

An innovative approach to improving writing skills in higher education

Un enfoque innovador para mejorar las habilidades de escritura en la educación superior

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ABSTRACT

In this paper we introduce an innovation activity which consists of a writing competition in a Faculty of Economics and Business at a large university in Spain. This activity allows us to assess the deficiencies that higher education students have in writing reports and to encourage students and staff to be aware of the relevance of written communication for their personal lives and their professional careers. This experience showed us that those students that enrolled in the competition had good marks in a multiple-choice exam with questions about orthography, grammar, punctuation and vocabulary but they found more difficulties in composing their own texts. This suggests that despite the years employed in learning the Spanish language prior to embarking on their higher education courses, the students do not have enough skills to compose texts at the advanced level that corresponds to professionals in Social Sciences. One implication of these findings is that higher education teachers should highlight the relevance of writing properly to their students and develop activities in those fields in which composition is compulsory.

Keywords. writing skills; composition; teaching innovation; higher education; motivation; business studies.

RESUMEN

En este trabajo presentamos una actividad innovativa que consiste en un concurso de escritura en una Facultad de Economía y Empresa de una universidad española generalista. Esta actividad nos ha permitido valorar las deficiencias que los estudiantes universitarios muestran en la expresión escrita, y con ella pretendemos animar a los estudiantes y al resto de profesores a ser conscientes de la relevancia de la comunicación escrita en el desarrollo personal y profesional. Los resultados de nuestra actividad muestran que los estudiantes que tomaron parte en el concurso obtuvieron buenas puntuaciones en una prueba con cuestiones sobre ortografía, gramática, signos de puntuación y vocabulario, pero encontraron más dificultades en la composición autónoma de textos escritos. Estos resultados sugieren que, a pesar de los años preuniversitarios empleados en aprender lengua española, los estudiantes aún no muestran las suficientes habilidades de redacción de nivel avanzado que corresponden a profesionales de Ciencias Sociales. Una implicación que surge de nuestro trabajo es que los profesores universitarios deberían hacer valorar a sus estudiantes la importancia de la expresión escrita, para lo que podrían desarrollar actividades de redacción en sus disciplinas.

Palabras clave. *habilidades de escritura; composición; innovación docente; educación superior; motivación; estudios empresariales.*

INTRODUCTION

The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) has initiated a new structure of higher education studies in Spain in which it is compulsory to produce and defend an undergraduate thesis in order to graduate. This undergraduate thesis has to be oriented to the assessment of the competences of the degree¹. In particular, one of those basic competences endorsed by degree level studies, regardless of the area of knowledge, is that “students can transmit information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialized and non-specialized audiences”².

Although undergraduate theses are regulated by each university, a common competence included in most of the programs is to be able to communicate correctly in Spanish in academic and professional contexts. However, in the experience we have gathered over ten years in relation to this competence in the Faculty of Economics and Business we have observed the difficulties that students have to express their ideas in their own language. And this is not a problem of the terminology and concepts of Economy and Business but a deficiency at a general level, leading to a great number of spelling mistakes and serious problems in writing which are not specific to a particular university (Segovia, Gallego & Rodríguez, 2013). As university lecturers in a Faculty of Economics and Business this issue was of some concern to us and thus we created a teaching innovation team to examine problems related to written and oral expression, and it is within this framework that we have developed the innovation activity which is explained in this paper.

An overview of the institutional context is relevant to underpin the innovative element of the activity. The process of learning written Spanish language begins during the first year at primary school and continues through secondary school. Spanish language is thus taught as a compulsory subject for 12 years (Royal Decrees 126/2014 –primary school–, and 1105/2014 –secondary school)³. Moreover, in order to enroll at any university, most students must pass an exam at the

¹ Article 12.7 of Royal Decree 1393/2007 establishing the organisation of official university education, repealed by Royal Decree 822/2021.

² Section 3.2 of Annex I of Royal Decree 1393/2007, repealed by Royal Decree 822/2021.

