

MA in Technology-Mediated Language Teaching and Learning

**Online comics as a resource to enhance
written productive skills in the primary
school EFL classroom**

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Abstract

The present project aims at enhancing English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' written productive skills through a digital comic about superheroes, created using ToonyTool. It also introduces an innovative proposal set to be used in the grade 6 EFL primary school classroom. The project addresses the challenges that written production poses for the students, such as the deficits that can be found in this skill, thus affecting their ability to communicate effectively in English. This will be done by helping students to produce clearer written work, which would also have an impact on their reading skills and motivation. The project consists of nine sessions divided into six phases lasting three weeks in total. Throughout these phases, students will be presented with the task instructions and a model to follow. Then, they will learn how to use ToonyTool and Google Classroom, along with the importance of using the Internet safely. After this, the present simple tense and the common language and vocabulary used in comics will be reviewed through games. Next, the first phase of writing will take place by creating the groups and thinking about the storyline. Then, students will create and share their comics, along with commenting on others' comics. This project will be assessed through summative and formative assessment. Concerning the first one, it will be done through a rubric, considering aspects like content, sentence structure, organisation and word choice. About the latter, an observation grid to check the progress will be used. Besides, peer-assessment and self-assessment will be carried out by the students, too. This assessment proposal would allow language teachers to prove if the students' attitudes and self-conception regarding writing have changed, and whether their performance has been affected positively by the creation of the comic.

Key words:

Comic books, EFL teaching, EFL writing, Primary education, ToonyTool.

Resumen

El presente proyecto tiene como objetivo mejorar las habilidades de expresión escrita en inglés, a través de un cómic digital sobre superhéroes, creado con ToonyTool. Además, se introduce una propuesta innovadora diseñada para ser utilizada en el aula del 6º curso de primaria, en la asignatura de Lengua Extranjera (Inglés). El proyecto aborda los desafíos que la producción escrita presenta para los estudiantes, y la carencia de habilidad para comunicarse efectivamente en este idioma. Esto se logrará ayudando al estudiantado a producir textos escritos más claros, lo que a su vez impactará en sus habilidades de lectura y motivación. El proyecto consta de nueve sesiones divididas en seis fases con una duración de tres semanas. A lo largo de estas fases, se presentarán las instrucciones de la tarea y un modelo a seguir. Luego, aprenderán a usar ToonyTool y Google Classroom, junto con la importancia de usar internet de manera segura. Después de esto, se repasarán a través de juegos el ‘Presente Simple’ y el vocabulario utilizado en cómics. Después, se crearán los grupos y tendrá lugar la primera fase de escritura en la que el alumnado decidirá el argumento de la historia. Luego, creará y compartirá sus cómics, además de comentar los cómics de los y las compañeros/as. Este proyecto será evaluado mediante evaluación sumativa y formativa. La primera se realizará mediante una rúbrica considerando el contenido, estructura de las oraciones, organización y elección de léxico. En cuanto a la segunda, se aplicará una guía de observación para analizar el proceso. Además, llevarán a cabo la evaluación entre iguales y la autoevaluación. Todo esto permitirá al cuerpo docente comprobar si las actitudes y el autoconcepto de los estudiantes respecto a la escritura han cambiado, y si su rendimiento ha mejorado gracias a la creación del cómic.

Palabras clave:

Cómics, Educación Primaria, enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera, expresión escrita, ToonyTool.

1. Introduction and justification

The implementation of technology in education has gained a lot of relevance in recent years, due to its presence in the daily life of most citizens. Before deepening into the project, it should be stated that, nowadays, our students have inevitable access to it. Although technology is deeply integrated into our society, it has not been as successfully integrated into schools, maybe due to various reasons, such as the lack of available digital materials, or copyright and safety-related issues, such as the impossibility of checking the websites students' browse in class, which teachers may not be prepared to face.

However, technology provides many ways of gathering and sharing information, promoting at the same time, interaction, both oral and written. Thus, it offers a great variety of possibilities when teaching, as well as the opportunity to engage students in a learning process related to real-world applications (Pilgrim et al., 2012).

The main focus of the present project will be writing, which is defined as a productive skill that includes aspects such as lexis, syntax, punctuation and organisation. Its development would consist of three stages: (1) construction of meaning, (2) transformation of that meaning according to the rules of the language, and (3) performance of the message. Research has pointed out some difficulties regarding the accuracy with which students convey written messages (Mohammad & Hazarika, 2016), so it is in need of further development. The lack of domain in this skill may also lead to difficulty in being able to communicate effectively. Thus, writing constitutes an essential part of any well-balanced course.

On a different note, lately, the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) approach has been gaining momentum in the educational field. This approach focuses on a goal to be achieved by the students, with clear outcomes and objectives to be assessed (Chen et al., 2019). It is also defined by Moore (2018) as an approach to language teaching that “uses tasks as a unit of analysis for research and practice in communicative language teaching” (p. 2). These tasks have a communicative outcome and draw on the cognitive processes that are in charge of language acquisition (Moore, 2018). In line with this, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

(Council of Europe, 2001) proposes an action-oriented approach to teaching, inviting teachers to create meaningful and real-life tasks that motivate students, which is closely related to the TBLT approach, in which tasks imply the use of language in authentic situations (Moore, 2018).

Therefore, the present Master's thesis arises from the need to improve writing skills in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom in Primary Education through technology. To achieve this, an innovative project is proposed, with a special focus on the ability to produce grammatically correct sentences adapted to the level of the students. To do so, TBLT and comics will be the central part of this innovative project (Robbani & Khoirotunnisa, 2021). Comics are short pieces of writing, full of visuals which can be used to develop both receptive and productive skills, and they also have a playful element. They foster learners' creativity as well, thanks to the variety of scenes, characters, etc., they have. Even though comics have been a literacy tool known for a long time, their application to teaching may not be that well-known, but research using them in the classroom context has hinted at positive results (Karap, 2017). Moreover, recent studies have shown that comics are a really motivating resource in the EFL classroom (e.g., Fatimah et al., 2019).

Furthermore, technology provides us with several ways of sharing the final products and providing feedback, as well as reflecting on the process of comic design and elaboration. For instance, different websites allow teachers to create a classroom group and different folders to post comments or videos about a topic. In this case, we will make use of an online comic creator, which is the 'ToonyTool' website, through which students will be expected to create a foreign language (FL) comic collaboratively, dividing them into groups. It is expected that students will present their comics to their classmates once they are ready and post them on Google Classroom, where they can comment and give feedback to each other.

Bearing in mind the benefits of using digital tools for creating comics, this MA thesis would make an interesting contribution to the field, since not many innovative and motivational proposals seek to improve writing skills in the FL in Primary Education, a crucial stage in language learning since it is then that students are deepening into their writing skills.

Apart from the innovative contribution the study would make to the field of language teaching through technological tools, this project is also motivated by personal reasons. I am an English teacher in primary, secondary and adult education and I have observed that, while primary students are very prone to speaking in English and using the language as a means of communication, they really feel uninterested and do not value FL writing. Due to that, I believe that, if they are asked to produce written texts through a technological tool which is of their interest, this situation would change positively.

Apart from this, reasons like motivation and the visual characteristics of this tool still play an important role and are to be analysed. I have used comics as a teaching resource, which when put into practice, proved to be beneficial for language learning. Children are probably interested in comics because the topic and animations are relevant to their age and their competence in the target language is not really high yet. This is an essential aspect to keep in mind since comics will not have the desired effect if we do not adjust them to the specific needs of the students. Furthermore, as I was an English student myself, I am aware of how relevant motivation is for language learning. It is difficult to feel engaged and perform appropriately when a topic you feel not too knowledgeable and motivated about is tackled, seeming a tedious and/or complicated activity to do. So as to gain some ideas of topics that would be relevant for the population this proposal is aimed at, a word cloud will be generated using the Mentimeter tool. Participants will be asked about topics they like to later on create a comic about them.

