EXPLORING HOW LEARNERS' WRITTEN COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH CAN BE IMPROVED

An analysis of real productions based on the English Key Competences Test

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Abstract

Writing is the most challenging skill for EFL learners as it involves both topic and previous linguistic knowledge. All these aspects increase the challenge of elaborating quality texts, which is likewise conditioned by the learner's command of the language code. This study aims to explore how teachers can improve learners' written competence in English. To do so, 6th grade of Primary Education students of 3 different schools were asked to write two types of texts. Additionally, 5 students from each school participated in a discussion group to know their perceptions about writing in English and an English teacher was interviewed on this matter as well. The results showed that it is important to propose writing tasks accurately defined and to provide appropriate scaffolding to meet students' needs in the process of writing. Therefore, the study contributes to rethink how writing in English is introduced in Primary Education.

Key words: EFL writing, scaffolding, teaching-learning process, written competence, Primary Education

Resum

L'escriptura és l'habilitat més desafiant per als estudiants d'anglès com a llengua estrangera (EFL) ja que implica el coneixement del tema però també dels elements lingüístics i discursius del text. Tots aquests aspectes augmenten el repte de produir textos de qualitat, fet també condicionat pel domini de la llengua per part de l'aprenent. Aquest estudi té com a objectiu principal explorar com els docents poden millorar la competència escrita dels estudiants en anglès. Per fer-ho, es va demanar als alumnes de 6è d'Educació Primària de 3 escoles diferents que escriguessin dos tipus de textos. A més, 5 estudiants de cada escola van participar en un grup de discussió per conèixer les seves percepcions sobre l'escriptura en anglès i també es va entrevistar una mestra d'anglès sobre aquest tema. Els resultats mostren que és important proposar tasques d'escriptura definides amb precisió i proporcionar una bastida adequada per atendre les necessitats dels estudiants en el procés d'escriptura. Per tant, l'estudi contribueix a replantejar-se com s'introdueix l'escriptura en anglès a l'Educació Primària.

Paraules clau: escriptura EFL, bastida, procés d'ensenyament-aprenentatge, competència escrita, Educació Primària

Resumen

La escritura es la habilidad más desafiante para los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) ya que implica el conocimiento del tema, pero también de los elementos lingüísticos y discursivos del texto. Todos estos aspectos aumentan el reto de producir textos de calidad, hecho también condicionado por el dominio de la lengua por parte del aprendiz. Este estudio tiene como objetivo principal explorar cómo los docentes pueden mejorar la competencia escrita de los estudiantes en inglés. Para hacerlo, se pidió a los alumnos de 6º de Educación Primaria de 3 escuelas diferentes que escribieran dos tipos de textos. Además, 5 estudiantes de cada escuela participaron en un grupo de discusión para conocer sus percepciones sobre la escritura en inglés y también se entrevistó una maestra de inglés sobre este tema. Los resultados muestran que es importante proponer tareas de escritura definidas con precisión y proporcionar andamiaje adecuado para atender las necesidades de los alumnos en el proceso de escritura. Por lo tanto, el estudio contribuye a replantearse cómo se introduce la escritura en inglés en la Educación Primaria.

Palabras clave: escritura EFL, andamiaje, proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje, competencia escrita, Educación Primaria

1. Introduction

Nowadays, English has become a global language, which implies that people need to learn how to use this language in order to communicate with the world. In this sense, learners need to be proficient in the four skills of the language: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Writing is considered the most challenging aspect because it involves knowledge about the topic and previous knowledge of the linguistic and discursive elements of the text, which are conditioned by the learners' mastery of the language code. For this reason, learners often feel demotivated when they are asked to write in English.

This research has as its main objective to analyse the students' writing competences in English and to give suggestions on how to improve the way writing in English is introduced in Primary Education. Accordingly, the research questions are the following: 1) What information about learners' written competence gives us the analysis of Key Competences texts? 2) What are the learners' perceptions about the written tasks proposed to them? 3) What is the interpretation that the English teacher makes of the data collected as a result of questions 1 and 2?

The investigation consists in asking 6th grade students to write two different types of texts; discuss learners' perceptions about writing in English and interview an English teacher.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 The teaching and learning process of writing

The Catalan Curriculum of Primary Education (2017) defines that children have to develop several competences to be prepared for the current society. Related to the *linguistic field*, students need to be competent in Catalan, as it is the official language; Spanish, the co-official one; and English, taught as a foreign language.

There are four skills related to *linguistic and communicative competences*: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The last two are understood as literacy skills because of

the use of written language. Accordingly, Cameron (2003) states that both skills are used to share and express meanings between people. Moreover, "literacy in this sense is both social and cognitive. Socially, literacy provides people with opportunities to share meanings […]. Cognitively, literacy requires that individuals use specific skills and knowledge about how the written language operates in processing texts" (p. 123).

The *linguistic field* is divided into five dimensions and the teaching and learning process of writing is placed within the *written expression dimension*. Students use the written expression to take part in different communicative situations, which may occur in society with a specific purpose. Camps (2017a) claims that the school should provide students with occasions to write, as practising is the way to learn how to do it. A diversity of writing opportunities can occur within the school, but also beyond the school by taking part in events that connect with the community. However, she emphasises that it is important to practise but also to teach the features of the written texts, as well as the different discourse types.

Camps (2017b) also outlines that teaching how to write needs to involve a double objective: students need to adjust the text into the purpose and they also should learn about the specific features of the discourse type. This aspect needs to be supported by proposing meaningful writing tasks to the learner; whose aim, communicative situation, context, and receiver ought to be clearly defined.