³ Royal Decree 126/2014, has been repealed by Royal Decree 157/2022, establishing the organisation and minimum teaching of Primary Education. Royal Decree 1105/2014 has been repealed by Royal Decree 217/2022,

end of secondary school which is organized by the educational administration of the Spanish regions⁴. In this exam, one of the subjects examined is precisely the writing competence in Spanish language through a composition of a non-specialized text related to the competences of Spanish language and literature (Royal Decree 412/2014). The rate of success in this exam before the Covid-19 crisis was around 93%. However, a recent study on the spelling of university students in the digital arena shows that there is still considerable room for improvement in terms of accent marks, spelling and other rules of orthography (Vázquez-Cano, González & Sáez-López, 2019). In this sense Guzmán-Simón & García-Jiménez (2014) also found deficiencies in reading and writing in the students at university. Despite that, there are just seven universities in Spain that have set up Writing Centers.

The problems related to composition in non-university contexts are well documented in Spain. Nevertheless, the concern regarding written communication at university is very specific (Gallego-Ortega, García-Guzmán & Rodríguez-Fuentes, 2013). In both higher education and secondary school contexts, the concept that dominates is that writing and composition are related to communication but not to the learning process, which leads to a superficial learning of writing (Mateos & Solé, 2012). There is also previous evidence that connects how writing is perceived by students with the way they write (Castells et al., 2015) and the relevance that they assign to good writing (Chitez, Castelló & Kruse, 2015). Other studies have analyzed how the writing process is considered differently by students and faculties (Álvarez & Yániz, 2015). A common conclusion is that student confidence in their own capacities as writers can help them to be more interested in writing properly (Castells et al., 2015).

Contrary to the US, in Spain there is no difference in the perception of academic writing in relation to the general writing skills acquired in previous stages of the educational process. Many university professors consider that since reading and composition are skills that should have been developed before enrolling at university, the students should be more than capable of changing register to one which is appropriate for academic writing (Castelló et al., 2012; Vázquez, 2005). However, the type of composition that is developed at university is different from that learned by the students at secondary school, and thus it requires specific pedagogic actions (Camps & Castelló, 2013; Castelló, 2008; Russell & Foster, 2002). In addition, some studies show that the difficulties of the students in relation to academic writing seem to be associated with the understanding of academic speech (Pérez, 2014).

Consequently, the writing level detected in the exams and undergraduate theses is very low, not only from the point of view of academic writing, which might be expected due to the lack of preparation in this aspect, but also from a more general perspective. Apart from spelling mistakes, there is a misuse or lack of use of punctuation, inappropriate or erroneous vocabulary as well as inadequate organization of ideas in paragraphs and the connection between them.

Based on this, we tried to develop an innovation activity open to all students in Bachelor Degrees, regardless of their academic year, which consists of a voluntary writing competition, with twofold objectives: a) to assess the problems that higher education students have in writing reports, and b) to encourage these students to be aware of the relevance of writing communication in their professional and personal lives. The motivation for carrying out this activity lies in the experience that, as university professors, we have had in the supervision of the students' undergraduate theses in the EHEA.

We thought that a voluntary writing competition with various prizes could be an innovation activity that might serve as a starting point to make the students aware of the relevance of written

establishing the basic curriculum of Compulsory Secondary Education. And more recently, by Royal Decree 243/2022, the organisation and minimum teaching of the Baccalaureate have been established.

⁴ Royal Decree 412/2014, article 26, establishes the possibility of enrolling at university without passing this exam for the students that come from vocational training cycles, but the percentage of these students in the degrees in Economics and Business is low.

communication and composition for their professional careers and in their personal lives. We thought that considering this competition as a ludic activity, seemingly distant from the usual analytical content of the Economy and Business fields, the students would be able to see it both as a game and as an opportunity to develop their creative talents, usually ignored in most of the subjects in these studies. Additionally, the results could be useful for assessing and disclosing the deficiencies in written communication, which in turn would focus efforts and the means to address the problem of writing skills in higher education.

