

Demotivation, Confidence, and Recognition in the Dissertation Writing Process

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Andamiajes, 5.2 / SKRIB 2.1

Abstract

This paper is an account of a tutoring experience offered to a doctoral student at a Colombian Writing Center. It offers a vision of the practice according to the needs of a specific profile. The experience of the accompaniment in the writing of the student's doctoral thesis, which was recorded in 114 tutorials, will be described in detail. This account will give an account of three specific moments that evidence the progression in the writing of the thesis and will be characterized as three distinct states of the writing process of the accompanied student. The first moment, called Demotivation, reflects the manifest difficulty of successfully completing the doctoral thesis. The second moment, called Confidence, will show the changes in her writing from selected samples of the text before and after receiving the tutoring; and the third moment, Recognition, details the influence of the progress of her writing process in her professional life up to obtaining a national award related to her research. This account is intended to be of interest to support similar processes in other writing centers or programs, as well as to serve as a reference in the creation of future research projects.

Keywords: experience report, tutoring, doctoral dissertation, revision support.

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Experience Report Context

Socializations of experiences are recognized for their contributions to pedagogical research and self-training (Suárez, 2021); however, their consideration as part of scientific research is still debated. Experience reports, as they are also known, narrate the significant details of a specific practical implementation to account for the experiences and processes executed. Thus, the reports can be disseminated in research communities or other spaces, in order to show learning or reflection on a fact to interpret it, producing knowledge in situ (Echevarría, 2022). In this sense, the story presented below shares the tutoring experience offered to a doctoral student in a Colombian Writing Center, based on three specific moments that frame the tutoring provided: Demotivation, Confidence and Recognition. This framework of an experience report is chosen to present this support with the idea of exposing a narrative reconstruction (Suárez, 2021) as an input for self-training and co-training in academic writing support at the doctoral level, as it is an experience from which distance is taken to look at it in detail, analyze what happened, and finally recreate it as a contribution to the practice of writing centers and programs.

In order to contextualize the writing support of the student's doctoral thesis, the total number of tutorials recorded was 114, spread over a period of one year and two months; two or three sessions (morning and afternoon) were scheduled in one day, depending on the time availability of the user and the tutors. In order to favor the continuity of the tutoring and the progress of the process, a protocol was applied, which is detailed in moment 2. In the same way, the user was assisted by eight tutors of the center, a different one in each scheduled session.

Moment 1. Demotivation

In 2022, a doctoral student in Education came to the Writing Center. The student visited the center because she felt that she did not have the necessary writing tools to write a document at this level and felt quite demotivated because she was not making progress in writing her doctoral thesis. She stated that if she did not get the expected help, she would most likely abandon her studies and, therefore, the goal of graduating as a doctor in education. When reviewing fragments of the text in the first tutorials, the more spontaneous mode of orality was

noticeable. Most of the paragraphs contained long sentences separated only by commas. One of the main concerns observed in the user was the repeated assertion that she would not be able to finish her thesis or graduate. Given this concern, it was necessary to ask her to start making positive affirmations to “counteract” her constant negative statements. It is noteworthy that “uncertainty in student discourse,” a finding noted by Mackiewicz (2018) in his study of conversations between tutors and mentees, was present in about half of the sessions. Uncertainty was not only manifested in personal comments, but also in insecurity in the face of questions from tutors inquiring about how she wished to express an idea, i.e., concretize what she needed to say in the text.

Most of the tutorials were scheduled under the virtual modality, because the user resides far from the university where the Writing Center is located. The platform used was Teams, with sessions lasting one hour. The user shared the screen at the time of the session to show her text, written in a Word document; it should be noted that at no time was the document shared with the tutors or edited by them, due to the center's own policy that does not allow the manipulation of users' texts by the tutors, for any reason whatsoever. Some of the user's tutorials were made difficult by the inconveniences associated with accessing a stable internet connection: failures due to rain, audio or image inconsistencies, among others, which were elements that dispersed the focus of the tutorial: the development of the writing skills that the tutor requires (Molina-Natera, 2017). At other times, the user showed a hurry to advance in the revision because she considered that she was going too slowly. In this sense, it was necessary to remind her of the protocol of attention used in the center for tutoring, which emphasized maintaining the necessary revision time to avoid skipping some part of the text or making an inadequate choice in some change.

