

# Exploring the Pedagogical Potential of Didactic Audiovisual Translation in Plurilingual Pre-school Education: The Perspective of Pre-service Teachers

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## **ABSTRACT**

**Introduction:** This study investigates the perception and pedagogical viability of Didactic Audiovisual Translation (DAT) in plurilingual education among pre-service pre-school teachers, using mixed methods. It explores the effectiveness of DAT—didactic free commentary in particular—for language acquisition, as well as its suitability for fostering Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and contributing to the improvement of foreign language proficiency. Despite previous research on DAT, there is a shortage of studies focused on early childhood education, underscoring the relevance of this work. **Methodology:** The study involves 103 pre-service teachers and utilizes questionnaires and focus groups to analyze the benefits, challenges, and opportunities of integrating DAT into CLIL practices. **Results:** Overall, the findings underline participants' confidence in the capacity of free commentary to enrich the educational experiences of their future students, while acknowledging associated challenges and emphasizing the ongoing need for exploration and refinement for effective integration. **Discussion:** The findings suggest adapted approaches for plurilingual instruction in pre-school and highlight areas for future research in this educational field. The integration of DAT into CLIL offers opportunities to promote plurilingualism and enhance linguistic and cultural competence.

**KEYWORDS:** Didactic audiovisual translation (DAT); pre-school education; CLIL; pre-service teachers; free commentary.

## ***Exploración del Potencial Pedagógico de la Traducción Audiovisual Didáctica en la Educación Preescolar Plurilingüe: La Perspectiva del Profesorado en Formación***

### **RESUMEN**

**Introducción:** Este estudio investiga la percepción del futuro profesorado sobre el uso de la Traducción Audiovisual Didáctica (TAD) en el aula de educación infantil. El artículo se basa en un diseño de investigación mixto en el que se explora el uso de la TAD –en concreto, el comentario libre– en la adquisición de lenguaje, así como su idoneidad dentro del Aprendizaje Integrado de Contenidos y Lenguaje (AICLE). Aunque el campo de la TAD se ha consolidado en la última década gracias a un corpus fértil de investigaciones sobre su uso pedagógico en el aula de idiomas, hay una escasez de estudios en la etapa de educación infantil, y también son necesarios más trabajos en los que se analice la aplicación de la TAD en el marco del AICLE. **Metodología:** El estudio involucra a 103 maestro/as en formación, empleando cuestionarios y grupos de discusión para analizar los beneficios, desafíos y oportunidades de integrar la TAD en AICLE en infantil. **Resultados:** En general, los resultados subrayan la confianza de lo/as participantes en la capacidad del comentario libre para enriquecer las experiencias educativas de sus futuros estudiantes, al mismo tiempo que reconocen los desafíos asociados. **Discusión:** Los resultados sugieren la necesidad de enfoques adaptados para la instrucción plurilingüe en educación infantil e identifican futuras líneas de investigación en este campo educativo. La integración de la DAT en contextos de AICLE ofrece oportunidades para promover el plurilingüismo y mejorar la competencia lingüística y cultural.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Traducción audiovisual didáctica (TAD); educación preescolar; AICLE; profesorado en formación; comentario libre.

### **Introduction**

Didactic audiovisual translation (DAT) refers to the application of audiovisual translation (AVT) modes, such as subtitling, dubbing, subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing (SDH), audio description (AD), and voiceover (VO), as educational tools in language instruction (Talaván, 2020). Essentially, DAT focuses on designing instructional activities wherein learners employ distinct strategies in subtitling or revoicing a video segment using Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Although DAT is commonly associated with Foreign Language Learning (FLL) –which is a proxy for teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL)–, the utilization of subtitling or dubbing can enhance students' proficiency in their mother tongue (L1) as well as their second (L2) or third language (L3). Experiments involving minority languages in Spain reveal that revoicing and subtitling serve as effective tools for learning endangered languages with limited media exposure (Avello-Rodríguez & Fernández-Costales, 2020).

In the realm of language acquisition, DAT serves as an interdisciplinary field that merges translation studies, applied linguistics, and educational sciences (Talaván et al., 2024). Notably, research within the domain of DAT has yielded promising outcomes in language education, contributing to the enhancement of students' communicative abilities across primary, secondary, and tertiary educational levels (Ávila-Cabrera & Rodríguez-Arancón, 2021; Bausells-Espín, 2022; Lertola, 2018; Pintado-Gutiérrez & Torralba, 2022; Sánchez-Requena et al., 2022; Talaván, 2013). While the use of DAT in language education has been extensively explored within higher education settings, particularly within language-related programmes, fewer studies have investigated its impact within secondary (Navarrete, 2013, 2018; Sánchez-Requena, 2016, 2018) and primary education (Fernández-Costales, 2021a, 2021b). To date, the examination of DAT in pre-school education remains largely uncharted territory.

