

## **An Evaluation of Using Dictogloss Tasks in Listening Lesson**

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### **Abstract**

Teaching and learning evaluation have become a hot topic in the University of Security in general and in its department of languages particularly. Evaluation is essential to the development of any education program as Murphy (2000) pointed out that it is evaluation conducted to determine how a program or intervention is worthwhile, and to aid decision-making through the purposeful collecting of information which is analyzed and reported to stakeholders. This paper is also with the purpose of analyzing and reporting to my dean of the department and colleagues what happened and how it happened in our class of English where dictogloss tasks were conducted.

**Key words:** dictogloss, evaluation, listening

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

In recent years, teaching and learning evaluation have become a hot topic in the University of Security in general and in its department of languages particularly. Evaluation is essential to the development of any education program as Murphy (2000) pointed out that it is evaluation conducted to determine how a program or intervention is worthwhile, and to aid decision-making through the purposeful collecting of information which is analyzed and reported to stakeholders. This paper is also with the purpose of analyzing and reporting to my dean of the department and colleagues what happened and how it happened in our class of English where dictogloss tasks were conducted.

The evaluation was undertaken at the University of Security (UoS) which belongs to the People's Police Ministry and its education programs are under the control of Ministry of Education and Training (MoET). Every high school student who wants to become a security student has to take the same entrance examination designed for all universities in Vietnam by the MoET. Most of the students have finished seven-year English program in high school, which means that they got a certain knowledge of English. In the UoS, students have to study English throughout four and a half academic years though English is not a major subject, and a level B<sup>1</sup> certificate is a must for their graduation. At the very beginning of the first year, the students are supposed to take a placement test for the right level class. Each week they have an English class of five periods (45 minutes a period). The main course book used in the UoS is a set of *International Express*, Oxford University Press.

Richards (1983, p. 223) states that listening comprehension is not easy because there are many factors from the listening source that can influence the learners' listening ability such as reduced forms, ungrammatical forms, pausing and speech errors, rate of delivery, rhythm and stress and cohesive device and because it involves the continuing construction of an interpretation of the spoken input (Chen 2009, p. 55). Therefore, it is important as a teacher of English to take into consideration how to help students improve the skill of listening in English teaching. In recent years, English has been taught to students in the University of Security, and most of the listening is intensive and takes place in classrooms. Students just got the listening activities of answering questions or filling in the gaps or deciding True/False. They feel bored with these repeated activities and often get very low scores in this skill, which has become my big concern and we really get interested in making a difference to listening class.

In teaching listening skill to second language (L2) learners, teachers can use many different strategies in order to get students involved and interested in the lesson, and dictogloss which developed from traditional dictation by Wajnryb (1990) is one of these. 'It is especially effective with English language learners because the strategy focuses on fluent academic language and supports learners in listening and recalling good English

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<sup>1</sup> Intermediate level (national standard)

language models' (Gibbons 1993, cited in Herrell & Jordan 2008, p. 254). Swain (1993, cited in Herrell & Jordan 2008, p. 255) also says that a dictogloss gives a very good opportunity for 'practice in listening, oral communication and negotiation of meaning in a small group setting'.

Vasiljevic (2010) in his article "Dictogloss as an Interactive Method of Teaching Listening Comprehension to L2 Learners" described how the dictogloss method and cooperative learning can be combined to promote the development of listening and speaking skills of second language learners. It gives a general plan of the dictogloss procedure and the background of theory behind it. The reader can learn the detailed procedures for implementing a dictogloss in listening class and some ideas for advantages and concerns about the implementation of this method.

