# The *Picture Dictation* Activity for EFL in Primary Education: An Experience with Preservice Teachers

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**Abstract**

Teaching listening in a foreign language requires time, practice, and effort. The Picture Dictation is presented as a creative activity in which a teacher describes an illustration to their students who have to draw it afterwards. This paper aims at exploring the impressions of preservice teachers of Primary Education towards the implementation of a Picture Dictation as an activity for enhancing listening skills in young students. A total sample of 423 undergraduate students from two academic years were invited to participate. Out of this total, 233 participants (G1) implemented the activity in the virtual modality during 2020/2021 academic year, whereas 190 students (G2) applied the activity in the face-to-face mode in 2021/2022. Each participant completed an online survey, which was uploaded onto Moodle platform. The main results showed that G1 would have preferred to apply the activity in a classroom environment, while G2 found some difficulty in the timing of the activity. However, the advantages were focused on promoting creativity and fostering listening comprehension. Even though the implementation of this kind of activity to practise EFL is not new, our findings contribute to gathering the main perceptions and beliefs held by preservice teachers, as well as the future implementation for their professional practice.

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## 1 Introduction

Listening skills enable language learners to communicate successfully and promotes the development of other language abilities (Goh & Vandergrift, 2012). For that reason, if students do not learn to listen correctly, then the latter phases of the complex outline of language acquisition will not be achieved by learners (Rintaningrum, 2018). In addition, *Listening* is regarded as a difficult and highly stressful skill (Brown, 2013; Cutler, 2001; Goh, 2000; Goh & Vandergrift, 2012; Graham, 2006). Students may have some difficulty in listening comprehension in a foreign language, such as English, since many textbooks and teachers seem not to pay enough attention to listening skills while planning their lessons, focusing mainly on teaching grammar, reading and vocabulary.

Likewise, many teachers wrongly presume that listening is acquired unconsciously during the process of language learning (Saraswaty, 2018).

The development of the listening skills involves both "top-down" and "bottom-up" processes. In the "top-down" process, learners have to activate background knowledge about the context and topic in order to understand the whole message without necessarily comprehending every word. Learners must also engage the "bottom-up" process that permits the complete understanding of the message straight from the received speech stream (Field, 2004). Nevertheless, many foreign language learners find the "bottom-up" process difficult, as they consider hard fragmenting the speech stream into significant units, retaining new data, identifying words already acknowledged, or recognizing homophones (Brown, 2013; Cutler, 2001; Goh, 2000).

Moreover, factors that may affect learners' listening comprehension may be the speech rate (Blau, 1990; Conrad, 1989; Griffiths, 1990; Zhao, 1997), the lexis (Rost, 2009), and the phonological qualities and the contextual knowledge (Chiang & Dunkel, 1992; Long, 1990). Other difficulties that the listener might encounter are the quality of the recorded class material (Azmi Bingol et al., 2014), the cultural differences between the two languages (Azmi Bingol et al., 2014), the accent (Buck, 2001; Goh, 1999), the unfamiliar vocabulary (Azmi Bingol et al., 2014), and the length of listening message (Azmi Bingol et al., 2014; Underwood, 1989). In the context of English as a Foreign Language, an additional difficulty of listening comprehension is linked to the pronunciation of words which is frequently different from the corresponding written form (Bloomfield et al., 2010; Walker, 2014).

Due to the different struggles that learners face when doing a listening task, it is important that educators devote more time to teaching listening skills in the classroom, focusing mainly on the selection of the appropriate strategy and listening material (Ghaderpanahi, 2012; Saraswaty, 2018). It is also advisable that listening activities are organized from basic to more complex formats so that pupils can advance gradually in their knowledge of the English language. An activity that may be particularly engaging for young pupils, who according to Phillips (1993) are learners from 5-6 to 12 years of age, is the so-called Picture Dictation (Norris, 1993). In this creative dictation the teacher (or a student) tells a short story to the pupils, who must draw afterwards (Ieong, 2003). Although research studies have been found around the activity picture dictation (Charong, 2019; Dwei, 2019; Ieong, 2003), no research has been encountered on gathering the impressions of future primary-school teachers towards the implementation of this kind of activity in class.

