Needs-based curriculum design for academic writing in Spanish as a foreign language

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Abstract

The present article addresses the complexity of writing a final project in a foreign language to obtain a university diploma. The study investigates how working with needs analysis can contribute to designing and implementing an academic writing workshop tailored to the participants. Specifically, the article targets an academic writing course in Spanish as a foreign language at a Danish university as a case study and presents the design of our needs analysis and the obtained results. The research design is based on questionnaires on self-assessed needs. Based on the answers at the beginning of the course, a writing workshop was designed to respond to the students' formulated needs. At the end of the course, a similar questionnaire was applied to measure the impact of the needs analysis-based workshop on the students' self-assessed learning. A positive result was attained, which encourages the use of this pedagogical strategy for curriculum design.

Introduction

Higher education writing in a foreign language

Writing in a foreign language is a complex skill in general and even more so when it comes to academic writing. The challenge is even greater when the goal is writing a final academic project, which will be the key to obtaining a university diploma. In this context, it is of utmost importance to find the most suitable pedagogical models to support students in their writing process development. Among different pedagogical strategies available for educators, needs analysis implies a deep reflection by students about their own difficulties. Therefore, it provides an opportunity to develop self-reflection as part of the students' educational process, which makes it an interesting conceptual and methodological tool to implement. In this article, we will present how working with needs analysis (West, 1994; Long, 2005a, b) can contribute to designing and implementing an academic writing workshop tailored to the participants. Having an academic writing course in Spanish as a foreign language as a case study (see also Fernández & Pozzo, 2024), we will present the design of our needs analysis and the obtained results. Therefore, the research question that we intend to answer is: To what extent can an academic writing workshop designed through needs analysis lead to perceived improvements among Spanish L2 university students by providing opportunities for self-reflection?

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Needs analysis

The present study has its starting point in the field called "needs analysis" (West, 1994; Long, 2005a, 2005b). This field of study has its origins in the early 20th century and its peak in the 1970s, especially in relation to the design of courses in English as a foreign language and for specific purposes courses (West, 1994, p. 2). Needs analyses can have multiple purposes and target groups in the context of language learning and teaching. The technique has often been used for curriculum development. For example, Akyel & Ozeka (2010) have implemented a needs analysis for the innovation of the ELT curriculum of an English medium university in Istanbul. Other authors (e.g., Sani et al., 2020) refer to the importance of needs analysis for the process of designing and carrying out any language course, whether (English) for Specific Purposes or General (English). Finally, needs analysis can also help to gain a better understanding of teaching techniques, strategies, or methods for language learning (Akhadalievich & Nozimakhon, 2022).

We are aware that the concept of "needs" is a construct that can encompass elements as diverse as desires, demands, expectations, motivations, shortcomings, etc. (Richards, 2021, p. 54). Macallister & Nation (2020) retrieve Hutchinson & Waters (1987) division of needs into target needs (i.e. what the learners need to do in the target situation) and learning needs (i.e. what they need to do in order to learn). The analysis of the former comprises: lacks (present knowledge), necessities (required knowledge), and wants (subjective needs). The above-mentioned and other exhaustive classifications deployed by Hutchinson & Waters (1987) show that seminal work on needs analysis has been crucial for further developments, as it has set the methodological framework for subsequent case studies.

In our case study, the goal was twofold: on the one hand, to identify the gaps between the target group of students' perception of their written ability and what they needed to do in the particular context in which they found themselves (that is, when having to write a final academic project in a foreign language) and, on the other hand, collect information about particular writing problems that they were experiencing. This means that the concept of "needs" should be understood in this context as a linguistic deficiency manifested between what the students can and should be able to do regarding writing in Spanish (Richards, 2021, p. 54), combined with possible deficiencies related to knowledge of topic and of conventions for academic papers. Because of this complexity, the analysis in this paper is done through three levels (micro, macro and superstructure), as it will be explained in the following sections. To sum up, "needs" are equivalent to "target needs" according to Hutchinson & Waters (1987).

Having our specific purpose in mind, we chose among the different types of existing needs analysis procedures to concentrate on the needs perceived by the participants themselves, and we focused on one particular area of their language proficiency: their academic writing. We believe that involving students in the course design process through self-reflection has pedagogical advantages. These include raising awareness about what it means to be a student, a greater capacity for self-assessment, and even the creation of realistic expectations about the course's contributions. By basing the course design on what students believe they need, it is possible to include class activities that are relevant to students, and which can therefore promote motivation and active participation in class and reduce course dropout (Nunan 1988, in West 1994, p. 6).

As an instrument for collecting self-assessed needs, we opted for one of the most used deductive procedures: the questionnaire (Pozzo, Borgobello & Pierella, 2019), in our case with closed and open questions (Tables 1 & 2). We scrutinised the students' needs from the double perspective of "weaknesses and strengths" and "writing goals" (see section 3.3). This main instrument was complemented by ongoing dialogue between the teacher and the students and observation throughout the course, which increased the quality of the information collected

and gave rise to adjustments along the way (Long, 2005b, p. 32), achieving a triangular approach as advised by Richards (2021, p. 59).

In accordance with our intention to include students as much as possible in the design of the course, we opted for the label "workshop", which carries the idea of a space for practice, collaboration, experimentation, and reflection (Imbernon Muñoz & Medina Moya, 2008, p. 16). The workshop allows teachers and students to collaboratively address a set of specific problems, in this case the needs of the participants regarding academic writing in Spanish. At the same time, it provides opportunities for personal growth: learning to be, learning to learn, and learning to do (Betancourt, 2007 in Asencio Pastor, 2019, p. 210). The workshop was thus designed to turn participants into protagonists. The programmed activities included reflection activities in groups, peer feedback and critical readings of own and other people's texts. This had the purpose of elevating the workshop beyond the practical objective of learning to write ("learning to do"), to "learning to learn", by preparing participants to continue their progress in writing independently, and "learning to be", by encouraging them to be autonomous scholars in their professional future.

Method

In this section we present the details of our study design, including our student population, course description, and data collection instruments.

The population

The subjects participating in this study are fifth-semester students on the Bachelor's degree programme in Spanish and Spanish American Language, Literature and Culture at a Danish university. During this semester, students must complete a "Bachelor's project", i.e. the final project of the Bachelor's degree programme, which makes up half of the semester's workload (15 ECTS). Like all university assignments, it is a very specific genre, targeted mainly to the examiners. To support this task, students are offered a 6-week writing course, and it is precisely the design of this course (which, as we indicated in the previous section, we decided to label "workshop") what we intend to analyse in this article.

Specifically, a group of 13 students, 11 women and 2 men, all of them native speakers of Danish and in their twenties, with a Spanish language level of around B1-B2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe, 2001), i.e. an intermediate proficiency level, participated in this study. It is worth mentioning that students are required to have studied Spanish at upper secondary school (three-years study) or have a similar Spanish level. All gave their written consent to participate in the study and allowed access to their data. The Bachelor's project consists of a written academic paper of 15-20 pages, which exceeds by far these students' previous academic writing experiences in Spanish, which were limited to shorter written assignments of up to 9 pages, some of them completed in groups. The Bachelor's project has the form of a monograph on a topic of the student's choice from any of the three pillars of the degree: an aspect of the Spanish language (a linguistic perspective), a cultural/social aspect of the Spanish-speaking world, or the analysis of literature written in Spanish. It can be a theoretical discussion or an empirical study (the latter is recommended and constitutes the option chosen by most of the students). Each student has a supervisor, who is a specialist in one of the aforementioned three areas. This supervisor is in charge of providing the students with individual feedback on language and content during their writing process, so only collective feedback was provided during the course. The students had access to previous Bachelor's projects so that they could see how other students had accomplished this task.

The instructors in charge of the writing workshop we are presenting are the authors of this article: the first author as a visiting professor and the second author as the regular instructor of this course, also in charge of other

previous subjects with the same students.

Description of the course

The writing course that constitutes our case study was designed as a pedagogical intervention (Tanggaard & Brinkmann, 2015) to improve the quality of the writing support given to the target group of students: writers of a Bachelor's project during the 5th semester of the Bachelor's programme. We understand pedagogical interventions as a procedure where "agents enter and influence a process of change in a specific field" (Ebbensgaard & Elf, 2011, p. 32). The course or workshop consists of 6 weekly classes delivered in Spanish of one hour and thirty minutes each, divided into two 45-minute modules. As a support course, it does not have a rigid syllabus, but rather establishes a series of general goals for the learners: improving academic writing in Spanish, expanding academic vocabulary, learning strategies to organise the writing process, learning how to cite texts and build the list of bibliographic references, receiving encouragement, support, resources, and motivation. Specific content and activities may be adjusted over the course of the semester. In this context, we set out to exploit the course's flexibility and test the benefits of this feature for learning. To achieve this, we proceeded to collect the students' needs regarding writing in Spanish, as expressed by the students themselves. Data collection was done through a questionnaire developed for this purpose (*ad hoc*). Then we designed and implemented the classes according to these needs. At the end of the workshop, and with the purpose of comparing the students' needs before and after the workshop, we surveyed the students' needs again by means of two instruments: a new version of the questionnaire and the analysis of the participants' written productions. From these two sources of post-course data collection, we focus on the former in this article, i.e. the students' self-expressed needs, while the analysis of the bachelor papers is presented in Fernández & Pozzo (in preparation).