The writing competition was structured in two parts: a multiple-choice exam with questions about punctuation, grammar, orthography and vocabulary, and a second part for which only the 20 students with the best marks in the multiple-choice exam qualified. This second phase consisted of a composition in which the students dealt with two texts: one that had to be rewritten, and a second one that had to be entirely composed by the student.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 sets out the literature review, Section 3 explains how the writing competition was conducted, and finally, Section 4 highlights the main conclusions of the paper.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Writing skills are developed throughout the education process in primary and secondary school. However, although in higher education students are expected to have a complete grasp of writing skills in their own language, they still face problems, which are quite similar, although at a different level, to those faced when learning a foreign language (Shuvra & Roy, 2022): besides orthographical and grammatical errors, or using discourse markers to improve the cohesion between sentences (Riznanda, 2021), they have problems in paragraph writing to assemble their ideas. From a more general perspective, how to plan a text and to organize it into paragraphs, how to write an essay, tell a story, summarize a writing or develop their own creative ideas are all potential stumbling blocks. It is not even considered worthwhile revising a text once it is written. Although the problems of written expression that students have when starting their degree at university have been widely studied in the literature (Björk et al., 2003; Kelley 2010; Morales, 2002; Núñez, 2013; Russell & Foster, 2002; Thaïss et al., 2012), the adoption of measures in higher education to solve this problem is limited. This would require more attention to the writing process, with language courses and continuous feedback in developing writing skills (Shuvra & Roy, 2022).

Learning composition is thus considered a process which uses standards in spelling and grammar to construct specific discursive speech for each field, which leads to different ways of writing, not learned when studying the content of a particular subject (Carlino, 2008). In this sense, academic writing is considered a social practice with its own rules, and its particular method of thinking and learning (Carlino, 2008; Castelló et al., 2012; Chitez & Kruse, 2012; Ellis, 2004; Graham & Perin, 2007; Mateos & Solé, 2012; Russell, 1997). Accordingly, the concept of academic literacy in the university context can be defined as the “set of notions and strategies needed to participate in the discursive culture of the disciplines, as well as in the activities of production and analysis of texts required to be learnt at university” (Carlino, 2005).

Under this focus of considering the achievement of academic literacy as a process (Carlino, 2002; Murray, 1972; Russell, 1997), universities in the US have been pioneers in adopting measures to overcome this problem, including a course on general writing skills –first year composition (Curry & Lillis, 2005; Moghtader, Cotch, & Hague, 2001; Rusell, 2013; Rusell & Foster, 2002). Moreover, these universities usually include compulsory subjects in their curricula to teach academic writing, as well as composition courses in diverse disciplines, organized through Writing Centers (Carlino, 2002, 2008, 2012).

In the Spanish language the concern over writing skills has been more focused on the diagnostic than on the measures to solve the problem. Studies such as Romero & Álvarez (2020) examine the writing skills at the Universidad de Deusto and conclude that the University should be responsible for teaching writing skills, since the new challenges of reading and writing are different to those previously faced by students. Among the activities they propose are language activities in different subjects, text analysis to learn to build a discourse in different fields and self-evaluation using evaluation rubrics. Similar studies based on Carlino's (2005) approach have been carried out in South America (Ávila et al., 2021; Muñoz & Pérez, 2021).

Regarding Social Sciences studies, composition skills are some of the most valued ones in the professional field (Moore & Morton, 2017), in particular in Economy and Business, since they are relevant both for learning the content of subjects relating to Economy and Business and for the future professional career of the students (National Commission on Writing, 2005; Buding, 2006). Nevertheless, composition in university contexts related to Business studies has barely been examined in the literature (Alhassan, 2019; Nikoulina, 2020). In Spain, one of the first studies which examines the competences of the Economist required by employers (Periañez, Charterina, & Pando, 2017) highlights the relevance of writing communication, and it suggests educative centers for the development of this skill. However, graduates consider writing communication as one the skills to which a Degree in Business Administration contributes least (Beraza & Villalba, 2017). Even in those cases in which business students showed that they had the necessary writing skills (Nikoulina, 2020), there were shortcomings in specific issues related to academic writing, such as implementation of the research question, clarity of exposition or transferring academic writing skills from one discipline to another, which suggests that universities should do more to enable students to develop their writing skills.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE WRITING COMPETITION

We structured the writing competition in two parts, a multiple-choice exam and a composition. We invited the students of university degrees with lessons in our faculty to participate, these being students of Economics, Business Administration, Marketing, Sociology, and the joint degree in Business and Law. The students were invited to participate through the available publicity means in the faculty: Faculty web, emails from the organizing committee to the faculty student list, advertising posters, and finally some teachers collaborated by announcing the competition in their classes. The competition was open to all students enrolled in Bachelor Degrees in the faculty in any academic year.

