TEACHING WRITING IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL

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Abstract

Competence in written English is widely recognized as an important skill for topics related to business, education and personal relationships. Teaching writing is fast becoming more and more important in learning today. The present study was intended as an attempt to explore whether Anita Pincas' teaching method for writing enables Spanish primary school children to improve their writing skill in English. This study was conducted with two groups of sixth year Spanish children who were divided as follows: i) making them use the teaching writing method (experimental group) and ii) without the method (control group). The first group was trained by means of a 4-lesson intervention programme following the main phases that Anita Pincas proposes. To examine the effects of this method, one pre-test and one post-test were given to the children of each group to check their differences and evaluate their improvement through comparing the errors made. Results indicated that the children of both groups improved their writing skill, although this was especially significant in the experimental group concerning writing structure. Therefore, it can be concluded that Anita Pincas' method positively influenced the progress of schoolchildren's writing skills.

Key words: EFL Writing, Anita Pincas' method, written errors, pre-test & post-test design, Primary Education.

Resumen

El escribir correctamente en inglés se considera una habilidad importante para tratar temas relacionados con los negocios, la educación y relaciones personales. La enseñanza de la expresión escrita en inglés está asumiendo un papel importante en el aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras en la actualidad. El presente estudio fue planteado con el propósito de explorar si el método de enseñanza de la escritura propuesto por Anita Pincas permite a los niños españoles de educación primaria mejorar su capacidad para la expresión escrita en inglés. Fue llevado a cabo con dos grupos de niños españoles de sexto curso que fueron divididos de la siguiente manera: i) haciéndoles usar el método de enseñanza de la escritura (grupo experimental) y ii) con ausencia total de dicho método (grupo control). Se intervino en el primer grupo, enseñándoles a usar dicho método durante 4 sesiones, siguiendo las principales fases que Anita Pincas propone. Los niños realizaron una prueba inicial (pre-test) y una prueba final (post-test) para poder observar sus diferencias y evaluar su mejora a través de la comparación de los errores cometidos. Los resultados indicaron que los niños de ambos grupos mejoraron su capacidad de expresión escrita en el post-test, aunque esta mejora fue especialmente significativa en el grupo experimental, sobre todo en lo referido a la estructura del texto. Por lo tanto, se puede concluir que el método de Anita Pincas influyó positivamente en el progreso de las habilidades de escritura de los escolares.

Palabras clave: Expresión escrita en EFL, método de Anita Pincas, errores escritos, diseño pre-test/post-test, Educación Primaria.

1. Introduction

Writing, which was once considered the domain of educated people, has become accessible to all. Whether used in reporting analyses of current events for newspapers or web pages, composing academic essays, reports, letters, or email, the ability to write effectively allows individuals from different cultures to communicate. Furthermore, it is now widely recognized that writing plays a vital role not only in expressing information, but also in transforming knowledge to create new knowledge.

Writing was traditionally viewed as less important than the other skills in English (listening, speaking and reading). Similarly, EFL writing has been employed in primary education mainly as a means of reinforcing and supporting overall English learning, especially grammar and vocabulary. Even in many classrooms, the writing is mainly relegated to a homework activity. Teaching writing does not mean simply asking students to complete grammar exercises. It requires specific and comprehensive methodology based on imitation models which help them to familiarise with the task and develop it successfully (Pincas, 1982).

However, nowadays their needs to be a balance between the development of oral and written skills in the field of learning and teaching foreign languages. In the same vein, it is generally recognised that writing is important from a very early age in foreign language classrooms. For that reason, it is necessary the study of different methods to know what is the best method to start teaching this skill in primary education.

Recent studies have focused on the process of writing, an area where the use of the first language (L1) during the composition process has been one of the main issues in research (Abisamra, 2003). Most of the studies related to teaching writing both in second language or foreign language acquisition appear mainly in the form of case studies of learners studying at universities and colleges (Ridha, 2012; Alhaysony, 2012; Chan, 2004 and Huang, 2001, 2006). Moreover, all of them were devoted to analysing the common types of errors that students made. Therefore research with beginner-level learners involving written production, especially instructed learners, is still needed and even studies which analyse writing teaching methods.

In an attempt to address this gap, the present study has been designed with the aim of exploring whether Anita Pincas' method, a pedagogical procedure based on teaching writing following a series of phases can help primary schoolchildren to develop and enhance their English writing skills. In order to figure out if this method is truly beneficial to improve the writing, an experimental study was conducted with two groups of Spanish children aged 11 to 13 (sixth year of primary education) who were divided into control group and experimental group. This last one, was trained by means of a 4-lesson intervention programme in which Anita Pincas' method was put into practice while the other group continued learning normally without any support. The children were set a pre-test and a post-test to evaluate their performances and if their writing improved as a direct result.

In what follows, writing as a skill and the ways it is taught are explored. A brief review of previous studies exploring the typical errors made by students in EFL contexts and their main limitations are underlined. The objectives of the study are then set out, the methodological decisions taken in the collection and analysis of data are reported, and the results obtained are discussed in an attempt to provide answers to the research questions. Finally, the conclusions related to the significance of findings for research development and its practical applications are presented.

