technological translators which they have designed. However, it is only from Nahuatl to Spanish and vice versa. They also confirm that writings are an elemental part of the process of acquiring this language. Therefore, they have developed computer systems that allow students to understand the NL from Spanish language. Additionally, they promote the use of technology when learning this indigenous language.

## Methodology

### Research tradition

This is a qualitative case study in which it is enabled to explore a phenomenon through the identification of different factors that have the same purpose. Tengnäs (2016) recognizes that case studies are mainly used in qualitative research and methodology because they represent a meaningful paradigm of what is being analysed. Some of the characteristics that Tengnäs attributes to the qualitative case studies are that they explore an individual or a group and they have the aim of identifying structures, variables, and interaction among participants in the setting. Some of the benefits are that qualitative researchers focus on human experiences in specific settings because they are descriptive according to participants' opinions and feelings. Qualitative research also have the qualities of being able to be constructed or reconstructed to a greater scope.

### Context

This research required to observe and interview 2 language learning groups in order to obtain relevant information for comparing the NL and EL during the writing learning process. Nevertheless, due to Covid-19 situation, this study was developed in a virtual form to avoid the crowd in a classroom. The first group was an online Nahuatl course which was taught 1 hour per week every Sunday from 11:00 am to 12:00 pm. The second group was an English course offered by the Universidad Veracruzana (UV) as a part of the elemental subjects in all the bachelors' degrees denominated as Área de Formación Básica General (AFBG).

The classes were given 2 hours per week every Tuesday and Wednesday from 7:00 pm to 8:00 pm via Zoom platform. In both groups the teachers changed traditional classes in order to continue teaching the content which it was expected to cover in their respective courses. However, online classes must not be a surprise currently. Sun and Chen (2016) claim that the development of online education has helped to stay and grow rapidly over the last decades. It does not mean that virtual classes are the replacement of face-to-face classes, but they are still a strong alternative. In addition, this study gathered information only via the internet, in this way, it was possible to carry out this research. Regarding the interviews, they were carried out via Zoom platform in an individual form. The participants were sent the link for joining the meeting in an individual form. Furthermore, computer equipment was used for performing the meetings, as well as a cell phone allowed to record the interviews. Finally, the interviews were transcribed in a sheet of Word in order to collect the information.

## Findings

### Grammar is complex in both languages

It was evident the challenge that students had when learning grammatical rules in the target languages. Firstly, the Nahuatl learners seemed to be confused while the teacher explained some grammatical points. However, it was observed that learners expressed their doubts at the same time they carried out the activities and the teacher provided several examples to review the involved topics. In the interview, participants claimed that agglutination in the Nahuatl language was the grammatical aspect more complex to develop. For instance, Simon said, "*El tema de que, al ser una lengua aglutinante, hay algunas palabras que deben aglutinarse y quedan muy largas*". Carlos also contributed, "*El tema de la aglutinación de las palabras es el reto que puedes tener*". This is because Spanish is not an agglutinative language and it means that Nahuatl learners are not used to create sentences utilising a lot of morphemes in only one word. De Felice (2012) defines agglutination as the kind of language that relates through affixation instead of separated words or phrases. In the case of the NL, it is characterised because the whole sentence is needed to be read in only one word in order to understand its meaning in most cases. This is the common complication that learning NL implies since agglutination is not applied in all the languages.

<sup>3</sup> Among other authors mentioned in the references.

English learners also revealed having had difficulties when acquiring grammatical aspects of the language. In this situation, it was observed that the teacher explained some structures of the sentence using a whiteboard. Nevertheless, learners continued making the same mistakes even when they had the explanation and some examples on the screen. There were activities that required the same answers, but learners could not perform even though they had previous responses. In this regard, Perla was the participant who stated this in the interview, “*Sí se me hace difícil porque hay oraciones que en español inician a la inversa. Por ejemplo, “yo soy estudiante de arquitectura” que en inglés sería: **I am an architecture student**”*. Therefore, English learners start to compare grammar in their mother tongue with the target language to succeed in developing the EL. Some authors such as Rao (2019) explain that grammatical structures are significant for the English learning process and how it should be taught. However, it was remarkable that learners did not search for a method to achieve the purpose of the course.

