

# **ANALYSIS OF CHILDREN'S COMPOSITIONS IN UPPER CYCLE AND THE INFLUENCE OF TEACHER'S CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK**

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Vic, May 2021

# ANALYSIS OF CHILDREN'S COMPOSITIONS IN UPPER CYCLE AND THE INFLUENCE OF TEACHER'S CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK

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## Abstract

Writing is one of the most important skills for educational success, but also one of the most challenging skills to be mastered for EFL learners. In that context, teacher's corrective feedback is considered to play an influential role in most theories related to second language writing learning, as it is viewed as a means of fostering learner motivation and ensuring linguistic accuracy. This study aims to explore the topic in question throughout three different perspectives. Firstly, to discover which are the most frequent types of errors in 11-12-year-old children. Then, to know how the teacher provides them feedback and finally, to investigate which role this correction acquires in future written tasks. To do so, 6th grade of Primary Education students of two different schools from Catalonia have been asked to write the same text in two different periods of time. Additionally, both students and English teachers have been interviewed. The results question the effectiveness of the subject matter and propose alternatives to better deal with that issue.

**Key words:** writing, EFL learners, teacher's corrective feedback, errors, sixth graders

## Resum

L'escriptura és una de les habilitats més importants per a l'èxit educatiu, però també és una de les més difícils de dominar per als estudiants d'anglès com a llengua estrangera (EFL). En aquest context, es considera que la retroacció correctiva de la mestra juga un paper important en la majoria de teories relacionades amb l'aprenentatge de l'escriptura d'una segona llengua, ja que es considera un mitjà per a fomentar la motivació de l'alumne i garantir la precisió lingüística. Aquest estudi té com a objectiu explorar el tema en qüestió a través de tres perspectives diferents. En primer lloc, descobrir quins són els tipus d'errors més freqüents en nens i nenes d'11 a 12 anys. Seguidament, conèixer de quina manera la mestra els proporciona els comentaris i, finalment, investigar quin paper adquireix aquesta correcció en futures tasques escrites. Per a fer-ho, s'ha demanat als alumnes de 6è de Primària de dues escoles diferents de Catalunya que escrivissin el mateix text en dos períodes de temps diferent. A més, s'ha entrevistat aquests alumnes i les seves respectives mestres d'anglès. Els resultats qüestionen l'eficàcia del tema i proposen alternatives per a un millor tractament d'aquest.

**Paraules clau:** escriptura, estudiants d'anglès com a llengua estrangera, retroacció correctiva, errors, estudiants de sisè

## Resumen

La escritura es una de las habilidades más importantes para el éxito educativo, pero también es una de las más desafiantes que deben dominar los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL). En este contexto, se considera que la retroacción correctiva de la maestra juega un papel importante en la mayoría de las teorías relacionadas con el aprendizaje de la escritura de una segunda lengua, ya que es vista como un medio para fomentar la motivación del alumno y garantizar la precisión lingüística. Este estudio tiene como objetivo explorar el tema en cuestión a través de tres perspectivas diferentes. En primer lugar, descubrir cuáles son los tipos de errores más frecuentes en niños y niñas de 11 a 12 años. Seguidamente, conocer de qué manera la docente les proporciona los comentarios y finalmente, investigar qué papel adquiere esta corrección en futuras tareas escritas. Para ello, se ha pedido a alumnos de 6º de Primaria de dos escuelas distintas de Cataluña que escriban el mismo texto en dos periodos de tiempo diferente. Además, se ha entrevistado a los mismos alumnos y a sus respectivas maestras de inglés. Los resultados cuestionan la efectividad del tema y proponen alternativas para abordar mejor este asunto.

**Palabras clave:** escritura, estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera, retroacción correctiva, errores, estudiantes de sexto

# 1. Introduction

In today's modern society, many children take a long time to master the skill of writing, this is even more challenging when they are asked to write in a foreign language. As Farid, S. and Samad, A. (2012) pointed out, in the process of learning, especially when learning something new, there is always the possibility of making errors. In the history of language acquisition and learning, students face many difficulties and one of the most important is reducing or even eliminating their linguistic errors. When linguistic inaccuracy occurs in the second language acquisition, learners face another problem called error correction. This difficulty often confuses teachers because corrective feedback is a key point that can harm or benefit children's performance and so many of these professionals do not know whether the error must be corrected or not and if so, how to do it. In that sense, there is undoubtedly an increasing debate about whether teachers should use error correction in writing sessions or not and if so, what kind of error correction is suitable to improve specific parts of writing.

The main aims of this study are to identify and analyse the most recurrent errors that children's compositions present in Upper Cycle and to examine teacher's feedback in children's compositions in order to discover if this feedback helps to improve grammatical accuracy in future compositions. Keeping in mind the main object of the study, this research poses the following main questions:

1. Do pupils produce errors in Upper cycle when writing compositions? If so, which are the most recurrent ones?
2. What kind of feedback is most frequently used by English teachers?
3. Is giving appropriate feedback important to improve children's written accuracy?

## **2. Theoretical framework**

### **2.1 Low-level students' writings**

As claimed in Agustín and Barreras (2007), several studies have pointed out an array of children's features, which must be taken into consideration when teaching English as a foreign language. According to Piaget, 11-12-year-old children are situated in the concrete operational stage and this means that they can understand specific aspects and topics rather than abstract ones. Consequently, they can easily understand the meaning of new words the referents of which are specific, such as apple, tree, and cat. Considering the situation, "it is useful to introduce words the meaning of which can be understood with the use of an action, body language, flashcards, photographs, drawings, and other objects. This happens because they can easily join the meaning to the thing or action it represents" (William and Burden, 1999). In addition, both authors also state that "words the meaning of which is abstract, such as love, justice, or hope, have no concrete referents and this makes children's understanding of the word difficult" (William and Burden, 1999).

Besides, Ronald (1999), cited in Agustín and Barreras (2007, p.10), asserts that children learn words easier than grammar. In this sense, Philips (1993) argues that "this may be because words have tangible, immediate meanings whereas structures are less obviously useful." In that way, it reinforces the idea mentioned above by William and Burden (1999) about abstract words as understanding grammar involves explanations given with abstract terms that students of these ages do not clearly understand.

Therefore, vocabulary related to children's environment is important because they can easily understand the new concepts without any translations into their mother tongue. Further to this, children of these ages give a lot of relevance to their personal experiences, which justifies the usage of certain topics to motivate them. This has to do with the use of meaningful learning, as the teacher uses their previous learning and experiences in order to widen them and introduce new information.

According to Agustín and Barreras (2007, p.14), the most recurrent semantic field is that related to leisure, games, hobbies, and free times as learners tend to explain what they like doing. Notwithstanding, most of the words included in this semantic field have to do with playing sports, mainly football and basketball, as children at this age are very physically active. 11- and

12-year-olds also use many items of vocabulary related to the semantic field of school as they learn English in the formal context of the classroom. Another paramount semantic field is that related to their families. Within that context, children tend to use all the family terms, but the most reiterative ones are those related to the basic family, that is *father, mother, brother, and sister*. Referring to the semantic field of home, they use to describe the different rooms and some pieces of furniture. However, they concentrate most on their bedrooms. The fact that children write so much about their homes and, to be more precise about their bedrooms, serves again as a support of the idea that children at this age are still in their egocentric stage although in its last phase. Finally, other less frequently recurred semantic fields have to do with the city, animals, food, and numbers. Nonetheless, all the words that they used are related to their everyday life.

Apart from the use of the semantic fields explained above, it is important to briefly highlight the use of the verbs and pronouns at the age of 12. According to the research carried out by Agustín and Barreras (2007, p.16), children use personal pronouns, although the most relevant one is *I*. They also use possessives to explain who the owner is. In general, children use all of them, but *my* is the most used. We can stand out that the most used verbs are *to have, to have got, or to be* as they are basic for descriptions. Other verbs also important in their writings are *live, like, love, can, go*. Again, these verbs are related to their self-centred stage.