As for the teaching and learning process of writing, Milian (2011) highlights that writing needs to be understood as both, a finished product and a recursive process, in which the student develops an active role. Similarly, Camps (2017b) claims that writing requires time to plan, write, and revise the text. These are the recursive phases of planning, writing, and revising. Children can go from one to the next and then go back to the previous one. Therefore, students need to organize and plan how the task would be organized according to the communicative situation given and then they have to revise it and having in mind the context, the receiver, the aim, and the conventions and grammar rules. Consequently, all these issues are to be taken into consideration when proposing writing tasks to students.

2.2 Writing in English

The Key Competences of the Foreign Languages document (2015) defines that creating a text is a complex process, as it involves the knowledge about the topic but also the previous knowledge of the linguistic and discursive elements of the text. All these aspects increase the difficulty to produce quality texts, which is likewise conditioned by the learner's command of the language code.

As stated before, competent writers in English also carry out planning, writing and revising in a simultaneous and recursive way. Consequently, the three competences included in the *written expression dimension* in foreign languages are defined according to these phases (pp. 62-63; the document is written in Catalan):

- *Competence 7*: Planning simple texts from identifying the most relevant elements from the communicative situation
- *Competence 8*: Writing simple texts according to the communicative situation and with some support
- *Competence 9*: Revising to improve the text according to the communicative situation and using specific supports

It is also important to note that the *Foreign Language domain* should not be understood as isolated from the other languages taught in the school. Therefore, learners should have the ability to transfer the acquired knowledge to the other languages when it comes to writing in English. However, Guasch (2001) states that this condition is only possible if learners have developed a basic competence in one of the languages.

When it comes to writing in English, the author summarizes the specificity of the strategies related to writing in a second language according to the different steps of the writing process and the overall writing process (see Table 1).

Table 1. Specificity of the writing strategies in L2

Planning
- Less attention is payed to global aims - Less planning of global text

Writing
- More pauses in the text than in L1 compositions
- More use of supplement materials
- Priority to shape ideas linguistically
- Little attention to accuracy
Revision
- Lower tendency to produce new drafts
- More difficulty to pay attention to both local and global aspects
Overall writing process
- More involvement in writing tasks
- More time is needed to produce texts
- L1 is used in the process of writing
- Simultaneous discovery of ideas and language structures
- Shorter productions

Adapted from Guasch (2001, p. 47)

Writing in L2 is associated with three factors: the degree of knowledge of L2, the use of L1 and the attitude towards the writing task. These three factors act directly or indirectly upon the writing activities and modulate the strategies used by the producers. Regarding to the role of the L1 in the composition processes in L2, De Groot and Hoeks (1995) suggest that at the beginning, learners always establish the relationship between forms and lexical meanings of the L2 from the L1. As L2 knowledge develops, this dependency decreases in favour of the direct relationship between forms and contents of the new language. In addition, Guasch (2001) argues that the use of L1 allows an automatic and fast processing of some composition operations that, if they were not done in L1, they would block the short memory of some less-skilled producers in the use of the language they are learning.

2.3 Teaching and learning writing in English

Referring to second-language writing, Cumming (2001) emphasizes that it is important to take into account that the features of the text students produce, the processes of composing texts, and the specific sociocultural contexts in which people write are integrally interrelated. What is more, he defines that each dimension has a micro-perspective or individual basis and a macro-perspective or holistic viewpoint. Table 2 includes the different aspects that a person learns when writing in a second language.

Table 2. What does a person learn when writing in a second language?

DIMENSION	MICRO-PERSPECTIVE	MACRO-PERSPECTIVE
TEXT	Syntax & Morphology Lexis	Cohesive devices Text structure
COMPOSING PROCESS	Searcher for words & syntax Attention to ideas & Language concurrently	Planning Revising
CONTEXT	Self-image or identity Individual development	Social change Participate in a discourse community

Adapted from Cumming (2001, p. 3)

Cumming (2001) defines the *text dimension* as the characteristics of the texts that students produce, which are improved during the learning process of writing. At a micro-level, learners improve their written texts in terms of syntax and morphology, and they progressively use a wider range of vocabulary. Regarding the macro-level, students enhance their abilities to relate ideas throughout the text using cohesive devices, and other particular discourse features according to the text-type. About the *composing process dimension*, Cumming claims that students learn to control their abilities to plan, revise and edit their texts, as well as to search for specific words and phrases, by paying attention to the forms of second language. Finally, about the *context dimension*, the author states that, by practicing writing, students learn how to cooperate and ask for assistance from different sources; how to reflect on new knowledge, situations and abilities; how to participate in a discourse community; and how to create their own identity.

Accordingly, the author affirms that teaching writing should take into account the three dimensions, as they cannot be understood separately and students may find difficulties in one or some of them. For that reason, it is important to provide scaffolding appropriately and meaningfully at learner's zones of proximal development.

2.4 Assessing written productions

Regarding the assessment of written productions, Troia (cited by Milian, 2011) states that there is a high percentage of teachers that make corrections only based on issues of formal order (spelling, morpho-syntax, presentation) and put aside other discursive and content aspects. Consequently, students have a wrong vision about what is regarded as writing,

as it is based only on formal aspects, which are the ones that the teacher tends to consider when correcting texts.

