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Diagnosis of Teachers' Practice in the Teaching of Written Composition

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1. Introduction

When considering the role of teachers in education an estimation and simplification could be made, indicating that their activity depends on factors that revolve around four key areas: students, time, space, and the characteristics of the institution. The enjoyment or discontent of their students, the number of students and the duration of the classes, the space available for physical activity and the support from other teachers and the institution, positively or negatively impact their availability to teach in a general sense and the self-regulation of their practice. We could say that understanding how a teachers' effectiveness influences overcoming the obstacles which are part of the process of education depends on many factors, including, among others, those described above, as well as other aspects, some of which will be studied in this article (Pacheco et al., 2009; Pacheco et al., 2008; Martin & Hodges, 2003).

The knowledge on the effectiveness of teaching specific lessons, such as developing writing skills is somewhat limited for teachers. However, many of these barriers, and the effectiveness of teachers in handling them would seem to be a logical obstruction to achieving other objectives and outcomes in their classroom. In this way, *belief in the self-efficacy or individuals' the set of beliefs about their own ability to achieve certain results* is a variable that needs to be considered in the study of teachers' practices (Bandura, 2005).

Beliefs concerning efficacy influence people's thoughts, both to stimulate and to disparage (optimism or pessimism) several aspects: the courses of action they choose to pursue, the challenges and goals that they set for themselves, their commitment to them, the amount of effort they invest in certain endeavors, the results they expect to achieve for their efforts, the magnitude of their perseverance against obstacles, the resistance to adversity, the levels of stress and pressure experienced when faced with challenging environment, and the achievements that they accomplish. The different areas of activity, performance, strategies, beliefs in the effectiveness for learning and developing their skills as teachers are some of the conditions associated with social cognitive theory. This theory presents some variation regarding the different domains of functioning (Álvarez et al., 2011; Pacheco et al., 2009; Bandura, 2005).

In addition, teachers' perceptions motivation to implement new ideas and teaching methods can generate changes in their conceptions of the teaching-learning process (de Caso &

García, 2006; García & de Caso, 2004, 2006a). Teachers may modify the preconceived ideas they have about any particular subject when faced with the need for a change of approach that is generated in society or in education. Training courses on new approaches can encourage them to talk about new ideas in cooperative groups and to relate theory to practice (Bazarra et al., 2004). In the case of adopting the constructivist approach and implementing its practice in the classroom, for example, by encouraging them to abandon the "spoon feeding" style of teaching in favor of a self-centered learning style and to discourage teacher-centered learning for student-centered learning, or choosing a democratic over an authoritarian style, placing greater emphasis on real and everyday life experiences rather than on approaches based on memorization and discarding traditional methods of evaluation for new methods that allow students to explain what they know or have learnt in different ways (Al-Weher, 2004; Flowers & Monroy, 2008).

With regard to educational research, the majority of teachers believed that the scientific method is present in the curriculum but is not employed in practice, which indicates the true situation for research (Sierra et al., 2009). This knowledge may allow them to suggest improvements in the areas of training in educational research. Some examples would be to research: how children learn, how students are motivated and which materials are necessary to make learning concepts more interesting for the students, the teacher-student interaction, whether real life examples stimulate students to study specific concepts, why students have problems with certain concepts or skills in certain areas, etc. According to the studies reviewed, the implications derived in terms of what teachers think and believe allow us to conclude that these teachers should be better prepared as regards the *what, where and how* of research in education (Al-Weher, 2004; Sierra et al., 2009).

When teachers are asked or inquire about what they think teaching is some of the studies reviewed showed that this provides them with an arena to talk about their beliefs and values in relation to their practices. More specifically, they are provided with ways to think about how they self-regulate, perceive their successes in teaching and also to contemplate ways to help them develop a sense of satisfaction as concerns their practice. The definitions, specifications and consistency of their answers can help obtain and identify the key patterns or categories that characterize their experiences of their actions. Interest, commitment, authentic communication, spontaneity, teacher-student dialogue and moments of learning, define and describe the moments in which the teachers perceive that learning occurs both for themselves and for students. The moments in which learning takes place, are considered to be within the classroom and not in their personal lives (Pacheco et al., 2008; Prieto et al., 2008; Tardy & Snyder, 2004).

When a teacher with a sense of satisfaction is in a teaching situation and feels involved other than merely mechanically, the teaching is productive. The importance of the sense of acting gives them a sense of wisdom about what they do and why they do it (Tardy & Snyder, 2004). According to researchers this suggests that education must provide opportunities for teachers to refine or improve their perceptions or self-regulation in their practice, thus encouraging reflection, exploration and articulation of their work. This also permits a good approach from the theoretical point of view; it can illuminate the understanding of language teaching from the teachers' perspective. When this occurs, the teacher is motivated in the workplace, enjoys what s/he is doing and therefore encourages her/his students. Such progress in learning is important both for students and for teachers because it provides the

sensitivity to achieve effective education that helps students develop as people and, if the ultimate goal of education is to inspire the desire to learn rather being a simple information transfer, this enables teachers to adapt or transform their practice (Pacheco et al., 2006; Prieto et al., 2008; Liew et al., 2008; Tardy & Snyder, 2004).

