

Peer tutoring to improve writing competence in primary education

La tutoría entre iguales para la mejora de la competencia escrita en educación primaria

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Abstract:

Knowing how to write is essential for academic success and lifelong learning. This study presents and evaluates an innovative peer tutoring programme (“Reading and writing in pairs”) for improving the writing skills of primary school students. A pre-test-post-test design was used to assess improvements in the writing skills of 75 students from years five and six of primary education, and a descriptive design was used to analyse teachers’ and students’ perceptions of peer tutoring. The results showed significant improvements in all dimensions of writing skills apart from grammar. According to the participants’ evaluations, these improvements can be attributed to the highly structured organisation of the programme’s writing activity and effective interaction between tutor and tutee. Students and teachers alike reported an increase in motivation towards writing. However, two key challenges were identified for effective peer-tutoring practice: initial training for the role of tutor, and support for text revision and preparation of improvements activities by the tutor. In conclusion, the study’s results suggest that sharing the teaching role with students through peer tutoring can be an effective way to motivate and improve writing skills in primary education.

Keywords: writing, writing instruction, written competence, collaborative writing, peer tutoring, primary education.

Resumen:

Saber escribir es clave para el éxito académico y el aprendizaje a lo largo de la vida. Este estudio presenta y evalúa un programa innovador de tutoría entre iguales («Leemos y escribimos en pareja») para la mejora de la competencia escrita de los estudiantes de educación

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primaria. Se adoptó un diseño pretest-posttest para evaluar las mejoras en la competencia escrita de 75 estudiantes de quinto y sexto de educación primaria y un diseño descriptivo para analizar las percepciones de docentes y estudiantes sobre la tutoría entre iguales. Los resultados muestran mejoras significativas en todas las dimensiones de la competencia escrita excepto en gramática. Según las valoraciones de los participantes, estas mejoras pueden atribuirse a la organización altamente estructurada de la actividad de escritura que ofrece el programa y a la interacción efectiva entre tutor y tutorado. Tanto estudiantes como docentes destacan un aumento en la motivación hacia la escritura. Sin embargo, para la práctica efectiva de la tutoría entre iguales, se identifican dos retos clave: la formación inicial del rol de tutor y los apoyos para la revisión del texto y la preparación de actividades de mejora por parte del estudiante-tutor. En conclusión, los resultados del estudio sugieren que compartir la capacidad de enseñanza con los estudiantes mediante la tutoría entre iguales puede convertirse en una vía efectiva para la motivación y la mejora de la competencia escrita en la educación primaria.

Palabras clave: escritura, enseñanza de la escritura, competencia escrita, escritura colaborativa, tutoría entre iguales, educación primaria.

1. Introduction

Primary school students' writing competence and its teaching are of concern internationally (Bañales et al., 2020; De Abreu et al., 2023; Graham et al., 2014; Graham et al., 2023). In the case of Catalonia, the report on the basic competences assessment tests (Consell Superior d'Avaluació del Sistema Educatiu, 2023), which assessed students in year six of primary education, found that written expression in Catalan is the linguistic competence with the worst results: 18% of students have a low level and 24.6% a medium-low level. These data are very concerning, given that writing is a key skill for educational success and for lifelong learning (UNESCO, 2017).

Writing is an especially complex task, as it involves making decisions about what to write, who to write for, and how to do it (Castelló et al., 2007; Solé, 2004). It is a social and situated practice that requires the production of texts according to discourse genres and specific communicative situations (Hyland, 2015; Graham, 2018). From a cognitive and emotional perspective, writing requires the simultaneous activation of multiple types of knowledge: command of the topic; use of writing strategies (planning, textualisation, and revision); knowledge of the linguistic code; comprehension of the discourse genre and communicational situation; and the motivation and identity of the writer (Castelló et al., 2007; Graham, 2018). Accordingly, written competence not only involves command of grammar and spelling rules, but also the ability to structure ideas logically, use argumentative strategies, and adapt the register and style of the text to the communicative purpose and the audience. As a result of this intrinsic complexity, new writers can find the process of writing overwhelming (De Smedt & Van Keer, 2018; Graham et al., 2018; Graham et al., 2023).