Introducing DAT into pre-school education can facilitate the development of not only linguistic, intercultural, and mediation skills, but also contribute to the enhancement of multimodal literacy skills. The importance of multimodal literacy is underscored by its recognition of the availability and utilization of various modes, such as speech, writing, imagery, music, gesture, gaze, and posture, for communication, representation, and interaction within a culture (López-Pérez & Bobadilla-Pérez, 2023). Consequently, the principal aim of this study is to investigate the perceptions of prospective pre-school educators concerning the pedagogical feasibility of DAT within the context of plurilingual education. Specifically, the study seeks to explore the use of free commentary as a resource within a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) framework. Our claim is that DAT provides learners with the chance to manipulate the language that conveys the content, which is shown in an interactive way, thus improving motivation of CLIL learners. Furthermore, DAT can activate cognitive processes and foster intercultural competence (Fernández-Costales, 2017).

## **Literary review**

### **Didactic audiovisual translation**

In the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the integration of AVT into FLL gained prominence with key publications by scholars such as Williams and Thorne (2000), Talaván (2006) and Danan (2010), which focused on the benefits of using subtitling and dubbing to learn foreign languages. While earlier studies had examined the use of watching subtitles to support learning (Price, 1983; Vanderplank, 1988), scholarly attention shifted towards the active use of DAT in the 2010s, emphasizing active integration of AVT into language learning rather than its passive use as a supplement. This shift resulted in the publication of seminal monographs (Incalcaterra McLoughlin et al. 2018; Lertola, 2019a; Talaván, 2013) and a rise in related articles in specialized journals.

In the past two decades, research in this domain has provided empirical evidence showcasing how DAT facilitates vocabulary acquisition (Lertola, 2019b), nurtures intercultural competence (Borghetti & Lertola, 2014), enhances oral comprehension and production (Ávila-Cabrera, 2022; Fuentes-Luque & Campbell, 2020) improves written proficiency (Ávila-Cabrera, 2021; Talaván et al., 2017), and advances overall

communicative competence in L2 acquisition (Baños-Piñero et al., 2021; Fernández-Costales et al., 2023). Beyond linguistic advantages, the application of DAT has demonstrated positive impacts on various educational dimensions: it fosters creativity (Ávila-Cabrera, 2022; Talaván, 2019), stimulates classroom interaction and motivation (Alonso-Pérez, 2019; Beseghi, 2018), activates prior knowledge, engages higher and lower-order cognitive abilities, and encourages translanguaging, encompassing the use of both the native and target languages in instructional settings (Baños-Piñero et al., 2021; Pintado-Gutiérrez & Torralba, 2022).

The primary benefits of employing DAT in various language contexts stem from its use of authentic video and specialized software, like subtitle editors or video editing programmes. These resources imbue the learning environment with authenticity, familiarity, realism, and motivation. Additionally, the integration of diverse codes (semiotic and linguistic) and channels (written and oral) actively engages learners during subtitling or dubbing tasks, enhancing the comprehensiveness of didactic AVT practice and its potential benefits in FLL. Leaving linguistic gains aside, the use of subtitling or active dubbing of videos by students facilitates the development of digital skills, multimodal working, and mediation (Martínez-Sierra, 2021). Moreover, it is noteworthy that DAT can be implemented in both face-to-face and digital educational settings, a particularly pertinent aspect given the increased prominence of virtual (online) and hybrid modes of language learning in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the growing corpus of papers devoted to DAT in the last decades, some research gaps can be identified in the field: the application of DAT in pre-school is unresearched, and we feel the insights of stakeholders (particularly, teachers) deserves further attention, as they are the key agents in language education.

Research in DAT has primarily focused on the analysis of subtitling and dubbing, although other modalities, such as VO and SDH, have been examined in more recent studies (see, for instance, Talaván, 2021; Talaván et al., 2022).

Free commentary is a lesser-known AVT mode that lies midway between dubbing and AD. It involves interlingual transfer in the aural channel, replacing the original dialogues with a new audio track. This track typically provides a relatively free description of the visuals combined with a loose translation or adaptation of the original dialogues. Free commentary is occasionally employed in documentaries (when voice-over is not used as the AVT mode) and has recently gained popularity in informal contexts, often aiming to produce specific effects on the audience, ranging from parody to political messaging. Despite its unique features, there is little to no research on free commentary as an AVT mode, likely due to its overlap with dubbing and the challenges of accessing the original materials or analyzing the transfer process in this creative translation approach (Lertola, 2021; Talaván et al., 2024).

One of the most comprehensive research projects carried out on DAT was TRADILEX (<https://plataformavirtual.tradilex.es>) that aimed to evaluate the impact of DAT on the participants' four linguistic skills (listening, reading, writing and speaking) and the integrated learning of foreign languages. The study involved 566 participants from eight Spanish universities during the 2020–2021 academic year. The results of the project revealed that DAT significantly enhances the English learning process, with participating students showing improvement across all four linguistic skills: written and oral reception and production. Additionally, students demonstrated notable

progress in both DAT and foreign language skills throughout the intervention, aligning with similar findings from earlier research (Fernández-Costales et al., 2023).