Regarding the assessment of students' cognitive skills, we found that the misgivings concerning the quality of teacher assessment are not unusual in themselves, as teachers are not necessarily competent assessors. Certainly they do not consider the many ways in which human judgments are subject to unintentional distortions, similar to the halo effect, or the effects of order and the transfer of rules. There is also a chance that the assessment trend becomes "slack" and generates specific complications: the tasks assigned to students which involve students choosing the topics or issues may diminish the quality of assessments for these students. Moreover, according to research, teachers should register, tally their assessments and communicate the results with the help of students, family, colleagues, the school administration and government advisors (Flores & Monroy, 2008; Stokking et al., 2004).

In this way, when inquiring about the quality of assessment practices, the research shows that firstly, there is no unique theoretical model to assess the cognitive abilities of students and, secondly, the requirements for research in skills development and for the goals that teachers set for their students depend on the notion of discipline, the willingness to investigate and report, and the expectations of how the pupils may be able to learn. The contribution of the research studies review opens an avenue for further research concerning the quality of the teachers' practice and the development of their applied skills in teaching across various or in specific disciplines (Flores & Monroy, 2008; Stokking et al., 2004).

As for writing, the review of empirical studies has demonstrated the use of techniques, strategies and instruments to encourage both teachers in the practice of the profession and future teachers to reflect on the self-regulation of their professional practice. In this sense, when investigating writing in the educational process (processes, models, strategies, etc.) noted that these are key tools that teachers must know about to be able to carry out the teaching of writing and help students acquire competence and fluency at a lexical level, gradually becoming skilled in the mechanisms of writing. Since the consolidation and mastery of the spelling system is a lengthy process, requiring a great deal of experience and practice, teachers should teach and encourage their students to employ self-regulation and to control written production. Hence the common goal of teaching strategies is to help students become self-learners, able to learn by themselves (de Caso et al., 2011; Pacheco, 2010; Rosino, 2009).

When we explore the role and importance of the different strategies used in developing teachers' reflective skills through instruments such as questionnaires and interviews, as well as examining the influence of their approaches, their thoughts, their stance and observations on writing (Pacheco et al., 2007; Bain et al., 2002). In this regard, in reviewing the empirical studies at an international level, as there is a lack of information on the Spanish case, we have seen the development, validation and implementation of instruments that measure the role of the teachers' practice in the classroom, and this has permitted the collection of relevant data on the topic, such as the scale of writing orientation, *Writing Orientation Scale*

(Graham et al., 2002), which analyzes and assesses the teachers' beliefs regarding the formal and informal methods for teaching writing. The scale of teacher effectiveness in writing, *Teacher Efficacy Scale for Writing* (Graham et al., 2001) describes personal and general self-efficiency. The scale of teachers' writing practices, *Teacher Writing Practices Scale* (Graham et al., 2000) provides information on the skills involved in writing and the instruction methods used by teachers in the classroom. These questionnaires are useful for assessing both teachers' theoretical orientation in relation to the writing teaching-learning process, as well as the procedures and activities that are generally followed in the teaching of writing, i.e. the type of practices that are developed in class from three different dimensions, (i) the thoughts concerning the effects of this type of instruction, (ii) the correction of writing and (iii) the natural methods of learning.

The data obtained in the review of studies show that the teachers' beliefs exert a strong influence on their practices and the success of their students in the classroom. In the area of language, for example, some theories suggest that these practices are shaped by the theoretical concepts or beliefs that teachers have on reading and writing instruction. If we correlate the efficacy and beliefs in their teaching of writing, the results are consistent with the statement that those teachers with a greater humanistic and a less controlling approach have a high sense of teaching efficacy. The authors of these studies believe that the effectiveness of teachers is an important element for effective teaching of writing. Therefore, knowledge of the theoretical approaches and guidelines on the instruction of teachers is significant in understanding the processes of teaching and learning (Graham, 2006; Troia, 2006; Troia & Maddox, 2004).

These considerations justify the objective of this study, as it seeks to study and evaluate the processes and components of writing from the teachers' point of view (the student's motivation, the role of parents or family in this process, the use of strategies, procedures and instruments used by the teacher in teaching writing) and, also, teachers' theoretical orientation (beliefs, attributions and expectations, their sense of personal effectiveness and self-regulation) about the teaching-learning process of writing. This objective is consistent with the line of research undertaken by the Team of Excellence for Research Intervention Psychological Difficulties in Learning and Development [IPDDA], led by Dr. JN Garcia-Sanchez at the University of León in 1994. The line of research has focused on studying the factors, determinants and processes of writing. Furthermore, research studies have covered the following areas: the evaluation and implementation of analytical tools for writing, their evolution and development, as their involvement and optimization; the improvement of planning in writing for pupils with learning difficulties, and also on improving reflectivity in writing; the development of the motivation to write; the study of assessment-related morphological awareness, in working memory or attention; the improvement of metacognition in writing, self-knowledge and self-improvement in processes for reviewing the written message. In this respect, when we consider writing as a recursive process with significant cognitive demands concerning attention, operational memory and we also consider writing as rewriting, requiring significant planning and the use of effective instructional strategies, the teacher's role and what they do or the approach they take are relevant and essential in this evolution (García & de Caso, 2007; García & Fidalgo, 2008a, 2008b; García & Rodriguez, 2007; Fidalgo et al., 2008; Pacheco et al., 2009; García, 2007).