In addition, the Spanish law, in the Royal Decree 157/2022 of March 1st, proposes different key competences to be acquired by the students during elementary education. Three of them will be addressed since they are highly relevant to the project. First, we should highlight the linguistic communication competence, since it focuses on interacting in a respectful, ethical and creative way, both orally and written, as well as through signs, taking into consideration aspects like the beauty and joy that language can produce, especially when it comes to creating a comic, where we intent to generate emotions and arise interest as well. Secondly, the plurilingual competence is of relevance to the project as well, as it revolves around using FLs to communicate

effectively, as well as respecting and valuing the differences between languages and cultural backgrounds. This is fostered throughout the project because they are writing a text in the FL, finding a sense in it. So, they are learning about the value of the FL for communicating. Finally, the digital competence refers to making a critical and safe use of technological tools for learning. It is a very broad competence that covers knowing about security aspects, programming, creation of digital content and sharing it, most of which could be related to the comic creation process in the present thesis, as stated in the previous paragraphs.

The present project thus aims to promote the creation of an online comic in the FL which, in its turn, develops primary school students' writing skills, by producing syntactically-accurate sentences, with proper grammar tenses, accurate punctuation and style also bearing in mind the lexicon lexis typical to beginners. Moreover, learners will be expected to be able to give feedback and exchange information about the task of designing and creating a comic.

In conclusion, this project aims to be a source of ideas for teachers at any level and in a wide array of disciplines, who can adapt and use this kind of technological application in their specific educational context. Nevertheless, the aim is not only to act as a source but also as support and encouragement for teachers who encounter difficulties in how to introduce technology in a meaningful and motivating way so that their students acquire the FL, which can be sometimes challenging.

The present thesis will be divided into different chapters: (1) a theoretical framework in which the research on FL writing and comic books will be reviewed; (2) the research questions the study seeks to answer; (3) the description of the intervention with information revolving around participants, instruments and procedure; (4) its evaluation, and (5) the conclusions drawn from the project.

2. Theoretical Framework

In the present section, the use of comics in language teaching will be explored, as well as an overview of the written productive skills in FL learning. The main focus will be placed on how to introduce online comics in the language classroom and their relevance for teaching writing skills in the FL.

2.1. Acquisition of writing in an FL

Being able to master the different language skills in an FL is especially relevant in any society where English is used for many purposes, being known as a ‘lingua franca’, and thus, most interaction in this language takes place between non-native speakers. Consequently, EFL is characterised as being a language used to communicate with people regardless of their native language (Seidlhofer, 2005). Having introduced the importance of mastering EFL, being competent in the four skills would be essential in order to exchange information in authentic communicative contexts. These skills are divided into receptive, which include the abilities to understand written texts (reading) or speech (listening); and productive skills, which involve the ability to exchange information in the FL, orally or written (writing and speaking). The latter appear to be the most difficult to master in an FL (Davies, 1976), and this is one of the reasons why, throughout this project, attention will be mainly directed towards writing.

As it has been pointed out before, the development of communicative competence is the main goal of FL teaching. Consequently, writing requires determined study and practice, since several factors influencing the process must be considered. Pysarchyk and Yamshynska (2015) state that these factors are content, organisation, vocabulary and spelling, among others. Because of that, a holistic approach to writing teaching should be implemented, considering all of these factors.

Pysarchyk and Yamshynska (2015) also offer a description of some stages that can be identified in the process of writing, which are: planning, organisation, review and editing. The first one involves planning the relevant aspects to cover in the text and searching for information about it. Organisation concerns the preparation of an appropriate structure taking into account factors like the type of text that is being written, the target audience, etc. Review implies improving the original composition, in order to move to the last stage, which is editing. Once the text is revised, reading through the text again and editing it would be necessary. This classification will be considered when designing the pedagogical intervention of this project.

Additionally, despite the fact that writing is a crucial skill for students to learn, they still struggle to master it. Some of the issues that arise may derive from the lack of

importance given to early writing instruction. Traditionally, students have been asked to talk about a certain topic and after doing so, they were given a mark on it. That way, the teacher would be failing to look after the process of writing, which is a crucial component. This typically leads to an unnatural writing style which is done mostly to prevent grammatical errors, which are the aspect of writing that teachers usually focus on, often overlooking the writing process or the organisation of the composition. This indicates that receiving guidance and feedback from the teacher constitutes an integral part of the writing process (Ariyanti, 2017).

Consequently, students should not be asked to complete a written task in one session, because this will negatively influence the quality of their production. In other words, students should not be pressured to finish this task promptly since, as Gibbons (2002) mentions, different steps should be followed: looking for information about a topic, creating an outline, writing, editing and proofreading, all of which require time. In line with this, writing acquisition requires time due to the implication of components such as working memory or motivation. Cowan (2014) defines working memory as the limited amount of information stored in individuals' minds and used during cognitive tasks such as writing. To prevent an overload of students' working memory, it is important to avoid presenting an excessive amount of information and allow sufficient time for task completion, considering the students' language proficiency. Nevertheless, lack of time is a negative aspect by teachers, who may find it difficult to guide every pupil and clarify their doubts if they need to teach a classroom with many students, all of whom possibly have different learning needs (Ariyanti, 2017).

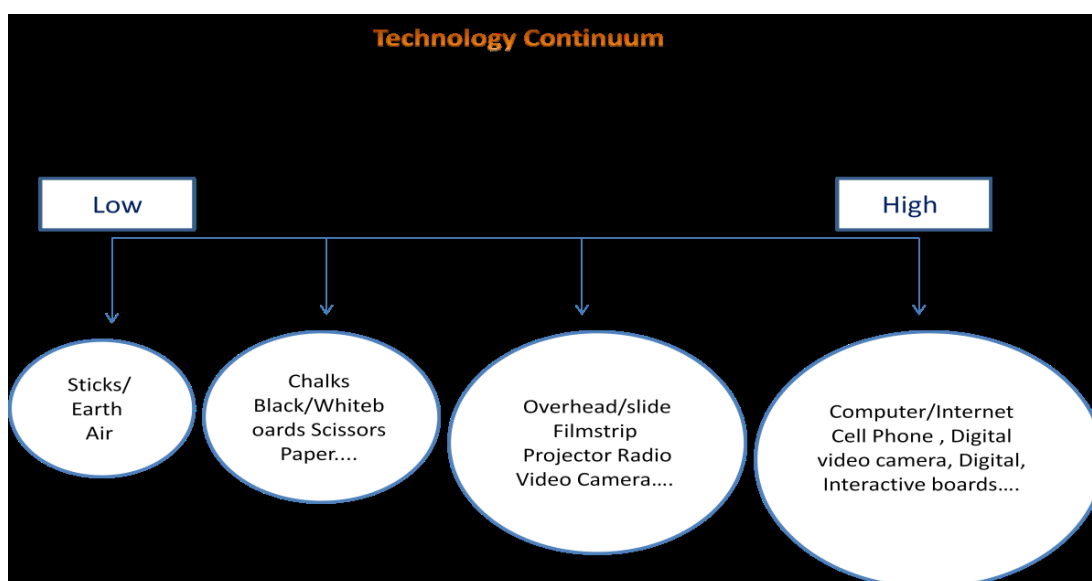
Overall, writing is a significant aspect of language teaching. However, it is important to remember that the assignment might not be rushed, due to the fact that students have to engage in cognitive activities and think deeply about the topic, in order to produce a text that meets the requirements of the task. Since the teachers act as guides, it is their role to assist and be aware of the time that writing takes, trying not to pressure the students. So, it must be said that respecting the students' acquisition processes, reflecting on the writing stages, and the importance of feedback are, by far, some of the most significant factors involved when teaching and learning writing (Ariyanti, 2017).