### **DAT in pre-school and primary education**

Scholars have foreseen the potential of DAT in teacher education since the early 2010s and research is gradually growing (Nicora, 2024). Pre-service primary education teachers have been involved in a few experimental studies aimed at investigating their perception on the applicability of the DAT-based methodology in primary education. After being introduced to DAT and practicing subtitling and/or revoicing tasks, they acknowledge DAT as a beneficial tool in primary education settings (Couto-Cantero et al., in press; López-Cirugeda & Sánchez-Ruiz, 2013; Fernández-Costales, 2014; Tinedo-Rodríguez & Lertola, 2024). In the case of Fernández-Costales' 2014 study, teacher training was intertwined with actual practice as the 30 pre-service teachers could implement a subtitling teaching unit with primary students in their placement school. In a feedback questionnaire, the pre-service teachers reckoned that didactic subtitling could foster primary students' motivation and vocabulary development. Furthermore, subtitling tasks proved to be particularly suited in CLIL context since the 4C can be effectively addressed. These results are in line with the perception of the primary students involved. In a more recent study, as many as 120 primary school children had a very positive perception on the use of didactic subtitling and didactic dubbing tasks (Fernández-Costales, 2021a). Interestingly, students showed a slight preference towards dubbing tasks as in-training teachers did (Fernández-Costales, 2021b).

Recent studies have explored DAT-based tasks with primary school children learning Italian as a Foreign Language in Ireland (Beltramello & Nicora, 2021; Nicora, 2022; Nicora & Lertola, in press). The three experimental studies have investigated the combined use of captioning and revoicing activities in face-to-face and online settings. Despite some technological issues, participants enjoyed the experience in terms of the development of language as well as transferable skills and expressed their interest in learning languages and content through DAT activities.

Furthermore, for what concerns CLIL, two didactic proposals have been advanced: in the first one by Tinedo-Rodríguez (2022), a short film has been produced to allow working on cross-curricular and linguistic content in an integrated way by means of a didactic voice-over task; in the second by Tinedo-Rodríguez & Ogea (2023), a lesson plan has been designed to delve into the photoelectric effect, employing didactic subtitling of documentaries as a novel approach to teaching Physics.

However, research on the implementation of DAT in pre-school is still limited. An exploratory study was carried out with Vocational Education and Training (VET) in-training - teachers (Lertola, 2021). Participants created a didactic free commentary task of a silent animated video by writing the script collaboratively and recording it individually. In a feedback questionnaire and a focus group, they acknowledged to have improved their own language proficiency in a creative as well as enjoyable way and expressed their intention to employ it in their future teaching practice. Notably, the age range of the infants sparked a debate. Some participants believed the DAT task could be appropriate for two-to-three-year-old children if modified, while others considered

it more suitable for children aged five and above. To conclude, the encouraging feedback from teachers and children regarding the integration of DAT activities into teaching practices documented in previous studies has paved the way for further research in the field of DAT in pre-school education.

### **CLIL in pre-school education**

Language acquisition in pre-school education is fundamental for laying the groundwork of effective communication skills throughout life. In recent decades, educational reforms in Spain, such as the LOE (2006), LOMCE (2013), and LOMLOE (2020), have increasingly emphasized the importance of second language learning, elevating plurilingualism to a central competency within the curriculum. The concept of plurilingualism, as outlined in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001), emphasizes the integration of linguistic experiences across diverse cultural contexts, thereby fostering a holistic communicative competence that transcends individual languages.

To promote plurilingualism, educational methodologies must integrate principles that address both linguistic and cultural diversity. CLIL has emerged as a prominent approach in this regard. As defined by Coyle et al. (2010), it is a dual-focused educational approach that intertwines language and content learning, with an emphasis on communication, content, cognition, and culture—the "4Cs" framework. This approach has seen growing interest in pre-school education, where developmental characteristics demand a flexible and playful pedagogy tailored to the holistic needs of young learners (Otto & Cortina, 2023).

The application of CLIL in pre-school must align with the globalized nature of early education. Rather than isolating subjects as in primary and secondary levels, CLIL proposals at this stage are better organized into interdisciplinary activities that address the three key areas of knowledge defined by the LOMLOE (2020): Harmonious Growth, Discovery and Exploration of the Environment, and Communication. Additionally, "culture" in the CLIL framework should encompass both local and distant cultural elements, fostering a sense of identity while introducing global perspectives. Task-based learning is particularly effective in this context, as it integrates these principles into meaningful, age-appropriate activities that support language acquisition and holistic development (Bobadilla-Pérez & Cancela-Pose, 2020).