2. Methodology

2.1 Participants

We evaluated 137 teachers from 30 state and private schools in the province of León, Spain (see Table 1), who teach in Spanish language (the native language) and are responsible for students with and without learning difficulties and/or low achievement, in the last year of infant education and the first three years of primary education.

The selection criterion for this sample was based on that used in previous studies that the research team has developed in these schools regarding different writing-related areas of interest concerned with the role of working memory and attention on students, both typically achieving and those with learning difficulties of different ages as well as those with and without ADHD.

Of the 137 participants, 63.5% were women, 64.23% worked in state schools and 37.77% in private schools. The average age of teachers was 46.92 years, with a maximum of 67 and a minimum of 23 years, indicating maturity and stability in the years of teaching. The average work experience in the field was 23.43 years, indicating a great degree of teaching experience, with 18.84 years in the area of language, which suggests that they are very familiar with the instructional aspects related to the teaching of writing. Only 17 teachers (12.4%) had a teaching or philology degree and the rest have master's degree in various fields, but none in special education.

Educational level	Gender		No answer	Total teachers
	FEMALE	MALE		
The third stage of Infant Education	7	0	1	8 (5.83%)
The first stage of Primary Education	24	6	5	35 (25.54%)
The second stage of Primary Education	27	9	8	44 (32.11%)
The third stage of Primary Education	29	10	11	50 (36.49%)
TOTAL TEACHERS	87 (63.5%)	25 (18.24%)	25 (18.24%)	137

Table 1. Distribution of the sample of teachers by gender and educational stage.

2.2 Instruments

The development of the instrument which is the object of this study began by first reviewing the Academic Search Elite databases, which are available at the Central Library of the University of León. Moreover, it was essential to study and review the Royal Decrees, educational programs and guides which establish the syllabi for both infant and primary education. This allows us to collect information about the evaluation criteria in the area of Spanish language in each of the educational stages studied.

These theoretical bases allowed the researchers to proceed with the collection, translation and modification of the instruments, where appropriate, as well as developing new tools to assess the areas and components that affect the teachers' practice in writing instruction. Once created, they were subjected to validation (reliability, validity, norms, etc.) by the research team.

In this way, we obtained the instrument that evaluates The Role of Teachers Practice in Writing [PRAES], with its corresponding questionnaires: the first focusing on Practice-Opinion [PRAESPO]; the second on the theoretical The Practical approach [PRAESPE]; the third refers to the activity in the classroom, what teachers actually do The Classroom practice [PRAESPA]; and, finally the focus of the last one was on self-efficiency [PRAESAE] (Pacheco et al., 2007).

2.3 Overview of the psychological meanings assessed

The PRAES is shaped both by the identity of the teacher, and by the four sections or questionnaires related to the components and factors which affect practice (for details, see Table 2). The names for each questionnaire, according to the order of presentation within the PRAES protocol are:

PRAESPO, this refers to the teachers' views regarding the role of the teacher in their practice in writing instruction considering the following components and indicators: the personal student (motivation, planning and review), the practice component , the family component and teachers' training.

PRAESPE, which evaluates teachers' the theoretical orientation in relation to formal teaching and the natural learning process of writing. This instrument was adapted from the Writing Orientation Scale The scale (Graham et al., 2001).

PRAESPA, measures the skills, instructional procedures, activities and materials used by teachers in teaching instruction, and the type of text or the actual texts they use. This instrument was partially built and developed by the team and partly adapted and translated from The Teacher Writing Practices Scale Practice-Teaching (PRAESAE) instrument (Graham et al., 2001). It helps to better understand the type of factors that create both personal and general difficulties for teachers in their teaching, thus determining their self beliefs in the process of teaching writing. This instrument differentiates between self-efficacy and general efficacy. This instrument was developed by the research team, from the Teacher Efficacy Scale for Writing (Graham et al., 2001), adapted according to directives and guidelines for constructing self-efficacy scales (Bandura, 2005).

2.4 Procedure

The design and plan of the sample consisted of verifying the time taken to apply this protocol in schools in the province of León, as a pilot in order to eliminate the problems and difficulties and adjust it to the research needs. The sample selected on the basis of the criteria explained above, in terms of the participants were teachers who were responsible for students with and without learning disabilities and/or low achievement in infant and early primary education. The next step was the field work itself. It consisted, firstly, of establishing telephone contact with the head teachers of schools to obtain permission to visit

TEST IN THE STUDY	COMPLETE NAME	COMPONENT	MEASURE
PRAESPO	Practice - opinion	Practical opinion: personal Component of the student:: Motivation Practical opinion: personal Component of the student: Planning and review Practical opinion: Practice component. Practical opinion: Family component Practical opinion: Teacher training.	Positive direction (address): 2,4,5,6,7,9,10,11,13,17,18,19,20 7: In complete disagreement 1: In complete agreement Negative direction (address): 1,3,8,12,14,15,16,21,22 1: In complete disagreement 7: In complete agreement
PRAESPE	Practice - approach	Practice - Formal education approach: Practice - Natural learning approach:	1: Very in disagreement 6: Very in agreement
PRAESPA	Practice - classroom	Practice - Classroom: Skills Practice - Classroom: Materials Practice - Classroom: Procedures Practice - Classroom: Texts Practice - Classroom: Activities	1: Never 2: Several times a year 3: Monthly 4: Weekly 5: Several times a week 6: Every day 7: Several times a day
PRAESAE	Practice - teaching	Personal self-efficacy General self-efficacy	1: No self-efficacy 2 3: Little self-efficacy 4 5: Some self-efficacy 6 7: Moderate self-efficacy 8 9: High self-efficacy