2.2. How FL can be improved through technology

The use of technology for educational purposes is becoming more relevant in recent days. By the same token, governments are working on making it mainstream in education. Abunowara and Libya (2014) suggest a continuum of technology used in EFL teaching, spanning from low to high (see Figure 1). Textbooks, the blackboard, or the tape recorder, among others, have been greatly relevant for teachers; however, technology is rapidly growing, being ‘high’ technology developed very quickly and offering effective results in the teaching practice. Research conducted by Noeth and Volkov (2004) has proven that computers improve students’ skills, provide greater academic results, and influence rapid learning acquisition and attitudes are enhanced, too (Abunowara & Libya, 2014).

Figure 1

Technology Continuum (Abunowara & Libya, 2014, p. 5)



The current development of technology has influenced writing skills as well, which have taken different forms. Göçen et al. (2023) define different concepts that are commonplace today, such as ‘digital literacy, digital writing, electronic writing, web-based writing, online writing, and multimodal texts. Digital literacy was first defined as:

The ability of individuals to appropriately use digital tools and facilities to identify, access, manage, integrate, evaluate, analyse and synthesize digital resources, construct new knowledge, create media expressions, and communicate with others, in the context of specific life situations, in order to enable constructive social action; and to reflect upon this process (Martin, 2006, p. 154).

With this in mind, digital writing is considered as a part of digital literacy and it consists in communicating through technological sources. This idea thus highlights the importance of integrating digital technologies into teaching writing (Martin, 2006).

That said, Abunowara and Libya (2014) acknowledge some of the limitations of technology-mediated writing, which can be related to time, effort or financial requirements, as well as teachers' attitudes towards it. In spite of this, according to recent research, the majority of teachers believe that using Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in the classroom will help pupils enhance the quality and quantity of their writing (Abunowara & Libya, 2014). This is partly due to the number of useful resources they can access through the use of ICT, which can lead to more flexibility and confidence in their written production. The internet has further advantages as well, since it allows students to interact and maintain dialogue through social media or with the teacher. Additionally, because social media's nature is interactive, it allows the sharing of content like videos, text, files, etc. (Ariyanti, 2017). The vast number of resources that can be found on the internet allows for an endless list of materials and tools which can be used to design activities aimed at fostering creative writing, including comics (Lazarini et al., 2015), which will be analysed in the subsequent section since they are the main tool the present project will explore.

2.3. Comic books and FL writing

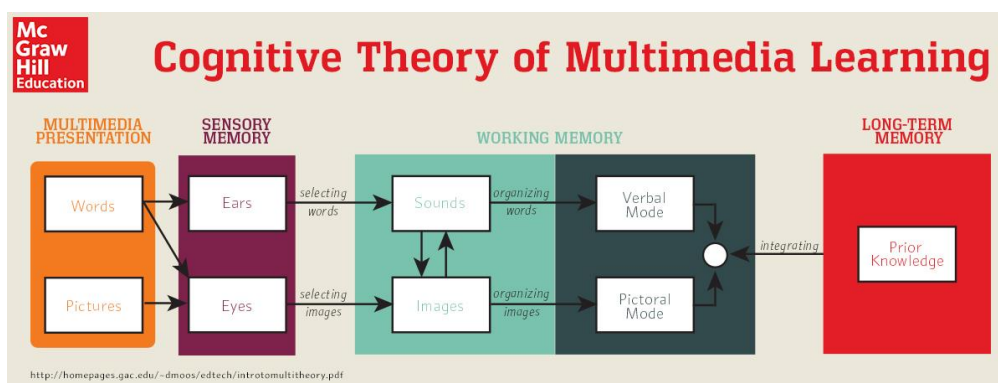
As it has been mentioned in previous sections, comic books are a type of literacy which is characterised by their visuals together with written language. Thanks to this combination, transmission of meaning is possible (Karap, 2017). Furthermore, Krashen (1993) stated that comic books are a type of "pleasure reading" (p. 1), which means that they tend to be read for pleasure only. Considering this, integrating comics

in FL learning contexts might be beneficial for students' psychological well-being, reducing the anxiety they may feel in the classroom (Karap, 2017). Likewise, it can be stressed that they are shown to be useful to improve vocabulary (Robbani & Khoirotunnisa, 2021), and also grammar, since students apply the knowledge they have to express themselves more accurately when producing written sentences (Mart, 2013, as cited in Cabrera et al., 2018).

This is in accordance with Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (CTML), which states that language learning can be enhanced thanks to the combination of images and words (Mayer, 2009, 2014). Thus, it is unsurprising that many people learn skills from watching videos and that books filled with pictures, charts, and diagrams are the first choice for learning, due to their effects on information processing. Mayer expresses that information is processed by the brain through two channels, visual and auditory. When students are shown visual and written information (e.g., comics), such information is processed through both channels, leading to greater depth of processing and better recall of information (*see Figure 2*).

Figure 2

Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning



Besides, two of the principles in the CTML are closely connected to comics' effect on teaching. The 'Multimedia Principle' highlights that students learn more effectively thanks to the combination of pictures and words, than from words alone, is in harmony with comics designs *per se*, due to their multimodal nature. In addition, the

‘Pre-Training Principle’ states that students learn more effectively from a multimedia message when they already possess some previous knowledge about it. This is why, before dealing with an activity, teachers must consider the previous knowledge the students have, and also, making sure they know how to use the tool they are going to work with (Davis & Norman, 2016). Thus, teachers must guide and prepare the students before dealing with the activity, paying attention to the comic itself and the digital tool chosen.

Overall, it can be said that there are multiple advantages to the use of comics in the language classroom. However, using comics also presents some drawbacks, which need to be taken into account. According to Trnova et al. (2013), their use may be detrimental if an improper selection of topics is made because this can lessen motivation. Nonetheless, these possible issues can be easily addressed with effective planning, supervision and guidance (Trnova et al., 2013).

Moving on to the tools for creating online comics, it is to be pointed out that most studies about comics in FL teaching focus on reading, such as Clark (2017), which highlights the improvement of participants’ vocabulary and literacy skills after engaging with comic creation tools. However, few studies focus on the development of writing, being this a gap in the literature, which this study will try to address.

Despite this lack of research, the majority of the publications that focused on the use of comics noted that most participants showed positive attitudes and found joy with them. For instance, the study conducted by Kiliçkaya and Krajka (2012) hinted at positive results of using an online comic strip creator, ‘MakeBeliefsComix’, with students aged between 14 and 18. It was seen that participants were able to produce longer phrases with more variability in content than before, showing attempts to use more complex grammatical structures and expressions. On the same note, Cabrera et al. (2018) explored the use of the ‘Pixton’ tool for creating comic strips among students who were between 19 and 24 years old and had an A1+ level in the target language. The students had to design comic strips and then show them to their classmates. After this, a final exam was administered to check whether they had achieved the desired outcomes or not. In comparison to the initial test, comics proved to be advantageous to promote grammar, vocabulary, coherence, cohesion and organisation of ideas. Besides,

it also was perceived as an easy-to-use tool, which also fostered creativity, collaboration and critical thinking.

The same results were observed in a subsequent study by Yasuta (2018), using Pixton as well. The university students in this study needed to design a comic to attract tourists to their city. Once it was designed, they re-read the texts created by other classmates and provided feedback about aspects to modify, taking into consideration the different stages of writing. A questionnaire was completed at the end, where the students pointed out their enjoyment of using the comic creator tool and appreciated working together with their peers. The topic content and its relation to their preferences was highlighted as well. The only negative comments found were on technical issues.