Data collection instruments

The first data collection instrument consisted of a pre-course survey (Table 1), written and answered in Spanish. As seen in Table 1, the instrument included closed and open questions. In order to obtain the most detailed information possible, the closed questions allowed the students to make comments on each item. In terms of content, the survey was implicitly structured by two complementary perspectives: a current one (the situation at the moment in which the survey was answered) referring to weaknesses – what needs to be reinforced – and strengths – what they already master – and a future one, expressed in writing goals, which in turn is another way of delving into weaknesses. The first perspective was adapted from a study with native Spanish students writing a Master's thesis project (Pozzo, Angelucci & Cardoso, 2021). This study, in turn, was based on Van Dijk's (1980) categories regarding difficulties in text microstructure, macrostructure, and superstructure.

Survey on the strengths and weaknesses of one's own academic writing
Fall 2022
Name:

Issues of microstructure (the local level of the text: the sentence)

Categories	Subcategories	1 (I feel confident)	2	3	4	5 (I feel insecure)	Comments
Punctuation and accents	Use of the comma						
	Use of semicolons						
	Use of colons						
	Use of the full stop						
	Other punctuation marks						
	Use of accents						
Style	Use of capital letters						
	Use of sentence connectors						
	Use of academic vocabulary						
	Verbal and nominal agreement						
	Use of pronouns (e.g. relative pronouns)						
	Use of tenses						
	Use of the subjunctive						

Issues of macrostructure (the cohesion between sentences and the development of ideas in the text)

Category	Subcategories	1 (I feel confident)	2	3	4	5 (I feel insecure)	Comments
Cohesion and coherence	Dividing the text into paragraphs						
	Cohesion between sentences						
	Use of discourse markers						

Issues of superstructure (the characteristics of the academic genre)

Category	Subcategories	1 (I feel confident)	2	3	4	5 (I feel insecure)	Comments
Formalities of academic writing	Finding a good title						
	Explaining the methodology used						
	Writing the theoretical framework section						
	Explaining the results of the analysis						
	Writing a discussion of the results						

	Presenting textual citations correctly					
	Making the reference list					

Additional comments:

Is there anything else you would like to comment on about your strengths, expectations, doubts, insecurities, etc. regarding writing in Spanish?

Writing Goals
Based on the insecurities identified in the questionnaire, write at least three writing goals for this semester (e.g. "I want to become more confident in the use of the subjunctive" or "I would like to learn to use the APA referencing system").
1)
2)
3)
...

Table 1: Pre-course survey

As we have previously indicated, the results of this survey were processed as soon as the first class ended, in order to plan the following ones based on the needs expressed by the students. At the end of the workshop, a post-course survey was implemented (Table 2) with the same structure as the initial one in order to obtain comparable results. Two questions were added regarding the usefulness of the course, inquiring into satisfaction with respect to the topics presented during the workshop and with respect to own learning gains. As for the other questions, there was both a quantitative weighting via a Likert scale and the possibility of free-text comments. The survey ended with a 20-minute free writing exercise in Spanish about their current feelings regarding academic writing in Spanish.

Writing Workshop Closing Survey - Fall 2022

Dear student: At the beginning of the workshop, you completed a questionnaire about the strengths and weaknesses of your own academic writing. Now that the workshop has ended, we would appreciate it if you carried out a new evaluation on the same aspects.

Evaluation about the workshop:

To what extent were your expectations about the workshop met in terms of the presented topics? Mark with X where applicable:

1: Not at all	2	3	4	5: Totally

Comments:

To what extent were your expectations about the workshop met in terms of what you learned during the classes? Mark with X where applicable:

1: Not at all	2	3	4	5: Totally

Comments:

Writing Goals
What are your writing goals at this point in the process and until you finish the Bachelor project?
1)
2)
3)

Time to write...
Next, write for twenty minutes about how you feel about your academic writing right now and what insecurities still remain.

Table 2: Post-course survey: the added questions to Table 1

It should be noted that the questionnaires contain a number of technical terms related to grammar and text construction. As these students have already completed three modules of grammar courses, including text grammar, the wording of the questionnaires did not pose any problems. In any case, the surveys were answered in class, with ample opportunities to ask the instructors clarifying questions.

Results

In this section, we present our analysis, structured according to pre-course and post-course results.

1. Student needs at the beginning of the course

The results of the pre-course questionnaire were processed in the survey's different sections: strengths and weaknesses and writing goals. The results are presented in the following sections.

1.1 Strengths and weaknesses

All figures about strengths and weaknesses show Likert scale values: light green for "confident" (1), yellow for the middle value (3), and pink for "insecure" (5), with dark shades of blue and green for (2) and (4), respectively. As can be seen in Figure 1, which summarises the results referring to microstructure issues, the topics in this category that present the highest level of insecurity for the participants are the use of the subjunctive mood and punctuation. The highest value corresponding to insecurity (weakness) in the microstructure (value 5) was observed in the use of the subjunctive (value 5 chosen by 4 students) and in punctuation marks other than the main ones (comma, semi-colon, colon, and full stop) (value 5 chosen by 5 students). In the next high value of insecurity (4), we find the use of the comma and the full stop (value 5 chosen by 4 students for each), which indicates a general high degree of insecurity in punctuation matters.
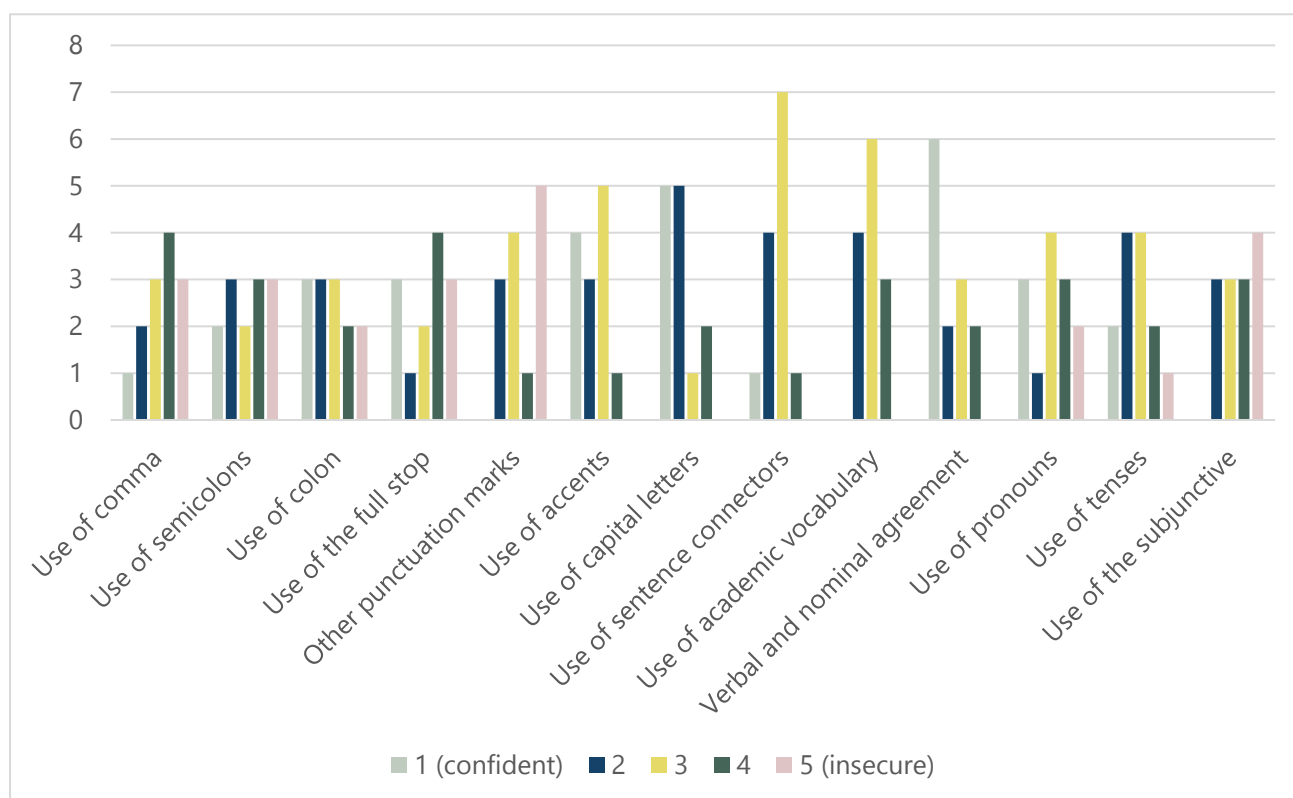