In primary education, especially at its higher levels, it is essential to put in place interventions that help students manage the complexity of the process of writing. To do so, pedagogical practices that foster reflection on one's own writing process and incorporate strategies for feedback between students are key, thus enabling the development of writing as a tool for building thinking and effective communication (Álvarez-Angulo, 2010; Álvarez-Angulo & García-Parejo, 2011). So, peer learning emerges as a valuable tool for helping students to manage complex processes, fostering a collaborative setting that facilitates the acquisition of writing strategies (Corcelles-Seuba & Castelló, 2015).

1.1. Peer learning for teaching writing

Teaching writing, from a constructivist sociocultural perspective (Vanderburg, 2006), highlights the importance of social interaction and, specifically, peer learning. Peer learning is based on acquisition of knowledge and skills by means of mutual help between people of the same status, for example students (Topping, 2005).

Meta-analyses of research show that collaborative writing (with previous training) has a positive effect on the quality of writing, with an effect size of 0.74 in primary and secondary school students (Graham & Harris, 2018). Research recommends combining collaborative writing practices with explicit teaching of strategies to boost their effectiveness (De Smedt et al., 2020; De Smedt & Van Keer, 2014, 2019).

Despite the large positive effect of collaborative writing interventions, it should be noted that this term covers various models and methods (Yarrow & Topping, 2001). In most research, help between peers is produced for the purpose of revising a text (e. g., Corcelles-Seuba et al., 2017; Topping et al., 2012) or at the moment of planning (Grünke et al., 2017). In some interventions, the collaboration is done throughout the whole of the writing process, principally through cooperative learning (Fitzgerald & Palincsar, 2017; Corcelles-Seuba & Castelló, 2015), but few interventions use peer tutoring (Christianakis, 2010; Duran & Monereo, 2008; Yarrow & Topping, 2001). The intervention set out in the present study centres on this last method.

1.2. Peer tutoring for teaching writing

Peer tutoring is a peer-learning method in which people of the same status (in this case students) share a common objective and help one another learn through an asymmetrical relationship, with one person adopting the role of tutor and the other that of tutee (Topping et al., 2016). These roles can be fixed or reciprocal when they are swapped. In the case of writing, the system called paired writing (Nixon & Topping, 2001; Sutherland & Topping, 1999; Topping et al., 2000; Yarrow & Topping, 2001) is a method that combines the teaching of metacognitive strategies (for learning writing processes) with interaction between students in the form of peer tutoring. Based on a diagram, the interaction between tutor and tutee is structured in six phases (generating ideas, composition, reading, editing, producing an improved version, and assessment) to learn the cognitive and metacognitive strategies relating to the process of writing. In each stage of the process, there is a clear division of tasks for each role with the aim of promoting scaffolding between peers, the motivation to write, and reducing anxiety about writing (Nixon & Topping, 2001; Sutherland & Topping, 1999; Topping, 1998; Topping et al., 2000; Yarrow & Topping, 2001; Topping, 2005). Studies that analyse tutor-tutee interaction show it taking forms that range from collaboration (asking for help or joint construction of knowledge) to more tutorial forms (offering help, using prompts, or guiding teaching and learning processes) (Duran, 2010; Duran & Monereo, 2005). The study by Yarrow and Topping (2001) shows that students mainly follow the roles of the guide and internalise the processes of writing as the programme progresses. Research shows evidence for the effectiveness of this method, with positive effects on the quality of writing and on attitudes towards writing in both formats (fixed and reciprocal) compared with control groups that wrote texts individually (Nixon & Topping, 2001; Sutherland & Topping, 1999; Yarrow & Topping, 2001). The “Reading and writing in pairs” programme (Duran et al., 2018), which is the focus of this study, emerges based on Paired Writing, but incorporating reading processes into the activity of writing and expanding the role of the tutor in the revision of the writing. This programme offers a series of materials that teachers adapt to implement in their classes. Unlike in many writing interventions, which are usually done exclusively by researchers, the engagement of the teachers in the contextualisation of the programme favours its sustainability (Finlayson & McCrudden, 2020).

1.3. The “Reading and writing in pairs” programme

The “Reading and writing in pairs” programme proposes a structured guide with a sequence of tasks for each tutor-tutee pair, with the aim of facilitating the processes of reading comprehension and writing. Research indicates that reading and writing skills are strongly

related (Philippakos & Graham, 2023; Shanahan, 2019). Accordingly, the programme includes a short text in each activity to be read before moving on to writing, with the dual objective of contextualising the topic and analysing the genre of the text. Each reading and writing activity is structured around an initial session, an intermediate session, and a final session (Table 1 on the structure of the sessions).