Table 2. Description of the tests in the study of the Role of Teachers Practice

and carry out the protocol with the Spanish language teachers, according to the school years selected in each of these schools. Then, two researchers visited the schools on the agreed

dates and times for teachers to complete the protocols. The collection of the sample was performed directly by the two researchers in order to ensure the reliability and validity of the instruments in the collection of information. Data collection was conducted over a period of five months. It is necessary to highlight the effort exerted both in the use of persuasion and communication techniques to synchronize more effectively with the agents under study and to develop their awareness regarding research, as well as the physical effort and the costs of work.

Once the field work was completed and all the protocols were collected, a total of 137, the codification and computerization of the data in an Excel data matrix were carried out. This matrix was transformed into a SPSS version 13.0 matrix which is available in the ULE for conducting statistical analysis. Then the preparation of tables, graphs and other data used for the presentation of results and to provide empirical evidence was carried out, including the interpretation of the data and the identification and extraction of conclusions. Furthermore, the limitations and prospects for future study were determined.

3. Results

The analysis and findings set out below focus on four specific points, (i) an analysis of the psychometric properties of PRAES, including its internal consistency reliability and validity of both the content and construct, (ii) an analysis of the descriptive data which highlight the averages of the measures and variables, (iii) a linear regression analysis (linear regression models), and (iv) a multivariate analysis of variance (general linear models).

3.1 Psychometric properties of the instrument

Reliability

The reliability is calculated by the internal consistency of scales. When calculating the internal consistency reliability of the four instruments, the Cronbach α is 793, which represents an acceptable reliability. When calculating the reliability for each of the four instruments, the results are variable, being generally adequate except for PRAESPE with a Cronbach α of .581, which is rather low, with regard to the rest of the scales α Cronbach; for the PRAESPO = 861; for the PRAESPA = 788 and, for the PRAESAE = 843.

Validity

To study the validity of the PRAES instrument, two types of analysis were carried out: content or apparent validity and construct validity.

Content validity of PRAES

From the revision of the international theoretical and empirical studies published in recent years, we can reasonably assert that the apparent or content validity of the PRAES is acceptable. In this review, we summarize the findings, the empirical evidence and the theoretical conceptualizations, in the four major components that relate to the role of the teachers' practice in teaching writing.

The first component, the PRAESPO is concerned with the way teachers relate to the multiple components of teaching writing, such as motivation, planning and review, family, and the

teacher's practice and training. This type of instrument, based on obtaining the opinion of teachers, has been used previously, in part, by Graham et al., (2001).

The second component, PRAESPE, refers to the theoretical approach followed by teachers at the schools involved in the study, which can be dichotomized into two major clusters along a continuum. At one extreme is formal education and at the other we find natural learning. It is understood that the different teachers are located along the continuum, with some elements of both approaches. This type of component has been studied previously in several studies by Graham et al., (2001).

Moreover, the component related to the specific practice undertaken by the teacher in the classroom in the teaching of writing, PRAESPA has to do with elements that include the deployment of skills, the use of specific procedures, the performance of the various activities, the use the appropriate materials or the use of diverse textual genres. Some of these aspects have been measured and studied by Graham et al., (2001).

Finally, we look at the self-perception component of efficacy which the teacher holds regarding their performance as a writing instructor/teacher, the PRAESAE. This component refers to the self-perception of the teacher, is related by Bandura (2005), and we followed his guidelines in the construction of that component.

Construct validity of PRAES

We obtained the estimate of the construct validity using a factor analysis of the principal components with a normalized varimax rotation.

The analysis allowed the extraction of five factors or principal components that only partially conform to the structure of the test following the validity of content which was developed from a review of international theoretical and empirical studies. In general, the factors extracted from the analysis did not coincide exactly with the four components of PRAES, although we can say that they were largely close, indicating at least partially an acceptable construct validity.

Firstly, we obtained a factor which has been labeled as general because it includes the saturation of the factorial weights of the total number of PRAES scales. The general factor explains 33.20% of the total variance predicted and is saturated by the weight factor for the PRAESPO, the subtotal of motivation (-.738) and the family subtotal (-.882), plus the PRAESPA with the texts subtotal (.765) and the activity subtotal (.813), as well as the personal self-efficacy subtotal (.569) and the general self efficacy subtotal (.479), although in the latter case, as can be seen, the totals are of a lesser magnitude.