Sanmartí (2010) claims that it is important to distinguish between summative assessment and formative assessment. Summative assessment takes place at the end of the teaching-learning process and it aims to determine if a set of contents have been acquired in a significant way. Formative assessment takes place during the teaching-learning process. It aims to identify students' progress to adapt the didactic process to the learning needs of the students. It has a regulatory purpose for both learning and teaching.

The *English Key Competences Test* has to be understood as a summative assessment tool, as it attempts to determine the progress in English at the end of Primary Education. In this sense, the correction criteria established by the Consell Superior d'Avaluació, aim to assess both the discursive competence (appropriateness and coherence) and the linguistic competence (vocabulary, morpho-syntax, spelling).

Camps (2017a) emphasises the importance of the learning process of writing and claims that writing in collaboration and interaction between peers is a powerful instrument. Likewise, Camps (2017b) says that the school needs to put emphasis on the learning process of writing, and teachers need to plan the specific aims and a variety of contents to teach.

Furthermore, she claims that is crucial that students and teachers create common criteria for planning, producing and revising texts. Thus, learners will be able to regulate the writing process using those guidelines in their text writing.

Finally, it is important to highlight that "the emphasis on making the most of each pupil's abilities (…) requires constant attention to (…) individual progress. (…) This means that teachers need to be able to do more than to assign a generalized grade to a piece of writing; they also need to be able to read texts both as drafts and as finished products with as much insight as possible" (Harris, 1993, p. 98).

3. Methodology

In order to provide an answer to the aforementioned research questions, the study has been carried out in three different schools in Osona, Catalunya. Two are state-funded schools and the other is public. Catalan is the vehicular language but children learn Spanish, as it is the co-official language, and English, taught as a foreign language. There are some students that do not have Catalan as their first language, but none of them has English as mother tongue.

The study is focused on 6th grade of Primary Education students because their writing skills in English are evaluated in the Key Competences Test. To tackle the issue, three different instruments are used: the analysis of students' texts, a discussion group in each school, and an interview to one of the English teachers.

Two different texts from previous English Key Competences Tests were used in order to know how children write in English. Since learners were asked to complete the task during the first trimester of the school year, that is well before the actual test, both texts had to be written in present simple and they were related to linguistic aspects already taught in the foregoing courses: writing about myself and routines. The task was read aloud by the researcher, then students were given 30 minutes to make their writings and the number of words was not limited.

20 samples of each type of texts were analysed adapting the correction criteria established by the Consell Superior d'Avaluació del Sistema Educatiu. Taking heed of this document, the analysis criteria were defined as the different texts were studied and they were categorized into two different categories: Appropriateness and Coherence; Morpho-syntax, Vocabulary, Spelling. Accordingly, Table 3 groups the different elements used to analyse each text.

Table 3. Aspects analysed in the learners' written productions

TEXT 1: WRITING ABOUT MYSELF
Appropriateness and coherence
The text is understandable at first reading The given model is taken into account to write the text The text is structured in paragraphs according to guidelines There's the information for the paragraph *Write about you*

There's the information for the paragraph *Write about other information*
There's the information for the paragraph *To finish (ask her a question)*
There's *Closing and signature*
The example questions are used to give more information and to ask new questions
There's the answer to the question: *Have you got any brothers or sisters?*
There's the answer to the question: *What do you like doing in your free time?*
Other questions are asked
Appropriate use of punctuation marks

Morpho-syntax, Vocabulary, Spelling
Correct use of I (correct/incorrect)
Use of *like / love / hate / don't like + verb (-ing) / + noun*
Use of *I am / I'm __ years old*
Use of *I have got __ brothers or sisters / I have got (pets)*
Use of *his* and *her*
Writing questions
Some other mistakes

TEXT 2: WRITING ABOUT ROUTINES
Appropriateness and coherence
The text is understandable at first reading
The initial sentence *Every day I…* is used to start writing
The text is structured in paragraphs according to guidelines
There's the information for the paragraph *What do you do in the morning?*
There's the information for the paragraph *What do you do at midday and in the afternoon?*
There's the information for the paragraph *What do you do in the evening?*
There's a *Closing*
The images given are used to write the text *(1- get up, 2- have breakfast, 3- go to school, 4- have lunch/have dinner, 5- go to the park, 6- stay at home/read a book, 7- go to bed/go to sleep)*
There's the answer to the question: *Can you please write to tell us what do you do on a normal day?*
Appropriate use of punctuation marks
Logical description to understand what he/she does on a normal day

Morpho-syntax, Vocabulary, Spelling
Use of *AT + hours*
Use of the structures: *In the morning, at midday, in the afternoon, in the evening*
Correct use of I (correct/incorrect)
Vocabulary used about routines (correct/incorrect)
Some other mistakes

In order to know about the students' perceptions, five students from each school were asked to participate in a discussion group in order to exchange their opinions and thoughts about writing, and more specifically, writing in English. The English teacher together with the children's tutor were responsible for deciding which students would take part in the discussion group. The discussion group took place after having written both texts and it was held in Catalan to promote the students' exchange of opinions in a more natural context. The different questions are collected in Appendices section (Table 1).

Finally, the English teacher of School 3 was interviewed in Catalan in order to confront the data collected from the analysis of the students' written productions with the information collected from the discussion group. Therefore, the questions were defined after having analysed the information collected from the texts and the discussion group. The different questions are summarized in Appendices section (Table 2).