Figure 1: Pre-course strengths and weaknesses regarding microstructure

Figure 2, which zooms into the results on punctuation, allows us to appreciate the high level of insecurity caused by the comma, which concentrates more than half of the responses (7 out of 13) between the two values of greatest weakness.
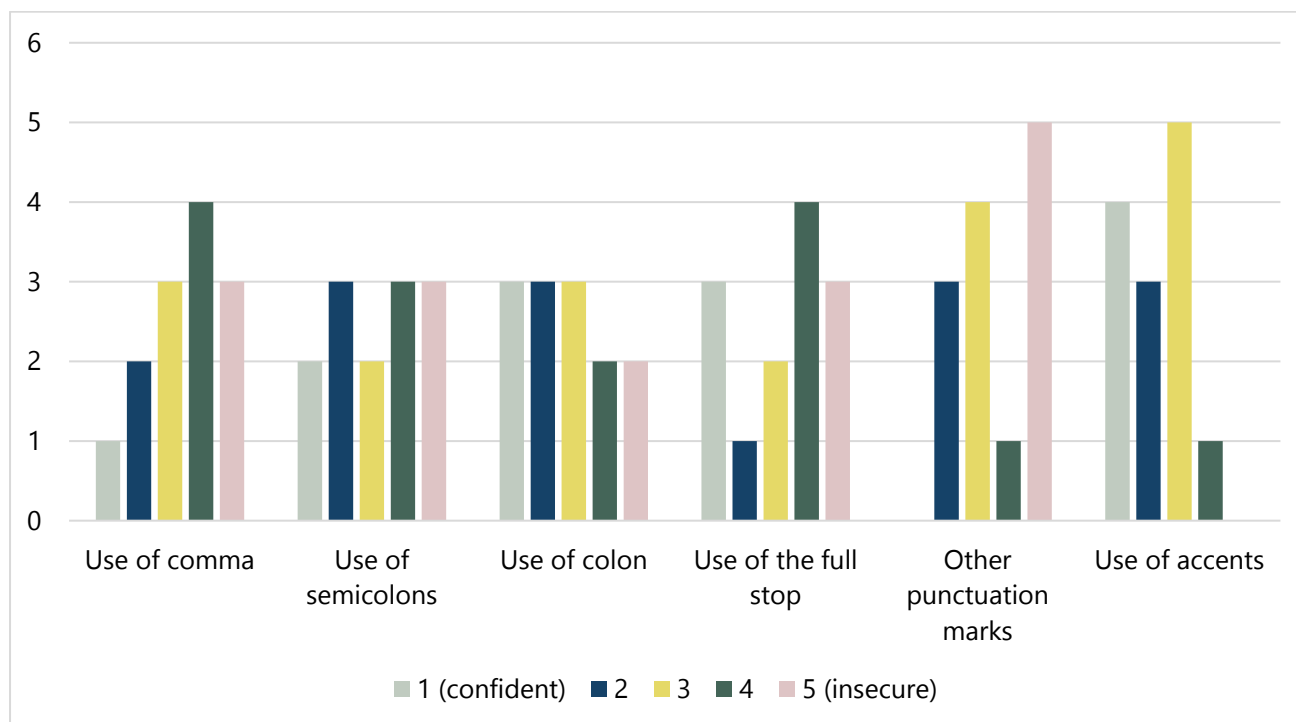
Figure 2: Pre-course strengths and weaknesses in microstructure by subject area: Punctuation

As anticipated in Figure 1, the "style" aspect of the microstructure (Figure 3) had its weakest link in the use of the subjunctive, presenting the greatest number of responses with the value of maximum insecurity (5) and without any response with the maximum of confidence (1). The other topics do not pose any major difficulties, with verbal and nominal agreement being a topic that shows great confidence among the respondents.
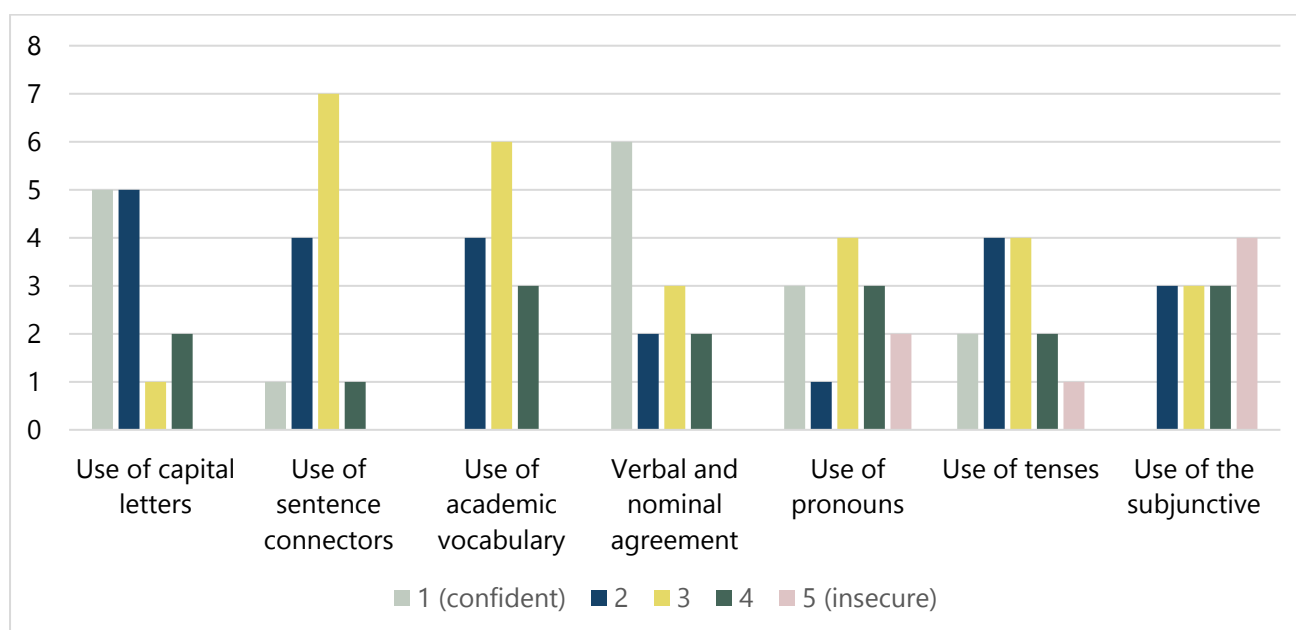
Figure 3: Pre-course strengths and weaknesses in microstructure by subject area: Style

At the macrostructure level (Figure 4), no topic has been marked in which the students feel totally insecure (value 5), and those with the next value (4) have a single response for each topic. Only one intermediate value (3) stands out, corresponding to the "use of discourse markers". All other areas denote a good level of confidence.
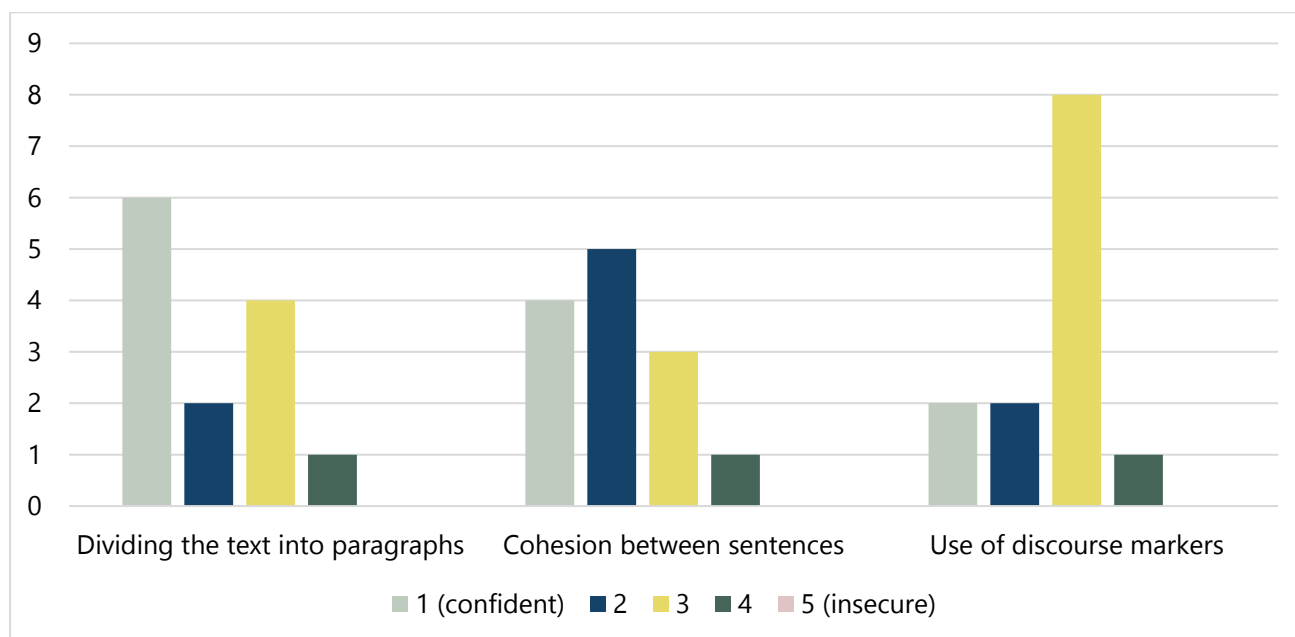
Figure 4: Pre-course strengths and weaknesses in the macrostructure: Coherence and cohesion