The main aim of this study was to examine the perceptions of the undergraduate students of a Degree in Primary Education at the University of Málaga (Spain) once they had carried out a picture-dictation activity in the classroom. As such, the study poses the following Research Questions (RQs):

RQ1: Is picture dictation an appropriate activity for all years within Primary Education?
RQ2: Which are the advantages and drawbacks identified by the preservice teachers when applying a picture dictation?
RQ3: How do preservice teachers define the picture-dictation activity?

## 2   Theoretical background

Teachers play a crucial role in guiding students through effective listening strategies to enhance comprehension, retention, and overall language proficiency. Noteworthy strategies may include: (1) selective listening, which involves gathering specific information for a particular task; (2) interactive listening, a collaborative effort among students to enhance language and vocabulary through interaction; (3) intensive listening, dedicated to grasping sounds, words, phrases, as well as grammatical and pragmatical units; (4) extensive listening, which entails prolonged listening with a focus on overall meaning over an extended period; and (5) autonomous listening, which emphasizes individ-

ual initiative and self-regulation, allowing learners to adapt their listening practices to suit their specific needs and learning preference (Rost, 2011).

Dictation, a central technique for improving intensive listening skills, saw a decline in popularity with the introduction of the communicative approach. Initially aligned with traditional teaching methods, emphasizing written translation and rule memorization (Kelly, 1969; Stansfield, 1985), dictation has persisted over time due to its classroom-friendly nature, requiring minimal teacher preparation (Kidd, 1992). This technique involves learners receiving some verbal input, storing it briefly in their short-term memory, and then transcribing what they heard (Nation, 1991). It serves as a valuable exercise for students, aiding in the development of phonetic awareness, refining listening, and writing skills (Chai, 2011). Dictation also contributes to the development of effective listening habits, improves understanding of punctuation and spelling, and enhances comprehension at various linguistic levels, including words, phrases, sentences, and clauses. Furthermore, dictation plays a pivotal role in advancing overall language proficiency, and promoting familiarity with the language (Mentari, 2018). Its versatility allows for application in groups of any size and proficiency level (Kidd, 1992).

Other advantages associated with using dictation in the classroom include: (1) fostering the development of all four language skills in an integrated manner; (2) affording students valuable opportunities to improve note-taking skills; (3) presenting a challenging task that engages students; (4) contributing to the enhancement of short-term memory; (5) encouraging unconscious thinking in the new language, fostering a deep understanding; (6) facilitating active participation by all students during and after the dictation; (7) allowing personalization to accommodate various proficiency levels; (8) enabling enthusiastic student involvement in the correction process; (9) aiding students in identifying and addressing specific spelling errors; (10) serving as an excellent review exercise for reinforcing previously learned material; (11) being effectively managed, even less experienced teachers; (12) affording the teacher flexibility to move around, providing individual attention to students during dictation exercises (Alkire, 2002). Beyond its academic benefits, dictation has the potential to create a relaxed learning environment, fostering active participation in the teaching and learning process (Gustiani & Yulia, 2018).

Nation and Newton (2009) proposed some guidelines for creating effective dictation texts for language learners. They recommended that a dictation text should ideally comprise 100 to 150 words, containing content appropriate for the learners' level. Such texts can be drawn from materials previously studied or yet to be covered in the curriculum. Additionally, it is permissible to select texts from other books of a similar difficulty level. Emphasizing the avoidance of unfamiliar words in the dictation text is crucial for aligning the exercise with learners' existing vocabulary, thereby reinforcing their language proficiency. Adhering to this principle significantly enhances the overall effectiveness of dictation as a valuable language learning tool. This approach ensures that learners engage with content that is both challenging and within the scope of their linguistic competence, fostering a more targeted and constructive language learning experience.

Dictation is, therefore, a valuable technique for educators to promote the development of listening skill in an engaging environment, thereby capturing students' interest in the learning process. Through the implementation of dictations, there is notable potential for significant enhancement in students' learning skills.

The picture dictation is a form of creative dictation, whose main purpose is to listen to and understand specific information as well as give commands to complete a picture (Brewster & Ellis, 2002). If learners do not comprehend the language heard, they will not be able to complete the task. Therefore, it is crucial that the teacher checks the information presented in the short story to achieve pupils' comprehension of the narrated text and picture drawing (Adnan, 2011). A picture dictation is also an exercise that needs low arrangement and works well with young learners, as "all the student's need is a blank piece of paper, and all the teacher's need is a bit of imagination" (Dwinalida et al., 2014, p. 81).