TABLE 1. Structure of the “Reading and writing in pairs” sessions.

Initial session: reading and first draft (1 h)	
Tutor role	Tutee role
READING	
Ask about prior knowledge Read aloud acting as a model Read together Pause-prompt-praise (PPP) Reading comprehension questions Listen to the tutee	Answer questions about prior knowledge Listen to the tutor Read together Read aloud Answer reading comprehension questions Read aloud expressively
WRITING	
PLANNING	
Ask about the introduction, the conflict, the conclusion, and the title of the micro story Write down ideas following the structure of the genre Encourage	Suggest ideas
FIRST DRAFT	
Find errors and offer help following the quality markers template (QMT) for the text (genre, coherence, cohesion, vocabulary, grammar, and spelling) Encourage	Write the first draft
EXPRESSIVE READING	
Active listening Read aloud	Read aloud Active listening

REVISION	
Ask questions following QMT	Answer
Intermediate session: revision and design of two activities (30 min)	
Individually assess the draft using the QMT Prepare two improvement activities for the first two indicators from the list that are marked as not having been achieved.	-
Final session: final revision (1 h)	
EXPRESSIVE READING	
Active listening	Read aloud
REVISION BASED ON THE IMPROVEMENT ACTIVITIES	
Explain the limitations of the text through the QMT and teach your tutee through the two activities to improve the text	Do the improvement activities prepared by your tutor
EXPRESSIVE READING	
Read aloud Listen and revise using the QMT	Listen and revise using the QMT Read aloud

1.4. Initial session: reading and first draft

The process of reading in each pair is organised in three interactive steps. Firstly, the tutors question the tutees before the reading to activate their prior knowledge and formulate hypotheses. Secondly, a short meaningful text (250–500 words) is read aloud (first the tutor reads it as a model, then the tutor and tutee read it together, and finally the tutee reads it with the supervision of the tutor through the pause–prompt–praise technique) (Wheldall & Colmar, 1990). Lastly, the student-tutor directs the questions to comprehend the reading and the discourse genre of the text.

After reading, the process of writing the first draft begins. The tutor and tutee cooperatively write a text about what they have just read. The tutor helps the tutee plan the text based on questions to generate ideas, and the tutee writes the first draft with the help of the tutor and following the steps indicated (Table 1 on the structure of the sessions).

1.5. Intermediate session: revision by the tutor and designing activities

The “Reading and writing in pairs” programme requires the student-tutors to revise the first draft individually, based on the previously negotiated QMT (Appendix 1). They then prepare two activities for their tutees to improve the text (Corcelles-Seuba et al., 2023). The programme’s aim is for the tutor to learn by acting as a teacher who proposes teaching activities for the

student or tutee. Possible improvement activities include thinking about different alternatives for a word, specific sentence, or title; using the pause-prompt-praise technique to correct errors (Wheldall & Colmar, 1990); or using writing resources (for example, a thesaurus).

1.6. Final session: final revision

In the final session, the student-tutors meet with their tutees again, and after rereading the draft and commenting on its positive aspects and areas for improvement, they help them do the two activities for improving the text.

Until now, the “Reading and writing in pairs” programme has proven to be effective in improving the reading comprehension and self-concept in both roles (Flores & Duran, 2013, 2016). However, evidence for its effectiveness in improving written competence has not been gathered. The efficacy of peer tutoring has been amply demonstrated (Bowman-Perrott et al., 2013; Cohen et al., 1982; Leung, 2015) as both the tutor and the tutee have learning opportunities; the tutee learns with the tailored help of the partner, and the tutor learns by teaching (Duran, 2016, 2017). Nonetheless, few interventions have used this method to teach writing (Christianakis, 2010; Duran & Monereo, 2008; Yarrow & Topping, 2001) and have also incorporated the students’ own perspective on their role as tutor or tutee, as well as that of the teachers who participate in and manage the intervention. In view of this gap in research, the present study has two objectives:

1. To analyse improvements in students’ written competence after participation in the “Reading and writing in pairs” programme; specifically, in knowledge of genre, coherence, cohesion, vocabulary, grammar, and spelling.
2. To discover students’ and teachers’ perceptions of the “Reading and writing in pairs” programme to identify positive aspects and areas for improvement.