The growing interest in CLIL for pre-school education has led to the development of specialized handbooks (e.g., Mair, 2021; Otto & Cortina-Pérez, 2023) and an expanding body of research, including studies by Alvira and González (2018), Almodóvar and Gómez-Parra (2017), and Cortina-Pérez and Pino (2022). These works emphasize the need to adapt CLIL practices to the unique learning characteristics of pre-school children.

### **CLIL and Free Commentary**

An emerging area of innovation within the CLIL framework is the integration of digital competences, a priority under the European Commission's Digital Education Action Plan (2021–2027) (2023). Digital tools can enhance the interactive and



multimodal nature of language learning, making it more engaging for very young learners. In this context, DAT represents a particularly promising approach. DAT leverages audiovisual media, such as subtitling and dubbing tasks, to support the development of both oral and digital skills. By engaging children in tasks such as creating Free Commentary for short stories, DAT promotes language acquisition while simultaneously building foundational digital literacy.

In pre-school CLIL settings, DAT aligns seamlessly with task-based learning, providing opportunities for authentic language use and collaboration. For example, Free Commentary activities can help children connect spoken and written language, enhancing oral comprehension and vocabulary retention while encouraging pronunciation practice and expressive communication. By integrating these practices, educators can create a rich, multimodal environment that fosters both linguistic and digital competencies, paving the way for future learning success.

Free Commentary represents a still relatively infrequent DAT mode. Recently, researchers and educators have begun to explore its potential due to its flexibility. Its primary objective is to convey the core message, rather than to adhere strictly to the source text or the images. This flexibility allows learners to focus on (inter)cultural elements either freely or in a guided way. These inherent features make Free Commentary a suitable approach for early childhood and primary education.

## **Method**

The study comprises three primary research questions:

R.Q1. What are the teachers' perceptions regarding the efficacy of DAT, and didactic free commentary in particular, as tools for facilitating language acquisition among very young learners?

R.Q2. Is free commentary a suitable instrument for fostering the implementation of CLIL within the pre-school educational setting?

R.Q3. Does the use and design of DAT resources contribute to the enhancement of classroom engagement among future pre-school teachers?

The objective of the article is to provide new insights into language education by presenting empirical research on the application of DAT in pre-school education, a topic that has been neglected thus far. Furthermore, through analyzing teachers' perspectives, we aim to explore not only the potential benefits of DAT in this educational stage but also the challenges and difficulties experienced by educators. The paper also contributes to the field of CLIL and plurilingual education by offering new insights and classroom approaches to be used in bilingual classes. The study adopts an exploratory research design, employing a mixed-methodology approach that combines quantitative –i.e., questionnaires– and qualitative –focus groups– data collection techniques. We find the use of both techniques aligns with the nature of the study (exploratory) and the aims of the paper. Besides, the research design is coherent with many studies published in the field of DAT and language education.

The investigation took place at the Faculty of Education of the University of A

Coruña, Spain, throughout the second semester of the 2023-2024 academic year.

## Participants

The participants consisted of 103 student-teachers enrolled in the Degree in Pre-School Education. All participants were enrolled in the course "Foreign Language Teaching in Pre-school " during the third year of their degree programme. It is also worth mentioning that in the Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Education, there is no specific subject dedicated to ICT; instead, these competencies are addressed transversally throughout the curriculum. Concerning their L2 competence, Table 1 presents data on the self-assessed English proficiency levels according to the CEFR. Despite the existing diversity, most of the participants (69.2%) acknowledged an intermediate level (B1-B2).

**Table 1**

*Self-perceived level of English*

CEFR Level	%
C2	-
C1	2.9
B2	17.3
B1	51.9
A2	22.1
A1	5.8

Regarding their digital proficiency, 18.3% of participants identified themselves as "advanced users" of ICTs, demonstrating a propensity for utilizing technology effectively in planning teaching activities and classes. Furthermore, 71.2% of the students categorized themselves as "average users" of ICTs, indicating regular and proficient use of technology both at home and in their academic pursuits. Conversely, only 10.6% of respondents classified themselves as "basic users," relying primarily on a limited number of applications for fundamental tasks.

## Data collection tools

To collect data for this research, four research instruments were used. The first two comprised a free commentary DAT lesson plan (LP) and a [review form](#), both of which underwent piloting and validation by two university professors expert in pre-school education and DAT. Initially, a lesson plan was formulated following the structure of the self-learning method [TRADILEX platform](#), which is a component of the TRADILEX project (Fernández-Costales et al., 2023). The two experts' answers to the form provided information about the suitability of this resource to current educational curricula as well as for strategies to involve very young learners in the teaching and



learning process. The review form of the lesson plan, also developed within the TRADILEX project, included 25 items, namely 2 Likert scale, 10 multiple-choice questions and 13 open-ended questions.