The picture dictation also focuses on interaction, developing fluency and cooperation with others. As it is centered on collaborative tasks, it is generally carried out in pairs or small groups. It integrates both receptive communication skills —listening and reading— and productive ones — speaking and writing (Ieong, 2003). Therefore, the picture dictation, firstly, promotes the improvement of written production and comprehension, as learners must write a short story and read it quietly to check that it is well elaborated; secondly, it develops oral production, since students must report the written texts; and, finally, it increases oral comprehension, as learners will have to concentrate on the narrated information to be able to make the drawings. Likewise, it can be an especially helpful practice to check vocabulary, prepositions, colors, and numbers (Jun, 2000), stimulating even the most adamant student (Grover, 1995). Regarding the procedure of teaching listening comprehension by means of a picture dictation, Ieong (2003) suggests the following steps: (1) the teacher dictates a short story to the pupils, and they draw a picture; (2) the students re-count their picture; (3) the pupils compare their drawing to the correct story.

The use of a picture dictation as a class activity provides the students with the resulting benefits: they will longer interact in English under the watchful eye of the teacher; they will be able to participate more actively in class and therefore feel more involved in their own learning process; the weaknesses and strengths of the students will be more easily detected by the teacher; they will be able to become better learners; they may follow their own pace and not feel pressured by the progress of other students, since there will be no time limits as restrictive as in other types of activities (Kurniawati, 2019). Similarly, as the picture dictation is an active activity that promotes concentration in students, it is a valuable practice for the teacher to easily control the students and for classes with a large ratio of students (Dwinalida et al., 2014). Nonetheless, the practice has some drawbacks: it can provoke fatigue on students, due to the constant interaction with the teacher; it can be difficult to evaluate the progress of the students; there is no individual study time; the lesson format can become monotonous (Kurniawati, 2019).

Research conducted in this area has shown not only a significant improvement in students' listening comprehension skills by using a picture dictation (Charong, 2019; Dwinalida et al., 2014; Kurniawati, 2019; Pertiwi et al., 2013; Tjendani & Mushaf, 2014; Yusman, 2013), but also better results in speaking skills —dealing with previous weakness of vocabulary, lack of confidence in speaking in public and absence of motivation for learning— (Dewi, 2019; Kasmi & Rahman, 2017; Sutrisna, 2019), writing skills —in terms of content, organization of ideas, vocabulary, using adequate mechanics to narrative composition— (Asrifan, 2015), in prepositions in English (Adnan, 2011), communication and interaction among the students of a foreign language (Bertoldi, 2018), vocabulary building (Khatimah, 2014, as cited in Kasmi & Rahman, 2017; Pervaiz et al., 2021), and memorizing chunks of language, which are imperative for communication and interactions (Brewster & Ellis, 2002).

Despite research carried out to this respect with the topic of picture dictation, no research has been conducted —at least to our knowledge— in detecting how preservice teachers of Primary Education perceive this type of activity for their future practice concerning the teaching of listening skills in the classroom of English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

## 3   Method

### 3.1   Participants

The participants in this study were second-year undergraduate students enrolled in a subject related to Foreign Language Didactics from the Degree of Primary Education at the University of Málaga (Spain). The total sample is formed by 423 students, most of whom are women (n = 291; 68.79%), in ages ranging from 20 to 50 years old, being the average age 21.22 (Standard Deviation, SD = 3.039).

Out of this total, 233 students (female = 163; 70%; male = 70; 30%) (called Group 1, or G1) applied the picture-dictation activity through the virtual modality during 2020/2021 academic year, while 190 students (female = 128; 67.4%; male = 62; 32.6%) (from Group 2, or G2) implemented the activity in a face-to-face session during 2021/2022 academic year.

The average age of G1 participants was 21.46 (SD = 3.585), ranging from 20 to 50, while the average age of G2 was 20.93 (SD = 2.165), with ages ranging from 20 to 37.

## 3.2 Instrument

The instrument used in this study was a semi-structured survey administered online into the platform of the subject.

