

The Effect of Using Comic Strips on Developing Reading Comprehension of Preparatory Stage Students

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Abstract

The study attempted to investigate the effect of using comic strips on developing reading comprehension of second year preparatory school students. One hundred-twenty students from AL-Robi preparatory school, Samalout Educational Directorate, Minia governorate were randomly selected. The study adopted the quasi-experimental design as hundred-twenty participants were divided into two groups. The treatment group (n=60) was taught by using the comic strips strategy (CSS), while the non-treatment group (n=60) was taught following the plan prescribed by the ministry of Education in Egypt. The instrument of study was a reading comprehension test. The instrument was judged by jury members. Analysis of the collected data indicated that most of the comic strips strategy model participants achieved significantly higher levels in reading comprehension skills than those of the non-treatment group. It was concluded that the comic strips strategy helps second year preparatory school students to develop their reading comprehension skills in English as a foreign language.

Key words: the comic strips strategy– reading comprehension.

أثر استخدام الشرائط المرسومة في تنمية الفهم القرائي لطلاب المرحلة الإعدادية

ملخص الدراسة

هدفت الدراسة الحالية الي التحقق من مدي تأثير الشرائط المرسومة في تنمية الفهم القرائي لطلاب الصف الثاني من المرحلة الإعدادية . وتكونت العينة من مائة وعشرين طالباً من مدرسة الروبي الإعدادية - التابعة لإدارة سمالوط التعليمية - محافظة المنيا ، وتم اختيار عينة الدراسة بشكل عشوائي ، وقسمت العينة الي مجموعتين (تجريبية وعددها ٦٠ طالباً واخري ضابطة وعددها ٦٠ طالباً ايضاً). واتبعت الدراسة المنهج شبه التجريبي (القبلي - البعدي) ، وقد تم تدريس المجموعة التجريبية باستخدام استراتيجية الشرائط المرسومة ، بينما تم التدريس لطلاب المجموعة الضابطة طبقاً لمواصفات خطة وزارة التربية والتعليم المصرية. وقد أعد الباحث أداة الدراسة وهي اختبار في الفهم القرائي. وقد تم تطبيق أداة الدراسة خلال الفصل الدراسي الأول من عام ٢٠١٧ وأظهر تحليل البيانات باستخدام (اختبار ت) انه توجد فروق ذات دلالة احصائية بين المجموعة التجريبية والمجموعة الضابطة في الاختبار البعدي للفهم القرائي لصالح المجموعة التجريبية . وأظهرت نتائج الدراسة التأثير الإيجابي لاستخدام استراتيجية الشرائط المرسومة في تنمية مهارات الفهم القرائي لطلاب الصف الثاني من المرحلة الاعدادية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: استراتيجية الشرائط المرسومة - الفهم القرائي

Introduction

English language is the most spread language all over the world. It is an international language so, learning English becomes necessary not only in educational system but also in other systems. The goal of teaching English in Egypt is to enable students to communicate.

Communication does not only take place with two or more speakers, but also it may happen between speakers and text. There should be a kind of interaction between the reader and the text.

Reading is a cornerstone for success in school and throughout the life. The ability to read provides the opportunity for personal fulfillment and job success. In addition, Edgiger, (2013) states that reading is considered very valuable in context of the foreign language. Reading is one important way to improve the student's general language skills in English and help students to think in English enlarge vocabulary. Increasing reading speed gain more knowledge and a good way to find out about new ideas, facts, and new experience (Milculecky & Jeffries, 2004).

Nowadays, there is attendance toward using media to aid and supplement educational objectives. At real life English, it is believed that language learning should be fun so, the better way to enjoy learning English language through comic strips. Using comic strips has three main benefits. First, comic strips motivate young learners. Second, they provide a context and logically connected sentences to help language learning. Third, their visual information is helpful for comprehension (Bowkett, 2011).

Scholars and teachers agree that motivation is crucial in language teaching. One well known way to arouse students' interest can be achieved by bringing something extraordinary and new into the language class. Especially among teenagers and young adults, comic strips can be used efficiently for this purpose. Comics are usually funny, therefore, applying them to methodological purposes will have the effect as using games in teaching English. It brings cheerful

atmosphere into the class (Koiriyah, 2011). Comic strips not only amuse and interest for L2 learners; there are plenty of other reasons to use them in education.

Comics have a story line; therefore, they have a conclusion. This way the student is motivated to continue reading and to become more involved in content than in language (Mikulecky, 2004). Consequently, the students will be eager to know what will happen, what will be the end of the story as his /her curiosity has been aroused and will remember the words, expression, and grammatical forms more easily.