It is important to highlight that 60 samples of each type of text were collected, but only a representative of 20 texts of each type was analysed, including the texts of the students that participated in each discussion group and five more texts of each type from the school in which the English teacher was interviewed (School 3). The information collected is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Summary table of the methodological aspects

METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS			
Schools	**Samples Text 1**	**Samples Text 2**	**Participants Discussion Group**
SCHOOL 1	SJO1	SJO2	SJO
	SMF1	SMF2	SMF
	SLI1	SLI2	SLI
	SAM1	SAM2	SAM
	SMA1	SMA2	SMA
SCHOOL 2	GLA1	GLA2	GLA
	GCA1	GCA2	GCA
	GNE1	GNE2	GNE
	GJR1	GJR2	GJR
	GMT1	GMT2	GMT
SCHOOL 3	XGR1	XGR2	XGR
	XAU1	XAU2	XAU
The English teacher of the school 3 was interviewed	XCL1	XCL2	XCL
	XJU1	XJU2	XJU
	XIR1	XIR2	XIR
	XMT1	XMT2	
	XPF1	XPF2	
	XHU1	XHU2	
	XAN1	XAN2	
	XAR1	XAR2	

4. Data collection

The data collection findings are organized according to the three different tools used to collect data. Firstly, the most notable aspects analysed from the written compositions are

presented. Secondly, the main ideas obtained from the discussion groups are outlined. Finally, the most relevant opinions of the teacher are highlighted.

Written compositions

For each type of text, the most relevant aspects collected from the analysis of texts are outlined by giving examples of them, and the number of texts that present the aspect. Although there are aspects which are specific for each type of text, there are some characteristics that can be found in both texts, such not structuring the texts in paragraphs according to the given guidelines or making spelling mistakes in words that students already know. This information is summarised in Table 5.

Table 5. Summary table of data collected from text analysis

TEXT 1. WRITING ABOUT MYSELF			
	Aspect	**Sample from the text**	**Nº of texts with the aspect**
Appropriateness and Coherence	The written text is not structured in paragraphs according to the given guidelines	Hello Tina, my name is L. I'm 11 years old and i have 1 brother called M. I like play the flute and I love riding. My favourite colour is turquise. Wat is your's? Do you like music? What languages can you speak and what is your favourite food? My favourite food is pasta [GLA1]	13/20
	Tendency to ask questions different from the given ones (usually with mistakes)	Have you got a house or a flat? [SLI1] Wat's the name of your dog? [XAU1] What do your live? [XAR1] How you from? [GCA1]	15/20
	An answer to the questions of the model is provided (siblings and free time)	I have got one brother [XJU1] Yes I have a brother [SJO1] In my free time I playng futbool, run… [GNE1] In my free time I like go with my friends and watch TV [XGR1]	Siblings 19/20 Free time 12/20
	It is difficult to use punctuation marks properly	I'm one brother, In my free time I like playing with my brother, I don't like pets [XIR1]	14/20
Morpho-syntax, Vocabulary, Spelling	The capital letter is not used for the first person of singular (I) and it is often written in other forms	i'm M (…) My speak english, catalan and spanish [XMT1] y a love play escacs [XAN1] but i play the piano to [GCA1]	11/20
	Use of the verb *to be* to write about the age	I'm 11 years old [GJR1] I'm 11 [XAR1] I'm 12 years old [GNE1]	20/20
	Have got is not used to talk about siblings or pets	I has 1 cat and 2 hamsters [GJR1] My y have a sister [XGR1] i am broder [XAN1] I have 2 sisters and 1 brother [SMA1]	18/20
	Mistakes to write about *likes and dislikes* to talk about actions	I love play tenis [SMA1] I like play or talk with my friends [XHU1] I like play the flute and I love riding [GLA1]	7/15 (in the other 5 texts, they are not used)
	Sometimes *his* and *her* pronouns are confused	I have one sister his name is L [XPF1] I have one brother your name is O [XHU1] I have one sister his name is O [GNE1]	4/7 (in the other 13 texts, they are not used)

TEXT 2. WRITING ABOUT ROUTINES			
	Aspect	**Sample from the text**	**Nº of texts that have the mistake**
Appropriateness and Coherence	The written text is not structured in paragraphs according to the given guidelines	Every day I get up at 7:40. Then I have a shower, I get dress and I have brekfaist. I go to school, the school starts at 9:00. When I finish school i go to home to do the homework. At 9:00 have lunch and at 10:00 i go to sleep [SJO2]	12/20
	In some cases, it is difficult to understand what the student does on a normal day (some parts are missing)	Every day I get up at seven o'clock and then I going to brekfast. At midday I go to the english academy and then I go to my house to comer. In the afternoon I go to the basquet, computer class, and music extresculars. In the evening I dinner with my parents and my brother in my house. by, C! [XCL2] *(there's no information about school)*	15/20
	It is difficult to use punctuation marks properly	i go to school and i go to my house i dinner i play and i go to school and 2 hours later i go to my house i breatcaft i do my homework i dutch and i go to sleep [SMF2]	15/20
Morpho-syntax, Vocabulary, Spelling	The capital letter is not used for the first person of singular (I) and it is often written in other forms	At midday y went to diner in my hose, and y finish y went to school [XGR2] Then i go home i take a shower and i do homework [SLI2] In the night i dinner and i go to my bed [GMT2]	12/20
	Prepositions of time are not properly used or there are spelling mistakes	In 3 o'clock [XPF2] In 21:30 [XAR2] At 2 half past three [GNE2] At eight ocloc'k [GJR2]	6/12 (in the other 8 texts, time is not used)
	Some mistakes to write about the parts of the day	In the midday that i go home [SLI2] In evening I have the dinner [XAU2] At the evening I have dinner [GLA2]	9/13 (in the other 7 texts, they are not used)
	Tendency to use meals as if they were verbs	Ai go dinner with my family [SMA2] I breackfest milk [GMT2] I lunch [XHU2]	11/20
	Use of L1 (more or less adapted to English) to write some words	I go to the basquet, computer class, and music extresculars [XCL2] Then I go run or play futbol [GNE2] I dutch and I go to sleep [SMF2]	10/20

Discussion group

In this part, students' answers to the questions from 2 to 9 are collected to show the most relevant ideas obtained from the discussion groups (see Appendices section, Table 1).