The third research instrument was a questionnaire adapted from Fernández-Costales (2021b) –which focused on the use of subtitling and dubbing in CLIL primary education. The tool adapted for the current research aimed to gather information on the applicability of free commentary as a tool for the pre-school classroom within the framework of the CLIL approach. This questionnaire comprised 27 items, including a combination of Likert scale close-ended items (17) and multiple-choice (5) and open-ended questions (5). The internal reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a result of 0.95. This value indicates excellent consistency among the items in the survey, suggesting that they reliably measure the same underlying construct. This level of reliability is generally considered to reflect strong internal consistency, ensuring that the survey results are dependable and robust for further analysis.

Descriptive statistics were applied to address the research objectives. The primary focus was to analyze students' perceptions of the use of DAT in early childhood education and CLIL, rather than to investigate differences between groups. Given this focus on understanding perceptions, the study did not require the use of inferential statistics. By using descriptive statistics, we were able to summarize and present the data in a way that highlights key trends and patterns related to students' views on DAT in these educational settings. The fourth and final research tool involved a focus group discussion which aimed at further exploring pre-service teachers' perceptions. Six pre-service teachers participated in structured group discussions, addressing the proposed ten questions. The responses from the focus group were transcribed and analyzed using thematic content analysis. This allowed for a deeper understanding of the participants' views and experiences regarding the use of AVT in early childhood education and CLIL. This approach helped uncover the underlying patterns and key insights that informed the study's findings.

### **Data collection procedures**

Data collection occurred during two face-to-face sessions, each spanning ninety minutes, in April 2023. These sessions commenced with an introduction to the study's topic, accompanied by an assurance of data confidentiality. Following this, the lesson plan was presented, and students independently completed it. Subsequently, the students filled out the feedback questionnaire. Additionally, a separate one-hour session was dedicated to conducting a focus group discussion involving six participants from the study.

The Free Commentary LP was devised to acquaint pre-service pre-school teachers with didactic free commentary and to guide them in crafting a new LP aimed at 5-6-year-old children. Specifically, the LP adapted a prior free commentary task designed for pre-service pre-school teachers in Vocational and Educational Training (Lertola, 2021) and followed the TRADILEX methodology (Talaván et al., 2024), encompassing four stages. Initially, in a 10-minute warm-up stage, pre-service teachers were tasked with comprehensively reading an excerpt from an academic text elucidating free

commentary in language education and summarizing it into two sentences. Subsequently, in a 5-minute video viewing stage, they actively watched the initial one-minute-and-a-half of a creative-common animation titled “Big Buck Bunny” (Blender, 2014) and responded to two questions. The first question was multiple-choice, inquiring about the tenses suitable for preparing their free commentary script, while the second question was open-ended, prompting them to list at least two descriptive words applicable to the characters depicted in the video. Following this, the main activity of didactic free commentary was introduced, accompanied by guidelines for its execution and an introduction to the Google Chrome plugin ScreenCastify for conducting the commentary. This AVT-task stage was supposed to last about 35 minutes. Finally, the 10-minute post-task phase involved a written reflection on the applicability of free commentary as a didactic tool in pre-school education, adhering to parameters outlined in the current Spanish educational law, the LOMLOE. This segment provided valuable qualitative insights into the practicality of this tool in pre-school classrooms, with students offering suggestions for specific tasks involving very young learners in the free commentary process.

The LP underwent pilot testing by two experts in both DAT and pre-school education, who completed the LP and provided feedback using an ad hoc LP review form developed within the TRADILEX project. Their comprehensive review and suggestions, including the integration of learning chunks and a deeper exploration of pedagogical principles outlined in the latest educational laws for pre-school education, were incorporated into the LP. Based on the reviewers' feedback, several modifications were made to the lesson plan to enhance its effectiveness and alignment with educational standards. First, minor adjustments were made to the timeline to better accommodate the pacing and flow of the activities. Additionally, the lesson plan was revised to align with the LOMLOE educational law, which emphasizes a more interactive and student-centered approach. This adaptation ensures that the lesson plan meets the current educational standards and fosters active engagement among students. In accordance with LOMLOE principles advocating for interactive learning scenarios, the plan was enriched with activities that promote greater student interaction and participation. Furthermore, the content was tailored to explicitly address themes of coexistence and conflict resolution, providing students with opportunities to explore and practice these essential social skills. In the final phase, participants were encouraged to reflect on their own lesson plan designs, deepening their understanding of the planning process and fostering continuous improvement in their instructional strategies.

## Analysis

### *Questionnaire*

The key findings from an exploratory descriptive analysis of the questionnaire responses provided by the study participants are presented in this section. Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviation of the 17 closed-ended items from the survey, assessed on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5.