Secondly, we obtained a factor which can be called theoretical approach which includes self-saturation of the factor weights of the total number of scales in the PRAESAE. This factor explains 22.49% of the total variance and is saturated by the factor weights corresponding to the PRAESPE, the formal education subtotal (.929) and the natural learning subtotal (-.582) with the PA PRAES with its skills sub-totals (.905) and the materials subtotals (.446), plus the personal self-efficacy totals (.657) and general self-efficacy totals (.580). These lower factorial weights contribute less to this factor's configuration. Thirdly, we obtained a factor we have called opinion, since it includes the saturation factor of the total weights of the various PRAESPO scales. This factor explains

16.22% of total variance and is saturated by the factor weights for the PRAESPO, the practice subtotal (.875) and the teacher training subtotal (.896), plus the PRAESPE natural learning subtotal (.640).

A further factor, called activities was obtained which includes the saturation factor of the total weights of the various PRAESPA scales. This factor explains 8.80% of total variance and is saturated by the factor weights corresponding to the PRAESPA, the procedures subtotal (.978) and the materials subtotal (.649), plus the PRAESPO motivation subtotal (.442). The latter with less weight and therefore make a smaller-scale contribution this factor. In fifth place, there is the review-planning factor, so called because it includes saturation of the weights of the total factors in one of the PRAESPO scales. This factor explains 7.23% of total variance and is saturated by the factor weights of the PRAESPO, the planning and review subtotal (.939), plus the PRAESAE general self-efficacy subtotal (-.408).

Descriptive data

In this section we give an overview of the descriptive results. We present the averages of the measures and variables in Table 3. This table contains data on the number of participants, the minimum and maximum scores obtained for each variable and the respective averages and standard deviations, as well as the highest scores for each of the variables.

As shown in Table 3 and Figure 1, the data generally showed a positive result for each of the variables included in the instruments. For example, in the motivation sub-component of PRAESPO the average score was 29.65, which exceeded the median potential in this variable, and a maximum score of 35 as obtained. Furthermore, the average years of teaching experience was 23.43, which indicates great teaching experience, with 18.84 of those years teaching Spanish language, which suggests the teachers were highly knowledgeable regarding instructional aspects, which is probably related to the teaching of writing.

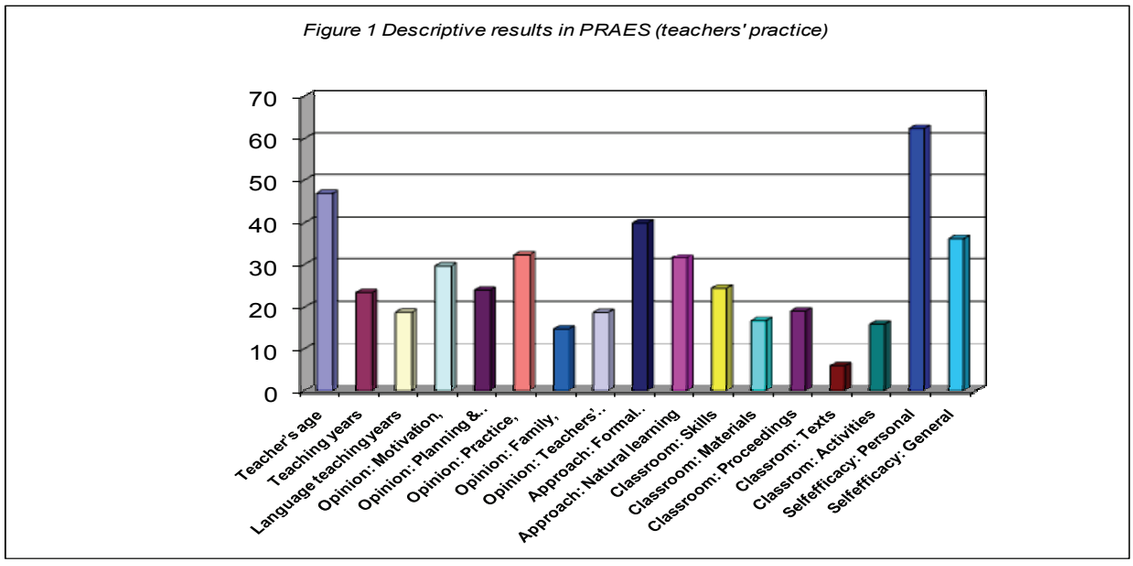

Fig. 1. Descriptive results in PRAES (teachers´ practice)

VARIABLES	COMPONENTS	N	Min.	Max.	Average	Standard deviation	Maximum possible score
AGE OF THE TEACHER		98	23	67	46.92	11.20	
YEARS OF TEACHING		111	1	43	23.43	11.75	
SCHOOL YEAR TAUGHT		137	-1	6	3.4	1.96	
YEARS TEACHING SPANISH LANGUAGE		113	1	43	18.84	12.77	
OPINION	Opinion, motivation subcomponent.	132	12	35	29.65	3.96	35
	Opinion, planning and review subcomponent.	136	4	28	24	3.37	28
	Opinion, practice subcomponent.	135	10	41	32.54	4.52	42
	Opinion, family subcomponent.	136	4	21	14.91	2.78	21
	Opinion, teacher training subcomponent.	129	6	26	18.76	3.30	28
APPROACH	Natural learning approach subcomponent.	124	13	54	39.99	7.76	54
	Natural learning approach subcomponent.	124	19	48	31.67	6.57	54
CLASSROOM	Classroom, skills subcomponent.	125	14	33	24.46	4.12	35
	Classroom, materials subcomponent.	94	7	30	16.89	4.99	42
	Classroom, procedure subcomponent.	132	9	28	19.12	4.08	28
	Classroom, texts subcomponent.	109	2	12	6.02	2.12	77
	Classroom, activities subcomponent.	120	6	28	16.03	5.18	28
SELF-EFFICACY	Personal self-efficacy subcomponent.	119	35	90	62.37	9.82	90
	General self-efficacy subcomponent.	115	24	50	36.34	5.57	54