Table 1 shows that 49 students enrolled in the writing competition, of which 26 participated in the first phase and only one of the 20 who passed to the second phase did not show up for this latter stage. In Table 2 the classification of participants is made according to the academic year in which they are enrolled. When we started to organize the writing competition we thought that the participation would not be high for several reasons. First, this was a multidisciplinary activity which was not linked to any particular subject. Second, the effort required to compete in good conditions could be perceived as a cost which could not be offset by the prize of winning the competition. Third, there are many students who do not perceive this as an interesting activity, since they have been passing exams and been progressing through the education process despite perhaps not having good writing skills. Perhaps, greater recognition of the relevance of written communication throughout all the stages of education and the destination of more resources to these kinds of activities could encourage more students to participate in projects like this writing competition. Finally, in this academic year 2020-2021 most classes were online due to the prevailing Covid-19 measures and so students were not in the habit of attending face-to-face classes, which may have discouraged them from enrolling in the competition since the second part was not carried out remotely.

In this first phase we designed a 30 question multiple-choice exam related to four areas following Almela (2019): punctuation, grammar, orthography, and vocabulary. This exam was based on a previous test developed in the same faculty in 2017 by the same university lecturers who organized the writing competition to assess the students' perception of their writing skills and their correspondence with their real outcome. Accordingly, we used the same categories and types of questions and focused more on those in which the students had shown more doubts and difficulty. Punctuation is a crucial category, since it allows ideas to be presented in an intelligible way and reports to be drawn up in any discipline. Grammar questions were focused, basically, on grammatical agreement, whereas the orthography questions referred to spelling and accent marks that present certain difficulty. Vocabulary questions aimed to determine whether the students made mistakes with regard to the meaning of the words used in different contexts, since an appropriate and rich use of words is a tool of great importance in the process of communication.

The number of participants in the writing competition represents a small percentage of the total students of the Faculty of Economics and Business (3,238) but the purpose of this activity was rather to draw the attention of students and staff than to accurately assess the level of writing composition. Analyzing the composition of participants, we see that the proportion of enrolment and attendance was higher for women (58% vs. 42% for attendance). It is also interesting to note that Business Administration students make up the vast majority in the initial enrolment data, as this is the most solicited degree in the faculty. However, when it comes to taking the exam they are the least likely to take part in the competition. This could be related to the fact that, in general, Business Studies students are less motivated than those of other degree courses (Davies, Tikoo, Ding, & Salama, 2016; Freixa, Llanes, & Venceslao, 2018), which could be also related to the high dropout rates in this degree. Something similar can be seen in Table 2 in relation to the academic year: although there were more first year students enrolled (21) – perhaps unsurprising as fewer students remain in the faculty in more advanced academic years– fewer than 50% of these first years (10) took part in the competition. Thus, it seems that maturity in academic life is also a factor that may influence enrolment rates in these kinds of extra-curricular voluntary activities. In relation to the test carried out in 2017, the participation in the writing competition was lower in 2021 because in 2017 some lecturers offered the possibility of carrying out the test in the classroom in the course of some subjects, whereas in 2021 the participation was voluntary outside the lessons. In addition, the 2021 competition took place during the pandemic years, so the attendance to face to face classes and the involvement in the Faculty life was reduced.

Table 1. Participants by Gender and University Degree

	Women	Men	Business Studies	Economics	Marketing	Business and Law	Sociology
Enrolled	26	23	18	11	5	8	7
Enrolled (%)	53.1	46.9	36.7	22.4	10.2	16.3	14.3
Attend 1 st phase	15	11	6	7	2	6	5
Attend 1 st phase (%)	57.7	42.3	23.1	26.9	7.7	23.1	19.2
Winners (9 prizes)	3	6	1	3	1	2	2
Winners (%)	33.3	66.7	11.1	33.3	11.1	22.2	22.2
Rest	7	3	2	4	1	2	1
Rest (%)	70	30	20	40	10	20	10