**Table 2**

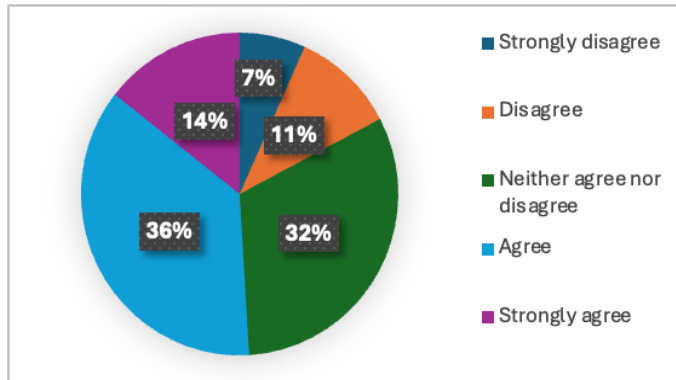
*Descriptive Statistics*

	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
1. Did you enjoy using free commentary as a teaching tool?	3.413	1.076
2. As an English student, has the activity helped you improve your written production?	2.952	1.135
3. As an English student, has the activity helped you improve your oral production?	2.692	1.124
4. As an English student, has the activity helped you improve your grammar knowledge?	2.894	1.148
5. As an English student, did you like the digital storytelling activity?	3.529	1.140
6. As an English student, did you enjoy learning with ICT?	3.625	1.134
7. Would you use free commentary in your own classes with pre-school students?	3.500	1.097
8. As a future pre-school educator, is the video duration suitable for your future students?	4.423	0.746
9. As a future pre-school educator, is the video content suitable for your future students?	4.423	0.759
10. As a future pre-school educator, are you satisfied with the story you've prepared?	3.788	1.067
11. As a future pre-school educator, did you like being able to prepare an activity with ICT?	3.760	1.047
12. As a future pre-school educator, would you combine traditional storytelling with digital storytelling in your future work?	3.654	1.041
13. Do you think free commentary can be used in CLIL classes in pre-school education?	4.173	0.818
14. Do you think that free commentary activities can facilitate the "dual" work in CLIL (language and content)?	4.000	0.924
15. Do you think that free commentary activities can facilitate working with the 4Cs (communication, culture, cognition, and content) in CLIL?	3.971	0.897
16. Do you think that free commentary activities can facilitate fostering creativity in CLIL?	4.019	0.892
17. Do you think that free commentary activities can promote the use of two languages (code-switching/translanguaging) in the classroom?	4.000	0.914

As can be observed in the previous table, the overall perception of the participants regarding the use of free commentary –and DAT– as teaching tools in language education is largely positive, with means close to 5 in many items. In particular, item 1 ( $M = 3.413$ ) indicates that teachers generally enjoyed using free commentary as a teaching tool in pre-school education (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

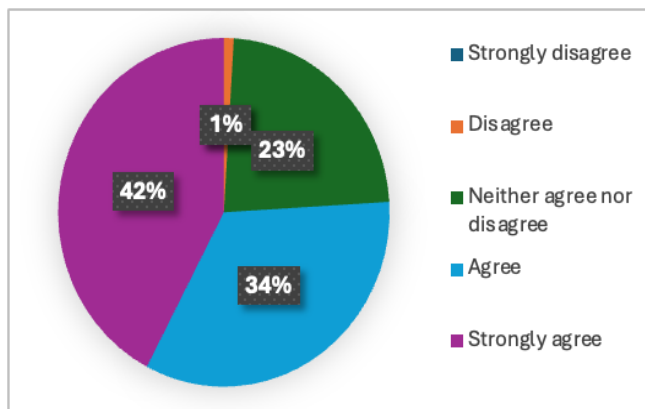
*Did you enjoy using free commentary as a teaching tool?*



However, the data suggest that free commentary may not have significantly improved the English language skills of the pre-service teachers themselves, with lower means for improving written production (item 2,  $M = 2.952$ ), oral production (item 3,  $M = 2.692$ ), and grammar knowledge (item 4,  $M = 2.894$ ). These scores imply that while the activities may have had some positive impact on students' language skills, the perceived improvement is moderate rather than strongly positive. Most teachers agree that DAT and free commentary are more effective when used in higher levels of pre-school education. Specifically, 95.31% consider 5 years to be the optimal stage, followed by 38.5% who believe 4 years is the ideal level. In contrast, only 7.7% selected 3 years, 1.9% selected 6 years, and 1% selected 1 year. Figure 2 underlines most participants would use free commentary as a didactic resource when teaching in pre-school education:

**Figure 2**

*As a teacher, would you use free commentary in your classes?*



Regarding student engagement through the use of digital storytelling (item 5) and ICTs (item 6), the mean scores are relatively high, at 3.529 and 3.625 respectively. This suggests that students generally enjoyed and were engaged with digital resources and DAT activities. Additionally, the mean scores for satisfaction with preparing activities using ICTs (item 11,  $M = 3.760$ ) and willingness to combine traditional storytelling with digital storytelling (item 12,  $M = 3.654$ ) are also notably high.

Participants also reported positive perceptions regarding the suitability of video duration (item 8,  $M = 4.423$ ) and content (item 9,  $M = 4.423$ ) for future students, confirming that they perceive the materials as appropriate for their intended audience. This indicates that future educators are open to integrating digital tools into their teaching practices.