### Reasons why students learn NL and EL are different

Another aspect to mention is the purpose of acquiring the target language because it defines how skills are developed. Regarding Nahuatl participants, they expressed having selected the NL to study because they find it interesting to preserve Mexican culture. It means that they learn the NL for pleasure. Which was the case of Carlos: “*Porque me interesa mucho aprender nuestras raíces. La verdad es que hasta siento vergüenza del no conocer lo suficiente de nosotros. Hay gente del exterior que conoce mejor nuestra propia cultura y creo que tenemos mucho. Y creo que deberíamos de interesarnos más en lo que tenemos y parte de nuestra herencia es el náhuatl. Entre más personas podamos aprender es algo que no dejaremos que se pierda*”. This interest was also seen when they were observed during the classes. Learners were motivated to ask questions to the teacher all the time. They also shared some comments about the Nahuatl culture in order to add information to their classmates. In the same way Julia mentioned why she decided to study the NL, “*me interesa que esas lenguas se vayan preservando. Yo sé que el náhuatl es de las lenguas más habladas, sino es que la más hablada a nivel nacional después del español (en México), pero esa parte del orgullo nacional, del orgullo por tus raíces te incentiva a conocer más de tu propia cultura, de tu propia historia. También en el ánimo de que no se pierdan estas lenguas*”.

It means that Nahuatl learners consider important to preserve Mexican native languages. As a result, learners demonstrated enthusiasm and perseverance when taking the Nahuatl course. Mojica (2016) notes that most people who study Nahuatl have the purpose to preserve this language because people like this culture. Thus, maintaining the language seems to be one reason to protect its culture in general.

In the case of English learners, they alleged to have selected the English course because it is needed in their daily activities such as job and education. According to the observation sheets, English learners did not demonstrate any interest in developing the EL. This is because they did not ask questions to the teacher, they did not make comments about the topics. Indeed, they attended the classes because it was required that students were there, but they did not participate unless the teacher selected for solving tasks for the whole group. In this respect, Karla explained, *Solo porque me lo piden y tal vez porque con la acreditación que nos dan en la facultad tal vez me vaya a estudiar a otro lado, pero aun así tengo que completar mi inglés. Entonces sí es por obligación*. Another example of this was julio who confirmed, *Lo estoy estudiando porque me lo piden para acreditar las materias del área de formación básica*. As it can be seen, the EL is considered as a necessity instead of a personal interest for improving their cultural knowledge. This fact can be taken as a disadvantage in the second language process due to interest can limit learners’ development. Dhanya and Alamelu (2019) claim that motivation plays a significant role in the second language learning process because when students have a particular interest, they are encouraged to engage in the procedure. Due to lack of stimulation English learners are not performing well in classes and in their own learning.

### Lack of access to vocabulary in Nahuatl

Learning vocabulary is considered as one of the bases when acquiring a second language. Nevertheless, it is one of the main issues that Nahuatl and English learners face during the writing learning process in this study. Regarding Nahuatl learners, some students assume that since they are at the beginners’ level, the vocabulary is scarce. Most of them find it complicated to create texts because they only have the vocabulary that the teacher has provided. Julia evaluated her performance by saying, “*al principio lo difícil es que no conoces absolutamente nada, pero conforme vas viendo solo es cuestión de aprenderte las palabras para poder escribir*”.

It was verified when the classes were observed due to learners were limited to write sentences because they did not have sufficient vocabulary. Indeed, vocabulary was mostly provided by the teacher since it was difficult for learners to obtain vocabulary on their own because this course was based on a specific dialect of the language. In the same way, Carlos answered the following regarding Nahuatl challenges, “*Aprender vocabulario e ir aprendiendo las reglas gramaticales*”. Thus, it is not easy to search some aspects of the language such as grammar and vocabulary of every specific variant. According to Alqahtani (2015), the lack of vocabulary in the target language is the reason why communication does not succeed. As a consequence, Nahuatl learners found it difficult to produce texts which required more vocabulary than the teacher explained them.