The survey consisted of eight questions divided into four dimensions. In dimension I, personal information questions collected their academic year, their age and gender. Their name and surnames were asked at the beginning, but they were informed that their data were going to be treated confidentially and their privacy would be assured. In dimension II, a 4-point likert-scale question was posed with different statements related to the adequacy (or not) of the picture dictation activity in Primary Education years. Dimension III questions focused on exposing the advantages and disadvantages preservice teachers encountered when carrying out the picture dictation activity. And, finally, dimension IV intended to collect preservice teachers' global perceptions towards the aforementioned activity. Table 1 outlines all the dimensions and the type of response collected for the analysis of the data.

**Table 1. Categorisation of the data collection**

| Dimension | Response type | Scale |
|---|---|---|
| **Dimension I. Personal information** | | |
| 1. Academic year | Closed | Single choice |
| 2. Age | Open | |
| 3. Gender | Closed | Single choice |
| **Dimension II. Picture dictation adequacy** | | |
| 4. Indicate the degree of adequacy of the activity regarding the different years of Primary Education | | |
| 4.1. First grade | Closed | Likert (1-4) |
| 4.2. Second grade | Closed | Likert (1-4) |
| 4.3. Third grade | Closed | Likert (1-4) |
| 4.4. Fourth grade | Closed | Likert (1-4) |
| 4.5. Fifth grade | Closed | Likert (1-4) |
| 4.6. Sixth grade | Closed | Likert (1-4) |
| **Dimension III. Advantages and disadvantages of PD** | | |
| 5. What are the advantages of implementing this activity? | Open | |
| 6. What are the disadvantages of implementing this activity? | Open | |
| **Dimension IV. Global perceptions towards PD activity** | | |
| 7. Suggest 3 adjectives for the activity of PD. | Open | |
| 8. If you had the opportunity to repeat the activity of PD, what aspect would you change? | Open | |

Source: Authors' own

### 3.3   Procedure

A picture dictation was proposed in the framework of a subject related to Foreign-Language Didactics, as part of the tasks and activities to the teaching of listening skills to Primary Education.

The activity was performed in groups of 4 or 5 students. They were given 10 minutes to elaborate a simple descriptive text in English, and then one of them would narrate the description in the form of a dictation to another group, whose members had to illustrate what they had understood. They would show all their illustrations so as to compare their drawings and their perceptions.

The students from G1 did the activity online, as we still had to teach some part of the lessons in an online mode, because of the COVID-19 protocols established at our university. The students from G2 carried out the picture-dictation activity in class. Therefore, both contexts differed, although the activity was the same.

After the activity, preservice teachers completed the online survey so as to gather their impressions towards the experience and the activity itself, as well as their adequacy (or not) to all years within Primary Education.

### 3.4   Data analysis

All the data were collected from the online survey, saved into excel and exported into SPSS statistical package. The analysis was mainly descriptive.

The qualitative questions 5, 6 and 8 were categorised and analyzed quantitatively with SPSS. The answers from qualitative question 7 were analyzed with Atlas.ti so as to observe the most frequent adjectives proposed by the preservice teachers.

## 4   Results

### 4.1   Picture-dictation adequacy

One closed-ended question was posed to preservice teachers in order to collect their opinions about the adequacy of the activity of picture dictation in the different years of Primary Education. The sixth statements of the question were measured with a 4-point likert scale.

In general, all the students from both groups considered very appropriate the activity for all the years of Primary Education. However, the percentages differed among the years. Both groups coincided in selecting third and fourth grades as the ideal years from Primary Education to implement the picture-dictation task. The highest percentages for G1 were found in fourth (62.2%) followed by third grade (61.8%), while for G2 the percentages were slightly lower, being the highest in third (58.9%) followed by fourth (57.9%).

Although the remaining percentages about their opinion of the picture-dictation adequacy did not exceed half of the students, they still worth some analysis. In G2, a greater percentage of participants found the activity inappropriate for all grade levels compared to G1. Particularly, the highest percentage was observed in G2 for first graders (14.7%), whereas G1 impressions stood at 9%. Next Figure (Figure 1) illustrates the adequacy considered by both groups.
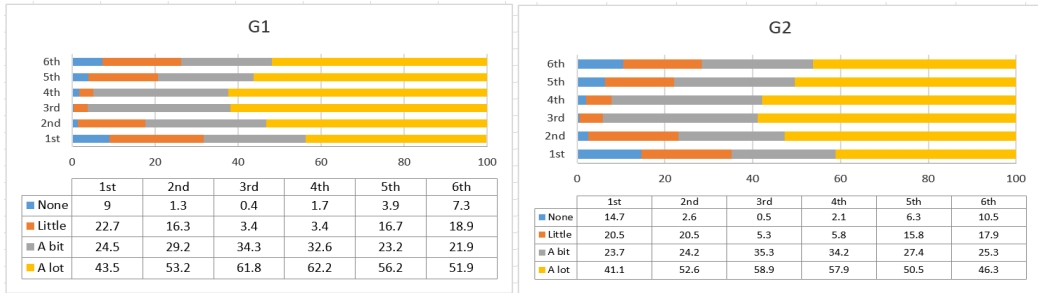
**G1**