2. Literature review

2.1. The writing skill

Writing is the process of using symbols (letters of the alphabet, punctuation and spaces) to communicate thoughts and ideas in a readable form. It is clearly a complex process, and competent writing is frequently accepted as being the last language skill to be acquired for native speakers of the language as well as for

foreign/second language learners due to it is being one of the most difficult skills that learners are expected to acquire, requiring the mastery of a variety of linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural competences. This sense of difficulty is most tangible when learners are required to produce a piece of writing (Hedge, 1988).

Traditionally, writing has been put on the back burner in second/foreign language teaching, however, this skill has assumed an important role in applied linguistics and it remains an important discussion topic in the field of linguistics. This is the case both to clarify how the skill works and to determine the steps to follow in its teaching or acquisition (Hyland, 2002).

Writing usually needs to be taught as it does not come instinctively through the correct use of vocabulary and grammar, but it has to be taught specifically (Pincas, 1982). Learning to write is not just a matter of developing a series of mechanical spelling strategies; it also involves learning a range of new cognitive and social relations (Tribble, 1996). Writing in a coherent, appropriate and effective way requires understanding the purpose of the text and the characteristics of the reader (Pincas, 1982).

2.2. Approaches to teaching writing in EFL classes

As mentioned above, writing, in the context of the second language or foreign language, was deemed necessary only in the case of written compositions. But for a long time need teach writing has gained more attention and people have become more aware of this importance.

Faced with the question how to teach writing, "there is no answer to the question of how to teach writing in ESL or EFL classes. There are as many answers as there are different approaches as teachers and teaching styles, or learners and learning styles" (Raimes, 1983, p. 5). Thus, we can find the following approaches to teaching writing in EFL classes according to this author:

- The controlled-to-free Approach

This teaching approach is also known as guided composition and traces its roots to Charles Fries' oral approach (1945), precursor of the audio-lingual method. Students are first given sentence exercises, then paragraphs to copy or manipulate grammatically by, for instance, changing questions to statements, present to past, or plural to singular. The reader is the teacher who acting as an editor focuses on linguistic forms rather than on the ideas expressed. In short, this approach focuses on formal instruction and emphasizes accuracy rather than fluency or originality.

- The free-writing Approach

On the contrary, writing fluency is the central axis of the Free-Writing Approach which stresses quantity over quality in terms of ideas. This approach encourages students to write quickly and as much as possible since "the emphasis in this approach is that students should put content and fluency first and not worry about form. Once ideas are down on the page, grammatical accuracy, organization, and the rest will gradually follow" (Raimes, 1983, p.7).

To emphasise fluency even more, some EFL teachers begin many of their classes by asking students to write freely on any topic without worrying about grammar and spelling for five or ten minutes. At first, students find this very difficult. As they do this kind of writing more and more often, however, some find that they write more fluently and that putting words down on paper is not so frightening after all.

◆ The paragraph-pattern approach

Increasing awareness of second language writers' need to produce extended written texts led to the realization that there was more to writing than constructing grammatical sentences. The result of this realization was what Raimes (1983b) has called the 'paragraph pattern approach', which emphasized the importance of text organization. Students copy paragraphs, analyse the form of the model paragraphs, and imitate model passages. They order scrambled sentences into paragraphs, they identify general and specific statements, they choose or invent an appropriate topic sentence, they insert or delete sentences. This approach is based on the principle that in different cultures people construct and organize their communication with each other in different ways. So even if students organize their ideas well in their first language, they still need to see, analyse and practice the particularly "English" features of a piece of writing.

◆ The grammar-syntax-organization approach

Some teachers have stressed the need to work simultaneously on more than one of the features. They devise writing tasks that lead students to concentrate on organisation while they also work on the necessary grammar and syntax. Students see the connection between what they are trying to write and what they need to write. However, they do not write starting with the form, but by the content, therefore, come to the organization based on the meaning.

According to Scott (1996) "The writing tasks are designed to make students to pay attention to grammar and syntax while also giving them words such as first, then, and finally to organize their text."

◆ The process approach

Recently, the teaching of writing has begun to move away from focusing on written form to an emphasis on the process of writing. Student writers in particular need to realise that what they first put down on paper is not necessarily going to be their finished product but just a beginning, a setting out of the first ideas, a draft.

This approach was developed by Zamel (1985), among others, who claims that ESL writers use similar strategies to those of native speakers of English who write through a nonlinear, exploratory and generative process whereby writers discover and reformulate their ideas as they attempt to approximate meaning. This approach offers the writer the freedom to address the situation, purpose, and audience for the text.

◆ The communicative approach

This approach stresses the purpose of a piece of writing and the audience for it. Student writers are encouraged to behave like writers in real life, knowing how to communicate to their audience and connect with their readers. This approach "feels that writers do their best when writing is truly a communicative act, with a writer writing for a real reader" (Raimes, 1983, p.9).

Teachers using the communicative approach, therefore, have extended the readership. The audience is extended; not only is the teacher but the writer's peers, too, who can respond, rewrite in another form, summarize, or comment their classmates' writings.

Hedge (1988), Brooks and Grundy (1990) and Pincas (1982) also proposed to teach writing communicatively joining communicative practice, an integrated approach taking into account principles

such as having something meaningful to say; reaching an audience; trying to be understood by others; working in small groups providing more opportunities of communication, etc.