2. Method

2.1. Contextualisation of the “Reading and writing in pairs” programme

The “Reading and writing in pairs” programme, promoted by the “Research group on peer learning” (GRAI in its initials in Catalan), comprises reading and writing in pairs from six activity sheets (six weeks of intervention), with the result of four micro stories written through peer tutoring. The micro story genre is used (Corcelles-Seuba et al., 2023) because it is an excellent discourse genre for teaching writing thanks to its short and concise character, which means students can produce writing and revise its quality in a small number of sessions.

Before the start of the programme, the teachers do a one-hour preliminary training session with the students to define the roles of tutor and tutee. After the initial training, the programme starts with explicit training on the genre of micro story in the first and second activity sheets, with examples of micro stories and comprehension questions aimed at familiarising students with this discourse genre. These activities serve to negotiate the guidelines for revising the text (QMT, Appendix 1). The reading and writing in pairs activity then starts with the remaining four activity sheets. The programme has a total duration of 15 hours of intervention.

2.2. Design

The research uses a pre-test-post-test design to assess improvements in students’ written competence and a descriptive design to analyse teachers’ and students’ perceptions of the programme.

2.3. Participants

Four teachers from four schools in Catalonia and 75 students aged between 10 and 12 years, who were in years five and six of primary education, took part in the research. The teachers

participated in the standard training for the “Reading and writing in pairs” programme, certified by the Department of Education of the Government of Catalonia with 60 hours. This training is intended to guide schools in how to implement and tailor this programme in class. It consists of three in-person training sessions (one per term), online follow-up, and autonomous and supervised work activities, with interchange of experience between schools. All of the schools were supervised by the research team to ensure the correct implementation and adaptation of the programme through the training sessions and the virtual follow-up. In the standard training, all of the schools implement the reading component (“Reading in pairs”) and they have the option to implement the writing part as well (“Reading and writing in pairs”). The four schools that chose to implement the writing in pairs component were included in this study. The teachers grouped the students into homogeneous pairs (with similar levels of reading comprehension and written expression) as the students swapped the roles of tutor and tutee after every two activity sheets. All of the participants and their legal guardians were informed of the research objectives and agreed to participate. The teachers assigned a code to each participant to avoid participants being directly identified with the responses given, fully guaranteeing the confidentiality of the data before they were sent to the researchers.

2.4. Data collection and analysis tools

Firstly, to assess improvements in their written competence, students wrote an individual micro story before and after the intervention. To assess the micro stories, the PECES (spontaneous written composition assessment test) instrument was adapted. This assesses writing in the narrative genre in primary education (Calaforra-Faubel, 2017). The adapted instrument comprises 20 binary items (yes/no) grouped in 5 dimensions: the micro story genre (7 items), coherence (3), vocabulary (2), grammar (3), and spelling (2). The sum of the items assessed positively gives a maximum total score of 20 points. The instrument was validated by consensus by two experts in writing and three primary school teachers. This instrument was used both for revising the drafts by the students and for the researchers to assess the texts (Appendix 1). The inter-rater test, carried out by the first and third author, gave 95% in this evaluation, with 30% of the sample. The remaining texts were distributed between the two researchers and were analysed independently. In addition, the words per spelling mistake index was calculated, by dividing the total number of words in the text by the number of mistakes, to give a quantitative marker of orthographic precision (Fontich, 2024). This method makes it possible to assess the frequency of errors in the writing objectively, giving a ratio that shows the number of words per spelling mistake, thus enabling comparison between different-length texts.

Once the scores were obtained from the initial and final texts, the Shapiro–Wilk test was applied to calculate the normality of the sample. The results suggested a deviation from normality ($p < .001$) in all dimensions of the guidelines, other than the *micro story genre* dimension and the final mark. Therefore, the non-parametric Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used to calculate the differences between the pre-test and the post-test in the dimensions of *coherence*, *cohesion*, *vocabulary*, *grammar*, *spelling*, and *spelling index*. For the *micro story genre* dimension and the final mark, Student’s parametric *t* test was applied. The effect size was reported: rank biserial correlation in the case of the Wilcoxon signed-rank test, and Cohen’s *d* in the case of Student’s *t* test. All of the statistical analyses were done using JASP 0.16.4.0.