One more paper talking about dictogloss is "Combining Dictogloss and Cooperative Learning to Promote Language Learning" written by Jacobs and Small (2003). It is from Jacobs and Small (2003) that this paper makes a description of dictogloss as an integrated skills technique for language learning in which students work together to create a reconstructed version of a text read to them by their teacher" (Jacobs & Small 2003, p. 1). The paper begins with explaining the basic dictogloss technique, opposite with traditional dictation, and citing research related to the use of dictogloss in second language instruction. After that, dictogloss is placed in relation to eight trends, overlapping trends in second language teaching that consist of learner autonomy, cooperation among learners, curricular integration, focus on meaning, diversity, thinking skills, alternative assessment, and teachers as co-learners. Then, in the main section of the paper, it describes how the literature on cooperative learning helps teachers to better understand how dictogloss works and to implement dictogloss with more effectiveness. A rationale for using dictogloss with global issues content is included in this section. (Jacobs & Small 2003, p. 1).

To help our students become more involved in the listening lesson, and then improve their listening comprehension, we decided to carry out the research on using a dictogloss to see how effective it is. This study aims at evaluating the impact of dictogloss tasks on listening comprehension. Based on this objective, the following research questions are posed:

1. *How does the use of a dictogloss get our students engaged in listening class?*
2. *To what extent does it help to improve our students' listening comprehension?*

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, the evaluators try to connect together the ideas, suggestions from previous researchers and evaluators regarding some dimensions related to educational evaluation: definition of evaluation, purposes of evaluation, forms of evaluation, audience, and evaluation procedure. This is a concrete foundation for the evaluation plan and design to be presented.

### 2.1 What is evaluation?

It cannot be denied the fact that evaluation is 'a good thing' (Keily 2006, p.597) and has become popular in our life. But how is evaluation understood? According to Kiwipedia, 'evaluation is the structured interpretation and giving of meaning to predicted or actual impacts of proposals or results. It looks at original objectives, and at what is either predicted or what was accomplished and how it was accomplished.' This definition seems so general and broad. In the educational context, Nunan (1994, p. 184) defines evaluation as a systematic procedure of 'determining the extent to which instructional objectives are achieved by pupils'. Another definition for evaluation is that evaluation is a process of collecting and interpreting information for decision-making purposes' (Nunan & Lamb 1996, p.245). Weir and Roberts (1994, cited in Mann 2004) states that evaluation is the process of gathering information in a systematic way in order to show the worth or excellence of a program or a project (from a certain aspect or as a whole) and to inform decision-making. Rea-Dickens and Germaine (2001, p.255) say that evaluation is a way by which we can obtain 'a better understanding of what is effective, what is less effective, and what appears to be of no use at all'.

### 2.2 Purposes of evaluation

When we do evaluation, we should know what it is for. In other words, evaluation has specific purposes itself. Rea-Dickens and Germaine (2001, pp. 253-255) suggest that evaluation may be undertaken for three principle reasons: (1) *accountability*, which is mainly concern with determining whether something has been both effective and efficient in term of finance; (2) *curriculum development and betterment*, whose aim is to improve the curriculum through gathering information from different people in forms of questionnaires, interviews, records or diary over a period of time, and (3) *self-development: teachers and other language teaching professionals*, which involves raising the consciousness of teachers and other ELT<sup>2</sup> practitioners as to what actually happens in the language teaching classroom.

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<sup>2</sup> English Language Teaching

A bit before Rea-Dickens and Germaine (2001), Murphy (2000, p. 210) has similar idea while stating that an evaluation can be conducted to find out if a program has met its targets, which usually focuses on accountability, or evaluation may research how far a program is on track to reach its goals, which usually focuses on development.

### 2.3 Forms of evaluation

There are several forms of evaluation which Murphy (2000) prefers functions of evaluation: summative and formative. It depends on the purpose of the evaluation that this form of evaluation or the other can be selected, as Nunan (1994, p. 197) states if the aim of the evaluation is to provide information for the ongoing improvement of the program, it will be formative in nature. On the other hand, if the purpose is to come with information for accountability, it is then more likely to be a summative evaluation. Vasiljevic (2011, p. 3) mentions these two forms of evaluation as *macro* and *micro* evaluations. The former can be carried out to examine various administrative and curricular aspects such as material evaluation, teacher evaluation, or learner evaluation, while in the latter, the specific aspects of the curriculum or the administration of the program are focused on (e.g. evaluation of learning tasks, questioning practices, learners' participant). This paper tempts to evaluate the effectiveness, efficiency and acceptability of a teaching task on my student listening comprehension and the evaluation took place right after the innovation was implemented, which is for accountability. So it is a summative or micro evaluation.