The present thesis will focus on the use of Toonytool for online comic creation, which research by Septiyani et al. (2020) has shown to be effective for writing, according to a survey filled in by pre-service teachers. It was concluded that this tool could be used for many purposes, such as storytelling or comic creation. Besides, its features increase its attractiveness to students, who can choose the characters in their story, backgrounds, conversation balloons, etc. Toonytool is especially advantageous due to its free nature and ease of use. Furthermore, it does not require a high-speed internet connection, which together with the previous advantages, makes it the perfect candidate for the present project.

3. Objectives

Given the importance of fostering writing through a technological tool, this thesis aims to explore the use of online comics in the EFL primary education classroom and the possibilities they offer for learning and improving such skill. More specifically, this will be done through the creation of an online comic in the FL. By means of a comic, students will be asked to produce accurate sentences, paying close attention to the grammar tenses, lexicon, accurate punctuation and register. They will need to do so following the stages of writing, and paying attention to organisation and content as well. On balance, comic creation is expected to be a suitable resource for this area of research, which seems to be underexplored by teachers and researchers alike. Based on this, the research question that this study seeks to answer is:

- How should digital comic books be used among EFL students in primary school to foster writing skills?

4. Methodology

4.1. Target learning context and learners' profile

Regarding the context in which this project would take place, it is aimed for a state school situated in the city of Córdoba. Concerning the socio-economic level of the families, it is medium-high with higher education levels, which implies that the majority of them give importance to their children's education. Thus, families' implication in the school is constant as they contribute economically and have no problem helping when needed. For instance, they participate in the different festivities carried out by the school.

That said, the school has two classrooms per year in pre-school, in which 138 students are distributed. In Primary Education, there are also two classrooms per course, in which 276 students are distributed. In relation to the facilities, the school counts with an ICT classroom, which not only has computers, but also a laptop cart. The regular classroom counts with a Digital Interactive Whiteboard and a computer as well.

Regarding the typical approach to English teaching in the region, we must consider that it is a three-hour-per-week compulsory subject, whose main aim is fostering students' communicative competence. Furthermore, the use of ICT is commonplace in the classroom nowadays; therefore, a communicative approach is applied. Nevertheless, this is done through the instruction of a set of grammatical structures and vocabulary that has to be applied later to written and spoken communication. So, the stages of writing should not be disregarded and, before leaving them autonomy to follow them on their own, teachers have to focus on the process in class. That is why a TBLT approach is recommended by law, in which students have to work to perform a communicative task later.

4.2. Needs analysis

The participants towards whom the present project is directed are a group of 20 students (8 boys and 12 girls) whose L1 is Spanish and are in 5th grade, that is, between the ages of 11-12. Regarding their level in the FL, it is considered to be an A1-A2 level according to the CEFR. Moreover, there is a boy in the classroom who has been diagnosed with ADHD (Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder).

After carrying out a needs analysis, it has been observed that writing, which is the main focus of this project, is underrepresented because participants do not tend to produce accurate texts in the FL when they are asked to, these containing numerous grammatical errors and a limited range of vocabulary. Additionally, within this group, there appears to be a lack of motivation when engaging with writing tasks. Consequently, this limited interest results in unfamiliarity when producing writing pieces in the FL.

Additionally, this project fosters writing in different ways, considering the needs of our students. First of all, as we have identified that they lack motivation and interest towards written productions, an analysis of their interests has been made through the Mentimeter questionnaire, which has led to the conclusion that they are into superheroes. Besides, as it has been specified throughout the project, one of the main advantages of comics and technologies is motivation. By considering their interests (superheroes), they will be motivated to produce a writing piece. Moreover, since they are not used to producing written texts, they will find that comics are short pieces of writing, mainly based on dialogues and short sentences, which is an adequate initial point. Besides, it should not be forgotten that the dynamic activities that will be proposed will be advantageous for our ADHD student, who has problems when focusing and behaving in the classroom, so his needs will be addressed throughout the project, too.

4.3. Design of the application

As has been specified in the previous sections, the website to be used in order to carry out the final task of designing a comic is Toonytool. It will be used in the present project due to the different possibilities it offers and the ease of using it. Some of the options that it provides are the different scenes, characters, speech bubbles, etc. that

students can choose to use and their suitability for elementary students, apart from the fact that it is free and allows downloads in different formats (image, video, GIF, etc.). Besides, Google Classroom is implemented to share content with the students and submit tasks. Hence, it is observable that technology will play a relevant role in this innovation project.

Furthermore, it must be considered that, in this project, the key competences developed in the Royal Decree 157/2022 are also fostered. The implemented technological tool pertains to digital competence. This involves aspects such as the critical and safe use of technological tools, as well as the creation and sharing of digital content, which will be worked in the classroom. Moreover, the development of the linguistic communication competence and the plurilingual competence is fostered through writing the digital comic in the FL. It is of relevance to consider this because the acquisition of these competences is seen as a success in students' learning itinerary, providing them with the abilities and skills to be able to face the challenges they encounter.

Hence, the main expected learning outcome resulting from the project would be the fluent and accurate performance in the production of a comic text in the FL, along with the subsequent promotion of digital skills and motivation while learning.

5. The pedagogical application

This teaching innovation will take place in a 5th-grade classroom. Under the Order of May 30th, 2023, which develops the curriculum of Primary Education in Andalusia, EFL is a core subject, which is taught for three hours per week (three sessions lasting one hour each). So, the project will take place over three weeks. This means that the present project is going to be developed in nine sessions which are organised into six phases, as seen in Table 1.

Table 1

Phases in which the project is organised

Phases	Number of sessions
Phase 1: Introduction of the task to be carried out and presentation of a model.	1 session
Phase 2: Presentation of ToonyTool, Google Classroom and importance of a safe use of the Internet.	1 session
Phase 3: Review of the common language used in comics, vocabulary related to superheroes, and the present simple tense.	2 sessions
Phase 4: Thinking about the storyline of the comic.	1 session
Phase 5: Creation of the comic.	3 sessions
Phase 6: Sharing the comics and commenting on others' comics	1 session

The methodology followed throughout these phases is described below. However, it should be noted that every phase will be structured similarly, promoting this way consistency and routine. Sessions start with a warm-up, continue with the main task and end with the wrap-up, which mainly consists in talking about the activities carried out during the session and asking doubts.

Phase 1: Introduction of the task to be carried out and presentation of a model.

This first session will be devoted to asking and letting students know about this teaching innovation project. First of all, a Google Form will be distributed among them, where they will be asked for information like: ‘What is a comic?’, ‘Have you ever read one?’, etc., as to introduce the task they are going to do next. After that, we will go through the answers together and the teacher will clarify any doubt that arises. Once this is done, they will be told that the final task they have to produce will consist in designing a comic about superheroes.

After about thirty minutes, we will focus on the different elements a comic has. In the first place, we will show our students an image from the Difference Engine website (*see Appendix 1*) where elements like panels, captions, gutters, speech bubbles, thought bubbles, composition, sound effects, and suspension or disbelief are exemplified. After that, they will be given a comic model, created with ToonyTool (*see Appendix 2*), and some time to individually identify the different parts of the comic.

Phase 2: Presentation of ToonyTool, Google Classroom and importance of a safe use of the Internet.

The second phase comprises a session in which the students will be shown the main features and possibilities that ToonyTool offers. With that purpose in mind, the teacher will use the digital whiteboard and project the webpage. First of all, they have to click on ‘Create a cartoon’ to start their comic. Then, they will have different options on the upper bar. The option ‘Setting’ will allow them to include a background that can be the living room, the kitchen, the bedroom, etc., depending on their storyline. The option ‘Props’ lets them add people, animals, and objects, or also upload one from their device. About the bubbles, they can choose between ‘default’, ‘speech’ and ‘thought’ bubbles, and also modify the font, size, colour and alignment. Besides, they can add a new panel or duplicate one. To download the final product, they have to click on ‘Cartoon’ and choose to save it as an image, animation, GIF, etc. In our case, they will need to download the comic strip both as a PDF and an image.