After describing some of the writing teaching approaches in EFL, it is important to consider that "there simply are no comprehensive theories of L2 writing teaching and it does not seem prudent to assume that theories of first language writing alone will suffice" (Silva, 1990). However, the above mentioned approaches are the most influential in EFL writing teaching. Some of them conflict in their viewpoint, but some also overlap. It is rare to "find a classroom where a teacher is so devoted to one approach as to exclude all the others. Thus, there is no one way to teach writing.

2.3. Previous studies

In addition to writing and writing teaching approaches, it is important to consider previous writing research findings which enrich the EFL writing theory. Several writing studies have been carry out in recent years, some of them related to the main above-mentioned approaches and others have analysed the second/foreign language learners' speech or written performance concerning the errors that they usually make.

Research into second language acquisition has seen massive advancements since the publication *Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language* (Fries 1974). Since then, various studies have been conducted to account for the process of L2 acquisition in many languages around the world. Most of the studies carried out so far have been fundamentally based on Error Analysis (EA) approaches. Error Analysis is a type of linguistic analysis that focuses on errors committed by learners (AbiSamra, 2003) and has attractive a lot of attention from linguists becoming an important part of applied linguistics. Instead of looking at learners' errors only, EA looks at the learner and the language being learned.

The error analyses studied have been conducted in English as a second or foreign language field. These studies are important because students' errors always provide an insight into how the language is learned, and it provides key information for teachers to revise their lessons. In the EFL context, Alhaysony (2012) examined written samples of 100 first-year female Arabic-speaking EFL students in the University of Ha'il. The findings showed that students made a considerable number of errors in their use of articles, especially, omission errors. This study had a mixed finding because these errors included interlingual and intralingual [1] transfer. In Hong Kong, Chan (2004) studied 710 Hong Kong Chinese ESL students. There were 5 types of error found (all of them related to grammar). This study found out that these university students used the syntactic transfer from Chinese to English, that is, they tended to think in Chinese first before they wrote in English, and that the sentence structures produced by the participants were identical or very similar to the usual or normative sentence structures of the learners' first language (L1), Cantonese. Therefore, it caused the run-on sentence and incomplete ideas.

Alonso (1997) studied the main types of interlingual errors made by Spanish students when learning English as a foreign language. The students who took part in this study were a group of twenty-eight first-year High School students. The interlingual errors taken from the corpus were divided into four types: transfer of structure, overextension of analogy, interlingual/intralingual and substitution. Most of the errors were due to transfer of structure. The linguistic structures of the mother tongue were the main cause of interference when writing in the L2.

AbiSamra (2003), in his article collected samples of written work from 10 students of 9th grade. He classified the writing errors into five categories, namely, grammatical (prepositions, articles, adjectives, etc.); syntactic (coordination, sentence structure, word order, etc.); lexical (word choice); semantic and substance (punctuation, capitalization, and spelling); and discourse errors. The results revealed that one third of the students' errors were transfer errors from the native language, and the highest numbers of errors were in the categories of semantics and vocabulary. The rest of the errors (64.1%) were errors of over-application of the target language, the highest numbers of errors being found in substance (mainly spelling), syntax and grammar.

In addition, Ridha (2012) examined English writing samples of 80 EFL college students and then categorized the errors according to the following taxonomy: grammatical, lexical/ semantic, mechanics, and word order types of errors. The results showed that most of the students' errors were due to L1 transfer.

Furthermore, she found that most of the learners rely on their mother tongue to express their ideas. She added that although the rating processes showed that the participants' essays included different types of errors, grammatical errors and mechanical errors were the most serious and frequent.

Specifically, some studies were conducted in the same context like this study. Huang (2001) investigated the nature of distribution of different grammatical errors made by 46 English students of a Taiwanese university. This study found the top six common errors were related to verb usage, nouns, spelling, articles, prepositions and word choices. These errors were due to overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restrictions, simplification, incomplete application of rules and L1 negative transfer. Huang (2006) analysed 34 Taiwanese English students' writing errors based on a web-based writing program. This study found that 55% errors are on the usage. Namely, subject-verb is the main area EFL students need to study. Huang's study (2006) also found the errors on mechanics, style, and grammar, and these errors are transferred from the EFL students' L1. Among these previous studies, there was no agreement found in these studies.

2.4. Limitations of previous studies

In spite of the insights offered, the studies reviewed above share a number of characteristics in relation to the type of populations analysed and the methodological procedures employed that, collectively considered, suggest a number of issues which need to be employed in further research.

Firstly, the participants included in the studies have been university students (Alhaysony, 2012; Chan, 2004; Ridha, 2012; Huang, 2001, 2006) and EFL junior high school students (Alonso Alonso, 1997 and AbiSamara, 2003), which means that the number and types of errors in writing on primary education children have been overlooked from an empirical perspective. In one of these studies (Alhaysony, 2012), the subjects were female only; therefore, it would be difficult to reach conclusions for both genders. Moreover, while only one of those studies were carried out with learners whose mother tongue was Spanish (Alonso, 1997) the others included participants with L1s such as Arabic (AbiSamara, 2003; Ridha, 2012 and Alhaysony, 2012) and Chinese (Chan 2004 and Huang 2001, 2006).