Secondly, to evaluate the process of writing in pairs and satisfaction with the programme, a questionnaire was administered to the students at the end of the intervention. A total of 45 responses were obtained from the 75 participants. The questionnaire comprised 9 closed questions answered on a 4-point Likert-type scale and 3 open questions. The closed-response questions asked students to evaluate how much they had enjoyed writing with a partner (question 1) and how much they thought the programme had helped them improve their written competence, considering improvements in planning (2), revision (3), and writing micro stories (4), as well as in expressing their ideas in writing (5), in the use of punctuation marks (6) and connectives (7), and in improving spelling (8) and vocabulary (9). Two of the three

open questions referred to the aspects of the programme that they liked the most (10) and the least (11). The last question (12) asked them to complete the phrase “Writing is...” to reflect their perception of writing.

Thirdly, a final questionnaire was administered to the four participating teachers to evaluate their view of the programme. This comprised 6 open-ended questions centred on the positive aspects of the programme and on improving its three stages: the first session of planning and preparation of the draft, the tutor’s autonomous work to revise the text and prepare the improvement activities, and the last session, in which the improvement activities proposed by the student-tutors were done.

Descriptive statistics were calculated based on the answers to the closed questions from the questionnaires. In the case of the open questions, content analysis was used (Prasad, 2008). The categories formed from the participants’ quotes were reviewed by a second rater until 100% agreement was reached.

3. Results

3.1. Improvements in written competence

The descriptive statistics suggest that there are improvements in the different dimensions between the pre-test and post-test (Table 2 on pre-test–post-test comparison). These improvements are significant in the dimensions of *coherence*, *cohesion*, *vocabulary*, *spelling* and *spelling index*, and in the overall score, with a large effect size ($0.53 \leq ES \leq 0.73$); and in the dimension of suitability of the micro story discourse genre with a small effect size ($ES = 0.22$). There are no significant differences in the grammar dimension.

TABLE 2. Pre-test-post-test comparison of written competence.

Dimension	Maximum score	Pre-test <i>M (SD)</i>	Post-test <i>M (SD)</i>	Test	Result	<i>p</i>	ES
Discourse genre	7	2.55 (1.66)	2.99 (1.67)	Student	-1.88	.032	0.22
Coherence	3	1.84 (1.04)	2.23 (0.97)	Wilcoxon	119	.002	0.58
Cohesion	3	1.49 (1.14)	1.99 (1.02)	Wilcoxon	213	< .001	0.57
Vocabulary	2	1.43 (0.72)	1.69 (0.62)	Wilcoxon	47	< .001	0.71
Grammar	3	2.27 (0.94)	2.40 (0.92)	Wilcoxon	186	.059	0.30
Spelling	2	1.03 (0.79)	1.43 (0.66)	Wilcoxon	75	< .001	0.73
Spelling index	n/a	6.90 (5.37)	11.08 (12.57)	Wilcoxon	541	< .001	0.62
Total	20	10.60 (4.27)	12.72 (4.05)	Student	-4.60	< .001	0.53

Note: the statistical analyses were done using JASP 0.16.4.0.

3.2. Students' perceptions

The students' appraisal of what they learned on the programme is fairly high for all items (Table 3 on appraisal of what was learned).

TABLE 3. Appraisal of what was learned on the programme.

Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
I learned how to plan a text.	3.1	1
I learned how to revise a text.	3.1	0.8
I learned how to write micro stories.	3.1	0.9
I learned how to express what I want to say better in writing.	2.8	0.9
I learned to use punctuation marks better.	3.2	0.8
I learned to use connectives better.	2.9	0.9
I am more aware of the spelling mistakes I make.	3.1	0.9
I learned new vocabulary.	3.4	0.7

Of the students, 86.67% ($f = 39$) stated that writing with a partner was something they quite liked or liked a lot. The content analysis (Prasad, 2008) of the open-ended questions shows that the students positively rated writing in pairs ($f = 20$; 44.4%), peer tutoring ($f = 17$; 37.7%), or both aspects ($f = 5$; 11.1%).

In the case of writing in pairs, the students reported that they liked writing micro stories to invent stories with their partner (E5: "Writing micro stories is lots of fun"; S42: "I liked writing the micro stories, having to think up and invent stories with my tutee"). They also mention the act of planning (S1: "What I liked most is planning the text with my partner") or revising the text to learn to write (S11: "I learned to write better and not make as many mistakes"; S10: "I have improved how I write, how I do a text, thanks to the programme").