When students are asked in which language it is more difficult to write, all of them agree on English. Moreover, students tend to say that they do not like writing in English and they find different difficulties when they are asked to write a composition; here there is an example:

Excerpt 1. *Opinion about writing in English and difficulties students face*

SCHOOL (1)

SJO: En català és difícil escriure perquè hi ha els accents, però un cop ho saps llavors és més fàcil perquè és la nostra llengua

[...]

SMA: A mi em costa l'anglès i per això no m'agrada escriure (en anglès).

[...]

SAM: Jo quan estic escrivint em trobo que una paraula no la sé escriure en anglès.

SMF: Per mi és difícil perquè hi ha paraules que no s'escriuen tal com sonen.

SJO: Sí, a vegades em trobo que em costa explicar el que vull explicar.

SCHOOL (2)

GNE: Escriure en anglès és més difícil perquè és la llengua que parlo menys. És més fàcil escriure en català o en castellà.

GMT: Sí, l'anglès només el parlem a l'escola però el català a tot arreu.

[...]

GCA: A mi m'agrada escriure en anglès però depèn del tema. Si són textos curts sí.

[...]

GLA: El que em passa és que no recordo les paraules i llavors no puc expressar el que vull dir.

SCHOOL (3)

XGR: És més difícil escriure en anglès perquè només en fem a l'escola.

[...]

XJU: No m'agrada fer textos en anglès perquè haig de pensar més.

[...]

XJU: Escriure en anglès costa perquè hi ha paraules que no les coneixem.

XIR: I també fem més faltes.

To cope with challenges, students use different strategies:

Excerpt 2. *Strategies used to overcome the difficulties students face*

SCHOOL (1)

SLI: Intento pensar, però si no em surt l'escric tal com em sona.

SAM: Jo si hi ha una paraula que no sé com s'escriu en anglès intento buscar un sinònim en català i veure si després em surt traduir-lo en anglès.

SJO: Si no és un examen també podem buscar al diccionari o demanar-li a la mestra.

SCHOOL (2)

GNE: Intento buscar un sinònim que sàpiga.

GJR: A vegades ho demano a la mestra però no ens ho diu.

GMT: Quan no ho sé poso el que em sembla, provo sort.

SCHOOL (3)

XCL: Intento buscar una altra paraula o bé construir la frase diferent, de manera que no calgui utilitzar la paraula que no sé.

Students are asked to think about how teachers could help them with the English writing tasks. Broadly speaking, all of them agree that it is useful to have some guidelines to know what to write and how to structure the text but also to have a model to help them. See the following example that makes explicit this aspect:

Excerpt 3. How can teachers help students with the English writing tasks?

SCHOOL (1)

SLI: Una de les pistes que ens donen és que fem frases curtes, que no ens emboliquem a fer-les llargues.

SMA: És més fàcil que ens donin pautes a l'hora de fer el text que no pas tenir un full en blanc.

SMF: Sempre que hi hagi una pista que ens digui alguna cosa sobre el text és més fàcil.

SAM: La guia per ordenar el text i també les imatges ens ajudaven a escriure.

SCHOOL (2)

GCA: Els exemples i models, un full en blanc no. Si no ho tinguéssim hauríem escrit menys i no tant bé.

GJR: Tenir només l'enunciat no ens ajuda perquè llavors anem molt perduts. Les pautes ens ajuden, sobretot si ens costa.

GLA: Ajuda tenir pistes que ens diguin què escriure a cada part.

SCHOOL (3)

XIR: És important haver treballat el vocabulari d'alguna manera. Per exemple fent jocs.

XAU: Aquestes tasques no van costar tant perquè ens ho donaven més mastegat. Ens deia què havíem d'escriure a cada moment, ens ensenyava algunes preguntes per fer i al costat esquerre deia què calia escriure a cada paràgraf. Donava pistes.

XGR: El model ens ajuda.

XJU: Crec que està bé que ens donin pistes però si no n'hi haguessin tantes també ho podríem fer.

The discussion group participants are also asked to compare the tasks in order to know which one was more difficult. Although the majority says that it was more difficult to write the text about routines, some of them have a different opinion; here there is an example:

Excerpt 4. Students' opinion about the most difficult task

SCHOOL (1)

SMF: Per mi va ser més fàcil el de parlar sobre mi perquè sabia més què dir.

SLI: Doncs per mi no perquè l'any passat vam fer el vocabulari de rutines. A més, a expressió escrita l'any passat ja ho havíem fet i ja sabíem les parts.

SCHOOL (2)

GJR: A l'e-mail hi havia vocabulari que havíem treballat més. El vocabulari pel de les rutines fa massa que el vam treballar i ho recordo a mitges. Hauria estat més fàcil si ho haguéssim fet fa menys temps.