Superstructure (Figure 5) does not seem to cause major insecurities, with the highest insecurity value (5) being found in the writing of the theoretical framework and in the presentation of the methodology used (both with 2 out of 13 responses), followed by the writing of the discussion of results (1 out of 13). Regarding the following value (4), it is distributed among the different options with one response in each case, except for "finding a good title", which recorded 2 responses. Areas of greater confidence, shown by value 1, are writing the reference list (6 out of 13), textual citations and the results, both with the same number of value 1 responses (5 out of 13).
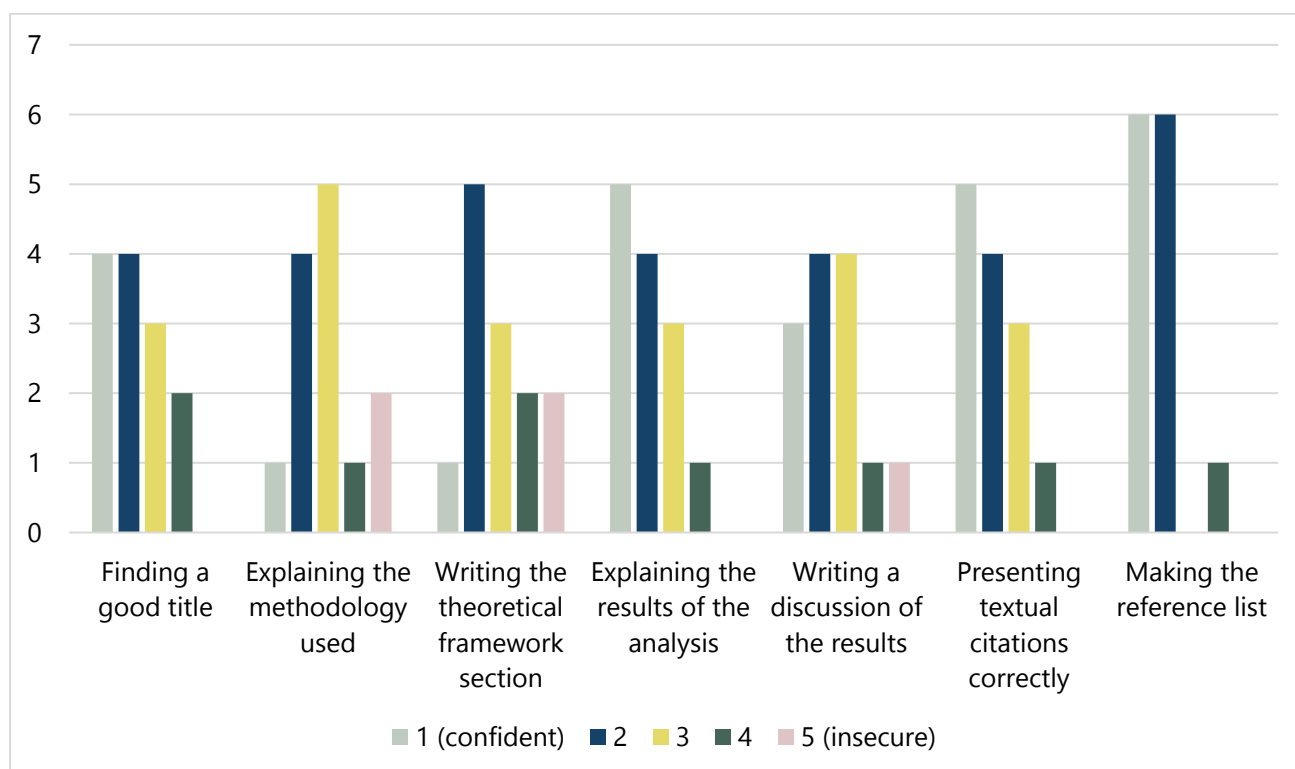

Figure 5: Pre-course strengths and weaknesses in the superstructure: Formalities of academic discourse

1.2 Pre-course writing goals

Regarding writing goals, which, as seen in Table 1, were freely formulated by the students themselves, they were systematised in the items showed in Figure 6, following the previous items to enable comparison. Most stated writing goals belong to the realm of the microstructure, especially with regard to the subjunctive and the use of the comma and pronouns. There is a complete coincidence with what the students raised in terms of weaknesses and strengths, as shown in Figures 1-3.
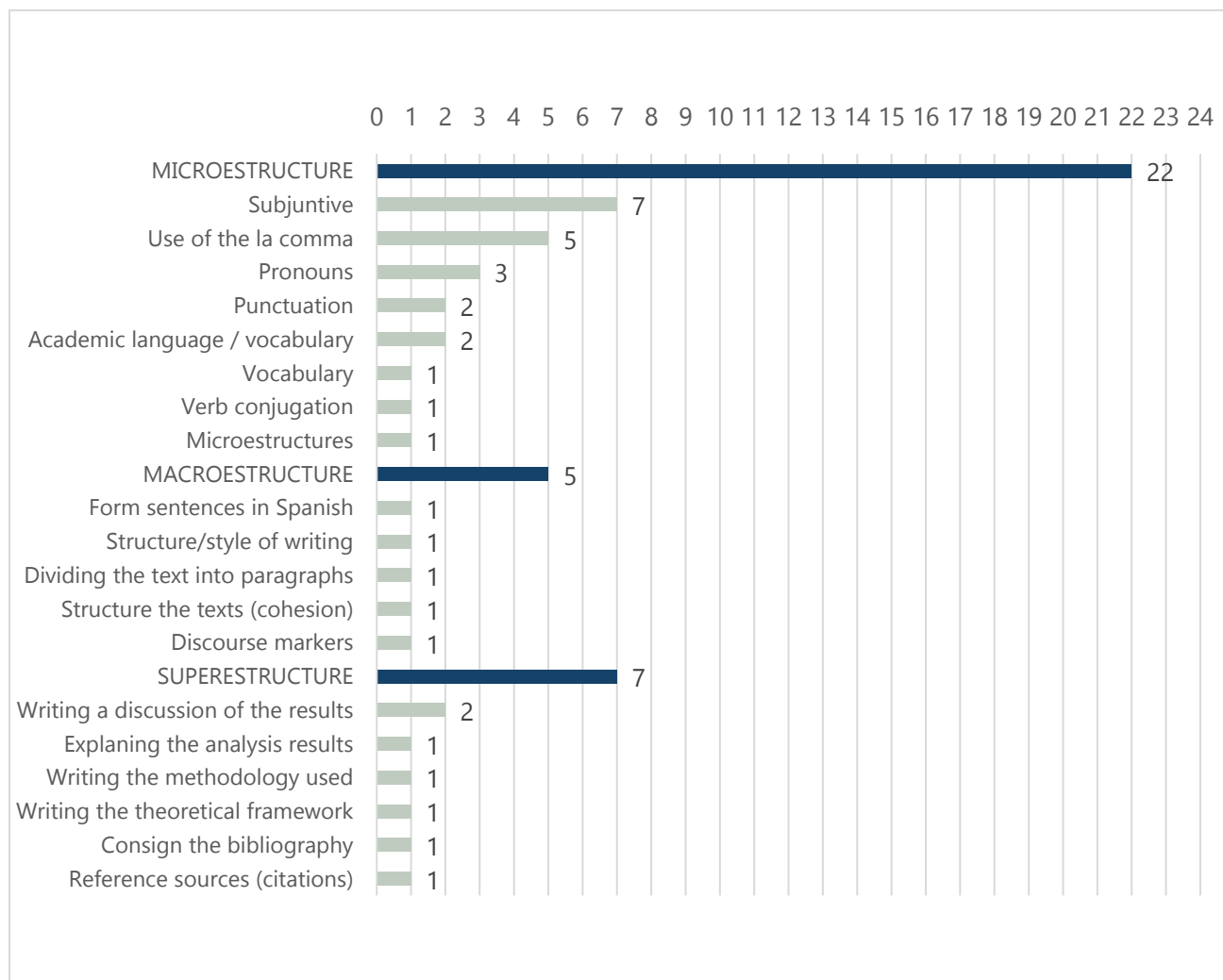

Figure 6: Pre-course writing goals by levels. The dark blue lines indicate the total amount of goals for each level (micro, macro & superstructure) whereas the light green lines show goals for each sublevel.