Table 3. Description of the statistics of the general variables and instruments

Multiple linear regression analysis

The aim is to predict the dependent variable (predicted variable) from the rest of the predictor variables. The total of the four scales are taken as predictors and each of the predicted variables is taken in turn, including the identification of other variables, such as the way in which the teacher teaches. When the educational year taught is taken as a dependent variable or as a variable predicted from the PRAES set of measures and their subscales in the hierarchical multiple regression analysis model with a single statistically significant regression coefficient (adjusted $R^2 = .313$) is obtained, step by step. One single variable was included in the model, from the PRAESPA – the procedure sub-component [$\beta = .613$, t=-2452, $p = .034$]. The rest of the variables were excluded from the model, as they did not achieve statistical significance. Moreover, when attempting to predict the teacher's formal theoretical approach, an adjusted R^2 of .616 was obtained, which is very high although it only generates one model or regression equation with the predictor variable PRAESPA in the skills subcomponent [$\beta = 807$ t = 4315, $p = .002$]. There were no other significant variables, which meant they were consequently excluded from the model. Similarly, the theoretical prediction of natural teaching can be realized with two regression equations. The first model gives an adjusted R^2 of .331, with a significant variable found in personal self-efficacy [$\beta = -.626$, t=-2540, $p = .029$], and in the second model, an adjusted R^2. 556 was obtained, the texts subcomponent being significant in addition to the personal self-efficacy subcomponent of the PRAESPA [$\beta = .774$, t= 2465, $p = .036$]. As a result, we excluded the remaining variables in the step by step multiple regression analysis. In summary, regression analysis provides statistically significant data for predicting each of the PRAES variables from the other variables, which is very interesting as regards its predictive validity. Furthermore, it indicates the great predictive potential of PRAES, as it allows us to obtain knowledge about variables that are not always of the same in nature as the rest. For example, the PRAES includes an opinion subcomponent concerning self-efficacy another that outlines the type of behaviors or activities performed by teachers in the classroom and a third concerning the theoretical approach followed by teachers in writing instruction. This different character, which provides such high regression coefficients, is a good indicator, which supports the integrity of the PRAES.

Multivariate analysis of variance (general linear models)

It is important to highlight that the analysis to distinguish the role or influence of the different grouping variables (teachers' gender, years of teaching experience, education centre, and the school year taught), does show statistical significance in the multivariate contrasts. Each of the PRAES variables used as an inter-subject factor were not statistically significant in the multivariate contrasts, except in the case of the teacher's natural theoretical approach. This variable, when grouped into three clusters, with a multivariate variance contrast is statistically significant and also shows a large effect size [$\lambda = 001$ F (2.18) =46,465, $p = .021$, $n^2 = 998$]. This is similar to the personal self-efficacy variable when it is grouped into three clusters and shows a large effect size [$\lambda = 001$, F (1, 10) = 1169.051, $p = .023$, $n^2 = 1$]. The tests of the inter-subject effects of personal self-efficacy and natural theoretical approach indicate there are some significant variables (see Table 4).

As regards the natural theoretical teaching approach, the evidence of the inter-subject effects indicate statistical significance for variables of the formal theoretical approach ($p = .053$, n^2

= .480), for the PRAESPA and its skills subcomponent (p = .024, n = ² 564). The same natural theoretical approach without clusters, was as expected (p = .001, n ² = .938), just as the personal self-efficacy variable (p = .024, n ² = .565), as shown in Figure 2.

SIGNIFICANT VARIABLES		λ	F(2,18)	p	η²
		0.001	46.465	0.021	0.998
	Theoretical formal approach			0.053	0.480
Theoretical natural approach	PRAESPA: Skills Subcomponent			0.024	0.564
	Theoretical natural approach			0.001	0.938
	Personal self-efficacy			0.024	0.565
		Λ	F (1.10)	p	η²
		0.001	1169.051	0.023	1
	PRAESPO: Family Subcomponent			0.038	0.365
Personal self-efficacy	PRAESPA: Materials Subcomponent			0.092	0.258
	PRAESPA: Texts Subcomponent			0.001	0.779
	Personal self-efficacy			0.002	0.626

Table 4. Results of the multivariate variance analysis of the statistically significant variables of the PRAES in three conglomerates