In addition to formative and summative evaluations, Richards (2001, p. 289) described another form of evaluation as *illuminative evaluation* that attempts to discover how aspects of the program work or are being implemented differently and aims to give deeper awareness of the processes of teaching and learning that take place in the program, not necessary to look for changes in the course in any way as a result. In this kind of evaluation, the important thing is that the teacher should regularly conducts interviews in class to see how students interpret what is going on in a course (Block 1998, cited in Richards 2001). Parlett and Hamilton (1972), cited in Keily & Rea-Dickens (2005) talk more about this form:

Illuminative evaluation takes account of the wider contexts in which educational programs function. Its primary concern is with description and interpretation rather than measurement and prediction. It stands unambiguously within the alternative anthropological paradigm. The aims of the illuminative evaluation are to study the innovatory of the program: how it is operates; how it is influenced by the various school situations in which it is applied; what those directly concerned regard as it advantages and disadvantages; and how students' intellectual tasks and academic experiences are most effected. It aims to discover and document what it is like to be participating in the scheme, whether as teacher or pupil; and, in addition, to discern and discuss the innovation's most significant features, recurring concomitants and critical processes.

Clearly three forms of evaluation (formative, summative and illumination) do have important role to play in different circumstances depending on the purposes of evaluation. These forms can take place during (formative, illumination) or after (summative) the innovation process. However, an entirely different form of evaluation that takes place before the innovation process has arisen from the work of Ellis (1997) who has suggested the form *predictive evaluation* 'designed to make a decision regarding what materials to use' (p.36). Not regarding materials but tasks, Vasiljevic's (2011) work '*The Predictive Evaluation of Language Learning Tasks*' tries to help teachers find out components in the task design that are likely to influence the accuracy, fluency, and complexity of the students' output *before* the task is conducted in the classroom and thus help the teachers to make decisions about task selection and their sequencing (p.3). This form of evaluation was proposed along three dimensions of task design: input, outcome and the procedures. These dimensions were stated further:

A verbal task input should be examined in the terms of its authenticity, whilst for non-verbal input, possible cultural bias should be taken into consideration. Task outcomes should be examined both at the surface level and for their expected learning outcomes at a deeper level. (...) Making evaluation procedures explicit raises teachers' awareness of any factors in the task design that may facilitate or possibly impede task performance, and allow them to make the necessary adjustments in order to optimize classroom practice. This makes predictive task evaluation an important element in teacher development (Vasiljevic 2011, p.7)

### 2.4 Who is the evaluation for?

Murphy (2000, pp. 210-211) expresses that 'evaluation need to be designed for the context in which they are used, sensitive both to local conditions and to the audience that will use them.' The audience here could be the evaluators, funding authorities, teachers, learners, parents, the head or college principal, or the educational researchers. We should take audience into important preliminary consideration because different audiences will often perceive different purposes and they may change their minds through the course of the

evaluation (Nunan 1994, p. 197). To my small-scale evaluation, the audiences are the Dean and my colleagues in the department.