| | 1st | 2nd | 3rd | 4th | 5th | 6th |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| None | 9 | 1.3 | 0.4 | 1.7 | 3.9 | 7.3 |
| Little | 22.7 | 16.3 | 3.4 | 3.4 | 16.7 | 18.9 |
| A bit | 24.5 | 29.2 | 34.3 | 32.6 | 23.2 | 21.9 |
| A lot | 43.5 | 53.2 | 61.8 | 62.2 | 56.2 | 51.9 |

**G2**

| | 1st | 2nd | 3rd | 4th | 5th | 6th |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| None | 14.7 | 2.6 | 0.5 | 2.1 | 6.3 | 10.5 |
| Little | 20.5 | 20.5 | 5.3 | 5.8 | 15.8 | 17.9 |
| A bit | 23.7 | 24.2 | 35.3 | 34.2 | 27.4 | 25.3 |
| A lot | 41.1 | 52.6 | 58.9 | 57.9 | 50.5 | 46.3 |

**Fig. 1. Adequacy to all years of Primary Education according to preservice teachers (Source: Authors' own)**

### 4.2 Advantages and disadvantages of the picture-dictation activity

**Table 2. Benefit themes according to G1 and G2 response**

| Advantages of Picture Dictation | | G1 | G2 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Creativity | N | 74 | 67 |
| | % | 31.8 | 35.3 |
| Entertaining and interesting activity | N | 74 | 54 |
| | % | 31.8 | 28.4 |
| Oral comprehension | N | 73 | 66 |
| | % | 31.3 | 34.7 |
| Teamwork | N | 41 | 25 |
| | % | 17.6 | 13.2 |
| Significant learning | N | 38 | 23 |
| | % | 16.3 | 12.1 |
| Motivation and participation | N | 37 | 24 |
| | % | 15.9 | 12.6 |
| Vocabulary | N | 34 | 33 |
| | % | 14.6 | 17.4 |
| Image-concept association | N | 31 | 18 |
| | % | 13.3 | 9.5 |
| Different from traditional dictation | N | 27 | 18 |
| | % | 11.6 | 9.5 |
| Oral expression | N | 27 | 18 |
| | % | 11.6 | 9.5 |
| Concentration and attention | N | 23 | 25 |
| | % | 9.9 | 13.2 |
| Written skills | N | 10 | 17 |
| | % | 4.3 | 8.9 |
| Simple and easy | N | 5 | 3 |
| | % | 2.1 | 1.6 |

Greater percentages were found in the categories Creativity (G1 = 31.8%; G2 = 35.3%), Oral Comprehension (G1 = 31.3%; G2 = 34.7%), and Entertaining and interesting activity (G1 = 31.8%; G2 = 28.4%). G1 also considered that the activity was perfect to promote teamwork (17.6%), while, with similar percentage (17.4%), G2 participants thought that pupils would gain more vocabulary

with this activity. The least frequent responses were encountered in Written skills and Simple and easy categories in both groups, as observed in Table 2.

Some of the statements of the undergraduate students (S) participating in the experience are listed below (translation into English has been provided between brackets).

S30: *Que los niños/as pueden desarrollar la creatividad, mejorar y aprender un idioma, entre otros.* [Pupils can develop creativity, improve, and learn a language, among other advantages].

S66: *Además de ser una actividad donde los niños pueden desarrollar su imaginación al dibujar, también aprenden vocabulario y practican su pronunciación en inglés.* [Apart from being an activity in which pupils can foster their imagination when drawing, they also learn vocabulary and practise their pronunciation in English].

S68: *Aprendizaje significativo, práctica de la lengua inglesa oralmente (speaking) y, a su vez, los oyentes van fomentando y mejorando su listening.* [Significant learning, speaking practice of English and, at the same time, learners foster and improve their listening skill].