Secondly, the subjects were English learners selected from one specific place (a university, a high school…), consequently the findings in these researches may not be generalised to the general group of EFL learners. And the data of these studies was collected from one piece of writing that was produced in a

specific moment by the participants. Accordingly, these studies merely serve as one preliminary attempt in this topic.

Bearing these limitations in mind, it may be concluded that the number of writing errors made by Spanish schoolchildren still remains relatively unknown. Add to that the lack of previous studies on the evolution of writing in primary school children following any of the previously discussed approaches to teaching writing. This issue, however, is precisely what the present study is intended to explore. This study will focus on the evolution of writing as a skill for Spanish schoolchildren using Anita Pincas' communicative method based approach.

2.5. The present study

Martínez Rebollo (2014) claims that a student who learns to write in a foreign language (FL) should follow a similar process to the one followed in his/her mother tongue (MT) and, therefore, the learning should start by simple or basic activities, in which the student has to copy, write and join sentences, complete sentences, analyse model texts, etc.

The objectives of writing are different when you learn a foreign language to when you learn your mother tongue. In this regard, Pincas points out that "most people, however, especially when writing in a foreign or second language, use it primarily to communicate with other members of their own community or the wider world. Our main task is therefore to teach effective functional writing rather than creative self-expression" (Pincas, 1982, p. 28). For that reason, as the writing process, besides composing, involves communicating (Hedge, 1988) the present study emphasises the need to equip students not only with suitable grammar and vocabulary but also the need to know the objective or purpose of writing, the students need to know the purpose of a text before writing it. Therefore, it is desirable that students become familiar with different types of text before practicing the skills involved in writing. This is best taught through the use of a model.

According to Pincas a writing lesson should follow three phases all of which are related and interlocked (Pincas, 1982, p. 14-22). The first is the stage of "familiarisation", in which you choose a text type as a model and work through an activity that can be simply reading comprehension.

The second phase involves a series of controlled exercises that introduce the student in the writing process. The third phase consists of guided exercises that establish a bridge between the activities of controlled writing and free writing. Finally there is the stage of "free writing". This is the phase of production and creativity by the student. It involves a real activity that establishes a certain relationship with the exercises and the previous stages but that makes the student develop their own writing.

Given the lack of research into EFL writing acquisition of Spanish-speaking primary school children, and particularly in Spain, the present study attempts to address this gap by measuring the effectiveness of Anita Pincas' method (based on teaching writing by means of different phases: familiarization, controlled writing, guided writing and free writing), with regards on the writing ability of Spanish primary school children. In order to do so, a pre-test and post-test experimental design was carried out in two groups (experimental group and control group) and the findings will be compared to discover if it more effective to use Anita Pincas' method. The general objective of this study (above-mentioned) can be broken down into the following research questions:

1) Are there any differences in the number of errors between the experimental group and the control group in the pre-test?
2) Are there any differences in the number of errors between the experimental group and the control group in the post-test?
3) Are there any differences in the number of errors made by the members of the experimental group between the pre-test and the post-test?
4) Are there any differences in the number of errors made by the members of the control group between the pre-test and the post-test?

3. Method

3.1. Research design

This exploratory study employed a quantitative methodology in order to ensure collection of data from various sources. It followed a pre-test and post-test experimental design over four sessions to carry out the different writing phases that Anita Pincas proposes in her method. Two classes were selected to analyse whether participants made any progress in terms of their writing ability. An experimental group, in which the different writing phases were implemented, a control group which continued with its normal lessons focused on grammar and morphology.

3.2. Context and participants

3.2.1 The school

This study was conducted at the State Primary School "Juan de la Cierva", a non-bilingual school located in Casillas, a small town 5 kilometres from the provincial capital (Murcia). Most of the children attending this school are from working-class families and some of them belong to a wide range of ethnic groups including, among others, Chinese, Moroccan and South Americans. Even though most parents' professions are related to the services sector, some of them have managed to finish secondary education and a small number of them have completed university degrees. In general, students' parents in this school assume a respectful attitude to the school, the teachers and the teaching; moreover, they are deeply committed with the education of their children.

The choice of this school was not random; the researcher selected this school because she attended it while she was a primary student and she carried out her first two teaching practice periods there. Therefore, she maintained keep a good relationship with the teaching staff.

3.2.2 The participants

The participants were selected from two 6th grade classes. Both classes were made up of 16 children whose ages ranged from 11 to 13 years old and they all spoke Spanish as their first language. They have a similar level of proficiency and all of them had been learning English at school since they were three years old (not in a bilingual programme). The children have all received some form of writing instruction, however it was not very intensive or detailed as their English lessons were mainly oral-focused.

As is the case in all classes, there are pupils with different levels of proficiency (high-achievers, average learners and low-achievers) but the majority of children in both classes are average learners, in terms of English level. In addition, they did not have any sensory impairments or disabilities.

3.3. Instructional treatment

3.3.1 Justification

The teaching procedures featured in this study were based on Anita Pincas' approach that is geared towards communicative competence in various forms of written English. This communicative approach suggests that the teaching material should be chosen for its intrinsic usefulness and interest, that is, if writing is placed in a realistic context, children's motivation increases because in this way they can be aware importance of writing. As Pincas (1982) proposes the training sessions of the study consisted of a series of activities from more to less control which students had to carry out it in order to improve their communicative written skill.