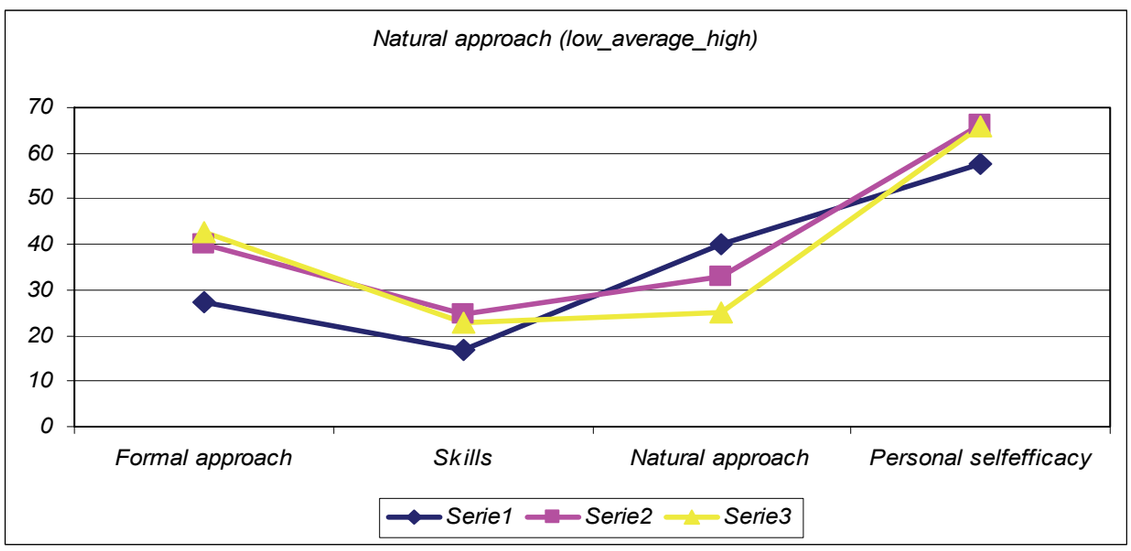

Fig. 2. Natural approach (low_average_high)

The tests concerning the post hoc contrasts, however, generally do show significant differences between the clusters of this variable. In terms of personal self-efficacy, the test for the inter-subject effects indicates statistical significance for PRAESPO variables, with the

family subcomponent (p = .038, n ² = .365). For the PRAESPA materials subcomponent (p = .092, n = ². 258), although in this case, the texts subcomponent also comes close to statistical significance (p = .001, n ² = .779), and as does personal self-efficacy (p = .002, n^2=.626). See Figure 3.

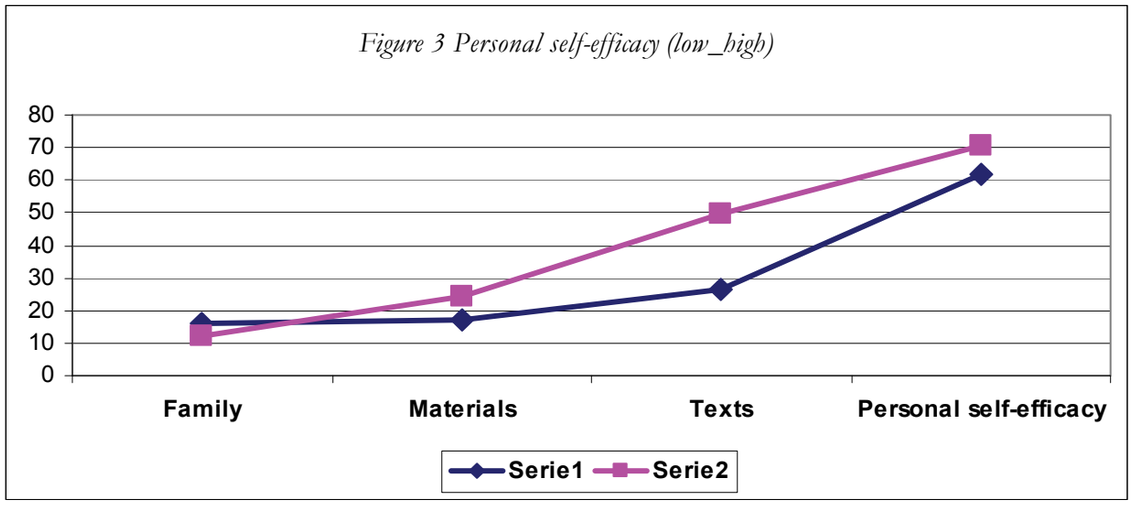

Fig. 3. Personal self-efficacy (low_high)

4. Discussion and conclusions

The aim of this study was to consider the type of practice carried out by language teachers in the area of teaching writing. Specifically, we wanted to look at the components that influence their practice and the theoretical tendencies that teachers hold about the teaching-learning process of writing, as well as their beliefs about their ability or their self-efficacy. Moreover, the study aimed to consider their views on the factors that affect the self-regulation of the teachers' practice in teaching writing.

Given this objective, it is expected that the type of practices that teachers develop in class are determined by and due to certain factors such as: the theoretical concepts they hold about how students learn, their thoughts regarding the effects of this type of instruction, the correction of writing and the different teaching methods (formal, natural, etc.). According to the results obtained and, in general, we can assert that the goal have been met because the project has investigated the role of practice, implemented appropriate tools, as well as used a representative sample of a range of levels of education. However, the hypothesis was only partially confirmed. We can say that the PRAES instrument adequately met the requirements in terms of reliability and validity, allowing for the extraction of data relevant to the study regarding the role of practice. But, the hypothesis was not fulfilled as regards the role of the differential data obtained from teachers, depending on the educational level of students, as no statistically significant differences were obtained, indicating flexibility in the teachers opinion, their theoretical approach, what they say they do or believe about their ability to teach writing, according to the characteristics of students (in this case, the student's progress was taken to be reflected by the year in which they were enrolled).