S104: *Es más divertida que un simple dictado.* [It is funnier than a simple dictation].

S170: *Una actividad más amena para el alumnado saliendo de lo común y lo tradicional.* [A more entertaining activity for pupils, different from the standard and the traditional activity].

S228: *Fomenta la comprensión oral y escrita, además de la pronunciación.* [It improves oral and written comprehension, as well as pronunciation].

S280: *Mejoran la escucha en idioma extranjero, aprenden nuevo vocabulario, entienden la historia y la representan con dibujos; aprenden a trabajar en equipo.* [(Pupils) improve their listening in a foreign language, learn new vocabulary, understand the story and represent it with their drawings; they learn to work in groups]

S349: *Los niños desarrollan comprensión oral y expresan lo que han entendido ellos mediante el dibujo.* [Pupils develop their listening comprehension skill and express what they have understood through illustrations].

S386: *Desarrolla la atención, concentración y comprensión.* [It promotes attention, concentration, and comprehension]

Regarding the disadvantages highlighted by the participants, some declared no disadvantages at all (G1 = 14.6%; G2 = 12.6%). However, other responses were categorised under other 11 themes. Table 3 lists the frequency and percentages per category in both groups.

**Table 3. Drawback themes according to G1 and G2 responses**

| Disadvantages of Picture Dictation | | G1 | G2 |
|---|---|---|---|
| FL level | N | 99 | 82 |
| | % | 42.5 | 43.2 |
| None | N | 34 | 24 |
| | % | 14.6 | 12.6 |
| More commitment | N | 19 | 31 |
| | % | 8.2 | 16.3 |
| Time | N | 19 | 17 |
| | % | 8.2 | 8.9 |
| Lack of confidence in drawings | N | 20 | 15 |
| | % | 8.6 | 7.9 |
| Boring for certain levels | N | 15 | 13 |
| | % | 6.4 | 6.8 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| No equal participation | N | 10 | 5 |
| | % | 4.3 | 2.6 |
| Online setting | N | 9 | 0 |
| | % | 3.9 | 0 |
| Only one skill is fostered | N | 8 | 7 |
| | % | 3.4 | 3.7 |
| Non inclusive | N | 5 | 3 |
| | % | 2.1 | 1.6 |
| Just one person dictates | N | 3 | 3 |
| | % | 1.3 | 1.6 |
| Chaos and noise in the classroom | N | 3 | 2 |
| | % | 1.3 | 1.1 |

The main disadvantage stressed by undergraduate students was the foreign language (FL) level of the pupils taking the picture dictation (G1=42.5%; G2=43.2%). The rest of percentages kept in very low figures, which also denotes a variety of disadvantages, as, for instance, more Commitment (G1 = 8.2%; G2 = 16.3%); Time in the preparation and execution (G1 = 8.2%; G2 = 8.9%); Lack of confidence in their drawings (G1 = 8.6%; G2 = 7.9%); Boring for certain levels (G1 = 6.4%; G2 = 6.8%); or No equal participation (G1 = 4.3%; G2 = 2.6%); among other disadvantages, as observed in Table 3. Some of the real comments of participants are exposed below:

S7: *El alumno debe estar más implicado* [The student has to be involved].

S100*: Puede haber personas en el grupo que no hagan nada* [Some pupils of the same team might not work at all].

S132: *Que hacerla de manera telemática es bastante compleja* [The activity is too difficult to carry out in an online environment].

S260: *Puede que precise mucho tiempo* [It might take lots of time].

S415: *Puede que haya alumnos que no se sientan cómodos dibujando* [Some pupils might feel uncomfortable when drawing]

S237: *Si se trata de alumnado más pequeño, creo que aún no tienen la suficiente capacidad para escribir un texto adecuado e incluso para captar lo que otro compañero le está describiendo* [Younger pupils do not have enough abilities to write an adequate text and, even, to understand what other partners are describing].

S287: *No se trabaja la redacción* [Writing is not practised].

## 4.3   Global perceptions towards the picture-dictation activity

Preservice teachers were asked to appraise the activity as a whole, and they were inquired to propose three adjectives for the picture-dictation activity. Next figure (Figure 2) illustrates the word clouds from both groups involved in the activities in both academic years.