Taking into account the results obtained in the survey, we included in our course design teacher presentations and activities related to the most requested topics, with classes where the subjunctive mood and punctuation took centre stage. In these classes, after the presentation of input by the instructor, the activities were based on the revision of previous work by the student (e.g. previous exam papers written in Spanish) with focus on mood or punctuation. The revision work was done in pairs and had the goal of promoting awareness of own learning by applying a critical, retrospective view of own writing. Likewise, we touched upon certain superstructure aspects of the academic genre that we know from previous experience can be useful to review. In all cases, we prioritised self-evaluation work, with critical readings of previous writing output and group discussion sessions (Swain, 2006) with peer feedback (Fernández, 2022). This is related to the "workshop" modality chosen for the

course, which aims for a hands-on approach. For more details on the activities carried out for each topic, see Fernández & Pozzo (2024).

2 Needs at the end of the course

Below we review the results related to the state of the students' needs once the workshop was concluded. As in the case of the pre-course survey, the results that we present here are the self-assessed needs, expressed in terms of weaknesses and strengths of the participants at the time of completing the questionnaire.

2.1 Post-course strengths and weaknesses

At the end of the course, the level of insecurity related to the microstructure element of punctuation has changed compared to the beginning (Figure 7): the use of the comma and other punctuation marks, which was raised as a need at the beginning of the course, no longer registers any level 5 response and moves to the average value (3).
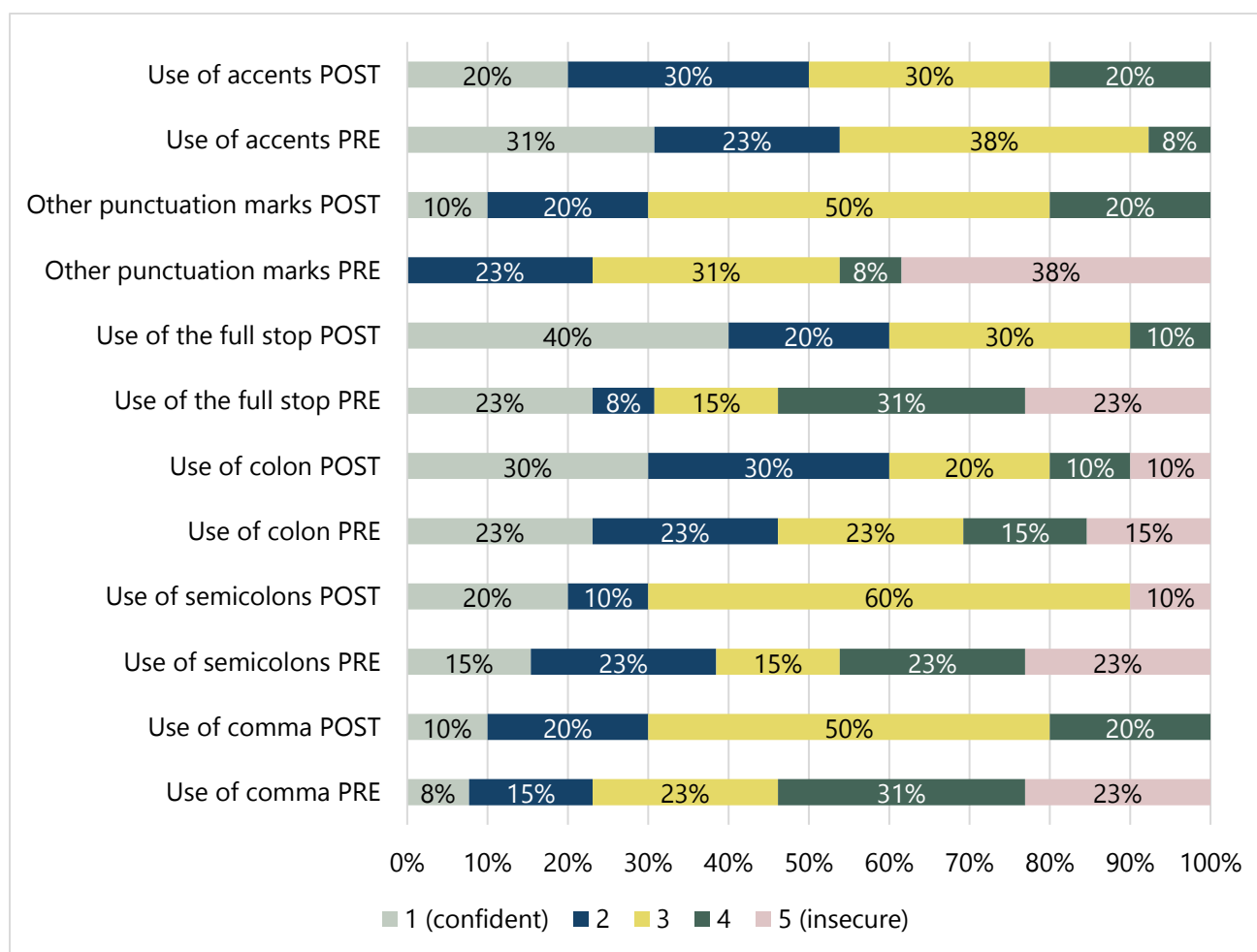

Figure 7: Pre & post-course strengths and weaknesses in microstructure by topic: Punctuation

Regarding the microstructure element "style" (Figure 8) and comparing it with the pre-course responses (Figure 3), the use of the subjunctive went from registering the greatest number of responses with the value of maximum insecurity (5) and without any response with the maximum security (1) to having a majority of responses in the value 2. Value 2 is the most frequent in all topics, except in verbal and nominal agreement, where value 1 is the most frequent choice. Thus, agreement continues to be the most confident among the respondents. Although

the measurement of actual writing skills is beyond the scope of this article, it is interesting to note that a number of students made quite some agreement errors in their 20-minute free writing exercise at the end of the course[2].
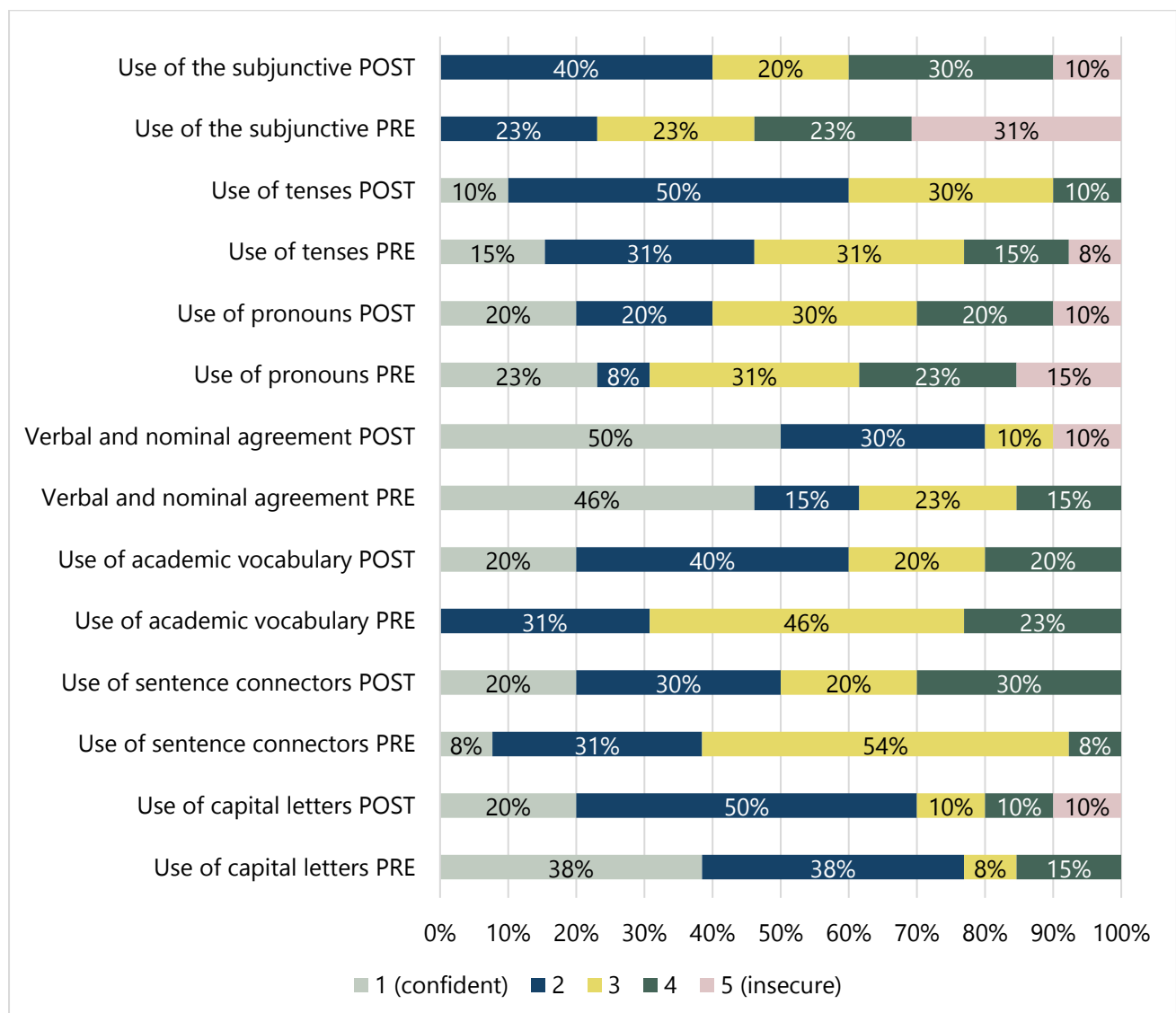