The theoretical base for this research study focused on reading comprehension improvement through a constructivist lens. Constructivism refers to the idea that learners construct knowledge for themselves by exploring and asking questions because learning is an active process of creating meaning from different experiences (Lew, 2010; Ryan, 2009; Richardson, 2003). According to Porcaro (2011), even though much traditional instructional pedagogy dominates the constructivist (or behaviorist) approach to learning, knowledge societies are built on collaborative constructivist-based learning environments. According to constructivist theory, teachers provide a favorable teaching environment when students focus on exploration and cooperative learning (Jia, 2010). Constructivist theorists such as Dewey, Piaget, and Vygotsky developed the theories arguing that people construct knowledge by linking new information to their prior knowledge (Ryan, 2009).

Constructivism presumes that learning is a process of individual meaning construction based on existing knowledge and incoming stimuli (Ryan, 2009). When a teacher uses constructivist instructional strategies to teach, he or she is stressing learner centeredness and autonomy, problem solving approaches, and rich authentic

environments (Yuen & Hau, 2006). A growing number of researchers recommend a constructivist method of teaching to help students to develop their cognitive and analytical skills (Gordon, 2008; Marlowe & Page, 2005). A constructivist approach to teaching reading helps students to learn words more effectively because children who have difficulty learning words just by seeing are encouraged when they realize everyone can learn (Ryan, 2009).

Researchers have concurred that making comics in the classroom can motivate students to learn and create opportunities for teachers to engage students in meaningful discussions and visual representations of content in different levels (Frey & Fisher, 2004; Morrison, Bryan & Chilcoat, 2002). The main goal of this study was to provide a strategy for teachers to narrow the vocabulary knowledge gap, particularly for students from poor backgrounds.

Review of literature and related studies

Reading is the most important skill for those who learn language, as it develops language vocabulary and culture, besides, maintaining fluency and competence in speaking, listening, and writing (Abdelfattah, 1997). Hock and Mellard (2005), Roe et al. (2005) and Shehata (2006) stated that reading comprehension is the goal of any reading activity which refer to grasping meaning from a text with one's intellect. The text offers letters, words, sentences, and paragraphs that encode meaning and the reader uses knowledge, skills, and strategies to decode the same (Al-hadi, 2008 and Mena, 2009).

Reading is a multifaceted process that develops only with practice. There are certain aspects of reading, such as fluency and word recognition, which can be learned in a few years. These basics must be mastered but at the same time reading comprehension should be

emphasized in the process. Students can parrot words on a page all day long but if they don't have the necessarily comprehension skills they will not be able to make predictions about what will happen next, monitor their understanding of content, sequence or characters, clarify confusing parts of the text, or connect what they are reading to their own experience or prior knowledge and that is what true comprehension is all about (Marshal, 2008: 1).

Reading is the most important skill in English language learning for several reasons. First, reading consolidates learning where it provides good models for writing and opportunities to introduce new topics, to stimulate discussion and to study language (Richards & Renandya, 2002). Second, reading facilitates curriculum parts (Montoya, 2002). Third, it develops cultural knowledge and awareness and gives students insight into the lifestyle and worldviews of the people (National Capital Language Resource Center, 2004).

Blocks, Rodgers, and Johnson identified four main levels of reading comprehension: literal comprehension, referential or interpretive comprehension, critical comprehension, and creative comprehension. In Day and Park (2005) description of reading comprehension, **literal comprehension** involves understanding and obtaining explicit information presented in the text. The next type of comprehension is **reorganization**, which is based on literal comprehension, students need to make use of their comprehension from different parts of text and combine it for additional understanding. **An inference** requires students to identify meaning that is in the text but not explicitly stated. The fourth comprehension type discussed by Day and Park is **a prediction**, which involve being able to determine what might happen next in the flow of text. An **evaluation** involves being able to make a judgment about the entirety or some aspect of the text. Finally, **personal response** necessitates a level of comprehension that enables reader to express opinion about the text and subject.

Silliman and Wilkinson (2004, pp. 30-35) identified the following components that are involved in reading comprehension, where mastering these components lead to skilled reading comprehension: vocabulary, world knowledge, motivation, purpose and goals, cognitive and metacognitive strategies, linguistic knowledge, discourse knowledge, and fluency.

Comic strips is about presenting pictures (accompanied by words) to convey meaning. According to Duncan and Smith (2009), a picture in comics is static; each panel in the comics has a picture which represents different moments in the story. The story in comics is presented in image-panels that flow in a narrative structure: conflict, rising action, climax, resolution, and denouement. The most important details of the story are chosen and ‘encapsulated’ in the panels. Encapsulation is a term used to describe the process of choosing the “prime action” and depicting those actions as dramatic sequential scenes to make up a story. Besides that, image panels help to create a focus for the reader because each of panels has something important to convey.