With regards to peer tutoring, students positively valued mutual help between tutor and tutee (S10: "What I liked most is helping my partner and she also helped me". S15: "The tutor and the tutee can learn things"). Some emphasised that they liked being tutors (S31: "Being a tutor was very strange it was fun and I liked it a lot"), preparing activities to help the tutee (S44: "Preparing our text, correcting it, knowing what my partner finds hard. That way I can help her"; S17: "Helping my partner"), and teaching a partner (S20: "I liked that my partner liked me teaching her and that she is happy when I teach her"; S8: "Teaching my tutee"). They also positively identified the relationship built with the partner (S41: "What I liked most was working with my partner"; S18: "Doing it with partners because that way we learn and we make friends").

Only 13.33% ($f = 6$) negatively valued having to write with a partner. These six students reported difficulties in the tutor-tutee relationship (S36: "I did not like my tutee"), they mentioned that the tutor did not resolve their doubts (S19: "My tutor did not resolve my doubts"), or they reported difficulties when playing the role of tutor and when preparing the improvement activities (S35: "What I liked least is preparing the activities"; S26: "Being a tutor"). Some of the

students who positively rated the programme also reported difficulties when playing the role of tutor ($f = 18$; 40%), especially in revising writing and helping the tutee (S42: “Revising the writing. Looking for mistakes; they are very hard to find. Also, not having any ideas to help the tutee”) or the difficulty of getting the tutee to pay attention to learn and do the improvement activities (S45: “My tutee does not want to write and I find it hard to convince her that we should write”; S7: “Sometimes my tutee did not listen to me”).

Finally, it should be noted that on completion of the intervention, 95.56% ($f = 43$) of the students attributed positive characteristics to writing, defining it as a fun and creative learning activity, as the following statements show: “Writing is something very nice, it is like you enter another place in your imagination. You can learn from your mistakes and reflect...” (S10); “Writing is fun and makes us develop our imagination” (S4); “Writing helps you express emotions, good ones and bad ones, and also adventures, of sadness, happiness, or mystery... to make people happy with your stories” (S37).

3.3. Teachers’ perceptions

Analysis of the open-ended questions shows that, as positive aspects, the four teachers value writing in pairs (the joint work by the tutor and tutee to improve the text as students help one another in the planning and revision). From the tutor’s autonomous activity, they positively value the tutors’ motivation to revise the texts and design improvement activities for the tutees. They view this as a good way for the tutors to be able to consider the content covered in class, to become aware of errors in the text, and so to learn. The teachers also positively value the engagement that tutees showed when doing improvement activities with the tutor and the explanation of the errors in the text by a peer, something that helps the tutee identify aspects to improve and be motivated to revise them.

As areas for improvement, they underline the fact that some pairs were less autonomous and needed more help. They note that some students did not do the planning (necessitating intervention) or that some tutors dictated ideas without letting the tutee have a say. With regards to tutors’ autonomous activity, they note that some tutors did not feel capable of playing the role of teacher because they were not used to it, lacked support, and lacked examples to devise improvement activities and guide the tutees. Accordingly, they note the importance of offering a space in the classroom to do this revision activity with guidance by the teacher, indeed one school did choose to do it in this way. The fact that the tutors worked autonomously generated much inconsistency among them with regards to the quality of the preparation. The teachers agree that, despite this type of teaching activity being very enriching, students are still not accustomed to peer teaching activities.

4. Discussion and conclusions

This study focussed on presenting and evaluating the “Reading and writing in pairs” programme, a pedagogical intervention based on peer tutoring, with reciprocal roles in the case of the sample analysed. The following conclusions can be drawn from this research.

Firstly, the programme seems to be effective for improving participating students’ written competence, in line with the evidence of the effectiveness of writing interventions based on peer collaboration (Corcelles-Seuba & Castelló, 2015; Fitzgerald & Palincsar, 2017; Graham & Harris, 2018) and, more specifically, on peer tutoring (Christianakis, 2010; Duran & Monereo, 2008; Yarrow & Topping, 2001).