In the case of English learners, the lack of vocabulary was also the same issue when developing the writing skill. Julio was the participant who stated this position: “*Uno de los retos que enfrento es que tengo que memorizar palabras en inglés lo más que pueda*”. Similarly, Karla stated, “*hay muchas palabras que, al momento de escucharlas, suenan igual y no sé cómo escribirlas*”. It means that English learners struggle at acquiring vocabulary and sometimes they misunderstand words. It is reflected when performing activities which involve the writing skill. As observed in the English classes, the recurrent problems that learners presented were that learners did not have too many words as expected. Equally important, English learners knew vocabulary when talking but not in a written form. Therefore, they demonstrated difficulties when writing some sentences. Tovar (2017) argues that it is also significant to learn words the same way as its use in order to produce the language in a written form. Not having enough vocabulary can produce some limitations when developing the writing skill. Commonly, texts are taken into account as formal tools. Accordingly, informal writings can be the result of the inappropriate use of vocabulary. In summary, the EL and the NL present the same issue when talking about vocabulary in the same way as many other languages. At the beginning of any language course, it is complicated to acquire vocabulary because learners may not be familiarised with the new language.

### The use of Spanish in both language learning processes

One of the most remarkable aspects seen in both classes was that teachers used the mother tongue instead of the target language for explaining vocabulary and grammatical elements in the English and Nahuatl languages. The English teacher who was observed explained the topics in the Spanish language to make the learners' understanding possible. Students defended the fact that the teacher explained them topics in their mother tongue because they think that if the teacher did not utilise this method, they would not comprehend anything in the target language. That is the case of Julio: “*la maestra usa español para podernos entender mejor en la clase*”.

This situation is recurrent because other participants support the same idea. Perla made the following comment: “*generalmente la maestra nos explica en español porque es inglés I, casi no sabemos y es la manera de ayudarnos*”. Therefore, English learners find it appropriate that teachers consider the mother tongue for explaining in order to achieve the main purpose of the course. Additionally, the use of the mother tongue is allowed in beginners' levels because in this stage learners are just familiarising themselves with the target language. Consequently, English learners also utilised translation as a tool when producing texts. In this case, learners wrote texts in Spanish and then they translated them into English in order to confirm what they wanted to express. Therefore, they had writings in both languages. Some authors such as Dagiliené (2012) justifies the use of translation in pedagogy since this method enables learners to identify differences in structure and vocabulary.

Regarding Nahuatl learners, Julia speculated that the teacher explained the topics in the NL because it was necessary that they understood some elements in the mother tongue. Hence, she said: “*utiliza el español para explicar los significados, para explicar la gramática. El náhuatl es mucho de prefijos, entonces utilizamos mucho esa parte. Detalles de la gramática en español para llevar la gramática el náhuatl y generalmente da ejemplos para hacer el comparativo entre el español y el náhuatl*”. Thus, in the Nahuatl group, the Spanish language is also present when explaining vocabulary and grammatical aspects. As observed in the Nahuatl class, there were some meanings that even in Spanish were hard to understand. Most of terminology was explained in Spanish in order to contextualise students about what the language implies.

Martínez *et al* (2012) add that it is necessary to explain some terms in Spanish since the linguistic Nahuatl might not cover many definitions that are elemental in the language process. Nevertheless, this method is not exclusive for teachers, but also for learners when performing writing activities. It was remarkable that Nahuatl learners almost did not resort to the Spanish language during the writing tasks. They were provided with several examples that allowed them to produce their sentences following the same sequence without using translation from Spanish into Nahuatl. This was the case of Simon: *“trato de memorizar las palabras o la estructura que tengo que seguir para armar una oración. Y con eso resuelvo los problemas. Hasta hoy y después de haber estudiado bien el material que se nos da en clase, no muchas veces he tenido que ir a consultar como se debe escribir una palabra”*. Carlos also alleged not having used the mother tongue when writing, *“Trato de no hacerlo. Si algo aprendí cuando aprendí el inglés, era que no se debía traducir, sino de pensar en la lengua y aquí trato de hacer lo mismo y creo que funciona mejor. Hace las cosas más rápidas”*.