Since pictures have a major role to play, cartoonists have developed various techniques to help readers experience the static pictures that they are engaged with. To create the experience and context for the enjoyment of readers, cartoonists use devices such as expressions to show the emotions of the characters, clothing, background (objects, places, and geography), color and lighting, sound and action, space and size, visual metaphors, inter-textual images, and narrator’s commentary.

The International Reading Association (2000) reported that making a difference in the classroom means making teaching different.

Comic Strips Strategy (CSS) is one way to make teaching different. It can be used in purpose of motivating young readers to become recreational readers, enabling them to expand their vocabulary knowledge, to engage their imaginations, and to inspire a love of reading (Krashen, 2013). Krashen argued that free voluntary reading is the most effective tool available for increasing a child's ability to read, write, spell, and comprehend, providing compelling supportive evidence through the accumulation of years of research from many different countries.

Comic strips bring a bright new strategy to reading instruction. CSS presents ways classroom teachers can use comics to build strategies to deepen their students' understanding of content using visual literacy skills. Teachers need to recognize the importance of visual literacy for the children of the technology generation. The union of reading and technology on the Internet is causing educators to take a new look at what it means to be literate in today's society (Leu, 2002; Leu & Kinzer, 2000). These new forms of literacy call upon students to know how to read and write in the print world as well as the digital world (Schmar-Dobler, 2003), necessitating the ability to comprehend through visual imagery. Due to the ease and access of information gathering on the Internet, children must have visual literacy skills to comprehend. The World Wide Web is the library of the future, and we must prepare students to understand it, just as we taught them to read books for information in the past.

Comic strips that incorporate text with visual representations offer teachers a great tool for helping children develop their visual literacy skills. Comic strips are a text structure with a story to tell. Just as a story in print requires comprehension by the reader, comics require the reader to blend the print and the graphics to comprehend the

intended communication to elementary classrooms as teaching tools. Comics can have a unique and powerful voice in the classroom by upholding the definition of visual literacy. Comics are a living, daily representation of real life, often representing the world as it changes. Naming them hybrid texts, Hatfield (2000) reconceived these pictorial narrations in our daily newspapers as definite text structures for the literate (those who can read, write, and understand); the illiterate (those who cannot read or write but can view comics and possibly comprehend through the visual representation); and the alliterate (those who can read, write, and understand but choose not to, yet are drawn to comics as an enjoyable brief form of reading). Comic strips have a definitive attraction for all literacy abilities.

Based on Bowkett's (2011) book, he uses children's interest in pictures, comics, and graphic novels as a way of developing their creative writing abilities, reading skills. The book's strategy is the use of comic art images as a visual analogue to help children generate, organize, and refine their ideas when writing and talking about text. In reading comic books children are engaging with highly complex and structured narrative forms. Whether they realize it or not, their emergent visual literacy promotes thinking skills and develops wider Meta-cognitive abilities.

Baker (2011) tried to examine the benefits of using comics with English language learners (ELLs). With their bright colors and familiar characters, comics are more appealing than traditional text. The comic represents something different and exciting without sacrificing plot, vocabulary, and other important components of reading comprehension. For these reasons and many more, comics might also play an important role in ELL acquisition of literacy. She expresses

many graphic novels are high interest with low reading levels, cover diverse genres such as biographies, and cover current events and social issues. Baker (2011) concurs with comics can be used to teach parts of speech, social situations, historical events, and more. She admits that incorporating text and visuals causes readers to examine the relationship between the two and encourages deep thinking and critical thinking.

Pan & Pan (2009) conducted a study to gauge whether pictures could help low proficiency learners of EFL perform better in their reading of text parallel to their proficiency level and reading of text that is above their proficiency level. The results indicated that pictures helped low proficiency learners in their reading comprehension immaterial of whether they were engaged with the low-level text or the high-level text.

Liu (2004) in his study talked about the role of comic strips on ESL learners' reading comprehension. He has two different students' levels of proficiency (low & high) with and without a comic strip. This study suggests that the reading comprehension of the low-level Students was greatly facilitated when the comic strip repeated the information presented in the text. He noted that the effect of comic strips on reading comprehension largely depends on the quality of the repetition effect. The study's results also imply that the advantage of providing comic strips with reading text diminishes when the student has difficulty Comprehending the text. After analyzing the results, they were said that low-level students receiving the high-level text with the comic strip scored significantly higher than their counterparts receiving the high-level text only.