After this, we will focus on the importance of using technology safely and give them some tips for that. First of all, we will discuss together what types of digital tools they use, how often and how they help them. After this brief discussion, flashcards depicting safe and unsafe actions on the Internet (*see Appendix 3*) will be stuck to the board, and students will have five minutes to decide in groups of four people to which category each flashcard belongs. After doing this, they will make sentences in the present simple tense about rules to follow when using the Internet, based on the flashcards. For example: ‘Don’t share your password’, or ‘Be kind online’. Besides, they will be recommended to look for images in [Unsplash](https://unsplash.com), which is a database with free copyright images.

Phase 3: Review of the common language used in comics and vocabulary related to superheroes.

The third phase is divided into two sessions in which students will sit in the same groups where they will develop the comic, previously decided by the teacher. The common language used in comics and vocabulary related to superheroes will be revised.

In the first session, students will read the comic model that was shown previously and revise the elements of a comic. They will identify the language used in each part. For instance, when captions are added, these are written in a more narrative form, so language changes. Besides, they must differentiate between the different speech bubble designs and what can be said in each of them. Later, they will propose within their group an alternative ending to the model comic, deleting the two final strips and creating new ones. In the comic model, Flex uses his horn and transforms into a lion, then, he digs a tunnel and takes the animal to their home habitat. In the last strip, they are safe and sound in their natural habitat. So, in class, they will have the time to modify this. First of all, they will have to decide on an idea for the new ending, then, they will ask the teacher for guidance and, finally, they will organise how they are going to structure it. After this is done, they will carry it out on ToonyTool, and then review it for mistakes and, if necessary, re-edit. This session is in line with the writing stages proposed by Pysarchyk and Yamshynska (2015), which have been mentioned in the theoretical framework.

In the next session, students will revise the common vocabulary used to describe people and the language commonly used for this (verbs *to be* and *to have got* in the present simple tense). Since this comic is related to superheroes, they will need to be presented with specific vocabulary, which they are likely to be unfamiliar with:

- Nouns: hero, heroine, villain, enemy, etc.
- Adjectives: coward, brave, strong, weak, etc.
- Superpowers: be invisible, shoot laser, super strength, talk to animals, fly, stretch, transform, etc.

- Clothes and accessories: hood, bodysuit, cape, tights, briefs, top, helmet, shield, tiara, mask, ring, glove, armour, bracelet, claws, hammer, wings, glasses, etc.

To do so, they will be shown flashcards (*see Appendix 4*). First, each flashcard will be identified with its word. Then, games to retain the target vocabulary will be played. The first game is called ‘Tap the flashcard’, in which the students are divided into two teams and every member of each team competes against a member of the other team. The teacher says a word and they have to touch the flashcard (that is stuck on the board) that it corresponds to; the first one to do so gets a point for their team. The game continues until all of them have participated. To end the session, they will play a game by the [British Council](#) in which they have to style their hero, being able to choose among the different options provided for head, body, hands, arms, feet, and legs gear. The functions of each gear are described in the webpage and they must take them into consideration because these will be the ones they include in their comics.

Phase 4: Thinking about the storyline of their comic.

In the fourth phase, the students will be divided into five groups of four students, the same groups they have already worked with. They will have one session to decide on their storyline. For that, they will use Google Drive to share ideas. This means that each group should have a shared folder in Google Drive, which the teacher will have access to. In this session, they will decide on the general idea of their comic.

Phase 5: Creation of their comic.

Participants will count with three sessions for the creation of their comic. Once they have decided on the storyline during the previous phase, they must move on to the next stages of writing. The first session will be devoted to the organisation of their comic, that is, to plan the structure of the strips and the information to be included in them, so, for that, they can use a blank sheet of paper and work together, being this the first stage of writing, as specified in the theoretical framework. After this, the second session will consist in creating the comic on ToonyTool. It is to be mentioned that, in order to do so, they will use the hero they created with the British Council tool, and then, use the website [PhotoRoom](#), to remove the background of their image and get the hero’s photo in .png format. This way, they will be able to upload their prop into

ToonyTool. Moving on to the third session, they will just have to revise it for mistakes and re-edit if necessary. Along this process they will count with the teacher's guidance.

Phase 6: Sharing their comics and commenting on others' comics

The last phase of this teaching proposal consists in sharing their comics with the whole class on Google Classroom. Besides, they will give feedback to each other with the feedback sandwich (*see Appendix 5*), which consists of three comments. The first and last comment would be the bread, and have to be positive, while the second one is the filling of the sandwich and it needs to be a suggestion for improvement. This peer-feedback strategy will be of utility for our students to reflect on their partners' comics and also for the partners to be able to see their weaknesses and strengths and be congratulated by their peers.

Self-assessment also plays an important role, and it will be implemented through the reflection on students' own work and experience, using self-assessment targets (*see Appendix 6*). There will be some items to assess, including 'accuracy', 'group work', 'behaviour', and 'participation'. 'Accuracy' is related to the appropriate use of the language used and its intelligibility, with varied lexicon and grammar. 'Group work' concerns the equal contribution of all the members of the group, carrying out their work properly. Regarding 'Participation', it refers to the quality of the contributions made. Finally, 'behaviour' deals with the contribution of a positive environment in the classroom. In order to complete the worksheet, they have to colour the number they think they have achieved, ranging from 1 to 4, and then, add up the score to get the final mark, out of a maximum of 18 points.

6. Evaluation of the application

As per the assessment of language learning goals, it can be implemented in many forms, however, throughout this project, a 'diagnostic assessment' is carried out to get to know our students' prior knowledge and interests. For that, we will ask them what they expect to learn and what topics they feel more interested in, but also whether they have read comics before and their interest towards this type of literature. Furthermore, 'formative assessment' and 'summative assessment' are key, too. 'Formative assessment' will be conducted through an observation grid (*see Appendix 7*), _____

while the students are designing their comics. This means that the teacher will ensure that their work is following an appropriate path, that they are working collaboratively and contributing to a positive atmosphere in the classroom, as well as give advice and feedback for them to make the necessary adjustments to their work. Moving on to ‘summative assessment’, which is carried out in the final stage, it will be analysed whether the objectives are met. To do so, students’ writing skills will be assessed through a rubric (*see Appendix 8*). The results obtained with these tools will count towards the final mark, representing the rubric a 60% and the observation grid a 40%.

Moreover, peer assessment will be an important part as well, since, as it was described in the previous section, students will assess each other with the ‘feedback sandwich’, which consists in giving two positive comments and another one for constructive criticism. Self-assessment targets will be used too, in which each group will have to give themselves feedback on aspects like ‘vocabulary and grammar’, ‘design’, ‘communication of ideas’, and ‘organisation’.

After having described how learning outcomes will be assessed, the strengths and weaknesses that our project presents will be identified. Focusing on strengths, this project will be fruitful in the development of written skills in the FL, through the use of technological tools like Toonytool or Google Classroom, allowing students to produce short pieces of writing, while their abilities to work collaboratively will be promoted, as well as vocabulary breadth or grammar accuracy. Furthermore, it should be noted that they will boost their self-awareness and be able to reflect critically on their pieces of work, as well as give and receive constructive feedback, through self- and peer-assessment.

