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## **Writing Comics in English as a Foreign Language Classes: A Didactic Sequence with Tertiary Students**

La escritura de comics en clases de inglés como lengua extranjera: una  
secuencia didáctica con estudiantes de tercer ciclo

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### **Abstract**


This experience report shows a didactic sequence put into practice during the academic year 2021–2022 with students from a public university in Los Ríos province, Ecuador, during the English 1 (A1) classes. The aim was to motivate two Basic Education degree students to write through the use of comics during English classes. The participants are 39 and 42 students (N = 81). This sequence lasted three weeks of class, a total of 12 hours. Due to the covid-19 pandemic, the courses were taken online through the Zoom platform. In the end, a questionnaire was used as a data collection instrument. The results demonstrated positive effects on the students, such as motivation, awareness of their learning, and autonomy. This study encourages teachers to use comics to improve English teaching in Higher Education and enhance students' English language proficiency to achieve a higher degree of proficiency in English.

*Keywords:* english, writing, comics, learning

## Resumen

El reporte de esta experiencia muestra una secuencia didáctica puesta en práctica durante el periodo académico 2021-2022 con estudiantes de una institución superior pública en la provincia de Los Ríos, Ecuador, en las clases de inglés 1 (A1). El objetivo de esta secuencia didáctica fue motivar a dos grupos de estudiantes de la carrera de Educación Básica a escribir a través del uso de comics en las clases de inglés. En esta actividad participaron de 81 estudiantes (N=81). Esta secuencia tuvo una duración de tres semanas clase, un total de 12 horas. Debido a la Pandemia del Covid-19 los cursos fueron impartidos de manera online a través de la plataforma Zoom. Al finalizar la actividad, se usó un cuestionario como instrumento de recolección de datos. Los resultados demostraron efectos positivos en los estudiantes, como la motivación, concientización de su propio aprendizaje, y autonomía. Este estudio motiva a docentes a usar comics para mejorar la enseñanza de inglés en la educación superior y perfeccionar la competencia del idioma inglés.

*Palabras clave:* inglés, escritura, historietas, aprendizaje

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## INTRODUCTION

Some discussions have arisen on the importance of sharing teaching experiences due to the lack of awareness regarding the pivotal role that sharing knowledge means in the educational field (Farahian et al., 2022). The strategies we use in class can help other teachers from other parts of the world to change their teaching realities and consequently positively impact learning (Santos et al., 2022). Therefore, teachers should share strategies, methodologies, and didactic sequences used in their classes through the experience report since it helps future educators with a tool to guide their methods and explain the steps used to reach the learning goal.

A didactic sequence is a collection of learning exercises organized in a particular order that considers the student's development. According to Richards & Crookes (1988), the idea of didactic sequencing is not new in the educational field since it is an outcome of educational practice. Harmer (2007) emphasized that students are likely to see a pattern of progress in a specific topic with coherent connections between lessons instead of a series of one-off tasks. For the teachers, reading experience from another colleague can help to learn different strategies in order not to use the traditional teaching model and foster reflection on the learning process (Mussi et al., 2021).

In English teaching, writing is a significant and challenging skill for learners to achieve language proficiency because it allows ideas to convey effectively (Darus & Ching, 2009). The mastery of writing should be of great importance, so it is necessary to have adequate resources and methods linked to the use of technologies for teaching and developing this skill in the student in a successful way. Moreover, in this new educational approach based on information and communications technology (ICT), the teacher is no longer the owner of knowledge but a facilitator of the educational process (Vanegas et al., 2019). In other words, users of digital technologies become content creators capable of interacting and collaborating to take advantage of the Internet's potential as a source of information, resources, didactic methodologies, and permanent stimuli (Briceño Polanco et al., 2018)

Nation & Macalister (2020) and Kaweera et al. (2019) mentioned that learners should apply experience and knowledge to their writing activities. Activities become more meaningful and successful when students are well-prepared for what they will write and when they see a connection about what they have to write. We can reach this goal through various previous works on the topic. English teachers can develop writing skills in their students with the help of various strategies and technological tools. Using digital comic strips as an English language teaching strategy provides opportunities for feedback and sharing of content. Digital comic strips provide opportunities to comment, share content, develop students writing skills in English and foster collaborative work, creativity, and critical thinking (Cabrera et al., 2018). Software tools such as Pixton, ToonDoo, and StoryBird allow the creation of comics and are used by Ecuadorian English teachers due to their easy access. Software tools such as Pixton, ToonDoo, and StoryBird allow the creation of comics and are used by Ecuadorian English teachers due to their easy access.