Table 2. Participants by Academic year of the Degree

	1º	2º	3º	4º	5º	Total
Enrolled	21	8	7	9	4	49
Enrolled (%)	42.9	16.3	14.3	18.4	8.2	100
Attend 1st phase	10	7	4	4	1	26
Attend 1st phase (%)	38.5	26.9	15.4	15.4	3.8	100
Winners (9 prizes)	3	2	0	3	1	9
Winners (%)	33.3	22.2	0.0	33.3	11.1	100
Rest	4	2	4	0	0	10
Rest (%)	40	20	40	0	0	100

This first part of the competition was organized online through the University digital platform (Aula Virtual), setting a period of 14 days in which each student could choose a time which suited them to take the exam, although once logged in, the students had to answer the questions within a maximum of 20 minutes. This was considered to be a sufficient period of time since most of the questions were sentences with three possible choices (a, b, c) or even two in some cases (a, b) with just one correct answer. To compose the questions, we consulted some Spanish good writing guides that had also been recommended to the students in the rules of the competition (Almela, 2019; Instituto Cervantes, 2012; Real Academia Española y Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española, 2013)⁵. In this phase we allowed the students to use any means they wanted, mainly because the questions were not easily solved with a dictionary, and the time limit rendered any such research ineffective. Moreover, due to this there was no need for supervision during the test⁶.

The 20 students with the best marks in the first phase qualified for the second one, in accordance with the rules established for the writing competition. The number of 20 was chosen as this is a reasonable number of compositions to be corrected thoroughly and rigorously and to provide an in-depth comparison. The number of main prizes (9) was chosen accordingly. This second phase consisted of two exercises: 1) to rewrite in an appropriate way a short text (146 words) that had spelling mistakes and in which the ideas were poorly expressed, and 2) a composition of around 500 words based on a letter addressed to an administrative authority. The time allowed to develop this part was one hour and thirty minutes. These texts were based on the models used to obtain a certification in a language according to the European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), for example, Cambridge, DELF or the Instituto Cervantes, and in the examples of rewriting texts to improve their coherency and fluency given in one of the books recommended to the students (Almela, 2019). The classification of the exercises to grant the awards was overseen by two university lecturers of Literature and Linguistics based on the following criteria: orthotypographic and syntactic precision, coherency and fluency of expression, ability to debate and originality⁷.

⁵ Appendix I displays all the questions of this first part of the writing competition.

⁶ As an example, the use of Spanish words such as *porque*, *por qué*, *por que*, requires previous knowledge and grammar skills to identify whether these words are correct or not in a particular sentence. Thus, if these skills have not previously been acquired it is difficult to choose the correct answer. Moreover, as there was a time limit of 20 minutes, time spent on one question would reduce the available time for the remaining questions.

⁷ Appendix II shows the two exercises of the second part of the writing competition.

RESULTS

The results of the first part of the writing competition are displayed in Table 3, which shows the number of questions classified by type, the proportion that they represent in the exam, and the average percentage of correct answers in each category. The most frequent were those corresponding to orthography (13), followed by grammar (8), punctuation (7) and vocabulary (2).

As Table 3 shows, the average level of correct answers of our students was high, although this result may be biased by the fact that those who enrolled in the exam were likely to be the students that had more confidence in their writing capacities. Overall, the percentage of correct answers was 65%, higher than that of the previous online pilot test developed by the same lecturers in 2017 (57%) in which the participation numbered 136 students. This may be due to the fact that since in 2021 the writing competition was voluntary, those students that decided to take part in it were those with a better background in writing skills.

The questions about punctuation show a higher percentage of correct answers, while the category with the most mistakes is orthography. These problems with orthography have also been highlighted by Vázquez-Cano et al. (2019) when studying mistakes made by the students of the Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED) in which they found that almost 67% of the mistakes were attributable to orthography.