Nevertheless, some weaknesses may arise, for which anticipation becomes crucial. Some shy students may have more difficulties in collaborating in the design of their comics and may find it a stressful situation, due to a lack of self-confidence in themselves. To tackle this possible issue, the teacher could be in charge of group formation, so shier students can be grouped up with others that they feel comfortable with. Moreover, lack of proficiency in English may become a challenge too, since, as it was stated before, the students face issues when writing. This is why scaffolding is vital; in the project, it is achieved thanks to initial phases and guidance throughout the whole

intervention, and the multiple examples the teacher gives. As stated before, the creation of a written task is essential, but to get to that point, the stages to follow are as relevant as the final product.

Therefore, considering all these aspects, it could be concluded that the application of the project seems viable in the context that it has been designed for. However, it can be easily adapted to any similar context, where some aspects should be considered, like the students' needs or the resources that the school counts with. For instance, a school which does not have an ICT room would need to make some adjustments, like using other kinds of devices, such as tablets, bringing laptops from home, or even doing it without digital resources. Similarly, if reading skills need to be improved, the task may be adapted to fit these needs, for instance, students could work on some already written comics, which may be longer, and some alternative activities could be designed, like being shown the book cover and predict what it is going to be about, focusing on the gist of the text or, also, completing a quiz to check understanding.

In conclusion, comics have been seldom used to foster writing skills in the EFL primary school classroom, and this project precisely fills this gap. The use of technology in combination with the design proposed will address the objectives that were formulated. These objectives were related to the lack of writing skills, which will be tackled not only through comic creation but also in the planning sessions, in which participants will work according to the stages proposed by Pysarchyk and Yamshynksa (2015). Besides, subsequent needs were observed too, such as a lack of motivation and interest, which are addressed as a result of choosing the superheroes topic and the Toonytool comic creator. However, there is still a need for further research on this topic, which would need to cover different skills, such as listening or speaking, in order to use the comic as a means of oral communication and propose new ideas for activities as well, in a variety of different language learning contexts.

7. Conclusions

Throughout this thesis, it has been observed that many elementary students find it challenging to produce written sentences or texts of their own in the FL, struggling to

convey grammatically accurate sentences independently and fluently. Thus, this project is designed to enhance this prevailing situation. This is done by implementing a final task in which grade 5 students in elementary school have to create an online comic through ToonyTool about superheroes. At the same time, motivation towards the FL is affected positively, as well as contributing to the communicative competence in the FL, which is the main goal of English instruction in our society. As a byproduct, teachers' confidence in using technology for EFL teaching is expected to increase. Some limiting factors are taken into consideration, such as the lack of proficiency in English, which is addressed thanks to scaffolding and teacher's guidance or the fact that some shy students may feel uncomfortable working in groups, so the teacher would be in charge of grouping them. Furthermore, since a gap was identified in the field of EFL writing teaching through online comic creation in elementary school, this project aims to fill this gap. However, future research would be required, especially considering different skills to be worked on, such as reading or oral skills, as well as applying different technological tools and devices, or no devices at all, and in different contexts and students' proficiency levels. Finally, it is assumed that this project will be of utility not only to cover the gap in the literature but also to improve EFL writing skills, using a free tool for creating comics, whilst enhancing pupils' interests towards the language, through a topic, tool and literary genre they enjoy. It is therefore possible to conclude that the present project will be advantageous for teachers who are reluctant to combine language teaching and technological tools, hence applying these ideas in class.

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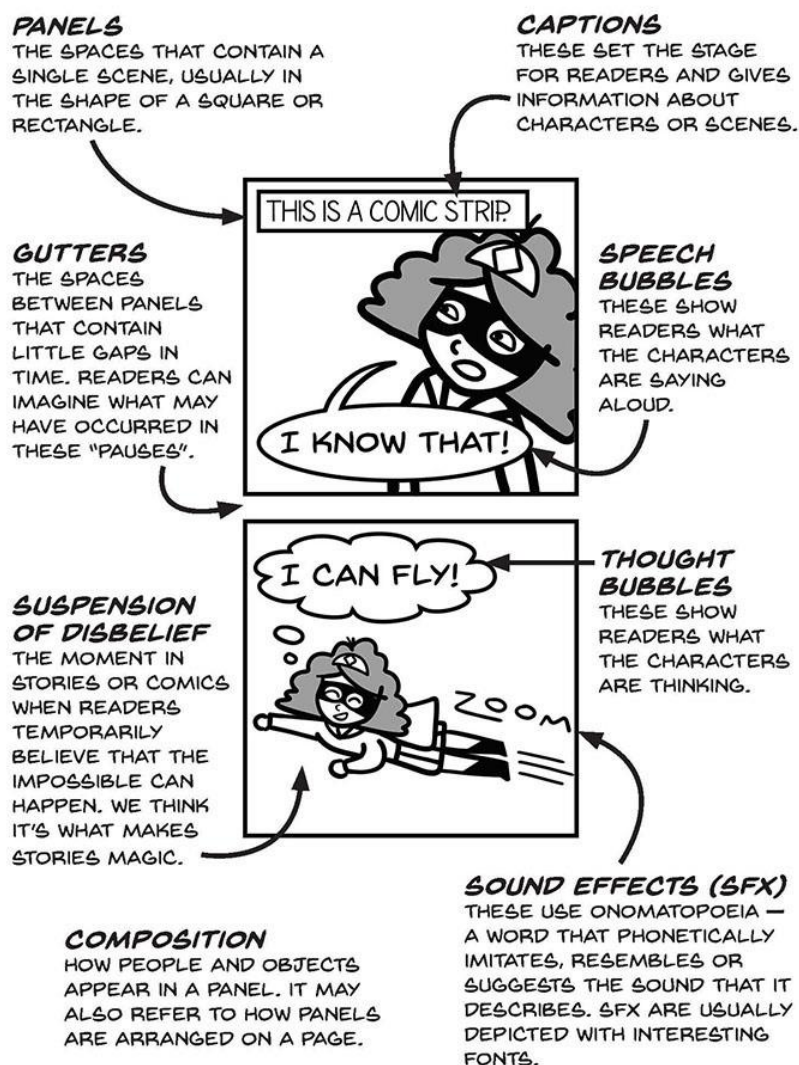
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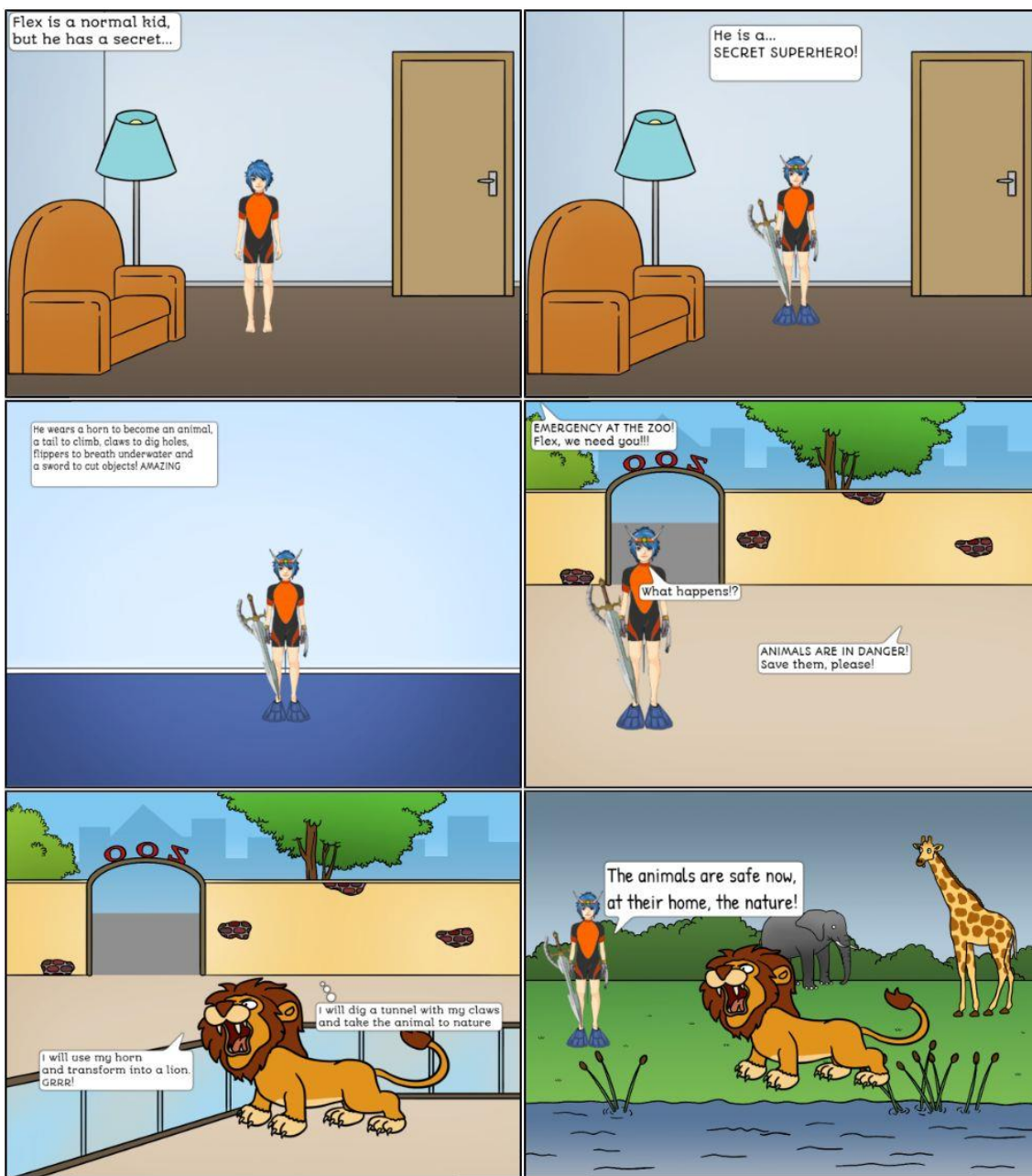
9. Appendices