In other words, Nahuatl learners have assimilated that it is essential that they recognise structures in the target language without comparing with the mother tongue since the beginning of their training. Hossain (2015) concludes that writing in the target language is a convenient form of reinforcing what learners study in other skills such as reading and speaking. This strategy helps learners to review vocabulary and grammatical aspects, and this manner, they become autonomous in the process.

### **There was more previous knowledge in English than in Nahuatl**

Social circumstances and conditions influence the learning process in a second language. Consequently, there are some challenges that learners could deal with during the development according to their contexts. This can be seen in this study which compares the issues that Nahuatl and English learners face in writing skills. On the one hand, English learners revealed that most of them have studied the EL for around 6 years because this language was a subject which was taught since secondary school. Perla recognized having studied English before: *“he estudiado inglés aproximadamente siete años, desde la secundaria”*.

In the same way Karla commented, *“Antes lo básico sí me gustaba, pero ya dejé de estudiar inglés desde la secundaria. En la prepa sí me lo pusieron, pero nada más en primero y entonces ahorita se me está complicando mucho más porque ya olvidé todo desde la secundaria, hasta ahora que lo metí hasta quinto (semestre de la universidad). Por eso no me gusta tanto porque se me hace muy complejo y eso que es el primero”*. Nevertheless, even though they have had contact with the target language for at least five years, they are studying at a beginners' level and they still demonstrate common mistakes as was observed in the classes. For instance, the verb “to be” which is considered as one of the main topics to work with in the first level, is still a problem when writing sentences in the EL. Tavakoli, *et al* (2016) assume that these difficulties are present because there is no practice outside the classroom. Even though English learners have taken classes for more than five years, they have not succeeded in acquiring the language. These authors also believe that students do not pay enough attention to the EL in secondary school and preparatory school due to a lack of interest. Most of students in these levels take the EL as any other subject in the school.

On the other hand, the Nahuatl learners accepted not having had contact with the Nahuatl variant “mexicano del centro alto” (Mexican language of the centre-north) which was the variant taught in this course. However, it must be emphasised the fact that NL has around 44 variants according to Pharaoh (2013), and there are significant differences among them. In addition, the NL was an oral language which means that texts were not recurrent to produce. Hence, the participants in this study did not have previous knowledge in the language. For example, Carlos claimed that this is the first year that he has contact with this language: *“En el curso actual llevamos dos meses. Lo había intentado antes en la UNAM hace como medio año, pero tenía los horarios complicados”*. Simon contributed to this question too, *“Encontré este curso en las redes sociales, en Facebook en específico y cuadraba con lo que yo estaba buscando. Fue por eso por lo que yo me animé a inscribirme y eso ocurrió en septiembre de este año. El curso lleva 2 meses”*. Despite all these challenges, it was observed that the Nahuatl learners were able to produce sentences well-structured according to the level they are. Even though some authors such as Hamel (2017) assure that the NL is not considered for academic aspects, it is significant to mention that since learners are developing the writing skill in the NL, it is likely to have more documents for preserving the language.

**Conclusion**

One of the main purposes of this study was to discover how different are the challenges that NL required compared with the EL regarding the writing skill. Therefore, the following table demonstrate the differences when learning the English language and the Nahuatl language.