The different phases that Pincas recommends to follow are:

- Familiarisation: involves activities which prepare students for actual writing by demonstrating one or other of skills that are to be practised (the main types of familiarisation are identifying and evaluating).
- Controlled writing: concerns activities with the objective of students practising writing to minimise mistakes (there are two types of controlled exercises –combining and substitution-).
- Guided writing: includes activities which establish a bridge between controlled and free writing. They include any writing that gives students assistance (such as a model to follow, a plan or outline to expand from, a picture...) to prepare them for an attempt to write freely (the principal exercises to develop this kind of writing are completion, reproduction, compression and transformation).
- Free writing: involves activities in which students write freely what has been taught. The children are given a topic without detailed assistance.

3.3.2 Teaching procedures

This study was conducted between March and April, 2016, over a period of 5 45-minute sessions. Before the research was initiated, the children's parents were given a consent sheet in which they were informed of its main objectives and procedures, and were asked for their permission for their children to be evaluated. In the first session, the children of both classes were given the pre-test (a friendly letter) and the following 3 sessions, which covered the training period (only with the experimental group), were devoted to each one of Anita Pincas' method phase (lesson 1: familiarisation, lesson 2: controlled writing and lesson 3: guided writing). Once the training period was over, the children of both classes were given the post-test, in which they had to write a friendly letter different from the pre-test (free writing phase). Each training session featured different activities to present input and to prepare student to write communicatively with minimal mistakes. The main procedures of which are described below.

Each session in the training stage of the study lasted 45 minutes and was devoted to preparing children to improve their writing skills by means of sequenced phases (see *Table 1*) focused on a communicative approach. The topics chosen for these writing classes were based on their intrinsic usefulness and interest. The first part of session, which was intended to work with vocabulary and grammar, began with a 15-minute period in which the teacher and the researcher presented new lexis or reviewed old language points encouraging children to actively participate at the same time. After the first 15 minutes, there was a 30-minute work period in which the researcher carried out different written activities with the children (mainly drills or meaningful

drills) so that the students could gradually familiarise themselves with the writing. All these activities were especially designed for this study following the practical writing exercises that Pincas suggests (1982) including several exercises to work individually or in pairs. These exercises were ranged from controlled to free writing depending on the lesson.

This is the schedule for the implementation of the study:

Table 1.- Study's implementation schedule

Session 1	*Pre-test* 1. Presentation of the study. 2. Implementation of the pre-test (a friendly letter about what he/she did last weekend).
Session 2	*Familiarisation* 1. A Prezi presentation showing a friendly letter in order to explain its main parts. 2. An ordering activity which children have to arrange in the correct order the pieces of a puzzle to create a new friendly letter (in pairs). 3. A "selecting information" activity in which students have to identify the past simple by underlining regular or irregular verbs in past that appear in the previous letter.
Session 3	*Controlled writing* 1. Presentation of specific vocabulary (free time activities) by means of flashcards. 2. A controlled activity in which students have to join words into sentences and match pictures with its corresponding free time activity.
Session 4	*Guided writing* 1. Individual written activity to review content worked on in previous lessons (parts of a letter, free time activities, past simple…) consisting of a gap fill exercise. 2. A semi-controlled activity in which children have to rewrite a friendly letter in pairs. 3. Individual activity to rewrite a letter with verbs in the past keeping the format given in an example.
Session 5	*Post-test (free writing) + questionnaire* 1. Each individual learner carries out the post-test (writing a friendly letter telling what he/she did last Easter). 2. Each student completes a questionnaire on their feelings about the method.

3.3.3 Materials used in the study

As mentioned above, during some of the study training sessions the children received some training about how to write a friendly letter by means of a Prezi Presentation. After this presentation, some review worksheets specially designed by the researcher and then worked on by the students to help them consolidate the key language and the steps to follow to write a friendly letter that previously were presented to them.

On the other hand, the materials for the pre-test and the post-test consisted of a friendly letter in which children had to write what they did last weekend or what they did last Easter, respectively.

3.4. Data collection

3.4.1 Instruments

The instruments employed for the collection of data were the following:

1) A pre-test which consisted of writing a friendly letter in which students had to describe what they did last weekend. The addressee could be a relative or a friend.

2) A post-test similar to the previous one. This task was made up of a friendly letter in which children had to state what they did last Easter. In this case, the addressee was their English teacher.

3) A questionnaire intended to gather information about the children's perceptions of the method.

4) A consent sheet for the parents which stated the purpose of the study as well as requesting their permission for their children to participate.

3.4.2 Procedure

The data was collected in the form of two integrative tests focusing on written ability consisting of two friendly letters. In the case of the pre-test, the topic was "Tell what you did last weekend" and the audience of the letter was a relative (their mother, father, uncle…). A similar topic was dealt with in the post-test; in this test children had to state what they did during their Easter holidays and the audience was their English teacher.

These two tasks were administered in both classrooms by the researcher under exam conditions, although the participants were told it will be unassessed. All the subjects were given 30 minutes to write on the given topic (above-mentioned) following the friendly letter format they had been shown (date, greeting, body, closing and signature).