## **2.2 Common EFL grammar mistakes produced by low-level students**

Lexical errors serve as an insight into the process of vocabulary acquisition, since they provide information about the aspects of lexis that are most problematic for learners, and in turn about the aspects they already master. In that sense, according to Ellis (2009), as cited in Agustín and Barreras (2007, p.14), four main categories of lexical inconsistencies can be identified: misspellings, borrowings, omissions, and substitutions.

First, Agustín and Barreras (2007, p.18) defined a **misspelling** as the mistake that happens when a student does not write the word correctly due to the lack of correspondence between the written form and the pronunciation of the word. As an example, some of the misspelling that children produce can be *biutiful* for beautiful, *chiken* for chicken, *scool* for school. Moreover, Celaya and Torras (2001) added that these types of errors are typical of beginner learners as the spelling of the words reflects their pronunciation, or the way the learner

pronounces it. Consequently, these statements also support Serra, E., Solé, R., Bel, A. and Aparici, M (2000) when they claimed that “children understand words and expressions before they can produce them, but they also sometimes produce words that they do not know or have not properly segmented” (in Agustín and Barreras, 2007, p. 19).

The second type of errors are the **omissions**. In this case, according to Barreras and Agustín (2007, p.18) they take place when students do not write the word they have to write. However, it is true that this affects mainly the verbs “to be” and “to have” as well as the use of pronouns in the sentences as they are the most frequently omitted ones in texts. For instance, “How old \* Peter?” or “I \* from Vic” could be an example of this category.

Thirdly, according to Richards, J., Platt, J. and Weber, H. (1985), cited in Agustín and Barreras (2007, p.19), a **borrowing** is “a word or phrase which has been taken from one language and used in another one, without any attempt at adapting it to the orthographic norms of the target language”. Beginners and young learners are the real protagonists of committing this kind of error as they lack vocabulary to express all what they want to say and therefore, they resort to compensatory strategies that allow for communication to proceed. So, this strategy reveals once again the importance of the use of the mother tongue when writing in a foreign language. Lastly, Barreras and Agustín (2007, p.19) asserted a **substitution** as the word that is used instead of another. For instance, “my” is used instead of “me” and “I” in examples such as “my like”, “my don’t like”. According to the research carried out by these two authors, pronouns are mistaken, especially, the third person pronouns. “I have three friends. Your (your for their) names are Julia, Carla, Anna.”

Still, there also exist other types of substitutions that involve nouns and verbs, as I “life” (life for live) in Vic. However, most of the researchers believe that this phenomenon is very common to occur in the early stages of language production as children use an item of vocabulary they know for others they do not know but which belong to the same word class or word family.

### **2.3 Written corrective feedback to EFL students**

As many authors point out, feedback plays an influential role in most of the theories related to second language (L2) writing learning as it is viewed as a means of fostering learner motivation and ensuring linguistic accuracy. As noted by Cardelle and Corno (1981), cited in (Fallis,

2013), written corrective feedback can make learning more effective. In author's words, “the more feedback students receive of their performance the better they understand what they need to do to correct their mistakes.”

According to Russell and Spada (2006), in language learning “the term corrective feedback refers to any feedback provided to a learner, from any source, that contains evidence of learner error of language form” (p. 134). For Truscott (1996), who has also contributed to giving a definition, “Written Corrective Feedback (WCF, henceforth), which is also called error correction or grammar correction, refers to the correction of grammatical errors for the purpose of improving a student’s ability to write accurately” (Truscott, 1996, p.329). Very similar to these definitions, Hendrickson (1978) stated that WCF has been regarded as a normal way of improving students’ writing accuracy and a necessary part of the writing curriculum. So from these definitions it is understood that corrective feedback is any indication to learners that their use of the target language is incorrect.

However, feedback can be either positive or negative. According to Ellis (2009), positive feedback affirms that a learner response to an activity is correct. In pedagogical theory, positive feedback is viewed as important because it provides affective support to the learner and fosters motivation to continue learning. Notwithstanding, as claimed by the same author, this kind of correction has received little attention in Second Language Acquisition as teacher’s positive feedback move is frequently ambiguous (e.g., “Good” or “Yes” do not always signal the learner is correct, for they may merely preface a subsequent correction or modification of the student’s utterance). On the other hand, negative feedback means that the learner’s utterance lacks veracity or is linguistically deviant. In other words, it is corrective in intent (Ellis, 2009). Both Second Language Acquisition researchers and language educators have paid careful attention to corrective feedback (CF from now on), but they have frequently disagreed about whether to correct errors, what errors to correct, how to correct them, and when to correct them.

A research carried out by Professor Jeanne Lambert of Cambridge University points out that WCF is important because it dovetails with students' academic goals whether the students want to move to the next level of ESL or succeed in college. Hence, it is undeniable that writing is the key to all those things and for that reason, WCF can clearly help to improve our students' writing. In the same vein, Jeanne Lambert (2015) made a special emphasis in the issue of accuracy in writing:



Accuracy and writing is often viewed differently than speaking. We tend to tolerate a certain amount of error in speaking that we do not tolerate in writing. We have the idea that writing should be error-free and because of that our ESL students could be negatively affected in their classes.

However, how does the other side of the coin view WCF? According to Ferris (1995), students believe that WCF helps to improve their writing. Hedgcock and Laffkowitz (1996) and Radecki and Swales (1998) claimed in their studies that students consider WCF important for improving their grammar errors. Concurrently, Radecki and Swales (1998) showed in their research that children want corrective feedback on errors but also highly value teacher comments, whereas Montgomery and Baker (2007) pointed out that children perceive receiving more CF than teachers perceive giving.

### **2.3.1 To correct or not to correct?**

The case against grammar correction in L2 writing classes has led to a great deal of discussion, giving way to numerous theories of theoretical and researchers in the field of Second Language Acquisition. Nevertheless, this research will just focus on the most discussed ones.

First, Truscott's (1996) theory lies in the fact that correction has little or no effect on students' writing ability as he conducted a research in a public University in Taiwan in which an experimental group received feedback in an EFL context whereas the other group did not. At the end of the 14 weeks of research, he found little to no difference in error rates between the two groups when a new piece of writing was introduced. Therefore, he believed that grammar correction in L2 writing classes should be abandoned. Below there are briefly described his reasons:

1. Substantial research shows it is ineffective and the nature of the process of language learning also contributes to its ineffectiveness.
2. Grammar correction has harmful side effects, having an impact on students' attitudes and the amount of time and energy it takes up in writing classes.
3. Practical problems with correction in the sense that the teacher may not recognize an error; if they do, students may not understand their explanation.

To fully contextualize his point of view, a quote is provided: “the issue is not the value of grammatical accuracy; the issue is whether or not grammar correction can contribute to children's development.” So for Truscott, WCF does not contribute to students’ development.

However, Truscott was not without his critics. Ferris (2007) examined Truscott’s theory and rebutted his argument by saying that this theory was incomplete and inconclusive as “providing language learners with clear feedback plays a crucial role in developing learners’ language abilities and helping them direct their learning” (p.181). Similarly, Zacharias (2007) enhances the importance of written feedback by suggesting that providing feedback can be a way to help students improve the quality of their writing and increase their motivation in such practice.

## **2.4 Types of error correction in writing**

CF on L2 learners’ writing can take many different forms. Approaches of written error correction may vary, for example, with respect to their explicitness, their focus, the person providing the feedback, the feedback medium, and so on. However, Ellis (2009) suggested a clear classification about the types of feedback that teachers can use in order to correct linguistic errors in students’ assignments: direct CF, indirect CF, metalinguistic CF, electronic CF, and reformulation. Notwithstanding, among these types, the methodologies that have received the most researcher’s attention are between focused and unfocused CF, and the contrast between direct and indirect CF. As a result of that, it is turned to consider each type briefly below.

### **2.4.1 Direct and Indirect WCF**

According to Van Beuningen (2010), direct CF consists of an indication of the error and the correct linguistic form straightaway. This indication can be done by either crossing the wrong or unnecessary word out, inserting a missing word or writing the right form above or close to the wrong form. On the contrary, indirect CF only indicates that an error has been made. Notwithstanding, the debate on the effectiveness of direct and indirect CF on students writing has been ongoing.