|   | Nahuatl   | English  | Conclusion  |
|---|---|--|---|
| <b>Grammar is complex in both languages</b>                   | It is complex to acquire Nahuatl grammar due to agglutination. It is a grammatical aspect that is not common in the Spanish language.   | In English there are some grammatical structures that have different order than the Spanish.   | In both cases, students expect that structures are as the same way as in the mother tongue. Therefore, it becomes complicated to acquire new structures that students are not familiar with.  |
| <b>Reasons why students learn NL and EL are different</b>     | The interest of Nahuatl students benefits their learning process because they express enthusiasm when acquiring the language in classes.  | Motivation limits English learners to perform due to a lack of interest in developing the writing skill.   | In this situation, the lack of motivation is a disadvantage for English learners since they do not pay enough effort for developing their skills in the target language.  |
| <b>Lack of access to vocabulary in Nahuatl</b>                | The lack of access to vocabulary because it is necessary to focus on one specific variety into the language since all the varieties in this language have meaningful differences. It is also complex to obtain the vocabulary through the internet. | English students have the advantage of having easy access to information such as vocabulary. For instance, the internet, a person with knowledge or books.   | Regarding English learners, they have the opportunity to obtain vocabulary on their own. However, this is a big challenge for Nahuatl learners since they find it difficult to search new words apart from the vocabulary given by the teacher. |
| <b>The use of Spanish in both language learning processes</b> | Translation from the target language into the mother tongue and vice versa was used for understanding the classes. However, it must be emphasised the fact that Spanish was not used for writing, but for speaking only.                            | The use of the mother tongue is also recurrent in the English learning process when students translate the words and the sentences which they write from the mother tongue into the target language. | In both groups, learners made use of the mother tongue. Nevertheless, the main issue is for English learners who use Spanish for writing because it is confusing for them when making tests.  |

|   |  |  |  |
|---|--|--|--|
| <b>There was more previous knowledge in English than in Nahuatl</b> | The previous knowledge in the NL was non-existent when the course started. | It can be concluded that English students had previous experience in this language since they took English for 5 years ago at least before the course started. | Even when both groups are in beginners level, the challenge is for Nahuatl learners because they found it difficult in being in context with the language since the start of the course. |
|---|--|--|--|

**Table 1** comparison on the challenges on developing English and Nahuatl languages  
Source: Own elaboration

**Pedagogical implications**

Language schools may explore Mexican native languages to incorporate in their programs since the NL has demonstrated that it has the pedagogy to be taught in schools as the same way that the EL. It is also significant that foreign languages such as the EL consider different strategies for helping students to acquire the language without minimal complications. Nevertheless, the most important point to mention is that beginner’s level is when students start the second language learning process. Therefore, it is when students must be encouraged to continue developing their learning and this way, they could achieve their purposes. It is expected that this study can help people to improve in the teaching-learning processes.

**References**

Aldaya, V. L. R. (2020). *Omissiones de la interculturalidad: una lectura desde Latinoamérica* (vol. 47). Editorial UOC.

Alqahtani, M. (2015). The importance of vocabulary in language learning and how to be taught. *International Journal of Teaching and Education, Vol. III (3), pp. 21-34*. Retrieved from <https://www.iises.net/international-journal-of-teaching-education/publication-detail-213>

Al-Gharabally, M. (2015). The Writing Difficulties Faced by L2 Learners and How to Minimize them. *European Centre for Research Training and Development UK*. Retrieved from <http://www.eajournals.org/wp-content/uploads/The-writing-difficulties-faced-by-L2-learners-and-how-to-minimize-them.pdf>

Arteaga, N. K. C. (2020). Análisis de las desigualdades socioeconómicas de la población indígena migrante interna y no migrante en México para los periodos 2010 y 2015. Publicación digital.