3.5. Data analysis

3.5.1. Instruments

To analyse each student's friendly letter carried out in the pre-test and in the post-test, the researcher used a classification of writing errors types adapted from Kroll (1990). Observing the collected data, the researcher decided to make several changes to Kroll's classification, including categories which the author failed to add and she found very pertinent for the purpose of her study as well as removing other categories that were not relevant. For example, other categories such as genitive, spelling or friendly letter format were added. As can be seen below, this classification includes varied errors from different categories (grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, etc.) and all of them were mistakes that children made in both tests.

Table 2.- Writing errors types

ERROR TYPES	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE
Lexicon (Lex.)	Insertion of a wrong or invented word	"I went to the beach and I saw two *krustys*" instead of "I went to beach and I saw two crabs"
Article (Art.)	A missing, extra or incorrect article	"I watched *a* TV*"* instead of "I watched TV"
Tense/Aspect (T/A)	An incorrect tense or not incorrect formation	"Last weekend I *meet* María (…)" instead of "Last weekend I met María (…)"
Preposition (Prep.)	An incorrect, missing or extra preposition	"*In* Sunday I played football" instead of "On Sunday I played football"
Missing word (MW)	Omission of a preposition, article, verb, subject, relative pronoun, etc.	"(…) and ___ *played* with my dog" instead of "(…) and I played with my dog"
Punctuation (Pun.)	Missing, extra, wrong including punctuation mark or do not include capitalization.	"¿What did you do last weekend?" instead of "What did you do last weekend?
Spelling (Sp.)	An error to the conventionally accepted form of spelling a word (vowel/consonant insertion, reduction, substitution…)	"I *eatied* a hot-dog" instead of "I ate a hot-dog"
Genitive (Gen.)	Missing/misused 'S or N of N misused	"I went *at house of my uncle*" instead of "I went to my uncle's house"
Wrong order (WO)	Words placed in the wrong order in the sentence (i.e. the adjective after the noun)	"I saw a *film horror*" instead of "I saw a horror film"
Format (Format)	Don't follow the letter format (date, greeting, body, closing…)	"*For Inma, by Teresa*" instead of "Your friend, Teresa"

3.5.2. Procedure

Previous writing studies as summarised in the literature review informed the selection of analytical measures to describe and compare learners. Table 2 shows the 10 measures or error types used to analyse the written tasks in this study; all of them were selected because in previous studies, they were seen to best reflect the development of level of accuracy.

The friendly letters in both the pre-tests and post-tests were rated by the researcher according to previously established criteria that are described below. To carry out this process of analysis the researcher followed the next steps:

First of all, each group´s pre-test and post-test were examined word by word and sentence by sentence to identify the different types of mistakes that children had made. Once they were examined, according to the classification of writing error, each mistake was counted and was differentiated to create a table (using *Excel* as data analysis software) which collected the final number of error of each student. This collection was carried out to subsequently compare the number of error made in the pre-test with the number of error made in the post-test, thus this comparison will allow the researcher to see if student improved their writing skill from the pre-test to the post-test. Table 3 lists the steps to analyse each error found in the writing samples.

Table 3. Steps to analyse errors

Steps	Definition of the steps	Examples
Step 1: Collect data	Gather written data from the tests	32 writing sample were collected
Step 2: Identify errors	Underline the main errors	*Rided* (rode) - *Mather* (mother)
Step 3: Classify errors	Differentiate types of errors	Lexicon, Article, Format, Tense/Aspect, Preposition, Missing word, Punctuation, Spelling, Genitive and Wrong order
Step 4: Quantify errors	Count the number of errors	<u>Student 1</u>: Lex. →1 ; Spelling→ 3
Step 5: Compare groups	Observe the number of errors of each groups	Experimental group (Pre-test) → 200 errors Control group (Pre-test)→196 errors

4. Results

The results obtained in this study are reported below according to the research questions proposed:

1) Are there any differences in the number of errors between the experimental group and the control group in the pre-test?
2) Are there any differences in the number of errors between the experimental group and the control group in the post-test?
3) Are there any differences in the number of errors made by members of the experimental group between the pre-test and the post-test?

Table 4.- Statistics final results

| • *ERROR TYPES:* | EXPERIMENTAL GROUP | | | | CONTROL GROUP | | | |
| | Raw Data | | Mean & Standard Deviation | | Raw Data | | Mean & Standard Deviation | |
	PRE-TEST	**POST-TEST**	**PRE-TEST** Mean (SD)	**POST-TEST** Mean (SD)	**PRE-TEST**	**POST-TEST**	**PRE-TEST** Mean (SD)	**POST-TEST** Mean (SD)
Lex	11	4	.6875 (.60)	.25 (.45)	18	20	1.125 (1.09)	1.25 (1.13)
Art	21	7	1.3125 (1.08)	.4375 (.51)	10	15	.625(.81)	.9375 (1.12)
T /A	24	13	1.5 (1.67)	.8125 (.75)	18	27	1.125 (1.67)	1.6875 (1.82)
Prep	23	5	1.4375 (1.41)	.3125 (.60)	34	19	2.125 (1.63)	1.1875 (1.42)
MW	16	12	1 (1.15)	.75 (1.18)	20	20	1.25 (1.73)	1.25 (1.57)
Pun	6	5	.375 (.81)	.3125 (.70)	6	6	.375(.72)	.375 (.62)
Sp	70	40	4 .375(2.42)	2.5 (1.37)	55	30	3.4375 (2.25)	1.875 (1.63)
Gen	10	1	.625 (.72)	.0625 (.25)	4	4	.25 (.45)	.25 (.45)
WO	4	1	.25 (.45)	.0625 (.25)	4	5	.25 (.45)	.3125 (.48)
Format	15	1	.9375 (.77)	.0625 (.25)	27	18	1.6875 (.60)	1.125 (.72)
TOTAL	**200**	**89**	**12.5 (11.08)**	**5.5625 (6.32)**	**196**	**164**	**12.25 (11.39)**	**10.25(10.95)**