On the one hand, Ellis (2009) claimed that the bright side of the direct corrective feedback is that it provides the learner with explicit information and guidance about how to correct errors and so it is the best method to apply if students are unable to self-correct their own errors. In addition, Ferris and Roberts (2001) highlighted the importance of using direct feedback instead

of indirect one with learners of low L2 levels of proficiency, who usually do not know how to correct the erroneous forms.

On the other hand, Lalande (1982) stated that indirect feedback provides learners with the competence of problem solving and guided learning, fostering learners to ponder on their own errors and so that it is why it is preferable to direct feedback. Nevertheless and contrary to the previous type of corrective feedback, students with low L2 proficiency levels may not have enough linguistic knowledge to correct their errors.

#### **2.4.2 Focused and unfocused WCF**

According to Van Beuningen (2010), the unfocused approach involves the correction of all errors in a learner's text, irrespective of their error category. Focused WCF, on the other hand, only targets several specific linguistic features. It means that errors outside the focus domain are left uncorrected (p.12). Nevertheless, different predictions have been made with respect to the relative effectiveness of focused and unfocused CF. Ellis et al. (2008), cited in Van Beuningen (2010), claimed that there are theoretical reasons for expecting the focused approach to be more beneficial to accuracy development than unfocused WCF. They stated that learners are more likely to notice and understand corrections when they target a specific set of error types. In the same line, Sheen (2007) and Bitchener (2008) argued that unfocused CF may not be the most effective correction method because L2 learners have a limited processing capacity and so they need to attend to many types of errors, being unable to focus much on each of them.

### **2.5 Teachers as the main part involved in the written correction process**

Unlike Truscott (1996), who was against error correction because he believed that correction has little or no effect on students' writing ability, most researchers contemplate the effectiveness of teacher corrective as a central part in EFL and ESL contexts. Although there exist other methods for correction such as peer-correction and self-correction, Ellis (2009) found out in his study that teacher's feedback was more effective for improving grammatical errors than the other two methods. In the same vein, he contributed by saying that "affective factors are also important in the success of feedback and studies suggest that students have a preference for teacher feedback over other types." Notwithstanding, he highlighted that the other two methods should not be left behind.

Moreover, apart from the errors made, Hyland (1998) found out that teachers also take into consideration the student who committed them, building their comments and corrections on the teacher-student relationship and the student's background, needs and preferences. In other words, he points out:

Teachers are now very conscious of the potential that feedback has for helping to create a supportive teaching environment, for conveying and modelling ideas about good writing, for developing the ways students talk about cultural and social worlds and their growing familiarity with new literacy practices.

## **2.6 Student's attitudes on error correction and feedback**

A significant number of studies have already examined students' attitudes and preferences for corrective feedback, and they have all reached the conclusion that there are many variables that can influence the effectiveness of corrective feedback, such as the context, the age, or the level of proficiency of each student. As Zarei (2011) pointed out, CF must be compatible with students' needs and preferences for correction to be effective. These needs may differ from one age group to another. According to Hyland (1998, p.3), "ESL students, particularly those from cultures where teachers are highly directive, generally welcome and expect teachers to notice and comment on their errors and may feel resentful if their teacher does not do so".

Research on EFL students' attitudes to teacher corrective feedback also showed that learners keep in mind and appreciate encouraging comments and expect constructive criticism instead of clichéd remarks (Ferris, 1995; Hyland, 1998). Moreover, several studies investigating students' attitudes to teacher feedback showed that learners consider teacher feedback valuable and helpful in order to improve their writing. If students do not get what they believe they need, they may lose motivation (Ferris, 2003). Results point to a students' preference for specific comments and suggestions for revising. Furthermore, studies report that learners tend to prefer direct feedback rather than indirect correction (Chandler, 2003; Ferris & Roberts, 2001).

Although similar opinions on the topic would be desired, teachers and students often have different attitudes on error correction. As Oladejo (1993) put it "teachers' opinion and classroom practice regarding corrective feedback do not always match the perceived needs and expectations of learners; such mismatch could contribute to lack of success in language learning". Some teachers prefer correcting all errors as they appear, while others believe that

constant correction can boost students' level of anxiety and thus hinder learning (in Krashen, 1982). Similarly to teachers, some students prefer being corrected more than others but there is a tendency for all students wishing to be corrected.

Due to these different attitudes, Zhu (2010, p.128) maintained that “both teachers and students should adopt a reasonable approach to handle the error-correction problem effectively and appropriately in order to adapt to their preferences in learning and teaching”. For that reason, teachers must know students' attitudes towards error correction so that they can adapt them to the learners' needs and preferences.

### **3. Methodology**

The current research is a case study as the principal aims are to identify the most recurrent errors that children's compositions present in Upper Cycle, to examine teacher's feedback in children's compositions and to discover if teacher's corrective feedback helps to improve grammatical accuracy in future compositions. In that context, the case study follows an interpretative paradigm since only two different realities from two different schools are analysed. For the completion of this study, three different tools are used: a systematic analysis of children's written compositions and two interviews to both English teachers and students. The triangulation of these tools helps in the analysis process to contrast and compare the information gathered from the three different points of view.

To accomplish the aforementioned objectives, a systematic analysis of 86 compositions has been carried out in two different public schools of Catalonia, one located in Pineda de Mar (school A from now on) and the other in the village of Gironella (school B), both in year 6 of Primary Education, as children at this age are evaluated in the Key Competences Test, a test that assesses the basic skills and knowledge that students must have acquired at the end of Primary Education to be able to follow the curriculum of Secondary School. Thus, considering that writing is one of these skills and that children at this stage give a lot of relevance to their personal experiences, it was very important to choose a topic that fully motivates them to write without setting aside the linguistic aspects already worked in previous courses. In that sense, the email has been considered the most appropriate one. So, for the complete achievement of the objectives, a text from previous English Key Competences Tests in which children had to write back to a previous email from an Irish English teacher, Alexander, coming to their school as an English language assistant, has been used. In that context, children were required to

introduce themselves and finish their composition by asking Alexander something they would like to know about him.

The execution of the writing task has been carried out in two stages that took place from January to March 2021. In the first one, the structure of the email was presented and then students had to write a first version. They had no time limit and had to write between 40 and 50 words, as the English Key Competence Writing Test requires. Within a period of a week, compositions were corrected by the teacher and given back to children. To do so, both English specialists opt to correct the compositions together with each child in order to let them know which errors they made. In that sense, they highlighted the wrong word and explained to them how the correct form would be. A month later, children were asked to write about the same topic again, using once more the email as a textual typology.

Additionally, two different types of interviews have been designed: one addressed to the two English teachers of both schools and the other to all sixth-graders that participated in the study. It must be said that, apart from the compositions that were designed and carried out in English, both types of interviews were done in Catalan as the sample was composed of Catalan speakers and the complete understanding of the questions was essential to obtain authentic conclusions.

### **3.1 School context**

**School A** is in the town of Pineda de Mar, in the region of Maresme. Many of the families in the neighbourhood in which the school is located were born outside the country and, therefore, have a level of education far below than the Catalan average. Within this figure, it is important to note that 16.3% of the students are considered of foreign origin, keeping in mind that 34% have neither Spanish nor Catalan as their mother tongue. The school currently attends 235 students between the ages of 3 and 12 and the number of students per class ranges from 21 to 26 students. However, due to the strong impact of the pandemic, this academic year the school has had to reinvent itself and adapt to a new reality and so they have had to distribute students equitably. Therefore, three heterogeneous groups have been formed per cycle with students of both levels.

**School B** is located in the village of Gironella, in the region of Berguedà. It is a public and Catalan school that covers schooling from P3 to 6th grade of Primary School. It currently

attends 136 students, most of them from different linguistic backgrounds: Catalan speakers, Spanish speakers, and Amazigh ones. However, the average of foreign students is very low, only 7% of them are considered of foreign nationality. At the same time, the number of students per class is not equal in each stage as it is a very small school that responds to the demand of the families of the neighbourhood. For that reason, its number ranges from 6 to 20 students and that is why they usually work cooperatively together with the cycle. However, this has not been possible this year due to the health crisis.