G1                                                      G2



**Fig. 2. Clouds of adjectives thrown by preservice teachers from both groups (Source: Authors' own)**

These two clouds were extracted from Atlas.ti. Besides, this software threw accurate information about the frequency of words proposed by both groups. As observed in Figure 2, the most frequent adjectives according to participants were *divertido/a* (funny) (G1 = 125; G2 = 89), followed by *creativo/a* (creative) (G1 = 81; G2 = 47), and *original or innovador* (original/innovative) (G1 = 41; G2 = 46).

Some other adjectives considered by participants are less frequent but also relevant, such as *entretenido/a* (entertaining) (G1 = 36; G2 = 28), *dinámico/a* (dynamic) (G1 = 36; G2 = 32); *interesante* (interesting) (G1 = 33; G2 = 20).

Finally, preservice teachers were asked if they would apply some changes if they had the opportunity to repeat the activity. Despite previous disadvantages stressed before, both groups of participants did not consider that they would make any changes (G1 = 30.5%; G2 = 33.2%).

However, other changes were stressed but with minor percentages. With similar percentages, participants considered that the aspects concerning planning were what they would change (G1 = 17.2%; G2 = 15.3%), while with lower percentages both groups indicated that they would like to do the activity with other teams, and not just one team, as established in the task.

The rest of categories seemed to show greater percentages in one group than the other. For example, G2 (19.5%) wanted to change their texts, while in G1 the percentage was lower (9.9%). On the contrary, minor percentages were found in Propose a common theme, Establish turns to foster participation, and Change the setting. Figure 3 shows all the categories of potential changes preservice teachers would implement in a picture dictation.
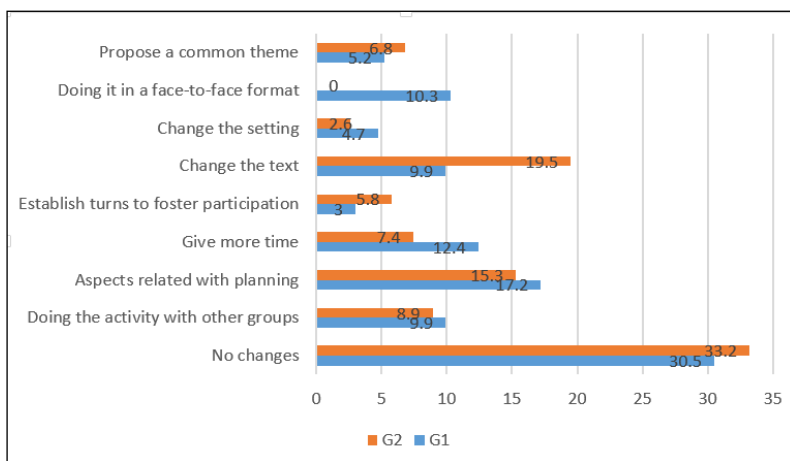


**Fig. 3. Potential changes to activity of picture dictation (Source: Authors' own)**

## 5 Discussion and conclusion

EFL teachers' responsibility lies in guaranteeing suitable practice and development of the foreign language they teach. However, some skills require specific attention or different approach. Listening is one of the skills that might need an adequate selection of materials (Saraswaty, 2018) or a design of more scaffolded activities suitable for second language acquisition or foreign language learning (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976). Thus, the implementation of a simple activity like the picture dictation would motivate young pupils and promote their listening skills (Adnan, 2011; Norris, 1993).

However, this technique might not be suitable for all the years of Primary Education (from 6 to 12 years old). Our undergraduate students participating in the experience considered that grades 3 and 4 were the most appropriate years to carry out the activity, that is, pupils aged from 8 to 10 years old. This contrasts with studies in which the picture dictation proved to be effective in older students (like Dwinalida et al., 2014, whose study was focused on 10th grade, or Kurniawati, 2019, on 7th grade). Other experiments in the classroom setting at school demonstrated that the inclusion of a picture dictation in year 3 of Primary Education was positive in a bilingual subject (taught in English) (Puche, 2020). Thus, in response to *RQ1: Is the picture dictation an appropriate activity for all years within Primary Education?* according to participants, not all the years are adequate for this type of activity, as no studies, to our knowledge, have implemented the picture dictation activity in students younger than 8 years old, which might be due to the level of EFL of the pupils.