**2.5 How to evaluate?**

Data gathered through pre- and post-program assessment cannot make an appropriate evaluation. This data only tells us what the learners can and cannot do as a result of taking part in the program. The data will not always tell us why objectives have been or not been achieved. Therefore, the evaluator needs to find out more information about what happened inside the classrooms (Nunan 1994, p. 189). Nunan (1994) states further:

In addition to information on what learners can or cannot do in the target language, it is important to obtain data about learning and teaching processes themselves. Non-observable problems such as failure to activate language out of class can be collected through learner diaries and self-reports. Other techniques, which are described and illustrated in some details in Nunan (1989), include interviews and questionnaires, protocol analysis, transcript analysis, stimulated recall, and sitting chart observation records. Ideally, the number of techniques and instruments should be utilized in order to obtain multiple perspectives on the program under investigation. (p. 189)

As mentioned above, this evaluation is a micro one that is to evaluate a task in teaching listening. Ellis (1997, p. 38) suggests seven steps that evaluating a task involves:

- Step 1: Selecting a task to evaluate
- Step 2: Describing the task
- Step 3: Planning the evaluation
- Step 4: Gathering information for the evaluation
- Step 5: Analyzing the information
- Step 6: Coming to conclusions and recommendations
- Step 7: Producing the report

Each of these steps comes out with elements and dimensions needed to be taken into consideration. Take some as examples, Step 1 (selecting a task to evaluate) gives some reasons that teachers may have to select a task to micro evaluate. The teachers may want to see the effectiveness of an innovation in their class, or they may seek how a very similar task really work in different teaching situations, or they may want to re-implement the previous task with some change to see how these effects the outcomes of the task. In Step 2, ‘a task can be described in term of its objective(s), the input it provides, conditions, procedures, and the intended outcomes of the task’. (Ellis 1997, p.38)

To plan the evaluation, we took elements in evaluation planning adopted from Ellis (1997) as a guideline. They are in Table 1.

Table 1: Evaluation planning adopted from Ellis (1997)

<i>Elements</i>	<i>Answers</i>
Purpose	The task was evaluated to firmly decide whether it had met its objectives
Audience	The teacher conducted the evaluation for himself and with aim to share the results with the Dean and his colleagues.
Evaluator	The teacher who taught the task
Techniques and instruments	Using observation, questionnaire and interview
Content	Student-based evaluation
Timing	Immediately after the task had been completed

**III. RESEARCH METHODS AND PROCEDURE**

**3.1. Methods**

According to Baxter and Jack (2008), “potential data sources may include, but are not limited to: documentation, archival records, interviews, physical artifacts, direct observations, and participant-observation. Unique in comparison to other qualitative approaches, within case study research, investigators can collect and integrate quantitative survey data, which facilitates reaching a holistic understanding of the phenomenon being studied” (p. 554). To triangulate the data (Hinchey 2008, p. 76), three methods of collecting data were used: participant observation, questionnaires, and focus-group interview.

• **Participant observation**

One of our colleagues was invited to be an observer. The observer sat at the back of the classroom with a guided observation sheet (See appendix 1) and she took notes from which data would be collected.

• **Questionnaire**

The questionnaire was administered to the students right after the instruction of dictogloss task on the last day of the three. This is an efficient way to gather a great deal of data on what students think about dictogloss (Hinchey 2008, p. 83). The questions were semi-structured (See appendix 2) and they were presented in the participants' mother-tongue language to make sure the participants would understand all the questions properly. The questionnaire is composed of five closed-ended and two open-ended items. The five closed-ended items were arranged in a five-point Likert scale: *Strongly disagree* (SD), *Disagree* (D), *Uncertain* (U), *Agree* (A) and *Strongly agree* (SA). The questionnaire sought the students' opinions pertaining to whether they like the tasks and how much they really get interested in the tasks.

• **Semi-structured focus group Interview:**

One of the most common qualitative research methods is the semi-structured interview and it consists of prepared questioning guided by identified themes in a consistent and systematic manner interposed with probes designed to elicit more elaborate responses (Qu & Dumay 2011, p. 246). The interviews took place on the last day of instruction and after the students finished the questionnaire. Five of the students were selected randomly to participate in the interview. They sat together discussing and answering the guided questions about the tasks. All the questions in the interview were semi-structured (See appendix 3) and were in the participants' mother-tongue language and their answers were translated into English in this paper. The interviewees' words were tape-recorded for transcription later. The transcribed version was sent back to the interviewees for checking.