Appendix 1. Elements of a Comic Strip



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Email: readcomics@differenceengine.sg
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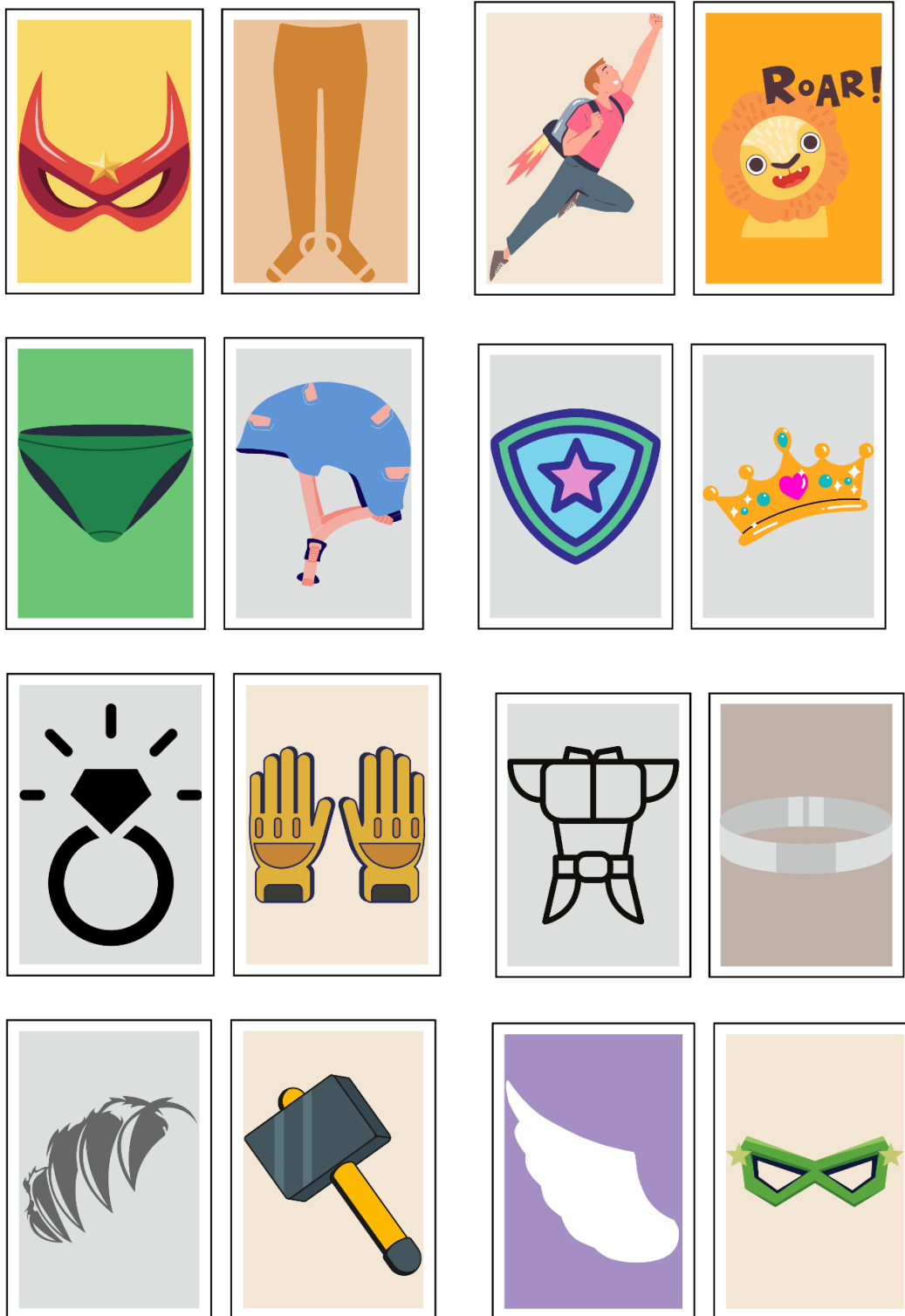
Appendix 2. Comic model