GNE: Per mi l'e-mail va ser més fàcil perquè al de les rutines havies d'utilitzar més vocabulari i en canvi a l'altre si sabies fer preguntes ja estava.

SCHOOL (3)

XGR: Per mi va ser més fàcil el primer (write about myself) que el segon (write about rutines) perquè no sabia tant vocabulari.

XAU: Doncs per mi va ser al revés perquè al primer no sabia què dir en canvi a l'altre vaig poder dir moltes coes.

Finally, students are shown their first written composition (write about myself) and they are asked to talk about their satisfaction with the final result and what they would change if possible. Most of them notice some spelling mistakes and agree on the importance of double checking the text. See the following example:

Excerpt 5. Students' satisfaction with the final results and common agreement on the importance of revising

SCHOOL (1)

SJO: Si m'hagués mirat el text abans d'entregar-lo hauria pogut corregir coses perquè tinc errors "tontos".

SMF: Jo veig que em falta alguna part.

SCHOOL (2)

GJR: Sí que canviaria coses. Ho podem canviar?

GLA: Jo m'he deixat interrogants i he fet una falta a don't.

GNE: Si m'ho hagués llegit abans d'entregar hauria vist que m'he deixat lletres.

SCHOOL (3)

XGR: Jo hauria d'haver canviat alguna cosa. Ho vaig posar així perquè no sabia com es deia una paraula.

XCL: Jo estic satisfeta però veig algunes faltes que hauria d'haver revisat.

Teacher interview

Before examining the opinion of the teacher (School 3), it is important to highlight that students of this school learn through centres of interest and one of them is the writing corner in which students are proposed to do different activities, such as creating words or writing texts.

The teacher claims that she tries to correct the tasks with the students whenever it is possible, although it is difficult for time reasons. About what she corrects, it depends on the task but mostly grammar and vocabulary. However, when a specific type of text is introduced, assessment criteria regarding structural features of the text is created together with the students. The following excerpt makes explicit the teacher's answers to these questions:

Excerpt 6. *Teacher's answer related with correction and the elements analysed*

> (Minute 1) A mi m'agradaria no haver de corregir jo i intento moltes coses corregir-les a la classe, o en parelles, o un el llegeix en veu alta i entre tots el comentem per ajudar-lo a corregir. Però sí que és poc viable pel que fa al temps.
> [...]
> (Minute2) Bàsicament es corregeix ortografia i gramàtica. Però quan treballem la tipologia textual és diferent perquè extraiem la normativa [estructura del text] a partir de l'anàlisi d'un exemple i creem els criteris d'avaluació de manera conjunta de manera que llavors els serveix de guia per escriure.

During the interview, the teacher is also asked to comment with the interviewer on the typical mistakes that students tend to make, contrasting them with the information obtained from the analysis of texts.

Referring to the first text (writing about myself):

- Usually students forget to write *got* when they write about siblings or pets. So, they tend to write: *I have a dog* or *I have a little sister*.
- One of the most serious mistakes it that they do not write *I* in capital letters, and it is often written as *i, my, ai,* etc.
- Learners often fail writing about their likes and dislikes. They write correct sentences when after the *like* word there is a noun but not when they talk about the actions, that they do not write *–ing* to the verb. For example: *I like play*.
- The teacher comments that one of the mistakes students tend to make is the one related with the age when they say *I have 11 years old* instead of *I'm 11 years old*. However, in the analysed texts there is no evidence about this mistake.

About the second text (writing about routines):

- Students also fail when writing *I*.

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- They often have trouble with the names of the different meals and they write *dinner* when they want to talk about *have lunch* but when they want to talk about *have dinner* they use the same word. In this case, they tend to write the words as verbs instead of adding *have*.
- A typical error in this case is the use of preposition for both hours and parts of the day. So, some mistakes are: *in 9 o'clock, in the midday*.

When the teacher is asked to justify the most common mistakes from each text, she emphasises that the students did the tasks at the beginning of the course and they had not worked specifically on the structure or content, although it had been taught in previous courses. She comments that some mistakes are usually done due to translations from Catalan. Other kind of errors are done because learners do not pay attention to them, as in the case of *I*; or because they do not take advantage of the given guidelines, for example when they write the parts of the day. However, she highlights that these typical mistakes have previously been taught but students continue to make them, so they are repeated.

The teacher is presented to the fact that, in the discussion group, the participants outlined the importance to have guidelines and models in order to help them to produce texts but then in the analysis it is exemplified that they do not take advantage of them. In this sense, she states that a similar situation happens when she proposes writing tasks and students usually fail to take advantage of the given instructions, as she highlights in the following example:

Excerpt 7. *Teacher's justification on structure and content errors*

> (Minute 9) Segur que un dels principals motius per no estructurar el text en els paràgrafs corresponents és perquè no llegeixen i no aprofiten les pistes que se'ls donen. Tampoc llegeixen els enunciats i llavors no saben què han de fer.
> [...]
> (Minute 30) És cert que moltes vegades no aprofiten les pautes que se'ls donen, com per exemple quan fan preguntes que no els dona l'exemple i llavors fan errors. Això em costa molt d'entendre perquè ho tenen tot mastegat però no paren atenció i llavors fan errors.