### **3.2 Participants**

As mentioned in the previous section, the sample for this study consists of 43 sixth graders and 2 English Language specialists from 2 different schools in Catalonia: 26 participants attend school A, in Pineda de Mar, where the other 17 attend school B, in Gironella. In both schools, EFL (English as a Foreign Language) lessons are taught by one Catalan speaker with experience in the CLIL (Content Language Integrated Learning) approach. In that sense, English is taught 4 hours per week, specifically three hours of conventional English lessons, in which they all follow a textbook, and one hour of Science-CLIL lessons.

Deepening in the teacher's profile, both English language teachers are responsible for teaching English lessons from Middle Cycle to Upper Cycle Education. One is 32 years old and the other 34. In that sense, although they are young, they all have a background of years of experience, knowledge, and anecdotes. Moreover, it is important to clarify that although both of them are English specialists, the one at school B is not qualified in that field. In fact, she has an Early Childhood Education degree, but some years ago she made up her mind and prepare herself in order to be able to teach English. Finally, a key idea to highlight is the continuous training of them in order to be up to date with the new methodologies and practices that take place at school, whether CLIL or E-twinning programs.

As for the characteristics of the two groups where the practical part of the dissertation has been carried out, it is important to underline different aspects. As aforementioned, sixth graders of school B come from different cultural backgrounds. In that sense, there are new arrivals in the class and so they experience learning and language disabilities. Moreover, 7 sixth graders have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). As a result, they have a lower level than the rest of the class in almost all the subjects. Regarding the English learning, this foreign language was introduced in Early Childhood Education. Additionally, Science and Reading in Pairs are

introduced in the Middle Cycle in order to reinforce the hours of exposure. Unfortunately, English is not used as the vehicle of expression and communication in the class. Thus, children can comprehend English instructions although many of them struggle when they must express themselves orally.

On the other hand, and as mentioned before, this year school A has had to reinvent itself due to the strong impact of the pandemic and, for that reason, they have created three classes with a mixture of fifth and sixth graders. Broadly speaking, students of year 6 have a lower level than the ones in year 5, and this difference can be seen constantly in all the school subjects. Of the three classes (A, B and C), five children have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Due to the low social-economic level of the families, none of them attend English extra-curricular activities, so the only time that children are exposed to the target language is at school. In that sense, it could be said that the hours of exposure to English are the same for everyone. Additionally, English lessons are practically done in Catalan and this may explain the low level in general towards the subject.

## **4. Results and discussion**

The results of the study are divided into three main sections according to the three tools used to collect data. Firstly, the most important errors obtained from the written compositions are outlined. Then, the main ideas gathered from the children's interviews are shown and finally, the most relevant opinions of both teachers are highlighted.

### **4.1 Analysis of children's compositions**

Before the analysis of children's compositions, the methodology that each school has used to carry out the task must be considered. In that sense, once a volunteer had read out loud the previous email that the Irish English teacher had sent them, the teacher in school A asked for a translation of the whole text to ensure understanding. Then, she put a lot of emphasis on the structure that the email must have and let them know what kind of information children had to write in each paragraph. Notwithstanding, her attitude during the execution of the task was active, that is, she was moving around the class helping children when they had questions about the translation or the spelling of specific words. In contrast, the teacher in school B presented the text as a part of the English Key Competences Tests in order to promote a more formal environment. First of all, she read out loud the whole text to ensure understanding. After that,



she projected a real model she had written before to show them an example and clarify what kind of information they were required to write. Children could have that model during all the test. However, the role of the teacher during execution of the task was not as active as the one in school A, as she wanted to give them autonomy. So, at this point, very simple doubts were solved. As for the second version, the text was presented differently. Considering that it was the same activity sheet, children of both schools already knew what they had to do. For that reason, they were required not to cheat nor ask any doubts.

In order to get conclusive results, a grid with the most relevant errors found in compositions has been designed as it is considered that by using this instrument, results will be more accurate. As can be seen below, the grid is divided into 5 main categories: four categories for each type of lexical inconsistencies established by Ellis (2009), which are misspellings, omissions, substitutions, and borrowings, and an extra one for other kinds of errors found in texts. Besides, all the errors of both versions are exemplified and the number of texts of each version that contain the noted aspects is also remarked.

**Table 1. Reply to Alexander's email from Pineda de Mar's school**

	<b>Aspect</b>	<b>First version (sample from the text)</b>	<b>Nº of texts with the aspect</b>	<b>Second version (sample from the text)</b>	<b>Nº of texts with the aspect</b>
<b>Misspellings</b>	Tendency to use some American words such as “favorite” and “color” instead of the British ones, or there are spelling mistakes	<i>What's your favorite color?</i> <i>My favorit subject is Science</i> <i>My fabourite subject is Maths</i>	12/26	<i>What's your favorite color?</i> <i>My favourite subject is Science</i> <i>My fabourite subject is English</i>	15/26
	Poor use of capital letters, basically when writing the name of their town or their favourite subject, as well as for the first person of singular (I)	<i>My favourite subject is english</i> <i>I live in pineda de mar</i> <i>i live in Pineda (Barcelona)</i>	11/26	<i>My favourite subject is English</i> <i>I live in Pineda de Mar</i> <i>I live in Pineda</i>	9/26
<b>Omissions</b>	They miss the subject on a sentence	<i>I live in Pineda de Mar</i>	3/26	<i>Live in Pineda de Mar</i>	4/26
	Prepositions of place are forgotten	<i>I live Pineda de Mar</i>	2/26	<i>I live in Pineda de Mar</i>	1/26
	They miss the verb on a sentence	<i>What your favourite food?</i> <i>What your favourite color?</i>	3/26	<i>What's your favourite food?</i> <i>What you favourite color?</i>	5/26
<b>Substitutions</b>	Tendency to misuse pronouns	-	0/26	-	0/26
<b>Borrowings</b>	Use of L1 to write some words in English	<i>Do you like arròs?</i> <i>My fabourite asignatur is mates</i> <i>Is the anibersari is 05/12/2008</i> <i>I have one german</i>	3/26	- <i>Mi asignatur favourite is mats</i> <i>I vorn at 05/12/2008</i> -	2/26
	Misuse of punctuation marks	<i>What's your favourite food?</i>	2/26	<i>What's your favourite food</i>	1/26

<b>Others</b>		<i>My name is X I am 11 years old I live in Pineda de Mar</i>		<i>My name is X, I am 11 years old. I live in Pineda de Mar.</i>	
	Use of the singular verb form “is” in a plural sentence or vice versa	<i>My favourite subject is English and Maths My favourite subjects at school is Science and Maths</i>	5/26	<i>My favourite subject is English My favourite subjects at schools is Maths and Science</i>	4/26
	Emphasis of the preposition “a” before the numeral adverb “one”	<i>I have one sister My favourite subject at school P.E</i>	0/26	<i>I have a one sister My favourite subject is a P.E</i>	5/26
	Misuse of the Saxon genitive	-	0/26	-	0/26
	Wrong word order	-	/26	-	/26

**Table 2. Reply to Alexander’s email from Gironella’s school**

	<b>Aspect</b>	<b>First version (sample from the text)</b>	<b>Nº of texts with the aspect</b>	<b>Second version (sample from the text)</b>	<b>Nº of texts with the aspect</b>
<b>Misspellings</b>	Tendency to use some American words such as “favorite” and “color” instead of the British ones, or there are spelling mistakes	<i>My favorite school subject is Maths. My favorite school subject is P.E. My favorite color is yellow.</i>	12/17	<i>My favorite school subject is Maths. My favourite school subject is P.E. My favourite colour is yellow.</i>	7/17
	Poor use of capital letters, basically when writing the name of their town or their favourite subject, as well as for the first person of singular (I)	<i>i live in Cal Bassacs. My favourite school subject is pe. Hello alexander. I live in cal bassacs, gironella.</i>	9/17	<i>I live in Cal Bassacs. My favourite school subject is PE. Hello Alexander. I live in Cal Bassacs, Gironella.</i>	6/17
<b>Omissions</b>	They miss the subject on a sentence	<i>Have got two dogs I am 11 years old and live in Cal Bassacs.</i>	4/17	<i>I have got two dogs. I'm 11 years old and I live in Cal Bassacs</i>	1/17
	Prepositions of place are forgotten	<i>I live Cal Bassacs</i>	1/17	<i>I live in Cal Bassacs</i>	0/17
	They miss the verb on a sentence	<i>My dad's name Wilder My favourite sport football</i>	8/17	<i>My dad's name Wilder My favourite sport football.</i>	4/17