When asked about the most salient benefits of using free commentary and DAT in pre-school education (Table 3), teachers selected the following possibilities (participants could choose more than one option in this question):

**Table 3**

*The most salient benefits of using free commentary for students.*

<b>Proposal</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Vocabulary acquisition	93.3%
Creativity promotion	89.4%
Collaborative work	80.8%
Using ICTs	73.1%
Pronunciation	65.4%
Motivation	65.4%
Grammar	57.7%

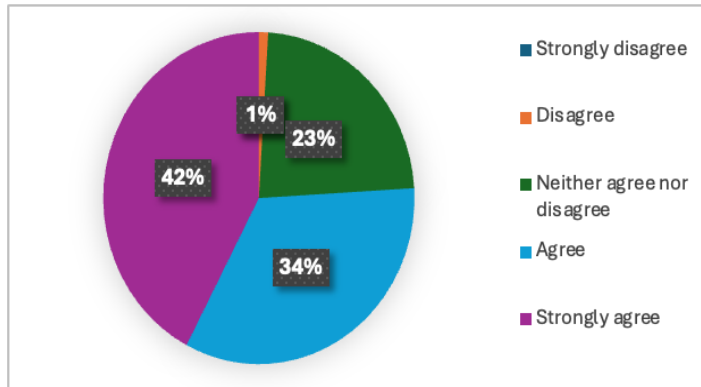
Aiming to identify potential challenges in the use of free commentary in pre-school education, participants were asked an open-ended question about the most evident difficulties for pre-school learners. Most participants believe that a lack of vocabulary may pose an issue for young learners. Other responses highlight classroom management, insufficient grammar knowledge, and the use of ICTs as possible difficulties.

When asked about the difficulties for teachers, participants consider time management and using ICTs as possible challenges when working with free commentary in their classes.

Concerning the use of DAT in bilingual education, the perception of prospective teachers on the use of free commentary in CLIL settings is favourable (76%) (Figure 4).

**Figure 4**

*Do you think free commentary can be used in CLIL classes in pre-school education?*



The results show that teachers generally view free commentary activities as beneficial for CLIL, particularly in terms of facilitating language and content integration, fostering creativity, and promoting bilingualism in the classroom. They believe that free commentary can be effectively used in CLIL classes in pre-school education (item 13,  $M = 4.173$ ) and that these activities can facilitate working with the 4Cs (communication, culture, cognition, and content) in CLIL (item 15,  $M = 3.971$ ) and foster creativity (item 16,  $M = 4.019$ ).

Pre-service teachers also believe that free commentary activities can facilitate the "dual" work of language and content (item 14,  $M = 4.000$ ) and promote the use of two languages (code-switching/translanguaging) in the classroom (item 17,  $M = 4.000$ ).

Overall, the data indicate positive perceptions of using free commentary and digital storytelling activities in pre-school language education and CLIL settings. These activities are seen as particularly effective in facilitating content and language integration, promoting multilingualism, and fostering creativity. However, the data also suggest that these activities may not have significantly improved the English language skills of the pre-service teachers themselves. While there is room for improvement in the perceived effectiveness of these activities for English language development, there is a clear interest and openness among educators towards integrating ICT and innovative pedagogical approaches into their teaching practices.

### *Focus group*

Next we synthesize the outcomes of the focus group, where six pre-service pre-school teachers were asked about the use of free commentary as a didactic tool within pre-school education.

Initially, participants showed a generally positive inclination towards the incorporation of free commentary into pedagogical methodologies for pre-school education. The general perception of the participants is well depicted in what one said:



“I consider it (free commentary) very useful for promoting significant learning of English in the pre-school classroom, especially because these activities encourage creativity in children”.

However, they recognized the need for additional time and practical experience to fully comprehend its potential, noting that the 90-minute session devoted to the resource's presentation was insufficient for adequate implementation. Identified advantages included the enhancement of English language proficiency, refinement of language and grammatical competencies, encouragement of children's creative expression, and fostering intrinsic motivation for learning. Additionally, one participant proposed the potential effectiveness of integrating “bits of intelligence”:

“I think it can be perfectly implemented in the pre-school classroom. It's as my colleague was saying, everything depends on the level and the foundation that the children have, but I also suppose that when the time comes to implement this in a classroom, it could also be adapted a little according to the age level. We could also do something beforehand, like for example, using intelligence bits related to the theme of the video so that they can learn words.”

“Bits of intelligence”, as outlined by Salazar-Almeida et al. (2023), within the context of free commentary serves to facilitate children's cognitive development. This methodology entails providing children with meaningful sensory experiences, leveraging their visual and auditory faculties to engage in activities aimed at memorization, recognition, and contextual understanding, thereby enabling them to adeptly navigate novel situations. Moreover, the integration of graphical material accompanied by auditory cues serves to enhance sensory engagement. Despite these benefits, several challenges were identified regarding the integration of free commentary into the pre-school education, including accommodating diverse student proficiency levels, addressing potential student reluctance towards English usage, ensuring effective classroom management, and securing necessary technological resources, as one of the participants noted:

“The two main challenges I see are the technical difficulties and the classroom management needed to organize the activity so that everyone participates and contributes something.”