- British Council (2015, may). English in Mexico: An examination of policy, perceptions and influencing factors. *Teaching English*. Digital publication.
- Celik, B. (2019). Developing Writing Skills Through Reading. Department of Languages, Tishk International University, Erbil, Iraq. Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/339528074\\_Developing\\_Writing\\_Skills\\_Through\\_Reading](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/339528074_Developing_Writing_Skills_Through_Reading)
- Dagiliené, I. (2012). Translation as a Learning Method in English Language Teaching. *Studies About Languages*. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.5755/j01.sal.0.21.1469>
- Dhanya, M. and Alamelu, C. (2019). Factors Influencing the Acquisition of Writing Skills. *International Journal of Innovative Technology and Exploring Engineering (IJITEE)*. Retrieved from <https://www.ijitee.org/wp-content/uploads/papers/v8i7c2/G10590587C219.pdf>
- De Felice, D. (2012). Nahuatl as a Classical, Foreign, and Additional Language: A Phenomenological Study. *The Qualitative Report*, 17(39), 1-23. Retrieved from <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol17/iss39/2>
- Hamel, R. (2017). Bilingual Education for Indigenous Peoples in Mexico. *Encyclopedia of Language and Education*. Retrieved from <http://hamel.com.mx/Archivos-Publicaciones/75.-hamel,-rainer-enrique.-2018.-bilingual-education-for-indigenous-peoples-in-mexico.pdf>
- Hossain, M. (2015). Teaching Productive Skills to the Students: A Secondary Level Scenario. *BRAC University*. Digital publication.
- Huy, N. (2015). Problems Affecting Learning Writing Skill of Grade 11 At Thong Linh High School. *Asian Journal of Educational Research*. Retrieved from [https://nanopdf.com/download/problems-affecting-learning-writing-skill-of-grade\\_pdf](https://nanopdf.com/download/problems-affecting-learning-writing-skill-of-grade_pdf)
- Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (2010). Lengua Indígena. INEGI. Digital publication.
- Martínez, C., Zempoalteca, A., Soancatl, V., Estudillo, M., Lara, J. and Alcántara S. (2012). Computer Systems for Analysis of Nahuatl. *Research in Computing Science*. Retrieved from <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Computer-Systems-for-Analysis-of-Nahuatl-Mart%C3%ADnez-Gil-Zempoalteca-P%C3%A9rez/bc4a046d6a21346e5edad256a36df9ed70c6d374>
- Mohammed, M. (2018). Challenges of Learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) by Non-Native Learners. *International Journal of Social Science and Economic Research*. Digital publication. Retrieved from [ijsser.org/more2018.php?id=97](http://ijsser.org/more2018.php?id=97)
- Mohite, M. (2015). An Investigation into the English Language Writing Strategies Used by Polish EFL Secondary School Learners. *London Metropolitan University*. Digital publication.
- Mojica, R. (2016). Intergenerational Language Ideologies, Practices, and Management: An Ethnographic Study in a Nahuatl Community. *Arizona State University*. Retrieved from [https://repository.asu.edu/attachments/170484/content/Lagunas\\_asu\\_0010E\\_15885.pdf](https://repository.asu.edu/attachments/170484/content/Lagunas_asu_0010E_15885.pdf)
- Moses, R., and Mohamad, M. (2019). Challenges Faced by Students and Teachers on Writing Skills in ESL Contexts: A Literature Review. *Creative Education*, 10, 3385-3391. Digital publication.
- Olko, J. and Sullivan, J. (2015). Empire, Colony, and Globalization. A Brief History of the Nahuatl Language. *Colloquia Humanistica*. Retrieved from <https://ispan.waw.pl/journals/index.php/ch/article/viewFile/150/120>
- Pharao, M. (2013). Nahuatl in the Plural: Dialectology and Activism in Mexico. *American Anthropological Association, Annual Meeting*. Digital publication.
- Rao, P. (2019). Teaching of Writing Skills to Foreign or Second Language Learners of English. *ELT Vibes: International E-Journal for Research in ELT*. Retrieved from [https://www.academia.edu/5174860/Nahuatl\\_in\\_the\\_Plural\\_Dialectology\\_and\\_Activism\\_in\\_Mexico](https://www.academia.edu/5174860/Nahuatl_in_the_Plural_Dialectology_and_Activism_in_Mexico)
- Sun, A. and Chen, X. (2016). Online education and its effective practice: A research review. *Journal of Information Technology Education: Research*, 15, 157-190. Retrieved from <http://www.informingscience.org/Publications/3502>

Tavakoli, N., Shakeri, N. and Ghanbarzadeh, T. (2016). *Language Learning Beyond the Classroom*. Digital publication.

Tengnäs, A. (2016). How to recognize a good case study. *School of Business, Engineering and Science, University of Halmstad, Halmstad, Sweden*. Retrieved from <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1055043/.pdf>

Tovar, R. (2017). Vocabulary knowledge in the production of written texts: a case study on EFL language learners. *Revista Tecnológica - ESPOL*, 30(3). Retrieved from <http://www.rte.espol.edu.ec/index.php/tecnologica/article/view/62>