Moment 2. Confidence

As she progressed through the revision process and began to receive positive feedback from her thesis directors, the user's enthusiasm was noticeable in continuing to revise the entire document with the support of the center's tutors. This enthusiasm was also noticeable in the student's recognition of several writing conventions, already exemplified in previous tutorials. This progress coincided with the demand for tutorials of a more directive nature (González Lillo

and Mateo-Girona, 2023), rather than suggestions and questions according to non-directive tutoring, which is most commonly used in most writing centers. The need for changes in the text that affected the expression and tone of the arguments was identified, which caused several revision sessions to be made with direct comments from the tutors, in response to the user's demand for information. For González Lillo and Mateo-Girona (2018) this change is related to the insecurity derived from the writing competence, so the tutors needed to discuss beforehand about the progress of some sessions to give her direct feedback that would allow continuity to be maintained.

Eight tutors were able to coordinate their support to the client throughout the process without any difficulty, because it was agreed that before starting each session, the first thing the client would do was to summarize what had been done in the previous session: progress made, pending tasks and completion of the tasks. This protocol was used only with this client in view of the particularity of her case, that is, the support of the writing of her thesis during 114 sessions of attention; subsequently the tutors noted the effectiveness of the protocol because it helped with the use of time and the productivity of the conversation. This part of the Confidence moment has similarity with what Mackiewicz (2018) pointed out, when he describes the evolution of the tutors' discourse in relation to the context, which is influenced by the refinement of pedagogical practices, that is, part of the discourse showed changes in terms of the type of questions asked, in this sense, the tutor refines the questions asked so that the user remembers her knowledge and builds a new one that she did not possess.

Out of the whole process of support, we share a selected example of the text before and after receiving a tutorial, which shows a significant change related to the user's writing decisions (see Table 1)¹:

¹ Translator's note: The example was left in Spanish to adequately represent the progress in the students' writing.

Table 1*Example before and after in a revision session*

Before	After
Para ilustrar, la primera pieza de activación, está compuesta por un repaso visual un repaso auditivo y una estimulación para decodificar las palabras. Estos tres momentos dentro de la primera pieza permiten hacer un refuerzo en la conciencia fonológica, activar los conocimientos previos en la clase de lengua castellana	Para ilustrar, la primera pieza de activación está compuesta por un repaso visual, un repaso auditivo y una estimulación para decodificar palabras. Estos tres momentos dentro de la primera pieza permiten hacer un refuerzo en la conciencia fonológica y en las habilidades de codificación básicas (Defior & Serrano, 2011; Gabrieli, 2009) para activar los conocimientos previos en la clase de lengua castellana.

In this example, the user analyzed the text and then decided what she needed to say and how she was going to include it, so that the text would say what she needed to say. Apart from punctuation and spaces left over, you can see that the paragraph changes when you add information and reference data that are key to understanding the text.

Moment 3. Acknowledgment

This moment does not give an account of specific moments in the user's thesis writing process, but rather details the influence of the progress of her writing process on her professional life, up to the awarding of a national prize related to her doctoral research.

In this sense, the user was selected to represent the Caribbean region in the annual meeting of Colombian teachers and students Educa Digital, an event that recognizes and rewards the best educational proposals with a focus on technology, made by teachers from public schools in the country. The proposal led by the user in the institution where she works was considered a significant classroom experience that combined creativity, technology and education. The document to apply for the award was related to her doctoral research and was also reviewed at the Writing Center. Afterwards, the user shared with the team of tutors words of gratitude that show the fundamental role of the review spaces for her transformation from an insecure and unmotivated writer into a self-confident writer, with new knowledge in writing that she applies in her daily life and that she was not clear about before coming to the center.

This experience report can be characterized as a success story, because it not only achieved the main objective for which the user came to the center, but also helped in the development of confidence to review other texts, such as her application for a national teaching award. The accompaniment can be considered relevant because it proposes a specific protocol for the particular needs of a user, which can help other centers to specify a detailed attention route for revision sessions similar to the one detailed here. It is hoped that this report may be of interest for similar processes that may be carried out in other centers or writing programs or to be considered as input for future research projects.

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