With the analysis of the texts and taking into account the students' opinions, we can state that learners do not check the text after writing it. Hence, the teacher claims that students only pay attention to the final text, without considering the process of writing. That would explain the fact that they do not check because they are used to doing everything in a rush. When the teacher is asked about how students learn to revise, she explains that she

proposes co-assessment activities or tries to make students notice their own mistakes by saying that there is an error in the first paragraph, for example. However, she states that it is really difficult for students, since nobody has taught them how to revise a text and she finds difficulty in how to do it.

Finally, taking into account the aspects commented in the interview, the teacher concludes that is really important to be efficient in terms of correcting texts to improve them, and that it would be ideal to correct the productions of the students individually. Nevertheless, time constraints are an obstacle. Here there is an example:

Excerpt 8. *Importance of correcting in an effective way*

> (Minute 32) Veient l'anàlisi que tu has fet puc dir que és molt important corregir de manera eficaç. Corregir nosaltres no té cap mena de sentit perquè als alumnes no els serveix de res [...]
> (Minute 35) Veig que m'haig de replantejar la manera de corregir, tot i que caldria organitzar-me diferent. Aquesta és la manera de poder reconèixer els errors que fa cadascú i plantejar-se solucions per resoldre'ls.

The data collected in this section allows us to bring out the most relevant information about writing in English. The findings will be discussed in the following section.

5. Discussion

This section aims to answer the research questions proposed before: 1) What information about learners' written competence gives us the analysis of Key Competences texts? 2) What are the learners' perceptions about the written tasks proposed to them? 3) What is the interpretation that the English teacher makes of the data collected as a result of questions 1 and 2?

Starting from the idea that Camps (2017a) outlines about the diversity of writing situations and the double purpose of writing tasks, the English teacher gives evidence of this fact when she mentions the tasks proposed when the students learn in corners but also when she suggests specific tasks to work on different kind of texts. The diversity of texts is also taken into account by analysing two different types of texts.

Regarding the correction of writing tasks, although the teacher says that grammar and spelling mistakes are basically corrected, as well as textual aspects, it would be interesting

to have evidence of this aspect. In this sense, what Milian (2011) claims that writing is both a finished product and a recursive process, which is not taken into account by the teacher. However, the teacher is aware of the importance of the different phases of the writing process (Cumming, 2001). So, when she is asked about how she could justify the results obtained from the analysis of the text, she states that students do not check as they are used to completing tasks too quickly, paying attention only to the final product instead of the process of writing, so the phases of planning and review are regarded as secondary. An explanation for this fact is given by Guasch (2001) through the information collected in Table 1, where the greater importance of writing in comparison with planning or revising the text is highlighted.

According to the teacher's opinion, most of the errors found in the analysis of the texts make reference to linguistic aspects, both structural and content, that have already been taught before. So, not everything taught is learnt, and it is evident that students do not pay attention to the revision of texts, but they only become aware of this issue when they are asked, in the group discussion, to comment on their written productions and they realise that if they had checked the text before, they would have been able to correct some mistakes.

Some of the errors that appear in the analysis of texts refer to the use of L1 when learners do not know a word they want to write in the text. According to the participants in the discussion groups, this is one of the strategies that students use to overcome the difficulties they find when writing texts in English. In addition, they emphasize that one of the main difficulties is that they would like to tell many things but they do not have enough command of the language to do it. Therefore, this aspect makes explicit what Guasch (2001) emphasises about the use that less-skilled students make of L1 as a resource to continue writing.

As for the English Key Competences Test, given the fact that its main aim is to assess the final result rather than the process of writing, it only makes reference to the elements included in the *text dimension* proposed by Cumming (2001) and it has to be understood as a summative assessment tool, as it aims to determine the progress in English at the end of Primary Education. But contrary to what Troia (cited by Milian, 2011) states, the correction criteria established by the Consell Superior d'Avaluació del Sistema Educatiu, attempt to assess the English Key Competences Test both discursive competence

(appropriateness and coherence) and linguistic competence (vocabulary, morpho-syntax, spelling) so, it is an assessment tool that allows assessing the final result taking into account all the text features.

Going on with assessment, although the text analysis is only based on the final result it is important to assess also the process of writing. In this sense, Sanmartí (2010) proposes formative assessment as the way to adapt the teaching and learning process to the learners' needs. In addition, Camps (2017b) suggests that it is paramount to have specific assessment criteria for each type of text to help learners regulate the process of writing, so this is the principle that has been taken into account to analyse the texts. Nevertheless, if the writing task proposed was part of the teaching and learning process, it would be interesting to discuss and agree the assessment guidelines with the students. By this way, learners would be able to regulate their process of composing since criteria could be used as a checklist to know what they have to do.

Moreover, it should be highlighted that students think it is important to have models and guidelines to help them during the writing process. In the previous paragraph, this fact is also evidenced by the teacher, as she gives importance to providing the appropriate guidelines for each type of text. However, the analysis of the texts shows that on certain occasions students do not take advantage of those guidelines. This leads to thinking that, as Cumming (2001) states, scaffolding should be provided appropriately or meaningfully during the process of composing the text. Therefore, teachers need to reformulate the writing tasks having in mind that each child has individual needs so different scaffolding in the different phases of the process of writing has to be provided in order to help them improve their written competence. By this way, the opinion students have about writing in English may change, as they would be able to cope with the challenges of writing in this language.

In conclusion, taking into account the different aspects that have been discussed in this section, the following lines are defined to improve the teaching-learning process of the writing: it is necessary to keep in mind that not everything taught is learned, it is important to correct the final product but also to help the students to revise the text, and we must provide appropriate scaffolding to meet students' needs during the different stages of the writing process.