Because we are working together in the same department every day, we just needed to send the Dean and our colleagues a verbal informed consent and told them the aim of my research and what we were going to do in our research. All personal information from questionnaires and interviews was confidential.

**3.2. The participants**

The participant was a class of 27 second year students, four of which are female, learning English as a non-major subject. Their ages ranged from 20 to 25. The students learnt at least 3 years of English in high school, and they were in pre-intermediate level of English proficiency. The students had a very limitation in direct communication with foreigners because of the strict regulations of the Security Force.

**3.3. The research procedure**

The research procedure followed the timeline presented in Table 1.

Time	Activities
Week 1	- Sent the verbal informed consent to the Dean of the Department of Languages - Sent the verbal informed consent to the colleague who would be the observer, and then had a meeting with the observer to tell her what to do as directed in the observation form - Asked for the students' agreement to join three next classes with listening activities, to complete the questionnaires and to participate in the interviews after the last of the three next classes
Weeks 2+3	- Introduced the first and second dictogloss tasks with observation.
Week 4	- Introduced the last dictogloss task with observation, questionnaires and interview
Week 5	- Gathered the data from observation and questionnaires for later analysis. Transcribed the data from the interview
Weeks 6+7	- Synthesized and analyzed all data, and then gave comments
Week 8	- Came to conclusion and suggestion

**3.4. The instruction procedure**

The story texts were adapted from the pre-intermediate-activity chapter in *Grammar Diction* by Wajnryb (1990) (See appendix 4) and the procedure of the task activities followed as much the instructions given by the same author.

**Stage 1: Preparation**

At this first stage, the researcher:

a) Prepared students for the texts they would be listening to by carrying out some warm-up activities. This type of topical warm-up prepared learners for the subject matter and made them more ready for the listening in the next stage: people listen more effectively when they are able to anticipate what they will hear, when their

interest in the topic has been aroused, and when they become personally involved in the discussion. (Wajnryb 1990, p. 7)

b) Prepared students for the vocabulary of the text. Vocabulary should be pre-taught if the teacher suspects that it is unknown to the learners or difficult for them to infer. (Wajnryb 1990, p. 7)

c) Told the students what they were expected to do at each stage of the procedure.

d) Organized students into groups of 4 before the dictation began.

**Stage 2: Dictation**

The students heard the dictation twice. ‘The first time, they should not write, but allow the words to ‘wash over them’. This way they get a global feeling for the whole passage. The second time, they should take down notes.’ (Wajnryb 1990, p.8)

When the students took notes during the dictation, they were encouraged to write down the type of word that would help them to piece together the text in the later reconstruction stage. Such words were content or information words. The grammar or function words were to be provided by the students themselves as part of the productive process of reconstructing the text. The text was dictated at normal spoken speed.

**Stage 3: Reconstruction**

Right after the dictation finished, the students, working in groups, proceeded to pool their notes and worked on their version of the text. The scribe wrote down the group’s text as it emerged from the discussion of the group.

**Stage 4: Analysis and correction**

The last stage of the dictogloss procedure was the analysis and correction of the learners’ texts. The group compared their constructed text to each other to see the similarities and differences in content. And then each group was asked to present their text orally. Finally, the original text was shown on the screen and the students corrected their text themselves.

**3.5. Data collection and analysis**

The questionnaire was administrated directly to the students and the semi-structured interviews were conducted with them by the researcher. The data collected through the questionnaire, the interviews, and classroom observation were analyzed manually in the form of thematic and interpretative analyses. They were organized and divided into relevant themes, categories, and patterns. At last, the data gathered from the three instruments were compared and contrasted in order to make decisions and report them (Zohrabi 2011, p.144). In order to maintain anonymity, students will be referred to with a number (e.g. Student (St) 1).

**IV. RESULTS ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

The results collected through the three instruments are not analyzed and discussed separately but alternately in order to easily put in comparison.