Substitutions	Tendency to misuse pronouns.	<i>I have got three brothers, he's names are Achradf, Ayoub and Bilal.</i> <i>I have got one dog, her name is Roc.</i> <i>I have got one sister, his name is Hajar.</i>	7/17	<i>I have got three brothers, he's names are Achradf, Ayoub and Bilal.</i> <i>I have got one dog, he's name is Roc.</i> <i>I have got one sister named Hajar.</i>	6/17
	Use of L1 to write some words in English	-	0/17	-	0/17
Others	Misuse of punctuation marks	<i>I have got one dog. her name is Sisi.</i> <i>I have got one sister, her name is Samah</i>	6/17	<i>I have got one dog her name is Sisi.</i> <i>I have got one sister. Her name is Samah.</i>	9/17
	Use of the singular verb form "is" in a plural sentence or vice versa	<i>My favourite animals is butterflies and cats.</i> <i>My favourite school subject are Maths.</i> <i>The names is Lola and Choco.</i>	5/17	<i>My favourite pet is the cat.</i> <i>My favourite school subject is Maths.</i> <i>The name are Lola, Choco.</i>	5/17
	Emphasis of the preposition "a" before the numeral adverb "one"	-	0/17	-	0/17
	Misuse of the Saxon genitive	<i>My mum's name is Fadwua</i> <i>My dad's name is Jordi and my mum name is Laia.</i>	1/17	<i>My mum name is Fadwua.</i> <i>My dad's name is Jordi and my mum's name is Laia.</i>	2/17
	Wrong word order	<i>My favourite school subject is P.E.</i> <i>You have got any pets?</i>	1/17	<i>My favourite subject school is P.E.</i> <i>Cork is beautiful?</i>	2/17

As it is shown in Table 1, the results reveal that in general, there has not been a noticeable progression in the second version. Broadly speaking, of the nine categories in which errors have been produced —as there are three of them in which no errors have been made—, only in five there has been an improvement, though not significant. This is probably due to the conditions in which the first writing was done, and the attitude adopted by the teacher. That is, the educational professional was strongly involved in the task, helping them to translate the words, to structure the sentence or to correct misspelling mistakes before the delivery of the task.

When analysing the corpus of the 26 texts written in English, it has been discovered that in many cases the same aspect is found either in the first version and the second one, which implies that there has not been any impact on the correction of the teacher. Additionally, there is a tendency to repeat many times the same word within the text (e.g., My favourite subject at school is P.E and my favourite colour is blue. My favourite sport is football), which directly implies the absence of the use of synonyms. Even so, when this repetition is produced, it is quite surprising that sometimes they write the word correctly and others not.

In general terms, **misspellings** have been the most recurrent type of error that sixth-graders in school A use to make, specifically when spelling the word “favourite”. In addition, there has been a slight increase in the number of texts in which this error has been produced, going from the 11 texts in the first version to 15 in the second one.

On the other hand and as can be seen in Table 2, the results reveal that contrary to Table 1, there has been a significant progression in the second version. Generally speaking, of the 12 most important aspects selected, in 7 there has been an improvement, though not in all of them has been notable. This is probably due to the conditions in which the first writing was done, and the attitude adopted by the teacher. Moreover, the educational professional was not involved at all during the task and did not help them to translate the words, to structure the sentence or to correct misspelling mistakes before the delivery of the task as she wanted to give them autonomy.

When analysing the sample of the 17 compositions, it has been discovered that some aspects of children’s writings have become worse in specific cases. For instance, the misuse of punctuation marks. In that context, there is a general tendency to not use commas or full stops. At the same time, it is important to underline that there have been categories where any kind of error has been found such as those related to borrowings, specifically the use of L1, and the emphasis of the preposition “a” before the numeral adverb “one”. Thirdly, it should be mentioned that although there has been a progression between the two compositions, misspellings have been the most

common error that sixth graders in school B made. In this case, there has been a slight decrease in the number of texts in which this error has been produced, going from the 12 texts in the first version to 17 in the second one. Finally, it is quite surprising the remarkable weight of the category “others”.

Before deeply analysing the compositions, it must be highlighted that comparing both the first composition and the second one, has not been an easy task as children have not literally written the same words in the two essays. Moreover, the fact that some errors have not appeared in the first version but in the second one has made the analysis even more difficult.

Despite the different examples of previous English Key Competence tests that can be found online, the task has been outlined from communicative situations experienced or imaginable by the student and in which (s)he can feel involved, as it specified in *Competències bàsiques de l'àmbit lingüístic* (2015). For that reason, it was considered that writing about one's interests, likes or hobbies was a key issue that would contribute and foster, at the same time, the enjoyment of writing. In addition, considering that the textual typology of the email had been worked before in both schools and that the task had clear recipients and communicative objectives, we had no doubt to bet on it, as children at this age must be able to transfer the contents learned in other languages.

In their research, Agustín and Barreras (2007) stated that the most recurrent semantic field in sixth graders compositions is that related to leisure, games, hobbies, and free time. However, we could not check the truthfulness of their ideas as children had a complete guideline in the text that gave them an idea of which kind of information could appear in each paragraph in order to avoid experiencing the blank page syndrome. Probably, if children were asked to write the same composition without any kind of help, the results could have been different. However, although in the guideline the topic related to food did not appear, many 11 and 12-years-old also used different items of vocabulary related to that semantic field, another recurrent topic within children of that age according to Agustín and Barreras (2007). Besides, the results also agree with the statement of these authors when they say that the names of the basic family members (father, mother, brother, and sister) are the ones that appear with total percentage in the essays.

As for the kind of mistakes, it is shown that **misspellings** are the errors per excellence in both schools, basically when writing the word “favourite”. On the one hand, there are some cases in which children have written the word exactly as it sounds, as the last “e” of the word does not sound. Additionally, some others have made other spelling mistakes in that word, writing it like

“fabourite”. This fact can be attributed to the use of their L1, as in Catalan or Spanish there is no difference between the phonetic sound of /b/ and /v/. In general, these lexical inconsistencies are typical of beginner learners as the spelling of the words reflects their pronunciation or the way the learner pronounces it (Celaya and Torras, 2001). On the other hand, the vast majority of students have written the American form of the word “favorite”, which both teachers have considered it as an error because the English that is taught in schools is the British one. Within this category, the poor use of capital letters has a great weight, basically when writing the name of their town or their favourite subject, as well as for the first person of singular (I). This fact might be attributed again to the influence of their mother tongue, as the lexical rules are completely different: any pronoun nor school subject are written in capital letters.

The second kind of error according to Ellis (2009) is **omissions**. As the results of table 1 and 2 reveal, the most recurrent error is the omission of verbs in a sentence, especially the verb “to be”, followed by the omission of the subject in a sentence, as Agustín and Barreras (2007) stated. In addition to these ideas, it should be considered that in Catalan and Spanish it is quite typical to omit the subject when writing.

Following with the third category, **substitutions** are highlighted. According to the research carried out by Agustín and Barreras (2007, p.16), children use personal pronouns, although the most important one is *I*, as it is reflected in children’s compositions. Furthermore, in school B there is a general tendency to misuse possessive pronouns, in particular, the third person of singular and plural (his, her, their), whilst these pronouns are not used in school A, probably because they have not been acquired yet.

The last category established by Ellis (2009) is **borrowings**. Although these errors are not usually made by Upper Cycle students, some examples have been found, specifically at the school in the region of Maresme. For instance, the words “aniversari”, “arròs” or “assignatur”, are directly extracted from their mother tongue. According to Richards, J., Platt, J. and Weber, H. (1985) research, children who make these mistakes are especially young learners because they lack the vocabulary to express what they want to say and, therefore, they resort to compensatory strategies. Regardless, it must be considered that although the translation of these words is common and repeatedly worked throughout their schooling, the students who have made these errors have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and struggle every day to pass the English subject.