Regarding *RQ2: Which are the advantages and drawbacks identified by the preservice teachers when applying a picture dictation?* according to participants, the activity would entail multiple advantages, but also disadvantages. Among the benefits, preservice teachers highlighted that the picture dictation fosters "creativity" and develops "oral comprehension", as many studies have widely stressed (Charong, 2019; Dwinalida et al., 2014; Kurniawati, 2019; Pertiwi et al., 2013; Tjendani & Mushaf, 2014; Yusman, 2013). However, it is surprising that the rest of the skills were indicated by very few students from both groups; we refer to "oral expression" (around 10% in both), "written skills" (not reaching 5% in G1 or 9% in G2), and "reading skills" (not indicated by anyone). This is not in line with Dewi (2019), Kasmi and Rahman (2017), and Sutrisna (2019) who pointed out that speaking was particularly practised, or with Asrifan (2015) when referring to writing, or even Ieong (2003), who stated that all the linguistic skills were developed in this type of activity. Our participants did not consider other skills could be practised with the picture dictation activity.

Also, participants thought that it was perfect to "acquire vocabulary" (Jun, 2000; Khatimah, 2014, as cited in Kasmi & Rahman, 2017; Pervaiz et al., 2021; Sutrisna, 2019), taking into account that its learning would favour the level of comprehension in young pupils (Barreras, 2004) and, therefore, their ability to interact (Brewster & Ellis, 2002).

"Teamwork" was another advantage fostered in this type of activity, according to participants' responses, which is also related to interaction and communication in a foreign language (Bertoldi, 2018). Besides, "concentration and attention" was among some of the positive responses of the preservice teachers (Dwinalida et al., 2014).

Apart from the above, some drawbacks were mentioned by participants, such as "the requirement of more commitment" or "the time of execution". Regarding the latter, Kurniawati (2019) indicated that pupils may follow their own pace as there will be no time limits for this activity. Charong (2019) indicated as a drawback that the picture dictation takes a lot of time. Our participants, even though they highlighted the time of execution as a negative aspect of the activity, they might have felt this pressure because we intended to have the experience with a set limit so as to test the activity and how they would feel with a real simulation in class. That is why participants have felt this as a disadvantage rather than an advantage. Nevertheless, the main negative aspect was the "level of foreign language" of the pupils, which consequently will influence the comprehension of the global message of the dictation. This drawback has not been discussed in the studies consulted in the literature concerning the implementation of picture dictation.

Despite the disadvantages exposed by the participants of the experiments, most of the preservice teachers declared that they would not change anything of the original planning, although some minor modifications would have been applied by some of the like, for example, doing it in a face to face session (participants from G1 since, because of COVID-19 reasons, they implemented it online), elaborating a different text, proposing the same theme for all the teams or even doing it with other teams.

Finally, our last RQ was *RQ3: How do preservice teachers define the picture-dictation activity?* To this respect, several adjectives were proposed by the preservice teachers participating in the experience. Thus, the most remarkable adjectives were funny, creative, and original/innovative, which denotes an interesting and motivating activity to learn English as a foreign language for young pupils. Despite not having found, and, consequently, contrasted, studies analyzing the impressions of EFL preservice teachers of Primary Education, the literature throws interesting definitions of the activity of picture dictation, including two of the adjectives mentioned above: creative (Charong, 2019), funny/enjoyable (Dwinalida et al., 2014; Grover, 1995; Kasmi & Rahman, 2017; Puche, 2020; Sutrisna, 2019) or "new technique to learn English with fun" (Charong, 2019, p. 25).

In conclusion, the implementation of picture dictation as an EFL teaching activity has been explored through the lens of preservice teachers in Primary Education. While the findings suggest that picture dictation can be a valuable tool for fostering creativity, oral comprehension, and vocabulary acquisition among 8 to 10-year-old pupils, it is crucial to acknowledge the nuanced suitability of this activity across different Primary Education years. The study revealed both advantages, such as promoting teamwork and concentration, and drawbacks, including potential challenges related to commitment and time constraints. Despite these challenges, the preservice teachers expressed a reluctance to alter the original planning, emphasizing the perceived benefits of the activity. One of the limitations of the study has been the analysis of the texts proposed by the preservice teachers so as to detect the topics and the vocabulary of their dictations. Further studies would also include the implementation of the picture dictation at schools during the EFL preservice teachers' internship to confirm or refute their impressions in a real setting with young pupils.

## Notes

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