Results from the questionnaire are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2: Students’ answers to the questionnaire

Items	Answers				
	SD	D	U	A	SA
1. I found the dictogloss tasks strange but interesting	-	1 3.7%	5 18.6%	20 74%	1 3.7%
2. I enjoyed the dictogloss tasks in learning listening skill.	-	-	2 7.4%	22 81.4%	3 11.2%
3. I think these activities were easy.	6 22.3%	17 51.8%	1 3.7%	3 11.2%	-
4. I want to do more activities like these.	-	-	7 25.9%	18 66.7%	2 7.4%
5. I think activities like these are useful in helping me improve my listening skill.	-	2 7.4%	9 33.3%	12 44.5%	4 14.8%

Based on the results of the questionnaire, it is optimistic to say that there is a positive sign of using a new technique in teaching listening skills to my students. The first questionnaire item shows that the large number of my students found dictogloss tasks interesting though they were new to them. This could also be seen from the interview that most of the students shared the same idea:

St1: “At first, I found it difficult and strange but after a few days it became easier and more interesting to me. And I liked it.”

St 3 and St4: “I completely agree with you on that point”

Through the observation by the researcher, it was noticeable that the students seemed not to be very confident when they performed the task on the first day. They appeared not to willingly join the activities during the task. Their low level of confidence was emphasized in their answers in the interview that they didn't do the activities well at the beginning. This could be explained by the fact that the students had not got familiar with the task (Shak 2006, p.52)

It is obvious from Item 2 in the questionnaire that most of the students were in favor of these tasks. The reason for this could be inferred from the interview in which they said they liked the tasks because they could work in group and had a chance to practice speaking and note-taking. Through the observation results (Appendix 5), the level of students' interest in the tasks has a considerable increase (Item 4, from 3 to 5, the high level in the scale), which could prove the view that the more familiar the students get with the tasks, the more interested they become. Then, they get involved more in the lesson.

Related to the complexity level of the task, which often leads to low interest and motivation (Shak, 2006), one student claimed during the interview that dictogloss tasks were not easy at first, and most of the other participants shared the same view:

St 3: "They were not easy at first because I didn't understand the activity."

This led to a problem related to the clarity of teacher's instruction. It is showed in the Day 1's observation that the teacher instruction was not clear enough to the class. Then from Day 2, this was improved, and helped the students far much in acquiring what to do.

Based on the result of Item 4 from the questionnaire, only a quarter of the students felt unsure of preferring further tasks. Otherwise, the others wanted to do more activities like these, which could lead to an affirmation that dictogloss tasks bring about certain positive effect to the students' attitudes.

The result of questionnaire Item 5 indicates that more than half of the students agree that dictogloss tasks are useful in helping them improve their listening skills. During the interview, the participants discussed the usefulness of the activities and they shared the same view as the result from the questionnaire since they could absorb the listening twice, one from the teacher and the other from their mates.

Based on questionnaire Item 6 and Item 7, one thing about these activities that many of the students like best was the speaking phase during the task. This may be true because most of the listening tasks in their course books are barely listening, just little speaking. None of the students revealed what they disliked about these tasks. Meanwhile in the interview, the students hesitated to give the reason for their interest in the task. They just said the tasks were interesting and would like the teacher to carry out more in the next lessons. And none of 'dislike' answers was released. This could be because the students were not willing to speak truthfully and they wanted to please their teacher (Hinchey 2008, p. 81).

## V. CONCLUSION.

In conclusion, we have some teaching experiences thanks to the evaluation. It is optimistic to say that there is a positive sign of using a new technique in teaching listening skills to our students. However, we also find that teachers' thoughts and ideas are unlike with those of learners. Hence, we need to be adaptable and creative in the teaching procedure to improve our students' listening skills. Moreover, activities and tasks of dictogloss should be put under serious consideration in teaching in order to increase ability of learners and create pleasant learning surroundings in order that students can get better improvement in listening input acquisition.

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