Finally, another category named “**others**” is also incorporated in the grid, despite the fact that Ellis (2009) did not mention it in his research. This new category is born from the need to group a series of errors that do not meet the requirements to be classified in the groups established by the author. Although the results vary from one school to the other, a significant number of students make no use of punctuation marks when writing, basically commas, full stops and question marks, a fact that highly makes the comprehension of the text difficult and sometimes results to the incomprehension of it. The second most frequent error is the great predisposition that children have to use the singular verb form “is” in a plural clause and vice versa. Furthermore, attention should be paid to other lexical inconsistencies despite the fact that the number of texts containing the errors in question is very low. For instance, in school A children tend to write the preposition “a” before the numeral adverb “one” whereas in school B children have already acquired this rule. The opposite happens with the wrong order. As for the saxon genitive, in any case children of Pineda de Mar’s school are used to writing this form, but students from Gironella’s school attempt to apply the content learned throughout the course. This fact reveals that despite the fact children must acquire the same competence at the end of Primary school, the learning of the saxon genitive is still not acquired in school A.

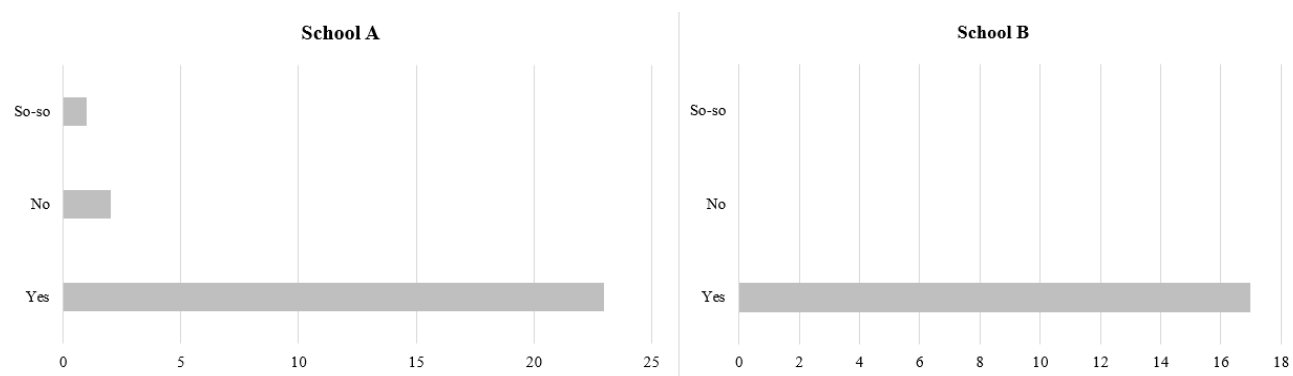
## **4.2 Children’s interview**

In order to know about students’ perceptions, all the sixth graders from both schools were asked to answer in a written way an interview in which they could express their thoughts and opinions about the teacher’s corrective feedback. This tool has been designed to contrast and complement the results obtained from the analysis of their compositions. To do so, a graph has been designed as it is considered to be a more visual way to observe the different feelings that children of both schools have. This way, quantitative results will be obtained.

The first question of the interview —*Do you think that the corrections that the teacher makes to you when you deliver an English essay help you to improve? Why?*— wants to have an overview of how children see corrective feedback. As the data graph shows, both schools’ value the great importance that corrective feedback has in their essays. The vast majority argue that it is a way to realize one’s own mistakes, learn from them and also a way to improve in future compositions. Nonetheless, two children from school A do not agree with the others as they consider that corrective feedback does not help them to improve because they usually do not understand why a specific error has been produced. Besides, a child attending school A details his answer by mentioning that he does not learn if he makes a stupid mistake as it will probably be because of



an attention deficit. So, for him, learning only occurs when he makes an error he did not know before.

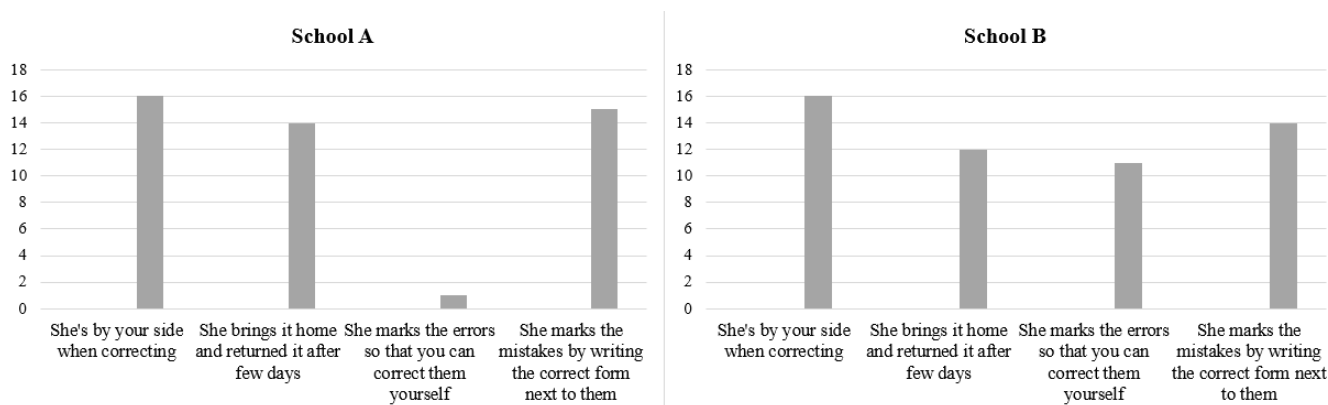


**Graph 1.** The effectiveness of teacher’s corrective feedback according to sixth-graders

On balance and similarly to Ferris (1995) and Hyland (1998) ideas, it can be seen in graph 1 that learners consider teacher’s feedback valuable and helpful in order to improve their writing skills. In other words, we can state that teacher’s comments in compositions are appreciated by students.

The second question —*How does the teacher usually correct your compositions?* — is a multiple-choice question as two different aspects are asked: What does the teacher do when children give them their writings and which methodology is used when correcting. Thus, children must select at least two different items.

As can be seen in both graphs, in general there is no method that prevails more than the others. What is more, in many cases children specify that depending on the moment, the teacher uses one method or another. However, what children from school A agree on is that their teacher barely marks the errors and asks them to correct them on their own. Instead, she marks the mistakes by writing the correct form next to them.



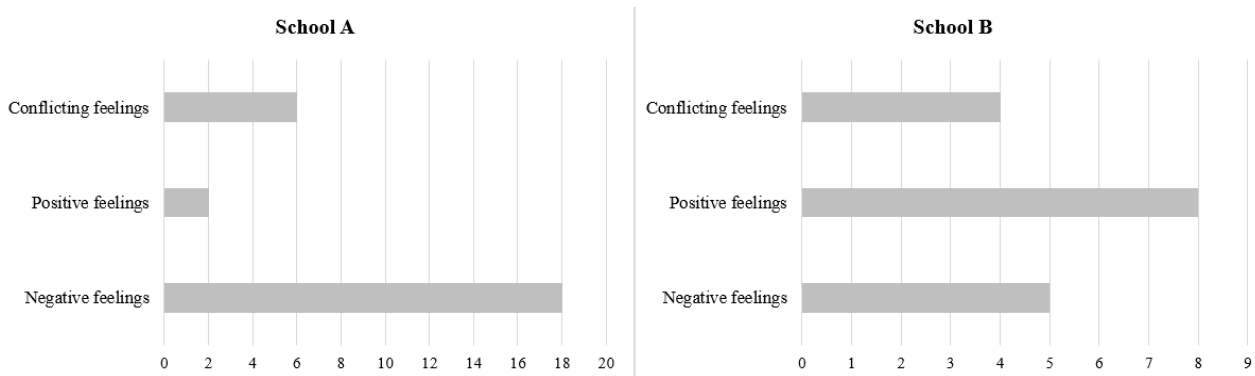
**Graph 2.** Different ways of correcting children’s compositions.