Table 3. Multiple-choice questions

Question	Frequency	Percentage	% correct
Grammar	8	26.7	64%
Orthography	13	43.3	59%
Punctuation	7	23.3	78%
Vocabulary	2	6.7	65%
Total	30	100.00	65%

Table 4 displays the descriptive statistics of success for each category of questions. Median values are higher than means and, in general, quite good, which suggests that some questions might have been difficult to answer. The category of orthography, which is the one with more mistakes, also reveals a higher dispersion of the data, although in general, the standard deviations are low. This suggests that the level of the students enrolled in the competition was fairly uniform and that they were some who had more interest in written expression.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of successful answers

	Mean	Median	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Grammar	0.64	0.70	0.16	0.41	0.81
Orthography	0.59	0.67	0.24	0.19	0.85
Punctuation	0.78	0.81	0.16	0.44	0.96
Vocabulary	0.65	0.65	0.18	0.52	0.78
Total	0.65	0.74	0.21	0.19	0.96

As shown in Table 5, the number of mistakes in punctuation in the compositions (second phase) were quite significant, even more than those related to orthography. This suggests that although the students were able to identify the proper use of punctuation when they were faced with different options, they still had problems when composing their own texts. Thus, the analysis of the autonomous compositions, despite these being produced by those students who are more motivated by the written language, shows that the reduced writing activities with linguistic feedback in faculties of Economy and Business may be affecting the writing skills of the students. The

remaining categories also reveal that the mistakes are related to the general use of the language, not specifically to an academic use, thereby indicating that despite the years and efforts made in primary and secondary school learning the Spanish language, students in higher education do not have a complete or sufficient mastery to compose texts at the advanced level that corresponds to professionals in Social Sciences. For example, besides mistakes which were similar to those made in the first phase, we detected some weaknesses in the composition in relation to formal aspects, such as the way to address an administrative authority (a minister) and the formal discourse that such a task implies. The distribution of the winners classified by gender, university degree and academic year can be found in Table 1 and Table 2. There was more enrolment of women (53.1%) and also more participation of women in the first phase (57.7%). However, in the prizes there was a majority of men (66.7%). At first sight, this finding seems surprising, but it should be analysed with caution due to the representativeness of the sample. For instance, in the 2017 test, the participation was similar (50.7% of men against 49.3% of women) and also the percentage of correct answers (58.0% in women against 56.8% in men) The degree least represented in these awards was Business Studies and if we compare the academic year of those students that attended the first phase with the prizes obtained in the second phase, it is worth noticing that those students in the fourth and fifth academic years were the most successful (4 prizes from 5 students against 5 prizes from 21 students for the first, second and third academic years).

Table 5. Types of mistakes in the second phase

Mistakes	
Formal aspects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of greeting at the beginning - Lack of signing off and farewell - Informal language
Grammar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of grammatical agreement - Inadequate use of reflexive/non-reflexive verbs - Sentences which are cut short before the end
Orthography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accent marks - Incorrect use of lower/upper case letters
Punctuation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inadequate use of commas - Inadequate use of full stops - Inadequate use of ellipsis - Inadequate use of colons
Vocabulary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Repetition. Limited use of synonyms - Inadequate use of prepositions

CONCLUSIONS

We proposed a writing competition in a Faculty of Economics and Business as an innovation activity to make students aware of the relevance of composing and writing with accuracy. To increase its visibility among the staff of the faculty we publicized this activity through the organization of an awards ceremony in which the Dean of the Faculty and the Vice Chancellor of the Universidad de Murcia were present. A report on the ceremony was also uploaded to the faculty website.

This activity enabled us to expose the problems that higher education students have in writing reports and to encourage the students to be aware of the relevance of written communication in their professional careers and their personal lives. In the multiple-choice exam the average level of correct answers of our students was high, and the questions about punctuation were those with a higher percentage of correct answers, while orthography was the category with more mistakes. However, in the autonomous composition mistakes in punctuation were as frequent as those for

the other categories, which suggests that the students have problems when they have to compose their own texts. Therefore, the lack of written activities with proper feedback in faculties of Economy and Business may be affecting the skills of students in this area.

Nonetheless the scarce representativeness of our sample to make inference by groups, the results of our writing competition by gender show that although there was a balance participation between men and women, the majority of prizes corresponded to men. With regard to the Degree and academic year, there was a majority of students of Business Studies, which is the Degree with more number of students in our Faculty. As regards the academic year, the participation was higher among the students of the 4th year.