The analysis of studies on digital comic strips for teaching writing in English as a foreign language reveals positive perceptions about this resource (Deligianni-Georgaka & Pouroutidi, 2016, Yasuta, 2018). It also highlights the positive effect on students' motivation to write in English (Yunus et al., 2012). Regarding the use of digital comic strips, Cabrera et al. (2018) pointed out the effectiveness of these tools in teaching English grammar and vocabulary, which are crucial aspects of English writing. Yasuta (2018), on the other hand, analyzed the potential of implementing project-based activities using online comics in the EFL classroom. The use of comics revealed a fascinating and positive change in the students' collaborative work giving a breakthrough in English language learning.

Hopefully, this research can show EFL teachers the value of sharing positive classroom experiences. Thus, to shed light on the importance of active methodologies in the learning context, this study shows a didactic proposal developed at Universidad Técnica Estatal de

Quevedo, Los Ríos, Ecuador. The goal was to motivate students to write through the use of comics during English classes. This article is organized as follows. First, it discusses the importance of sharing positive experiences in higher education. Second, it presents the study's methodology followed by the didactic sequence used in class. Third, the results are presented with some discussions; finally, we end with the conclusion and recommendations.

### **METHOD**

This study is an experience report (ER) that describes a didactic sequence used during English class. Mussi et al. (2021) postulated that the experience report is a kind of knowledge production in which the text copes with an academic and/or professional experience in one of the three principles of university education (teaching, research, and extension), with the main feature is a description of the intervention. In other words, ER is turning into written words the experiences aiming the contribution to the production of knowledge of the most varied themes.

### **Setting and participants**

This study was undertaken at Universidad Técnica Estatal de Quevedo, Los Ríos, Ecuador. The participants are two groups of Basic Education degree students enrolled in the English I (A1) course aged 18 to 42 years. The first group comprised 39 students and the second of 42 altogether, 81 students (N = 81). The choice of this sample is because they are students of one of the researchers. So, all of the students agreed to participate in this study and consequently signed the consent letter.

### **Description of the Didactic Sequence**

We followed the didactic sequence model proposed by Marcuschi (2019). This model is composed of three different phases. The first phase is the introduction of the situation. It is the moment that the teacher presents the topic to the students and tries to activate their previous knowledge of the topic. The second phase is creation. The participants create autonomously and collaboratively what the teacher proposed to do. Finally, the third and last phase is reflection. The students present what they have done and reflect on the whole procedure through critical thinking.

This didactic sequence lasted three weeks of class, a total of 12 hours in the academic period of May/2021-August/2021. Due to the covid-19 pandemic, the students took the classes online through the Zoom platform. Each week of class was used to focus on one aspect of the didactic sequence. In the first week, the teacher introduced the comics genre. It was shown students several examples of comics, and they were asked to search for similarities until they discovered by themselves the characteristics of the comics. Some discussions were generated to listen to students' opinions.

In the second week, it was presented "My English comic project." Students were separated randomly into groups of five. This activity aimed to provide creative and unique ways of expressing students' knowledge of content standards through drawing and sequential art; in other words, students were required to create a comic using the content of the four units they had learned. To create the comic, learners needed to follow some instructions: a) Create a comic using the content learned during the unit 1, 2, 3 and b) The comic should be a real-life conversation; c) They could create their comic by hand or use a webpage to help them. After presenting to students what they had to do, the teacher gave a rubric to students to demonstrate how they would be assessed. This rubric focused on five domains: content knowledge, Grammar, Vocabulary, Creativity, organization, and originality.

Finally, in the third week, students needed to present their comics to the class. Each group showed their comic and read them to the whole class. Later, the other students gave feedback about their classmates' results focusing on positive aspects and things they could improve. The last week was important because listening to their classmates' opinions and assessing their

classmates' comics helped create awareness about the learning process. They saw positive points and parts that needed improvement.

The project finished with the students answering an online questionnaire that focused on the project. This questionnaire aimed to make students reflect on the whole process of the didactic sequence. The questionnaire contained four open questions regarding the project. To enhance validity, it was revised by two Ph.D. students in Applied Linguistics from a university in Brazil. The analysis of the answers was done in the light of the grounded theory. First, all of the responses were read, and they were coded and grouped into similar solutions.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Comic**

We decided to present three different comics created by the students. In the first comic, the use of language goes beyond the A1 level. The students used verb tenses like present perfect continuous, and future (will). The idea of the comic embraced the situation that the world was living in at that moment, the Covid-19 pandemic. So, this group used elements of their real-life reality and created their comic, giving meaning to what they learned in class.