In that context, there is a clear preference in correcting the errors next to children and marking the mistakes by writing the correct answer next to them. This practice is attributed to direct feedback, as the correct form is given to children by the teacher. In that sense, children's answers coincide with Chandler (2003) and Ferris and Roberts (2001) studies, who said that learners tend to prefer direct feedback rather than indirect correction.

As the results indicate, direct CF is the method that prevails the most in both schools, especially in school A. Nevertheless, although direct feedback is the most voted one, there is no clear evidence between the direct and the indirect approach, particularly in school B. However, this fact agrees with the study carried out by Ellis (2009), in which he found out that teacher's feedback was more effective for improving grammatical errors, but that self-correction should not be left behind.

The third question wants to know how children feel if the teacher selects many mistakes in the same writing. The answers to this question have been various, though very similar. In this sense, we have decided to group them into three main categories: children who experience conflicting feelings, children who feel positive feelings and children who adventure negative ones. Before analysing the answers of graph 3, it should be highlighted the criteria followed in order to make these three distinctions. In first terms, negative feelings include all the answers of who stated that they feel bad, sad, disappointed, or shameful when children see they have made mistakes. Also, it must be said that many of them associate making mistakes with the fact of not having studied enough. On the other hand, people who go through conflicting feelings are the ones that as a first reaction they experience negative feelings for having made certain mistakes, but at the same time they take them as a source of motivation to improve next time. Finally, positive feelings include all the people who mentioned that they see mistakes as a normal part of the learning. You cannot improve without making mistakes ("it is normal to make mistakes and learn from them").

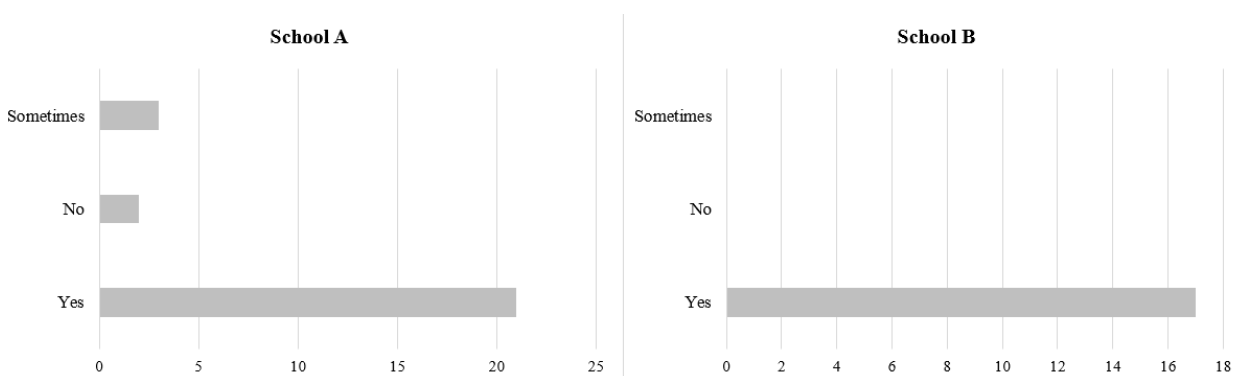
In that context, the results differ from both schools. Whereas in the school of the region of Berguedà positive feelings predominate, these feelings are the ones that children from school A experience the least. Secondly, it can also be observed that negative feelings are on the lead in the school of the region of Maresme (18 out of 26) while at school B are not in first place. Finally, conflicting feelings are the ones that although they do not have an important weight, they are gaining importance in both cases.



**Graph 3.** How do children feel when the teacher selects many mistakes in a composition

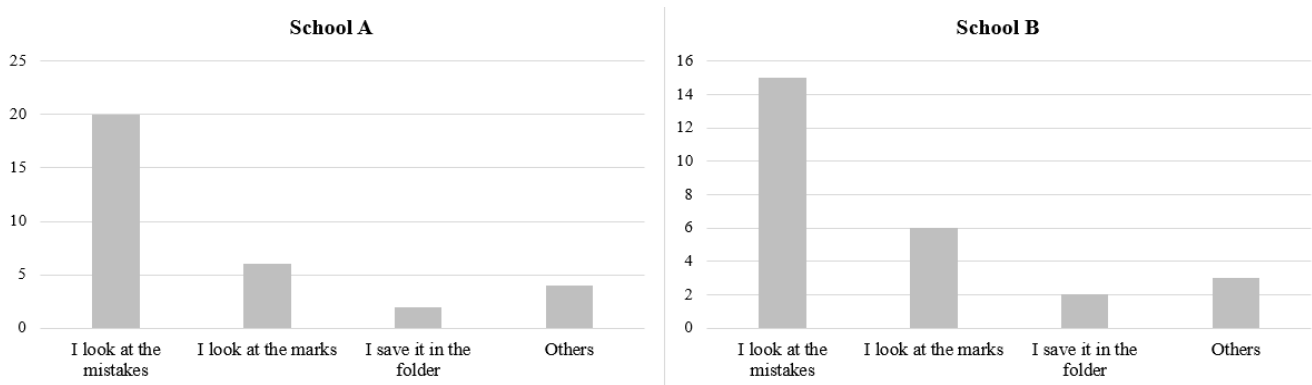
As the findings show, different feelings arise when providing children’s written feedback. Considering these attitudes, Zhu (2020) maintained that some teachers prefer correcting all the errors as they appear, while others believe that constant correction can boost students’ level of anxiety and thus hinder learning (Krashen, 1982). So, this fact can explain the significant difference between both schools, as the feelings come up depending on children’s needs. For that reason, teachers play a crucial role in all the process, as they must know students' attitudes towards error correction so that they can adapt their corrections to the learners’ preferences.

The following question aims to know if children find it easy to understand teacher’s corrections. In that context, it is clear that the teacher does her best to make herself understood by their students. However, the two children who do not think the same at school A justify their answer by saying that the unclear teacher’s handwriting is the main reason for their answer. In addition, of the 26 participants in school A, 3 of them argue that depending on the error they understand it more easily. However, when this happens, they quickly ask the teacher for her help.



**Graph 4.** The easiness that children have to understand teachers corrections

As for the last question —*What do you do when the teacher gives you back a corrected composition?*— there is clear evidence in both schools: many of them look at the mistakes they have made. Nonetheless, in Gironella’s school 8 out of 17 students save it in the folder as a first reaction whilst 6 of them just look at the marks. Contrary to this, in the school of Pineda de Mar, children do not usually do that. Moreover, it must be highlighted the important predominance of the category “others”, in which some of them say that they take a step further and read the composition again while re-doing or copying the mistakes they have made on another piece of paper.



**Graph 5.** *Actions that children take once the teacher gives them back a composition*

At this point, it is seen that very few students save the essays in their folder as a first reaction and hence, are not interested in improving. So, the answers reveal again the importance that children attribute to written corrective feedback, as the first thing they do when the teacher gives them back an essay is to look at the mistakes and thus, to learn and avoid making them next time. This fact is strictly related to Jeane’s Lambert (2015) idea when saying that attention is the key that leads to writing and linguistic improvement and can make learning more effective.

### 4.3 Teacher’s interview

It is commonly accepted that interviews are a tool used to be able to talk about different experiences and lead the participants to express their concerns and beliefs about a specific topic, in that case, the corrective feedback. In addition, through this methodological instrument, qualitative data is gathered to find out teachers’ points of view referring to their practice in the classroom.

To start with, the first question is aimed to have an overview about the importance and efficacy of corrective feedback. In that sense, both teachers value the great importance of this tool in children's learning process as it enables them to improve their compositions. Below, it can be seen an example that makes explicit this aspect:

**Excerpt 1: Teacher's opinion about the efficacy of written corrective feedback**

*School B: És molt eficaç ja que és una manera d'aprendre i interioritzar els errors a llarg termini. Si no marquem els errors no saben en què han de millorar. [...] Tot i això, cal adaptar-se a les necessitats educatives de cadascú.*

*School A: El retorn intento que sigui sota els mateixos criteris en el grup, en excepció d'alumnes que tenen un pla individualitzat, necessitats educatives especials varies o sensibilitat emocional. També és cert que si hi ha algú talentós li dono fórmules de millora.*

These opinions are in consonance with Zacharias (2007), who enhanced the importance of written feedback by suggesting that providing feedback can be a way to help students improve the quality of their writing and increase their motivation in such practice. Moreover, Hylan (1998), firmly considered that teachers must build comments and corrections taking into consideration the student's background, needs and preferences. Additionally, the author also believed that it is also a way to reinforce teacher-student relationships.