Furthermore, discussions explored the potential alignment of free commentary with the four components of the CLIL approach—communication, culture, content, and cognition—indicating its potential to support a globalized approach inherent in the pre-school curriculum. Interestingly, participants emphasize the importance of carefully selecting the audiovisual material to be used in order to integrate the 4Cs framework effectively:

“The material, in this case the video, will play a significant role in incorporating those 4Cs.”

Finally, participants also acknowledged the utility of engaging in free commentary tasks for the development of their own linguistic skills.

## **Discussion & conclusion**

Overall, participants in this study expressed confidence in the capacity of free commentary to enrich the educational experiences of their future students, while acknowledging associated challenges and emphasizing the ongoing need for exploration and refinement for its effective integration. Next, we address the three research questions formulated in our study. Next, we proceed to address the three research that were central to our study:

### **RQ1. What are the teachers' perceptions regarding the efficacy of DAT and free commentary as tools for facilitating language acquisition among very young learners?**

The results underscore the potential benefits of integrating DAT and free commentary in pre-school education, with teachers predominantly expressing positive perceptions. These findings align with those in Fernández-Costales (2021a, 2021b). The study suggests that DAT enhances language acquisition by offering various communication modes. However, challenges such as managing classroom diversity in language proficiency, students' reluctance to engage in English, and the necessity for adequate technological resources were highlighted. Therefore, the teacher's role in planning the instructional sequence becomes crucial. Given that DAT lends itself to a student-centred approach, where the teacher acts as a facilitator (Talaván & Lertola, 2022), it is imperative to design instructional sequences that are adaptable to varying levels of language proficiency. Also, time constraints were a significant barrier, as the 90-minute sessions were insufficient for comprehensive implementation and understanding of free commentary. It is crucial to adapt DAT to the unique needs of very young learners and develop strategies to address these challenges.

### **RQ2. Is free commentary a suitable instrument for fostering the implementation of the CLIL approach within the pre-school educational setting?**

The findings suggest that free commentary is a valuable tool for fostering CLIL in pre-school education. Future educators believe DAT supports the 4Cs, the dual approach (learning content and language), and promotes translanguaging—key aspects of CLIL. However, additional training and support are necessary for teachers to effectively integrate free commentary into their practices (Almodóvar & Gómez-Parra, 2017; Cortina-Pérez & Pino, 2022). Comprehensive training for pre-service teachers, including pedagogical strategies and technical skills, is essential for maximizing the potential of these tools.

### **RQ3. Does the use and design of DAT resources contribute to the enhancement of classroom engagement among future pre-school teachers?**

The study indicates that the use and design of DAT resources enhance classroom engagement among future pre-school teachers. This underscores the importance of incorporating engaging and interactive activities into language education and CLIL practices. The results highlight the significance of multimodal literacy skills in pre-school education (López-Pérez & Bobadilla-Pérez, 2023). DAT can develop these skills by providing opportunities for learners to engage with various communication modes, such as speech, writing, imagery, music, gesture, gaze, and posture. Additionally, the study emphasizes the importance of cultural and communicative development in pre-school education. According to Rodríguez-Arancón (2023) DAT promotes the development of Intercultural competence by exposing learners to diverse cultural models and integrating familiar as well as distant cultural elements.

The findings of this study demonstrate that DAT and free commentary are highly effective pedagogical tools for enhancing language skills in pre-school education, especially within CLIL frameworks. These approaches not only improve language proficiency but also stimulate creativity and promote bilingualism among young learners. Participants emphasized the value of integrating ICT tools, such as Screencastify, into the educational process, noting that these tools offer valuable hands-on experience for pre-service teachers. However, there is a clear need for appropriate training and resources to maximize their effectiveness.

The alignment of DAT and free commentary with current educational policies, such as Spain's LOMLOE, highlights their practical relevance in modern classrooms. This research underscores the importance of further investigation into the practical application of DAT in early education settings, as well as strategies for overcoming the challenges teachers face in implementing these tools.

Limitations such as the homogeneous nature of the sample and the potential desirability effect should be addressed in future studies, which could expand the sample size and include a more diverse group of educators. Future research could also explore the impact of other DAT modes, like audio description or dubbing, on students' motivation, engagement, and language acquisition, as well as their contribution to CLIL outcomes.

We hope this study opens new avenues for educators and researchers to incorporate innovative didactic strategies into language education at the early stages.

#### ***Authors' Contributions***

Alberto Fernández-Costales: research design, theoretical framework, data analysis, discussion and conclusions. María Bobadilla-Pérez: theoretical framework, data analysis, discussion and conclusions data collection. Jennifer Lertola: theoretical framework, data analysis, discussion and conclusions data collection.

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