The fact that the teachers state that they do the same, believe the same, maintain the same theoretical framework for teaching writing, with the same feelings of ability, regardless of the students' level may have several causes. It may be simply an observation of what is actually expected, which contradicts our hypothesis, and that teachers apply these patterns without considering the characteristics of students. This may be because their training is not specific or because practice in writing instruction is scarce, except in the initial levels, where the mechanical aspects are predominant, which all indicates a lack of self-regulation their practice. But it is possible that, by using such general measures rather than more direct measures of the teachers' actions, which consequently reflects the teachers' social desirability, including their own ideology, beliefs and theories, their views, all of which were very generic.

If the actual teaching of writing to different levels was addressed it may produce might greater differences as it is not possible to teach students of different educational levels in the same way. In this sense, the PRAES would measure the beliefs and wishes more generally than the role of the actual practice. This instrument, which was applied at the margins of the teachers' direct activity, thus reflects components of "trait" rather than "state". What would have happened if teachers had been directly observed in the classroom in their writing instruction with their students from different educational levels? It is expected that they would have demonstrated different strategies, but this possibility must be explored in another study. As for the sample, as well as being representative, relevant and of a broad-spectrum (as compared with the samples from other empirical studies), allows for the description of the kind of practice carried out by these teachers, and the gaining of valuable data, although these are, as previously indicated, partly limited.

Concerning the instrument applied, given the review of theoretical and empirical studies published in recent years, one can reasonably assert that the PRAES presents adequate validity and acceptable reliability. However, the questionnaire is the instrument most used in research conducted in this area.

Furthermore, we can ensure that the construction of PRAES demonstrated the selective and representative collection of elements that refer to the opinion or approach components, on the specific behavior carried out by the teachers in the classroom in the teaching of writing composition and the self-efficacy component, as indicated above. It should be emphasized that no published study is known to have researched the four components together. This justifies and affords relevance to this research.

Regarding the statistical analysis and as a contribution to this research study, five factors or components were obtained that, although only partially conform to the structure of the test, do have some overlap with the four components of the PRAES. Firstly, there is an overlap between the general factor, in which the teachers' both personal and general self-efficacy interact with motivation, the family and the classroom activities in the teaching of writing. Secondly, is the factor of self-efficacy and theoretical approach, since the following are interrelated, the natural and formal theoretical approach of the teacher interacts, the skills they develop and the materials used in teaching writing, identifying their personal and general self-efficacy. In addition, the third factor, opinion, interrelates the nature of the theoretical approach to teacher training and the practice developed in the teaching of

writing. Similarly, the fourth factorial component of activities in which motivation interacts with the procedures and a material used in the teaching of writing also overlaps with the above. And finally, the planning and review factor, which relates general to self-efficacy with planning and revision practices followed by the teacher in the teaching of writing.

In summary, we can say that these factors allow us to infer the nature of the practice developed by teachers in the area of language. No remarkable facts concerning significant differences in relation to the theoretical concept and strategies applied in the teaching of writing at different stages of infant and primary education were discovered and, therefore, we find low levels of self-regulation of the teachers' practice.

In addition, the curriculum guidelines as described by the royal decrees do not seem to affect this practice, since, according to the results obtained, all teachers appear to act uniformly in terms of the theoretical concepts that guide them. This also indicates that there is no difference in the treatment of learning and teaching of writing in students with and without learning difficulties and/or low performance. When compared with other empirical studies that address the same area we discovered some important contributions of this research study. First, it is the first study of its kind in Spain. Secondly, it is the first to address the four components combined into a single instrument (Opinion, Approach, Classroom behaviors and Self-Efficacy). The other research studies in this field have studied only one or two aspects. Moreover, the sample or study population is fairly representative, in terms of breadth and of educational levels covered because, as noted, the empirical studies reviewed have either poor samples or are focused on the first levels of education. It is important to note the limitations of the study. Among these, we include the lack of data about the performance of these teachers' students in order to establish meaningful relationships between what the teacher teaches and what/how children learn. This issue is to be addressed in a second empirical study. Furthermore, the study was based on questionnaires, and these instruments have certain limitations. It is well known that from the psychological point of view, the acquiescence effect is produced, i.e., the tendency to respond positively to everything that is asked. Although this variable was controlled by introducing different directions in the elements of the instrument it should be monitored more effectively.

Another limitation, also mentioned by other authors, is the lack of direct observation of the teachers' behavior in the classroom to actually verify what they say they do. Overcoming this limitation will require the implementation of further studies. It would be pertinent to verify whether there are differences in teaching methods from other areas. This would be of great interest to detect if they apply the same strategies, both with and without students with learning difficulties, as in the different educational levels.

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Learning disability is a classification that includes several disorders in which a person has difficulty learning in a typical manner. Depending on the type and severity of the disability, interventions may be used to help the individual learn strategies that will foster future success. Some interventions can be quite simplistic, while others are intricate and complex. This book deserves a wide audience; it will be beneficial not only for teachers and parents struggling with attachment or behavior issues, but it will also benefit health care professionals and therapists working directly with special needs such as sensory integration dysfunction.

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