As for the way of providing feedback, all kinds of errors are usually corrected in both schools, either grammatical, lexical, or presentation aspects. Notwithstanding, teachers reinforce their answer by saying that the ones that have been worked previously acquire more weight than the others. So, according to their answers, two different concepts arise: errors and mistakes. While the first ones take place as a result of lack of knowledge, the latter reflects the failures that arise as a result of memory limitations and lack of automaticity (Salzamann, 2015). Moreover, teachers correct using the unfocused methodology, that according to Van Beuningen (2010), involves the correction of all errors in a learner's text, irrespective of their error category. At the same time, it is certainly true that both English teachers do not use any specific code when providing feedback. Instead, they just indicate the word by underlining it and providing the corrected form. So, according to the same author, teachers also make use of the direct corrective feedback approach, which unlike the indirect feedback, it consists of making an indication of the error and the correct linguistic form straightaway (Van Beuningen, 2010). Besides, considering the characteristics of the students aforementioned, it is considered the best methodology of correction

with learners of low L2 levels of proficiency, who usually do not know how to correct erroneous forms autonomously (Ferris and Roberts, 2001). Here there is an example:

**Excerpt 2: Teacher's method when providing feedback at school B**

*Penso que en alguns casos és bo que els infants intentin corregir els errors que han fet però també és cert que la majoria de vegades no tenen el coneixement suficient de la llengua per a fer-ho de manera autònoma. Per això, normalment els hi escric la forma correcta.*

## **5. Conclusions**

At the end of this study, it is important to draw brief conclusions in order to summarize everything that has been observed throughout the research. For that reason, the main objectives are revised in this section.

As for the first objective, “to identify the most recurrent errors that children's compositions present in Upper Cycle”, a great range of errors are found in compositions, many of them with respect to spelling. In that sense, the results show that spelling is a complex cognitive activity that EFL students face when writing as many skills are involved, for instance, the correct association between English phonemes and written graphemes. Additionally, omissions and other error categories have also a great weight, probably due to the interference of the Catalan and Spanish language. On the contrary, although borrowings and substitutions are the less frequent type of errors produced by sixth graders, it is of paramount importance to correct them and not set them aside, as when an L2 learner produces his/her own variety of language, it might lead to fossilization, a process that cannot be easily corrected.

The second objective was to examine teacher's feedback in children's compositions. Overall, our findings show that the direct and the unfocused methods are the most used in both schools. However, it is very difficult to determine which strategy is the best one among the four established by Ellis (2009), as it depends on many factors (e.g.: children's L2 level, language goals, feedback focus, etc.). Nonetheless, the teacher's preference method to error correction at this stage is because low-level students lack the background knowledge to self-correct and so they prefer to correct children's writings by their side so as to promote the acquisition and the complete understanding of the errors produced.

Deeping in the third aim, that was to discover if teacher's corrective feedback helps to improve grammatical accuracy in future compositions, the results reveal that there has not been steady

progress in accuracy improvement from one time to another. In that context, this statement is in consonance with Truscott's theory when claiming that error correction does not have a significant impact on enhancing learners writing accuracy (1999). Nonetheless, the results of the study can be explained from two different perspectives. On the one hand, we consider that for the complete effectiveness of written tasks, teachers should handle specific lessons to deal with the errors. For example, considering the misspellings as the most recurrent errors, activities and proposals could be implemented to help children associate the spoken sounds with the written forms. This would agree with Ferris (2002) when claiming that children need distinct and additional intervention from their writing teachers to make up their deficits and develop strategies for finding, correcting, and avoiding errors. On the other hand, the teacher's attitude has not significantly contributed to further progress, that is, children had a lot of help in the first version whilst none in the second one. In other words, this assistance should have been progressive in order to ensure children's autonomy when writing in English.

At this point of the study, we value the importance of errors in the process of second language acquisition as they reflect children's progress. In that sense, we consider that the total amount of errors in a text is inconceivable and unnecessary for everyone, regardless the age as, without them, learning will never occur. However, what is of great importance as teachers is to develop actions that make children understand, relate, and internalize the errors so that they decrease more and more.

## 6. References

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## 7. Appendices

**WRITING**

**AN EMAIL**

**An Irish English teacher is coming to your school as an English language assistant. He will help you to improve your English. He sent you this email:**

Hi there,  
My name is Alexander. I am coming to your school next month.  
I am 21 years old and I live in Cork, Ireland. I am very happy to teach you English.  
We are going to have fun together. Tell me about yourself.  
See you soon,  
Alexander

**Write back to Alexander and tell him about you. Finish your composition by asking him something you would like to know about him. Write between 40 and 50 words.**

**FOR EXAMPLE**

<b>About you:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- What's your name?</li><li>- How old are you?</li><li>- Where do you live?</li></ul>	<b>Other information:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Have you got any brothers or sisters?</li><li>- Have you got any pets?</li><li>- What's your favourite subject at school?</li></ul>	<b>To finish:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Ask Alexander a question about him.</li></ul>
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**Greeting** Hello Alexander,

**Write about you and where you live.**

**Write about other information (e.g. family, pets, subjects)**

**To finish: Ask him a question**

**Closing and signature**

DRAFT

*Figure 1. Model text that children had to follow to write their compositions, extracted from the Key Competences Test 2019*

**Table 1.** Questions asked in the teacher's interview

<b>TEACHER'S INTERVIEW</b>
1. Creus que és important fer un retorn sobre els errors d'escriptura que fan els estudiants?
2. Sobre quins aspectes de les redaccions dels alumnes proporciones aquest retorn/comentaris? (per exemple aspectes, lèxics, organitzatius, de contingut, gramaticals). A tots els hi dones la mateixa importància?
3. Corregeixes tot els errors que fan o en seleccions alguns de més importants? Si és així, quin criteri utilitzes a l'hora de seleccionar-los?
4. Quan fas el retorn/comentari sobre els errors gramaticals dels alumnes, els hi proporciones la forma correcta o fas servir diferents mètodes per fer-los saber quins errors han comès? El retorn que fas és el mateix per a tots els alumnes?
5. Tenint en compte que un error es produeix quan una persona no coneix la norma mentre que una falta quan l'estudiant la coneix i tot i així segueix fallant, a quins d'ells s'hauria de prestar més atenció en una redacció segons el teu punt de vista?
6. Una vegada els hi has corregit la redacció, acostumes a demanar-los que presentin una versió definitiva del text que han fet? Si és així, a quina versió li dones més importància?
7. Els hi poses nota a les redaccions dels alumnes? Creus que els estudiants estan més interessats en els comentaris que els fas per tal que puguin millorar o en les notes?
8. Segons el teu punt de vista, quin és l'aspecte més difícil a l'hora de corregir/ proporcionar comentaris als vostres estudiants?
9. Què fas quan veus que els estudiants no responen a les teves correccions?
10. Segons la teva opinió, quina eficàcia té la correcció d'errors per millorar l'escriptura dels estudiants?

**Table 2.** Questions asked in the children's interview

<b>CHILDREN'S INTERVIEW</b>
1. Penses que les correccions que et fa la mestra quan entregues una redacció d'anglès t'ajuden a millorar? Per què?
2. Com acostuma a corregir-te la mestra les redaccions? <i>(Pots marcar més d'una opció si ho necessites)</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a) Està al teu costat corregint la redacció.</li><li>b) Se l'emporta i al cap d'uns dies te la retorna corregida.</li><li>c) Marca els errors per tal que tu després els corregeixis sol/a.</li><li>d) Marca els errors tot escrivint la forma correcta al costat.</li></ol>

3. Com et sents si la mestra et marca molts errors en una mateixa redacció?
4. Et resulta fàcil entendre les correccions de la mestra? Si la resposta és NO, fas alguna cosa per entendre-les?
5. Què fas quan et retornen una redacció corregida?