6. Conclusions

In order to learn how to write it is necessary to practice and, in this sense, the school plays a crucial role because it can provide students with a great variety of occasions to write. However, it is important to keep in mind that the teaching and learning process of writing must be of high quality and that it is important to reflect on it.

This current study has found out that teachers need to plan for meaningful writing tasks to the learners and help them adjust the text into the purpose and the specific features of the discourse type. Moreover, writing needs to be understood as both, a final result and a learning process in which three recursive phases are involved: planning, writing and revising the text. According to this idea, the assessment made by the teacher is really important, since she needs to adapt the teaching-learning process to the needs of the students in each phase. Therefore, the task has to be carefully planned and needs appropriate guidelines so that each student can improve its written competence.

Although the study explores ways to improve students' performance when writing, the research presents some limitations that should be commented. On the one hand, only 40 out of 120 texts have been analysed and only one teacher has been interviewed. The main reason was a lack of time, so analysing all the texts would have resulted in a wider study in terms of scope. On the other hand, there are some aspects that were overlooked that may have influenced the results, such as the methodology to teach and learn writing in English or the learners' background.

Finally, as lines of future research, the study could be expanded by analysing other textual types that include a greater variety of linguistic aspects to compare them with the results obtained before. It would also be interesting to know if students' perceptions change if the teacher implements some of the suggested improvements.

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Appendices

Table 1. Questions asked in the discussion group

DISCUSSION GROUP - QUESTIONS
1. Us agrada escriure textos? Per què?
2. En quina llengua és més difícil escriure? Per què?
3. És més fàcil escriure en català que en anglès? Per què?
4. Us agrada escriure en anglès? Per què?
5. Amb quines dificultats us trobeu a l'hora d'escriure en anglès? Amb quins problemes us trobeu?
6. Què feu quan us trobeu amb aquestes dificultats?
7. Va ser complicat fer els textos que us vaig demanar? Quin va ser més fàcil per a vosaltres?
8. Com creieu que els i les mestres us poden ajudar a l'hora d'escriure textos en anglès?
9. Us ensenyaré el text (e-mail) que vau fer, us el podeu mirar tranquil·lament i el comentem. Parlarem de si esteu satisfets amb el que vau fer, de si trobeu algun error, etc. Si el poguéssiu tornar a fer canviaríeu alguna cosa?
10. El temps per fer la tasca (30 minuts) va ser massa curt?
11. El fet que hi hagi un límit de paraules pot ser una dificultat afegida?

Table 2. Questions asked in the teacher interview

TEACHER INTERVIEW - QUESTIONS
1. Quines tasques d'escriptura en anglès es plantegen als alumnes?
2. Com es corregeixen les tasques d'escriptura proposades?
3. Quins aspectes de la llengua es corregeixen?
4. Ara t'ensenyaré una mostra de 10 textos del primer tipus (*writing about myself*) i m'agradaria que els comentem destacant els errors més típics.
5. M'agradaria comentar el cas de XAN, ja que és un cas que m'ha permès extreure molta informació. Veuràs que hi ha molt poques coses que estiguin correctes però és l'únic que va començar copiant una frase extreta del model.
6. També m'he adonat que sovint els costa estructurar el text en paràgrafs. Què en podries dir?
7. Després d'analitzar els textos i tenint en compte les opinions dels alumnes al grup de discussió, m'he adonat que no revisen. Es treballa d'alguna forma específica?
8. Tenint en compte les tres fases recursives de planificar, textualitzar i revisar que destaca el currículum, què em podries dir pel que fa a la planificació?
9. Com explicaries els errors que han fet en aquest primer text?
10. Ara t'ensenyaré una mostra de 10 textos del segon tipus (*writing about routines*) i m'agradaria que els comentem destacant els errors més típics.
11. *Una de les idees més repetides al grup de discussió era que a l'hora d'escriure textos en anglès volen dir moltes coses però que sovint no ho poden dir perquè no tenen el suficient vocabulari per*

poder-ho explicar. Quan els vaig demanar què feien en aquests casos, molts deien que intenten reformular la frase o buscar un sinònim, però veiem que no ho fan. Com explicaries aquest fet?

12. M'agradaria comentar el cas de XAU, ja que crec que és un cas que s'escapa de la tendència de la resta de textos analitzats.

13. Tornem al cas de XAN però aquesta vegada per aquest segon text. He vist que ell no sabia com començar els paràgrafs i els començava copiant la pregunta però sense interrogant. A més, és l'únic que ha utilitzat totes les imatges que es donaven per ajudar-los a escriure el text.

14. Com explicaries el fet que hi hagi tanta diferència entre un text i un altre d'un mateix alumne?

15. Com explicaries els errors que han fet en aquest segon text?

16. S'havien treballat els continguts dels textos abans que fessin la tasca?

17. *Quan al grup de discussió els vaig demanar com creien que els mestres els podien ajudar a l'hora de fer tasques d'escriptura en anglès, les opinions més destacades van ser: és necessari tenir el vocabulari treballat, cal que hi hagi pautes que guiïn l'escriptura, que hi hagi un model, les preguntes ens ajuden però també seria interessant que no hi fossin.* Què en podries dir?

18. Quins creus que són els punts forts i els punts febles després de veure aquests textos?

19. Creus que es podrien analitzar els textos de manera individualitzada, segons les capacitats de cadascú?

20. Creus que et pot ajudar en un futur per replantejar-te les tasques d'escriptura que es proposen i la correcció d'aquestes?