**Figure 1**

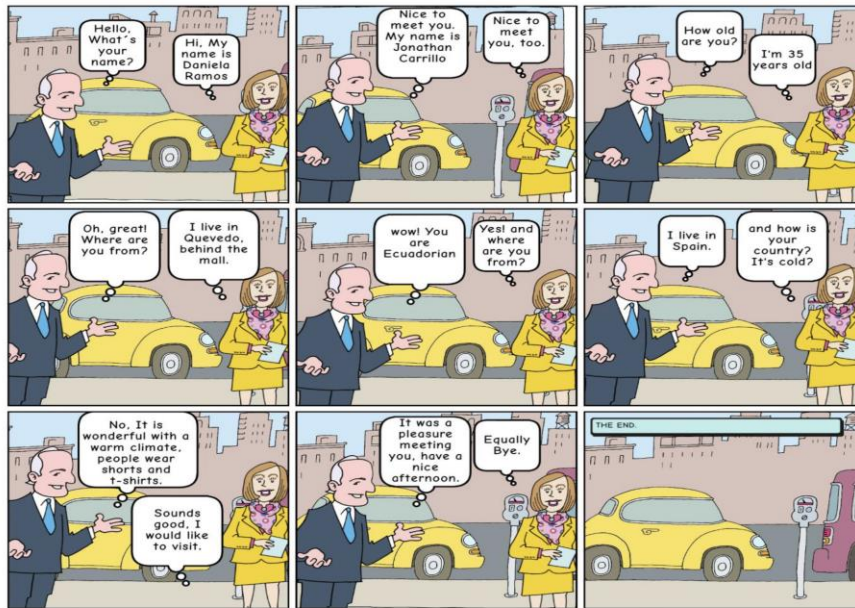
*Wash your hands*



The second comic shows a daily life situation. The students used the content of greetings, prepositions of place, weather vocabulary, countries, and nationalities to create a conversation.

**Figure 2**

*Nice to meet you*

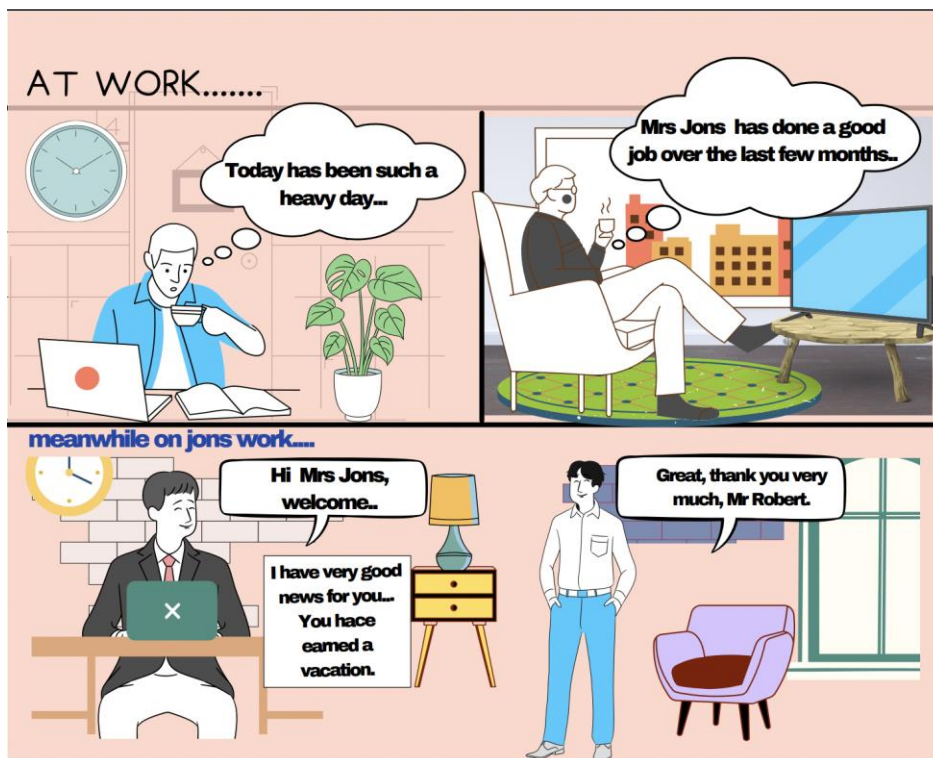


This comic was created at [www.MakeBeliefsComix.com](http://www.MakeBeliefsComix.com). Go there and make one now!

Finally, the students used a more advanced vocabulary in the third comic. Also, they used the types of balloons correctly: the one that means normal speech and the other which means daydreaming or happy thoughts.