The students perceived improvements in aspects such as planning, written expression, and revision of the micro story genre. The teachers also positively valued writing in pairs, as working jointly helps with planning and revising the text. These perceptions of improvement are confirmed in the pre-test-post-test results, which show significant advances in all dimensions of the written competence apart from *grammar*. The complexity of this dimension could require more extensive attention or a prolonged intervention to observe significant changes

(Camps & Fontich, 2021). The effect size of these advances is high, except in the dimension of the *micro story genre*. The programme might have to offer more explicit training on this genre to improve results further.

Secondly, the programme increased students' motivation for writing. The results show that what they liked most was writing micro stories in pairs and the relationship created with their partners to learn from and teach one another reciprocally. The teachers positively value the interest and motivation of the tutor to revise the text and design improvement activities, as well as the engagement of tutees when doing improvement activities with the tutor and their motivation to revise the text. Furthermore, on completion of the intervention, the students regard writing as a fun and creative learning experience. This finding is especially important, as motivation is a key factor in learning and many students view writing as a difficult and demotivating task (De Smedt et al., 2018). According to Bruning and Horn (2000), motivation increases when students perceive that writing tasks are meaningful, and when they are done in an emotionally pleasant context where help is offered to regulate writing processes. Consequently, it seems that reciprocal peer tutoring provides this emotional and cognitive support, which contributes to generating a pleasant and meaningful experience of writing. The relationship created with the partner, the mutual help, and the audience provided during writing in pairs contribute to making the task meaningful and are key to learning and motivation (De Smedt et al., 2018; Hyland, 2015; Magnifico, 2010; Yarrow & Topping, 2001).

Therefore, improvement in students' written competence can be attributed to the highly structured organisation of the writing activity and of the interaction between peers through the reciprocal roles of tutor and tutee (Yarrow & Topping, 2001). This interaction requires students to negotiate and share decisions about the text, develop thinking, and jointly regulate the processes of writing, something that favours metalinguistic activity as a means of learning writing (Corcelles-Seuba & Castelló, 2015; Vanderburg, 2006; Wigglesworth & Storch, 2012). Furthermore, the tutor-tutee interaction helps distribute the cognitive load involved in the activity of writing. This interaction favours both participants' learning and motivation: of tutees, who receive constant and tailored help from their partner, and of tutors, who, thanks to the interaction with their partners and the revision of the text and prior preparation of improvement activities, can learn by teaching (Duran, 2016, 2017). When swapping roles, reciprocal tutoring means that both students can enjoy the benefits of both roles.

Nonetheless, the study does identify some difficulties associated with peer tutoring, for example, in the relationship between tutor and tutee or with the role of tutor. In reciprocal tutoring, where both students in a pair have a similar level of competence, it is vital for the tutor to prepare the material in advance to create the asymmetry needed to be able to teach the partner (Duran, 2016). These difficulties pose two key challenges for improving the programme. The first relates to the need for more thorough prior training on the tutor's role at the start of and during the programme to give the tutor resources and confidence to revise the text. The second relates to the need to ensure quality advance preparation of the material by the student tutors. Both of these aspects are fundamental to ensure that the tutor and the tutee learn (De Backer et al., 2015; Duran, 2016, 2017; Topping, 2005) and they require supervision by the teachers, who can help the tutors revise the writing and offer them guidance material with more specific examples to carry out the improvement activities. For example, online resources can be offered to analyse the dimensions of the revision guidelines (Appendix 1) and/or guides for using artificial intelligence with the aim of revising the text and helping the tutor to plan improvement activities for the tutee.

In essence, this study shows that students who participated in the "Reading and writing in pairs" programme improved their written competence. This research also records the perceptions of students and teachers about peer tutoring as a method for teaching writing. Given that studies that analyse these perceptions are still scarce, these findings offer a valuable

perspective for identifying opportunities and difficulties. In conclusion, despite the difficulties mentioned, the positive results indicate that sharing the role of teaching with students can create an effective pathway for motivation and improving written competence in primary education.