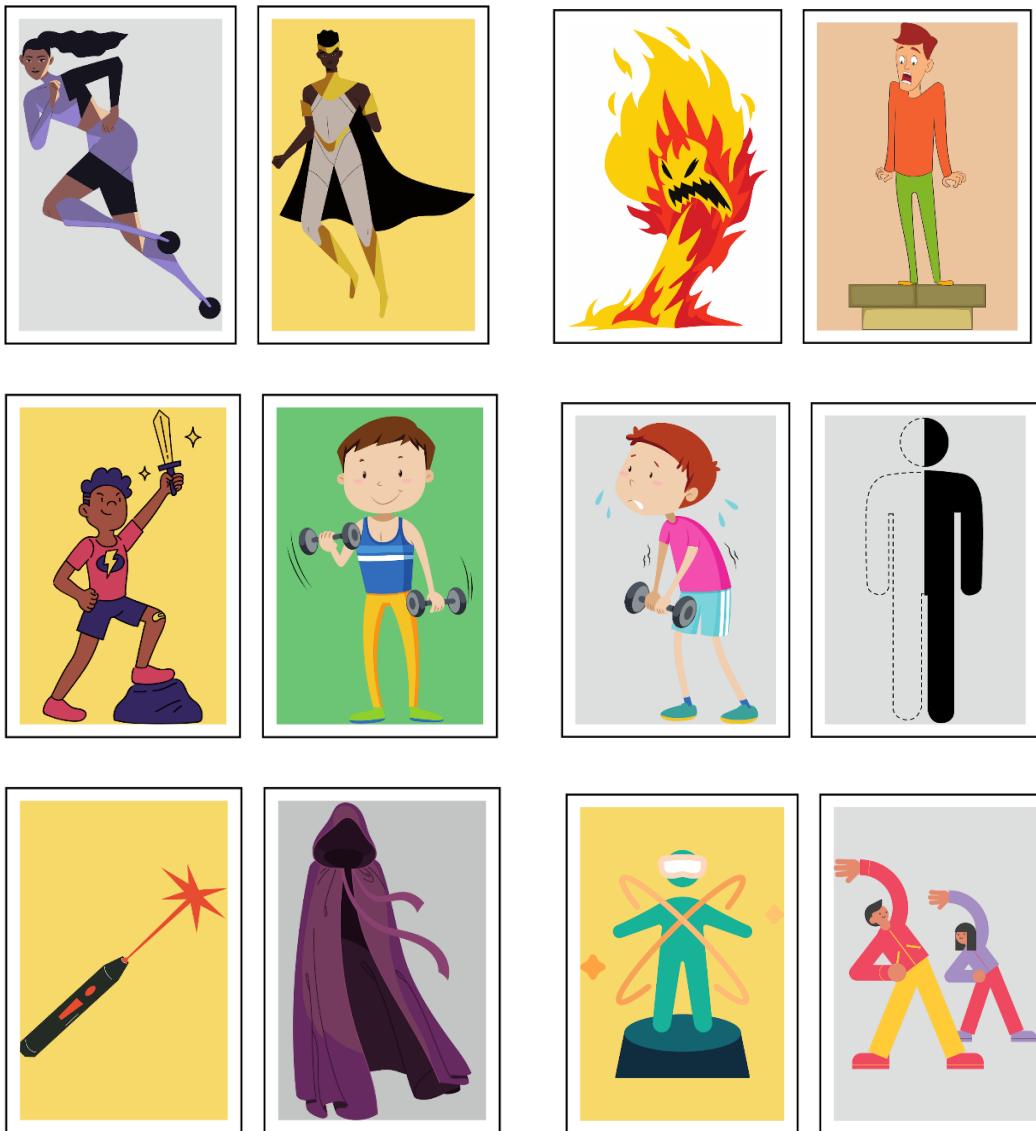


Appendix 3. Flashcards for safe use of technology.

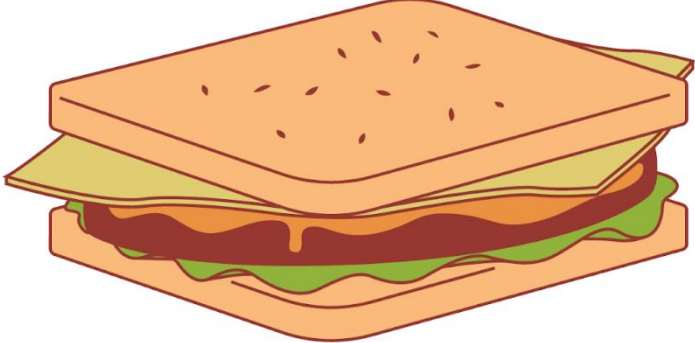





Appendix 4. Superheroes vocabulary flashcards.

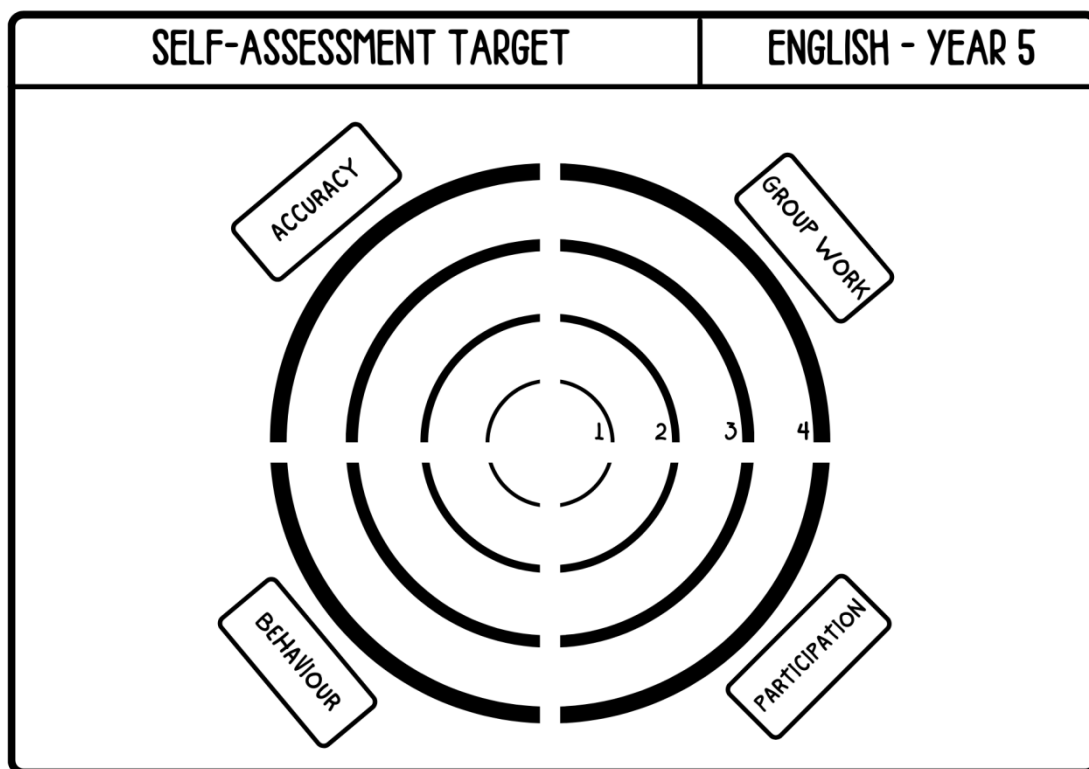




Appendix 5. Peer-assessment sandwich.

PEER-ASSESSMENT SANDWICH	ENGLISH - YEAR 5
	
	
	
	

Appendix 6. Self-assessment targets.



Appendix 7. Observation grid.

Observation grid - Phase 5

Phase: 5	Class: Year 5	Group:
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Descriptor	Yes	No	Occasionally	Comments
The students work collaboratively taking into consideration the ideas of all the members of the group and reaching an agreement.				
The students participate proactively, proposing ideas.				
The students follow the writing stages expected by the teacher and identified by the literature on the subject matter.				
The students make use of the target grammar and vocabulary.				
The students contribute to a positive classroom environment, by raising their hands and speaking in an appropriate voice tone.				

Appendix 8. Rubric for assessment.

ASSESSMENT RUBRIC	Content	Sentence structure	Organisation (text/pictures)	Word choice
Excellent (3)	The content is original. It is clear and easy to follow with almost no inconsistencies.	The sentence length and word order are excellent in most instances.	The sequence of the comic strips is logical and smooth, and the text is related to the pictures.	The students use the vocabulary presented in the intervention in an efficient way.
Shares traits of both bands				
Good (2)	The content is original. It is presented clearly in most parts and it can be followed easily.	The sentence length and word order are usually appropriate, with minor grammar mistakes.	The sequence of the comic strips is mostly logical and smooth, and the text is usually related to the pictures.	The students use the vocabulary presented in the intervention in an acceptable way.
Shares traits of both bands				
Needs improvement (1)	The content lacks originality. It is not very clear and difficult to follow, presenting many	The sentence length and word order lack appropriateness, due to grammar mistakes.	The sequence of the comic strips is not as logical and smooth as it should be and text-picture	The students do not use or inefficiently use the vocabulary presented in the intervention.

	inconsistencies.		relationship is not always seen.	
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