With this paper we have aimed to contribute to the literature of teaching innovation in higher education. We believe that by enhancing the relevance of writing and composition – with the proper publicity and the staging of the awards – in a faculty whose main concerns are not related to written texts, we contributed to making students and staff aware of the relevance of writing texts with accuracy. We also think that by diffusing this activity in education meetings between lecturers and teachers of Economy and Business studies we can extend our concern –and even our idea of a ludic writing competition– to other Social Sciences faculties in Spain and other countries. Even by imitation, our objective could be extended to other studies in which language skills are not the main focus, such as Sciences, because the ability to build a precise coherent writing discourse without errors is a fundamental skill in the development of a consistent professional career.

The main shortcoming of our study is the low participation of students and, consequently, the low representativeness of our sample and the possible bias towards those students who are more interested in writing. Thus, we consider this experience as an exploratory study which could help students and staff to be more aware of the relevance of continuing their writing education at university. Hence, these kinds of activities could be incorporated into faculty academic life through non-official programs. For example, courses of writing composition and academic writing with proper feedback would be very useful for the education of undergraduate students, and these courses could finish with similar competitions to that shown in this paper, which would render them more attractive for students. It is our purpose to continue with this approach elaborating online material to solve the most frequent doubts that students have when faced with writing composition tasks.

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- Real Decreto 217/2022, de 29 de marzo, por el que se establece la ordenación y las enseñanzas mínimas de la Educación Secundaria Obligatoria.
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- Real Decreto 243/2022, de 5 de abril, por el que se establecen la ordenación y las enseñanzas mínimas del Bachillerato.
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APPENDIX I. Questions of the first phase of the writing competition

Choose the correct option (a, b, c) according to the punctuation marks:

1.

- a) ¿No van a ampliar el plazo de presentación?. ¡Qué desastre!
- b) ¿No van a ampliar el plazo de presentación? ¡Qué desastre!
- c) ¿No van a ampliar, el plazo de presentación? ¡Qué desastre!

2.

- a) Él sabe que si bebe no debe conducir.
- b) Él sabe que si bebe, no debe conducir.
- c) Él sabe que, si bebe, no debe conducir.

3.

- a) Dijo que vendría pero no vino

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- b) Dijo que vendría, pero no vino.
 - c) Dijo que vendría pero, no vino.
- 4.
- a) Tiene cáncer de pulmón porque fumó mucho cuando era joven.
 - b) Tiene cáncer de pulmón, porque fumó mucho cuando era joven.
 - c) Tiene cáncer de pulmón porque fumó mucho, cuando era joven.
- 5.
- a) Para que puedas vivir sano has de comer sano a partir de ahora.
 - b) Para que puedas vivir sano, has de comer sano, a partir de ahora.
 - c) Para que puedas vivir sano, has de comer sano a partir de ahora.
- 6.
- a) El jamón de bellota, es tan bueno que no se puede dejar de comer.
 - b) El jamón de bellota es tan bueno, que no se puede dejar de comer.
 - c) El jamón de bellota es tan bueno que no se puede dejar de comer.

Decide whether the following sentences are correct or incorrect according to the use of grammar, orthography and vocabulary:

7. Aquí les enseñamos a arreglárselas solos, pero siempre estamos detrás suyo.
- a) Correcta
 - b) Incorrecta
8. Tendrás que aclararme porqué te callaste.
- a) Correcta
 - b) Incorrecta
9. En el teatro habían muchísimos espectadores.
- a) Correcta
 - b) Incorrecta
10. Tú eres de los que creen que todo se arreglará
- a) Correcta
 - b) Incorrecta
11. Se detuvieron a los tres asaltantes
- a) Correcta
 - b) Incorrecta
12. Si alguno de vosotros prefiere practicar otro deporte, lo podéis hacer.
- a) Correcta
 - b) Incorrecta
13. Se han ido todos, a parte de nosotros.
- a) Correcta
 - b) Incorrecta
14. El abogado alegó asimismo que no había indicios suficientes.
- a) Correcta
 - b) Incorrecta
15. Estuvimos hablando acerca de la beca que le han concedido.
- a) Correcta
 - b) Incorrecta
16. Se reunirán para hablar entorno al tema de la crisis.
- a) Correcta
 - b) Incorrecta
17. El camino por que va está demasiado mojado.
- a) Correcta
 - b) Incorrecta