4.1. Limitations and future research

This study has several limitations that should be considered. Firstly, despite significant improvements in the quality of participants' writing, the lack of a comparison group prevents precise evaluation of the impact of peer tutoring compared with other forms of non-tutorial writing, such as individual writing. Nonetheless, numerous meta-analyses have shown that collaboration between peers is more effective than individual writing for learning and improving writing skills, thus supporting the validity of this approach (Graham & Harris, 2018; Graham et al., 2023; Graham & Perin, 2007). Secondly, the study does not analyse the interaction between tutor and tutee during the process of writing in pairs. Thirdly, the fact that the intervention features a reciprocal peer tutoring role limits the possibility of analysing the differences between the roles of tutor and tutee, and does not allow for measurement of the effectiveness of the programme if a fixed role is performed. Fourthly, the study sample is small and comes from two years of primary education. A subsequent study evaluated the effectiveness of the programme in compulsory secondary education, again with positive results (Corcelles-Seuba et al., in press). Fifthly, the study does not consider whether there are factors of the students or of the task that can generate differences in the effectiveness of the intervention.

Given these limitations, future studies should consider the use of comparison groups, analysis of tutor-tutee interaction, implementation in other tutoring formats and educational stages, and analysis of student and task variables. These approaches will enable a deeper comprehension of the mechanisms that explain the effectiveness of peer tutoring for improving the written competence. The need for further study of this type of intervention implemented by the teachers (instead of by the researchers themselves) in teaching writing in primary education should be noted (Finlayson & McCrudden, 2020). Evaluation of the programme's long-term sustainability in schools will be key. Although the sustainability of the "Reading in pairs" programme has been promoted and documented through peer learning networks (Miquel & Duran, 2017), future studies must also analyse the sustainability of the writing component as part of this programme.

Authors' contributions

Mariona Corcelles-Seuba: Conceptualisation; Data Curation; Formal Analysis; Investigation; Resources; Visualisation; Writing (original draft); Writing (review and editing).

Jesús Ribosa: Conceptualisation; Data Curation; Formal Analysis; Investigation; Visualisation; Resources; Writing (original draft); Writing (review and editing).

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Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy

The authors do not claim to have made use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the preparation of their articles.

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Annex 1. Micro story quality markers template (QMT)

AUTHORS:

TITLE:

DATE:

DIMENSIONS AND MARKERS		ACHIEVED		COMMENTS
MICRO STORY NARRATIVE GENRE				
1.1. Is the story's content original and does it impact the reader?	Yes	No		
1.2. Does it contain the three parts of a micro story: introduction, conflict, and ending?	Yes	No		
1.3. Are there elements of surprise, fiction, or humour?	Yes	No		
1.4. Is the ending unexpected or thought-provoking (does it invite the reader to think)?	Yes	No		
1.5. If they are needed, are exclamation and/or question marks used?	Yes	No		
1.6. Is the title original?	Yes	No		
1.7. Is it a short text? Is the text between 70 and 120 words long?	Yes	No	How many?	
COHERENCE				
2.1. Is what happens in the story understandable?	Yes	No		
2.2. Are the ideas well ordered?	Yes	No		
2.3. Does the title relate to the story?	Yes	No		
COHESION				
3.1. Are punctuation marks used correctly? (More than 3 errors score 0)	Yes	No		
3.2. Does it avoid repeating words used in previous sentences?	Yes	No		
3.3. Are connectives (of time, place, cause, consequence, opposition) used correctly?	Yes	No		
VOCABULARY				
4.1. Is specific vocabulary with a variety of words used? (Not always the same ones)	Yes	No		
4.2. Does it avoid using foreign words or expressions from other languages? (More than 1 interference scores 0)	Yes	No		
GRAMMAR				
5.1. Do the sentences in the text include all of the elements they need to make sense? (More than 1 error scores 0)	Yes	No		

5.2. Is there agreement between the elements (subject and verb, noun and objects...)? (More than 1 error scores 0)	Yes	No	
5.3. Does it use verb tenses correctly (e.g., past, present, future, conditional)? (More than 1 error scores 0)	Yes	No	
SPELLING			
6.1. Are there fewer than 5 spelling mistakes (not counting accents)?	Yes	No	How many?
6.2. Are there fewer than 5 mistakes with accents (when they are left off or used incorrectly)?	Yes	No	How many?

Once you have assessed the markers and applied the spell check, revise in order the ones you marked as not achieved. Before you meet your tutee again, prepare two improvement activities for the first two indicators from the list that are marked as not having been achieved.

IMPROVEMENT ACTIVITY (1) What needs improving? Marker ____	IMPROVEMENT ACTIVITY (2) What needs improving? Marker ____
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