Firstly, the results of both groups in the pre-test and the post-test will be compared. Then, the differences in the number of errors made by both groups in each test will be presented. Table 4 includes statistics which have been used with the aim of describing the development of participants' errors as a whole. In order to analyse the main findings of the present study, the mean number of errors in each category will be observed to differentiate the progress of both groups in both tests.

1) *Are there any differences in the number of errors between the experimental group and the control group in the pre-test?*

This question was answered by counting the errors made by the children once both groups had finished their pre-tests and calculating the mean of errors made. Figure 1 shows that, globally the mean number of errors made by both the experimental group and the control group were very high ($M = 12.5$ and $M = 12.25$ respectively), the most common mistakes related to spelling, prepositions and the format of the text.

2) *Are there any differences in the number of errors between the experimental group and the control group in the post-test?*

The answer to this question involved comparing the number of errors in the post-test with those made by the children of each group. Figure 1 shows a notable difference between the errors that the students of the experimental group made and those made by the students of the control group. The experimental group made 5.5625 mistakes while the control group made more than double, 10.25 mistakes. Moreover, both groups agreed about the type of errors made, especially, they made those related to spelling, missing words and tenses.
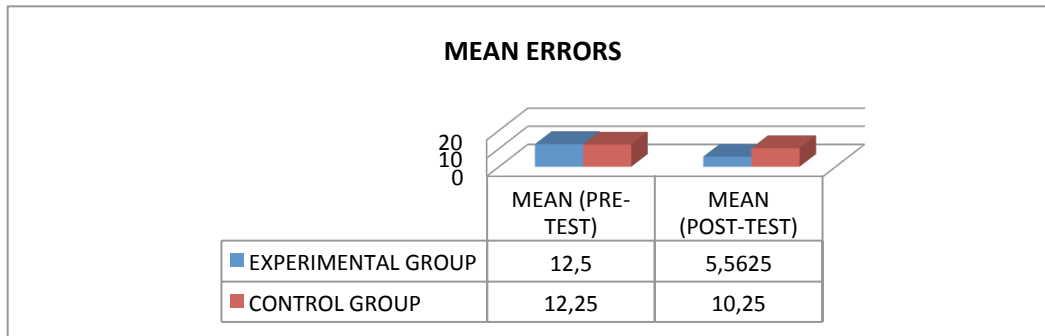
Figure 1. Mean errors of both tests

3) *Are there any differences in the number of errors made by the members of the experimental group between the pre-test and the post-test?*

So as to answer this question, the number of errors made by the children of the experimental group was compared between the two tests (pre-test and post-test). As Table 4 shows, there was a strong decrease in the total mean number of errors, from 12.5 mean errors in the pre-test to 5.5625 mean errors in the post-test. Besides, the mistakes of each category diminished considerably. Those categories that underwent the most important drop were those related to spelling, prepositions and the format of the text (see *Figure 2*).
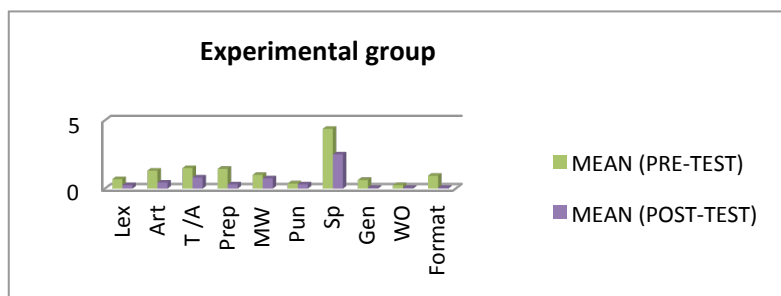

Figure 2. Experimental group's mean errors by categories

4) *Are there any differences in the number of errors made by the members of the control group between the pre-test and the post-test?*

As in the previous question to answer this question, the results of both tests (pre-test and post-test) were compared. As Table 4 shows, there was a slight reduction in the total number of error between both tests (12.25 in the pre-test and 10.25 in the post-test), which is in contrast to the findings above so this group did not improve at the same rate. Some error types decreased (spellings, prepositions and format) however, others like lexicon, articles and tenses increased (see *Figure 3*). Therefore it can be said that the number of errors did not vary greatly from pre-test to post-test in the case of the control group.
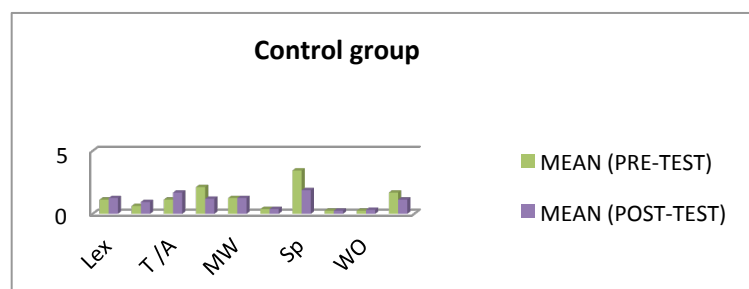

Figure 3. Control group's mean errors by category

5. Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to explore whether Anita Pincas' teaching writing method helped primary school Spanish children to improve their writing skill in English.