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18. Es posible que no lo acepten sino lo envías a tiempo.
a) Correcta
b) Incorrecta
19. Nunca digas: de este agua no beberé.
a) Correcta
b) Incorrecta
20. Mi vecina me ha contado lo que se gastó en la boda de su hija, que se casó hace un mes.
a) Correcta
b) Incorrecta
- Elija la opción correcta (a, b, c) según la utilización del léxico, la ortografía y la gramática:
21.
a) Siempre debe de haber un respeto hacia los compañeros.
b) Para participar en el sorteo, debe rellenar este cuestionario.
c) Las dos son correctas.
22.
a) El Sevilla prefiere ser campeón de la Europa league que tener un papel secundario en la Champions.
b) El Madrid prefiere ser campeón de la Champions a ganar la Liga española.
c) Las dos son correctas.
23.
a) Cada uno está convencido que su método es el mejor.
b) Cada uno está convencido de que su método es el mejor.
c) Las dos son correctas.
24.
a) La víctima, un hombre joven, fue trasladado al hospital.
b) La víctima, un hombre joven, fue trasladada al hospital.
c) La víctima fue un hombre joven, que fue trasladada al hospital.
25.
a) Juan ayer frió un huevo de un pollo que él crió.
b) Juan ayer frio un huevo de un pollo que él crio.
c) Juan ayer frio un huevo de un pollo que él crió.
26.
a) No os riais: hui porque no tenía más remedio.
b) No os riáis: huí porque no tenía más remedio.
c) No os riáis: hui porque no tenía más remedio.
27.
a) Es una feria bianual, tiene lugar cada dos años.
b) Es una feria bienal, tiene lugar cada dos años.
c) Ninguna es correcta.
28.
a) Me extraña mucho de que quiera tributar al treinta y un por cien.
b) Me extraña mucho que quiera tributar al treinta y un por ciento.
c) Me extraña mucho que quiera tributar al treinta y uno por ciento.
29.
a) Le dije al profesor que cerrara el aula y viniera a la reunión.
b) Le dije al profesor que cerrara la aula y viniese a la reunión.
c) Le dije al profesor que cerrara el aula y vendría a la reunión.
30.
a) Higinio y Laura estudiaron la misma carrera, ambos aprobaron la oposición, pero Laura sacó mejor nota.
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- b) Los dos hijos trabajaban en la misma empresa, pero después crearon sendas empresas.
c) Las dos son correctas.

APPENDIX II. Second phase of the writing competition

1.- (2 points) Rewrite a text.

Rewrite the following text so that the ideas contained can be clearly expressed and the rules of orthography and grammar be respected. You can change words, reorder sentences and use punctuation marks different to those of the text.

Lo que sientes cuando...

¿Que es lo que se siente justo antes de realizar un examen importante cómo la selectividad o uno de evaluación? ¿y después?

Lo que yo siento antes de un examen importante es como un nudo en el examen que me hacen tener ganas de ir al aseo, o que esté tan nervioso que no me pueda estar quieto, morder un boli...

Pero lo que más detesto es el saberte el temario, pero que a la hora de la verdad no te salga nada debido a esos nervios, dudas. O simplemente no haber estudiado nada, o haberlo estudiado todo las tres horas antes del examen. Y después de haber suspendido te hace la charlita de: No has estudiado, que si no te esfuerzas, que no atiendes en clase...Y al final tu siempre acabas igual, cabreado y con la cara de que sientes frustración.

2.- (8 points) Writing composition.

The Ministry of Education has launched a call for suggestions with the objective of adopting measures to improve the writing skills of students at secondary school. Considering your interest in Spanish language, you have decided to write a letter to the Minister with a proposal about aspects that, in your opinion, could be improved. You could mention all the questions that you think it as opportune and appropriate. As examples, you could include some of the following: relevance of reading and writing in the education of citizens, repercussion of language proficiency in professional life and personal development, your own learning experience in the education system, and the future of the language in a technological society.

Extension: Around 500 words.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

CRedit AUTHOR STATEMENT

All authors have contributed equally to all parts of the work.