Figure 8: Pre & post-course strengths and weaknesses in microstructure by topic: Style

With respect to macrostructure (Figure 9), and as expressed in the pre-course survey (Figure 4), no topic has been marked in which the respondents feel totally insecure (value 5). But compared to the pre-course moment, there is a noticeable shift of the three topics to the value of greater confidence (1).

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[2] The written exercise did not otherwise generate interesting results for the present study, as all students decided to write about the academic content of their Bachelor's projects rather than about their writing process.
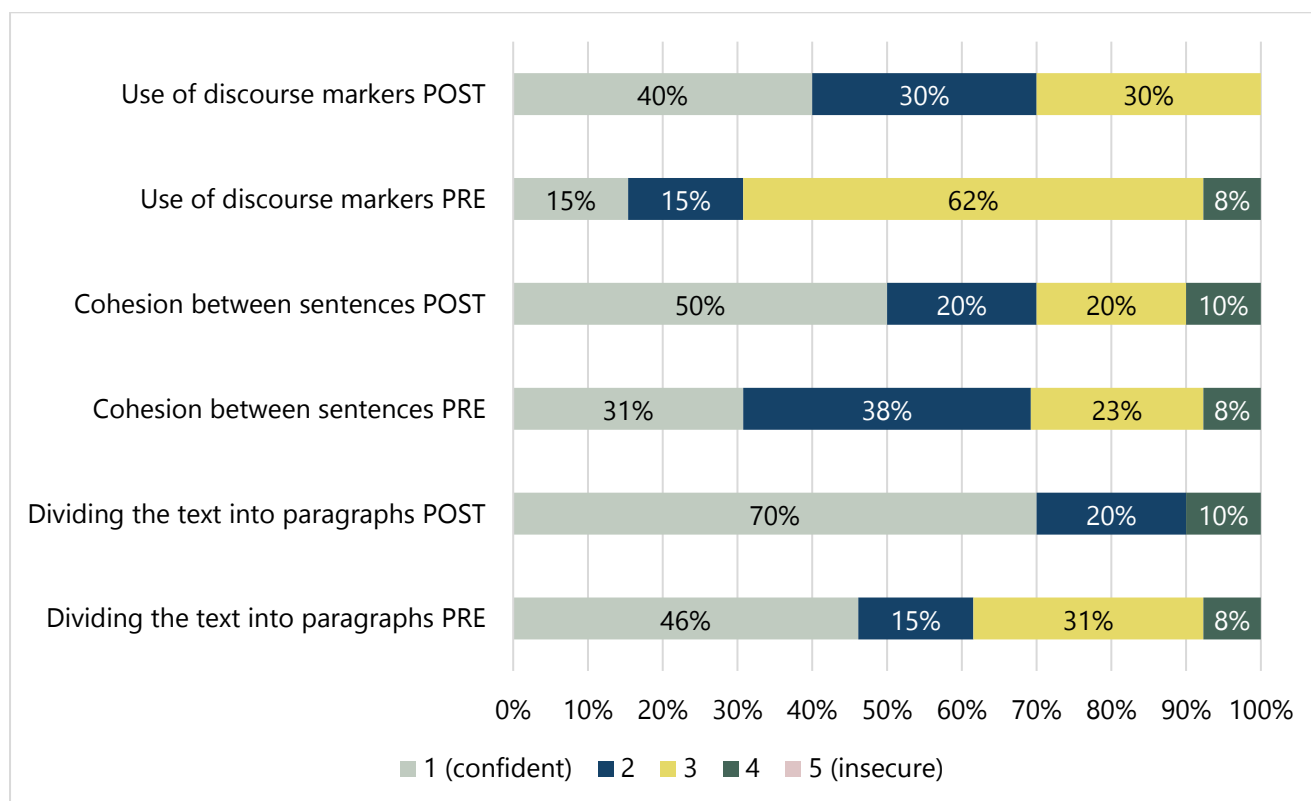
Figure 9: Pre & post-course strengths and weaknesses regarding macrostructure by topics

Finally, regarding superstructure (Figure 10), there no longer appear any responses with the maximum level of insecurity (value 5). The three most insecure elements in the pre-course questionnaire (Figure 5) – writing of the theoretical framework, presentation of the methodology used, and writing the discussion of the results – have moved towards confidence, with value 2 being the most frequent choice. "Finding a good title", which was at a fairly high level of need (with value 4 as the most frequent) now has value 1 as most frequent choice.
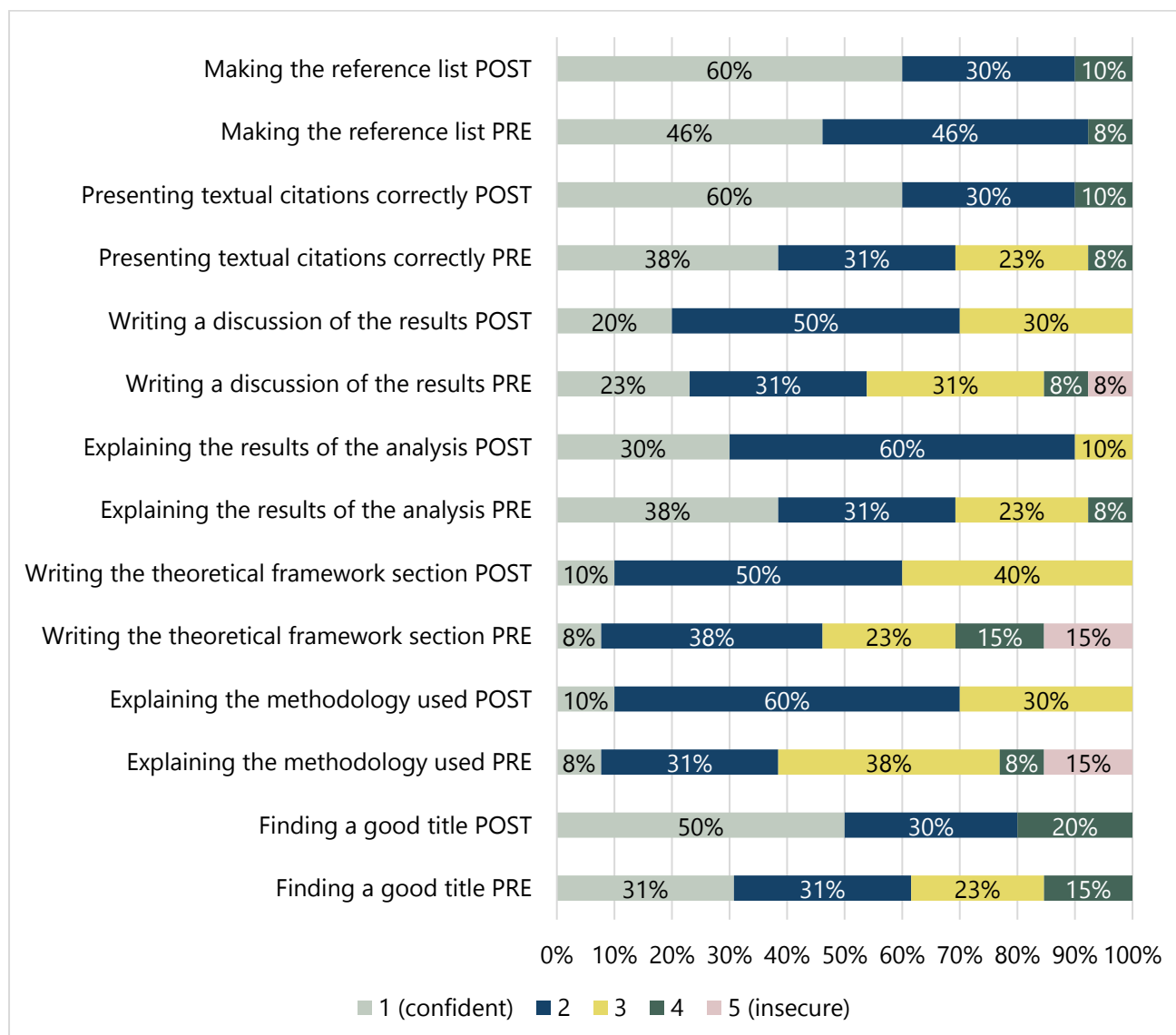
Figure 10: Pre & post-course strengths and weaknesses in the superstructure by topics

2.2 Post-course writing goals

Of the eleven students who answered the post-course survey, nine completed this section. As mentioned before, this was an open question, and it offered the possibility of stating at least three goals per respondent. Seven of the nine respondents stated three goals each, whereas one student stated two goals and one student stated one.