**Figure 3**

*At work*



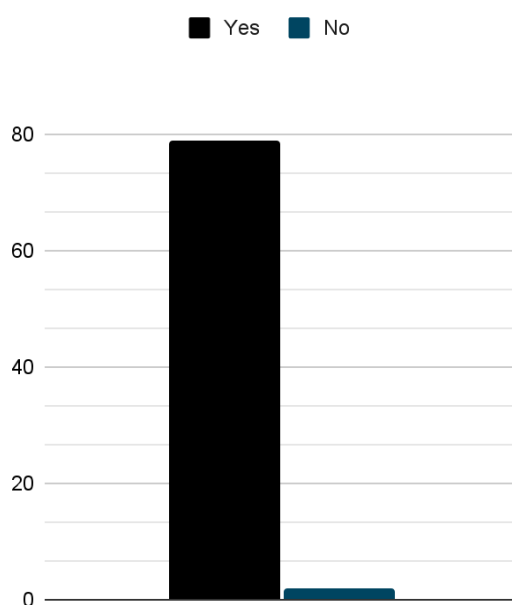
All of the three examples portrayed before showed the creativity of the students. Their comics were based on their daily experience, so they brought elements they were costumed to create, such as the covid-19.

### Pedagogical View

According to the participants, the use of this didactic sequence played an essential role in their learning. The answers found in the questionnaire confirm this idea. When asked if they liked using comics as a genre to be used in the English class, 79 said yes, and two said no. Graphic 1 portrays this idea.

**Figure 4**

*Students' opinions about the use of comics in EFL class*



The two students who said no pointed out why they disliked working with comics. The first one affirmed that "writing comics demands much time" (Student 1). Indeed, writing comics demands much time because it is necessary to think about the storage; on the other hand, the other one said, "I do not like this genre, so it makes it hard to create one" (Student 2).

Some students mentioned that "writing comics was a great tool to facilitate the English teaching and learning process" and "using comics is an interesting strategy to break the boredom, and experience new methodology to learn English in a meaningful way." These comments match a comics study in which learners expressed positive perceptions and showed motivation when creating a scene of something they read previously (Cimermanová, 2015).

Learners respond differently to stimuli like music, pictures, sounds, or movements, and specific activities stimulate their learning more than others. Participants also reported that not all students learn the same way, such as using tests to evaluate knowledge, so looking for other strategies is a good option. A class is full of different individuals with different learning styles and preferences. An experienced teacher acknowledges this and must ensure to cater to the different learning styles as often as possible, providing a wide range of diverse lessons to cater to individual differences and needs (Harmer, 2007; Yin et al., 2020).

One participant mentioned, "using comics improves student-teacher interaction because there exists more cooperation in the learning and teaching process" To keep this interaction, teachers must sustain motivation in class with activities that involve them and raise their curiosity (Harmer,

2007; Jääskä et al., 2022). This opinion can suggest that comics are a valuable hook to engage students in learning and make them more responsible for their progress. One student mentioned that using comics in English language learning significantly impacted the development of some skills. According to him, "teachers can use comics as a learning strategy for students to improve their knowledge in a more practical, creative, and critical way since we must think a lot before creating a comic." A study conducted by Nur (2020) also found that using comics in English language learning significantly impacted the development of productive skills, critical thinking, creativity, and writing story. Therefore, it can be said that teachers rely on comic activities as a strategy to teach a second language and help learners improve their language skills.

Finally, from another perspective, using comics can convey multiple messages and help students become more autonomous in the learning process; comic-style drawings are well suited to depicting the plurality, difficulty, and often paradoxical nature of human experiences. One participant corroborated this idea when she said, "using comics as a learning strategy in class benefits the educational community since it makes students become autonomous and can develop their skills according to their knowledge." So, the emotional power of comics also promotes dealing with the topics presented, leads to lively debate, and enables a process of social meaning formation (Darnhofer, 2018).

### **CONCLUSION**

In the context of second language learning, the comic is a pedagogical tool that may be included in the classroom. Its use only tends to benefit students in their learning process. This study demonstrated one didactic sequence done with tertiary students in Ecuador, which helped focus on a communicative-oriented teaching method; consequently, students were the primary agent of the learning process. The results demonstrated positive effects on the students, such as motivation and awareness of their learning.

This didactic sequence showed the importance of teachers searching for new ways to conduct their classes based on the students' real-life experiences. Thus, we hope this study can inspire teachers to generate new didactic sequences in their learning contexts and share the results with other teachers.

The findings of this study have to be seen in the light of some limitations that could be addressed in future research. First, the students were only accustomed with reading comics. However, they had not written one before. It was their first time having this experience. So, it was necessary to explain the parts of the comic genre sincerely to make them understand, but we could not spend much time on this part due to the lack of time. Consequently, some comics were affected by this action.

In short, this paper encourages English language teachers to consider the educational implications presented in this paper as they improve the teaching of English in Higher Education and enhance students' English language proficiency to achieve higher proficiency in English.



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