In order to explore the effectiveness of this method the pre-test and post-test evaluations that each group completed were analysed to identify the different types of mistakes that the children made. Once they were checked, according to the classification of writing errors proposed by Kroll (1990), each mistake was counted and was differentiated so as to create a table which collected the final number of error of each student. This collection was carried out to subsequently compare the mean number of errors made in the pre-test with the mean number of errors made in the post-test.

The data indicated that children improved considerably in terms of their writing ability given that there was a reduction in the total number of errors from the pre-test to the post-test in both groups. Generally both groups improved their writing, but mainly, the group which most improved was the experimental group. This important progress was due to the writing instruction that the experimental group received by the researcher. The categories which experienced the most significant fall were *spelling* and *prepositions*; surprisingly children improved in these two types of errors which are the most difficult for English learners to acquire. In spite of this, children in the experimental group decreased the number of errors in every single category, the control group only improved in *prepositions*, *spelling* and *format* (see Table 4). The reduction in the number of errors in the format category in the control group was an unexpected result because in contrast to the experimental group, the control group did not receive any instruction on how to organise a friendly letter or its main component parts.

Despite the fact that children generally improved, the most common mistakes that children of both groups continued making were those related to *verb tenses*. This result is in line with the findings reported by Sawalmeh (2013). He claimed that the main errors made by a group of Saudi EFL learners at university level in their written work were those referred to *verb tenses*. Nevertheless, the participants Sawalmeh's study also made a lot errors related to the *word order* category while children of the present study made fewer errors of this type. Therefore it can be claimed that adult learners and young learners usually made the same types of errors when they write in English.

In accordance with the Torras, Navés, Celaya and Pérez Vidal's study (2001) in which the learners who received more instruction gain more marked improvements, in the present study happened the same, the group which received the instructional lessons of the writing phases of Anita Pincas' method, obtained better results. Moreover, the experimental group learners wrote longer compositions with longer sentences and used a greater variety of content words. Thus, general results seem to suggest that students who were taught through Anita Pincas' method substantially improve their English writing skill.

6. Conclusions

As the present study was intended as an attempt to explore whether Anita Pincas' teaching writing method allows Spanish primary school children to improve their writing skills in English. Looking at the data collected it is clear that young language learners can improve their writing skills with the help of this communicative method.

Several pedagogical implications for teaching writing can be drawn from the results previously reported and discussed. As English teachers know, writing in a foreign language is by no means easy. Teaching writing in a foreign language to large classes of unskilled writers is a demanding job. Though significant progress may not be easy to achieve within a limited timeframe, teaching learners to improve their writing skills is possible if teachers have better understanding of their students' writing difficulties. Furthermore, they should prepare themselves with effective instructional strategies such as Anita Pincas' method, which integrates reading, writing as well as vocabulary and grammar.

Poor writing ability is a problem for many learners at this school made worse by the fact that English is not the main means of instruction in the Spanish education system, the students are less exposed to English in daily communication, and they are weaker at English, especially in the written form. Thus, the researcher of the present study believes that sufficient practice of English writing and a proper method as Anita Pincas' method of teaching English writing are the best solutions to help young learners to improve their writing skill in English and reduce their writing errors. Additionally, they should be encouraged to speak English at home and with their friends, as well as being taught more effectively the rules and conventions of writing. Because writing is a skill acquired only through practice. Therefore, our students need much practice as possible in writing.

The present study, like all studies, has its limitations which should be considered for future research. For instance, the numbers of subjects involved were relatively small and the duration of the training was limited. More solid evidence might have been obtained if a longer study could have been over a longer period and with a larger sample of participants. Moreover, a more complex study might have been conducted with different kinds of compositions (informal letter, formal letter, etc.) The results would be more scientific if different types of classes had been included in the study (different levels, bilingual groups…). In addition, the subjects were students of 6th year selected from a non-bilingual school. Therefore, the findings in this research may not be considered as a representative of all Spanish EFL learners. Besides, the lack of previous studies related to Anita Pincas' method made it difficult to compare the results obtained in this study to others from different studies. Therefore, the present study merely serves as a preliminary attempt. Given the results of this study, a number of recommendations for further research can be suggested. Firstly, it is recommended that further research be undertaken to investigate Anita Pincas' method in different levels of the Primary Education, from Year 1 to Year 6. Moreover, further investigation into the effectiveness of this method for bilingual groups of all levels is strongly recommended to compare whether children in different programmes improve at the same rate. Last but not least, it would be interesting to compare experiences of learners from Spain to children from other countries. Even it is recommended to compare the results of this study with others in which Anita Pincas' method is carried out.

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