In terms of the three general text levels, microstructure concentrated again the greatest attention, followed by superstructure and, to a minimal degree, macrostructure. Within each level, we observe a great dispersion, without major differences between the chosen topics. Specifically, at microstructure level, academic vocabulary led with 3 responses compared to the rest with 2: vocabulary, verb tenses, subjunctive, use of commas, and connectors. There was also one mention of the use of pronouns. At macrostructure level, only two responses were registered, distributed between coherence and cohesion, and discourse markers. The level of superstructure is the one that registered some internal difference with answers regarding writing the theoretical framework (4 answers), writing the methodology (3), formulating the research question (1), and starting to write (1).
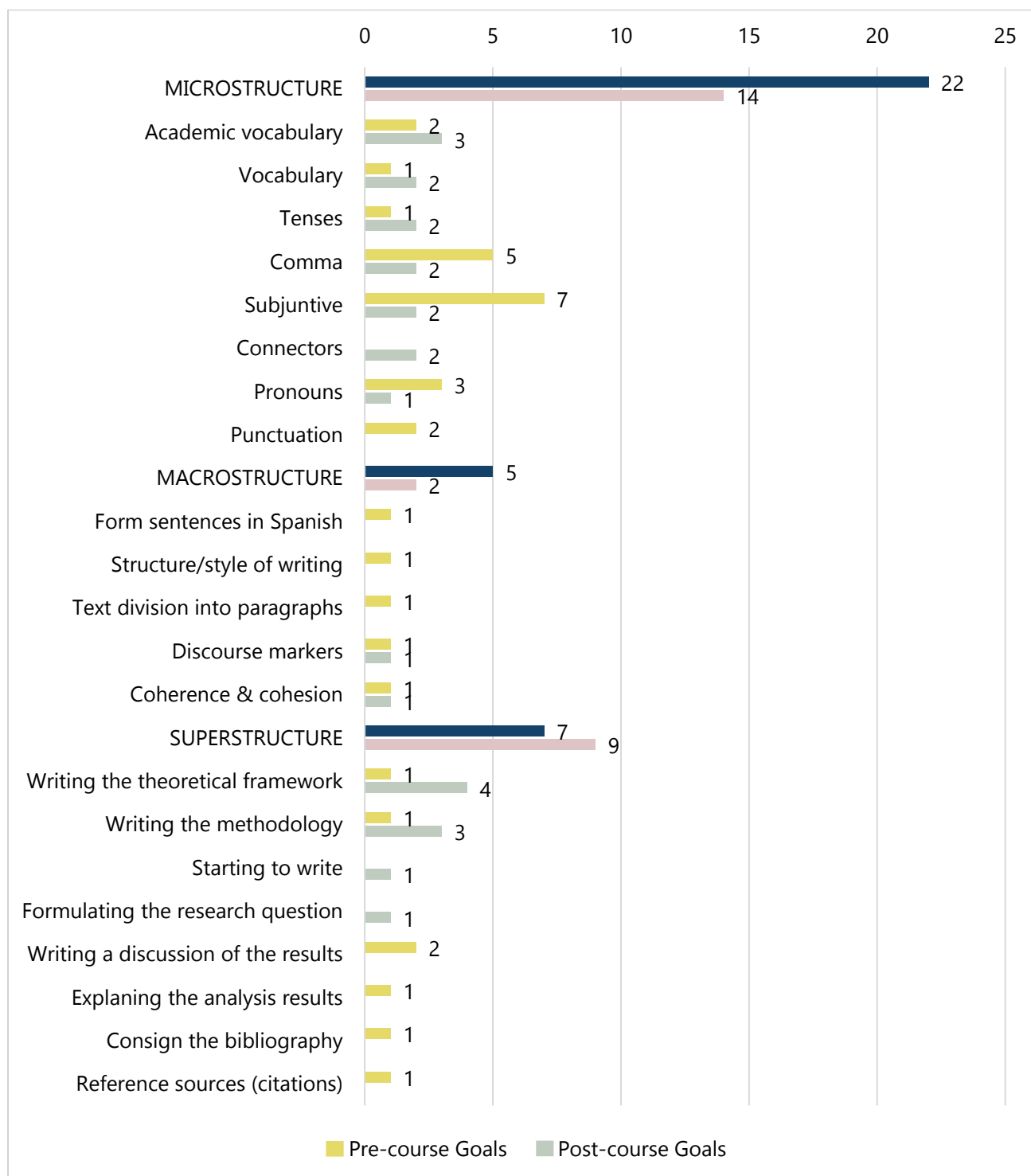
Figure 11: Pre and post-course writing goals by levels. The dark blue lines indicate the total amount of pre-course goals for each level (micro, macro & superstructure), whereas the pink lines indicate the post-course goals for each level. Yellow lines show pre-course goals for each sublevel and light green lines correspondingly show post-course goals.

Comparing the pre-course and post-course individual writing goals, the microstructure got the most attention in both. Nevertheless, we observe that some of the linguistic issues that were most frequently mentioned as writing goals at the beginning of the course – subjunctive, use of commas and pronouns – were overhauled by "academic vocabulary" at the end of the course. Regarding macrostructure, there was a bigger number of issues

at the beginning than at the end of the course, where only two remained. Contrary to this, superstructure definitely gained greater importance at the end of the course: the mechanical tasks named at the beginning of the course ("recording the bibliography" or "referencing the sources") got replaced by more creative aspects (Pozzo, 2020), such as "writing the theoretical framework", "writing the methodology", or "research question".

2.3 Post-course expectations regarding the writing workshop

The formulation of met expectations was raised on two levels: a) in terms of the topics presented at the workshop (as extensively described in Fernández & Pozzo, 2024) and b) in terms of what the students felt they learned, both shown in Figure 12. Regarding the first level, the responses concentrated around values 3 and 4, with four responses in each. Two students responded "totally" (value 5) and none responded "not at all" (value 1). The student who responded with a value 2 – the lowest value of all the responses obtained – clarified their choice in a comment: "It's my fault, it has not been possible for me to participate in all the classes, so clearly I have missed a lot of information".
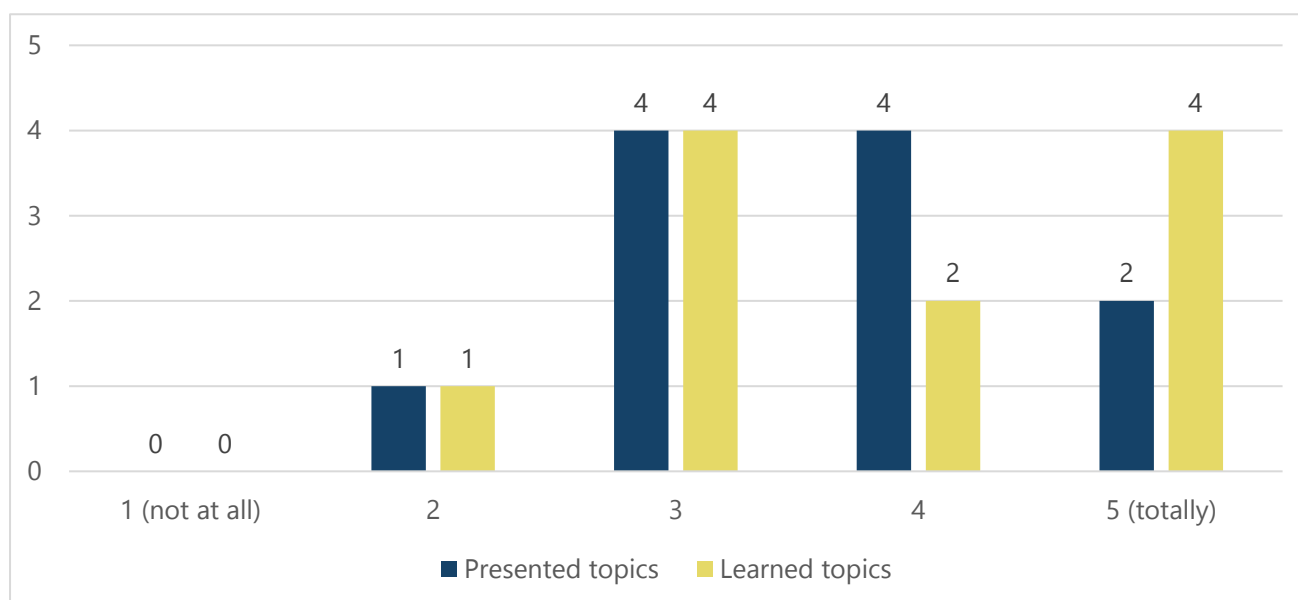

Figure 12: Extent to which the students' expectations about the workshop were met in terms of the topics covered and the topics learnt.

Regarding self-perceived learning, the most frequent values are the medium value 3 and high value 5, with four responses in each case out of the eleven in total. It is worth mentioning that in this question (about learning), there is a greater emphasis on "totally" than in the question about presented topics and, again, no one answers "not at all". Here too, the student who responded with a value 2 – the lowest value of all the responses – repeats the same comment as in the previous question: "It's my fault, it has not been possible for me to participate in all the classes, so clearly I have lost a lot of information".

3. Summary of results

Regarding student needs at the beginning of the course, we found that microstructure issues presented more insecurities than macro or superstructure issues. Within microstructure, the most insecure areas were the subjunctive mood and punctuation (Figure 1), particularly the use of the comma (Figure 2). The same applies to stated pre-course writing goals, where the most targeted goals were the subjunctive, the comma, and pronouns (Figure 6). This means there is a complete coincidence with what the students raised in terms of weaknesses and strengths (Figures 1-3).

By the end of the course, the level of insecurity related to the microstructure element of punctuation has decreased compared to the beginning (Figure 7) and the same applies to the subjunctive mood, although verbal and nominal agreement continues to be the most confident aspect (Figure 8). As in the pre-course survey, macrostructure (Figure 9) remains a quite confident area, but there is in fact a noticeable shift to even greater confidence. Regarding superstructure (Figure 10), there no longer appear any responses with the maximum level of insecurity. The three most insecure elements in the pre-course survey (Figure 5) – writing of the theoretical framework, presentation of the methodology used, and writing the discussion of the results – have moved towards confidence. "Finding a good title", which was at a fairly high level of insecurity, has now moved to the highest value of security as most frequent choice.

Post-course writing goals show, again, that microstructure receives the greatest attention, followed by superstructure and, to a minimal degree, macrostructure. Within each level, a great dispersion is observed. Comparing the pre-course and post-course individual writing goals, "academic vocabulary" overhauled the subjunctive, the comma and pronouns within microstructure and within superstructure the mechanical tasks named at the beginning of the course ("recording the bibliography" or "referencing the sources") got replaced by more creative aspects such as "writing the theoretical framework", "writing the methodology" or "research question".

Finally, there is a majority of high-value responses regarding satisfaction about the topics presented at the workshop and of medium and highest value for perceived learning.

Discussion

The needs of university students related to academic writing in a foreign language – in this case, Spanish – translate into weaknesses, as opposed to strengths. The incorporation of writing goals in the self-assessment instrument allowed us to corroborate the students' level of consistency regarding their own weaknesses, i.e. we expected and found a coincidence between stated weaknesses and stated goals. This characteristic contributes to providing reliability to the data collection instrument and the desired triangulation, as presented in Richards (2021). At the same time, stating a writing goal in own words requires a higher level of reflection than simply marking an answer on a Likert scale. Therefore, we believe that the double feature has given the students a more salient role in the needs analysis.

Regarding the effect of the workshop designed around self-perceived weaknesses, we can confirm by the obtained results that the workshop contributed to mitigating them. At the end of the course, punctuation, a feature of the microstructure that was highlighted as problematic at the beginning, had changed status: the use of commas and other punctuation marks, which were presented as needs at the beginning of the course, descended from the level of greatest insecurity to the middle value (3) (Figure 7). The use of the subjunctive mood was another of the microstructure topics presented as a weakness, with the largest number of responses with the value of maximum insecurity and without any response with the maximum of confidence (Figure 3). The initial insecure position of these features was confirmed by their presence as pre-course writing goals. After intense work on these topics during the course through a combination of input by the instructors, critical re-readings of previous work in Spanish by the students, reflection activities in groups, and analysis of model texts, they obtained a value of 2, which is closest to "very confident" (1).

At the same time, it is worth noting how dynamic needs are. Specifically, the course touched upon topics related to the writing of the Bachelor's project, which the students were working on during the six weeks of the workshop (and continued working on for some more weeks after the completion of the workshop). This implied that new needs emerged along the way, not perceived by the students before embarking on this task. The post-

course survey revealed new demands regarding issues specific to the research nature of the Bachelor's project, something the students had not tried before in such depth in previous instances of their university studies. At the end of the course, we observed a stronger presence of demands related to superstructure (Figure 11) compared to this same category before the course. This throws light on the students' writing development and their development as writers (Jakobsen & Krogh, 2016) and shows that the writing process is not always linear, and that new needs and new insights arise along the way.

A comparison of the standardised table and the open writing goals in the pre and post-course questionnaires yields an encouraging result, with the majority of responses in the three highest values (3, 4, and 5). A slight majority of expectations were met in terms of what was learned than in terms of the topics presented in the workshop. This can be explained by the diversity of needs expressed within the student group: not all students perceived the chosen topics as equally important.

Conclusion

In this article, we have presented an intervention study, where we designed a university-level writing workshop for Danish students of Spanish as a foreign language using needs analysis as a central element of course design. Our goal was a curriculum design centred on student needs, where the contents of the course were dictated by the results of the pre-course survey.

For the purpose of our research, we gathered the students' needs through a series of data collection instruments implemented at the beginning of the workshop and replicated at the end. In order to elicit comparable results, the instruments were practically identical, except for a final question referring to satisfaction regarding the topics presented during the course (chosen from the weaknesses expressed at the beginning) and the amount of learning. When reviewing the results of the post-course survey, it can be concluded that the workshop, despite its short duration and the fact that no homework was assigned, managed to increase the self-confidence of the participants and reduce all the insecurities stated in the pre-course questionnaire. Future studies should consider the coincidence between self-perceived needs and real needs, as manifested in errors in students' written productions (see Fernández & Pozzo, in preparation).

We know that this is a small sample and in no way do we intend to generalise the results to other teaching situations. On the contrary, we wish to highlight the peculiarity of each particular context. In our case, for example, the weakness attributed to the use of the comma can be explained (at least in part) to a contrasting feature of Danish with respect to Spanish. Surely, this element will not cause the same amount of difficulty for another student group with a different native language. On the other hand, the subjunctive mood contains an intrinsic difficulty, manifested in the abundant literature on the subject (for example, Vandaele & Neyens, 2014; Sánchez-Naranjo, 2016; Rodellas Martín & Rodríguez López, 2018), which makes it a challenging feature regardless of what language group the students belong to. In that sense, the questionnaire would be different according to which languages are involved in the student population in question. For instance, if the target language has a writing system different from the learners' language, it would be probably necessary to add further questions.

Another important aspect of a needs study, which could be more deeply looked into in the future, is the psychology of the language learner (Wenden, 2002; Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015). We refer specifically to whether a learner's perception of strengths and weaknesses tends to change or remain static – almost fossilised – no matter what the learner actually learns or is taught. Likewise, it could be relevant to delve into the development of the students' writer identities, e.g. through a more longitudinal study such as the one developed in Krogh & (2016).

After this experience, we are confident that a teaching device deliberately designed to respond to students' perceived needs generates a special bond between instructors and students based on mutual commitment. This could be seen in the students' high levels of attendance and active participation, which remained constant throughout the duration of the course, which from the beginning was presented as optional. Although it may be a little more laborious to teach a course in the form of a workshop based on student needs than a regular standard course, we believe that it provides benefits for both parts that compensate for the added workload. In this sense, needs analysis as a tool for course design can be considered a pedagogical strategy capable of fostering foreign language learning, as it was shown through the case of a university academic Spanish writing workshop at a Danish University.

It is important to note that the data presented in this study were collected prior to the widespread adoption of AI-assisted writing tools by university students. While these technologies have undoubtedly transformed the way students approach academic writing, they have not diminished the need for structured writing support, but the nature of that need has evolved. Today, writing courses must also foster critical awareness of how to use AI tools ethically and effectively. The pedagogical value of needs analysis remains highly relevant, offering a flexible framework to adapt writing instruction to emerging challenges and technologies.

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