Context of the Problem

Observing some EFL classrooms in Al-robi preparatory school at samalout - Minia Governorate, it was found out that students of second year of preparatory school students have problems regarding their reading comprehension skills. The researcher selected this sample because the second preparatory students study a short story as an integrated part to the content for the first time and the comic strips strategy is the most suitable strategy to facilitate reading comprehension.

To verify the problem in more specific way, the researcher applied a test of vocabulary and a test of reading comprehension in the first term with students of second year of preparatory school. The purpose was to know if the students have a problem regarding their reading comprehension skills. The scores of most students confirmed that they have problems regarding their reading comprehension.

Statement of the problem

Through the results obtained from the students' knowledge reading comprehension test, and interviews with teachers beside the observation of second year from AL-Robi preparatory school at Minia Governorate, the researcher found that they have problems regarding reading comprehension. So the present study attempts to investigate: "The effect of using comic strips on developing reading comprehension of second year of preparatory school students."

Objective

The current study attempted to identify the effect of using comic strips on developing reading comprehension of the second-year preparatory school students.

Question

The current study answered the question: what the effect of using comic strips on developing reading comprehension of the second-year preparatory school students?

Hypothesis

The current study tried to verify the following hypothesis:

There is a statistically significant difference between mean scores obtained by the experimental group and the control group on the post administration of reading comprehension test (favoring experimental group).

Design of the Study

To achieve the aim of the present study, the researcher adopted the quasi-experimental design (a pre-post control group design). An experimental group and a control group were exposed to pre-posttests in reading comprehension in English as a foreign language. The experimental group was instructed and trained in a manual of comic strips strategy, while the control group was taught following the plan prescribed by the ministry of education in Egypt.

Participants

Eighty sixth students from El-Robi preparatory school were randomly selected as the participants of the study. They were divided equally into two groups (an experimental group and a control group).

Material: The suggested comic strips strategy manual

Content of the manual:

The manual consists of two books, instructor's book, and student's activity book. It includes four chapters; each chapter includes three sessions. Each chapter begins with general objectives and each session includes its behavioral objectives. It also includes a model of strategies which the students will use. Each session has activities, each activity related to vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension skills. Each session ends with an evaluation of the different questions to assess the students' progress.

The first side of this manual focuses on using some instructional techniques to teach vocabulary for enhancing the second year of preparatory school students' vocabulary acquisition. The other side of this manual is for developing reading comprehension. In this part students are supposed to acquire three skills of reading comprehension one by one (Literal comprehension, inferential comprehension, and critical comprehension) these skills help students not only to understand what they read but also to accept and refuse what they read.

Procedures

Step one: (presentation)

The treatment group used the comic strip series. The participants in the treatment group read the series of comic strips and follow the story to arrive at the main ideas of the lesson. The researcher asked the learners to give definitions, synonyms, and antonyms to clarify the

meaning of the texts. Thus, students study the text and the researcher helped them to comprehend the passages.

Step two: (the students' groups)

The researcher divided the participants into 10 groups. Each group contained 6 students. The researcher observed and inferred to engage shy students to join as active ones. The researcher distributed the comic strips (cards) to students incorrect order and ask each group members to put them in the right orders according to the events of each chapter of the story.

Step three: (presenting the topics to the students).

During each session's procedures, the researcher adopted a suggested comic strips strategy (CSS) to achieve the objectives of each one. The researcher presented a model of the required activities and pronounced the guided vocabulary many times. Also, the researcher briefly explained the target structure of the session and how to use them in the required activities. The researcher paid attention to the shy and poor participants during sessions.

Step four: (Observing the participants' progress).

The researcher recorded and observed the participants' progress in each group and encouraged the shy and poor ones to improve them through active participation and language use.

Step five: (practice).

This phase depended on the information processing through applying the acquired tasks in the form of problem solving, positive interaction, making conversations or answer sheet's questions.

Step six: (assessment).

The researcher focused on creating appositive interaction environment through involving tasks for assessment that depended on practicing the language such as role-playing, retelling story or discussing what will happen at the end of each chapter.

Instrument of the study

The test of reading comprehension skills was prepared by the researcher according to the sub-skills of reading comprehension skills and the content areas that were covered in the manual. It included eleven items representing the most important and emphasized objectives of the manual. The test included five questions. These questions represent specific objectives of the test and second year preparatory school students' reading comprehension skills. It has sixty marks. It was designed according to a table of specifications. It included different types of questions which were judged by a jury of EFL experts.

After administering the pilot study, the data collected used to calculate the statistical validity of the test, the internal consistency (item-total statics) was calculated as shown in the following table:

Table (1): The item correlation and the whole test that belong to N = (60).

Item	Corrected item-total correlation	Item	Corrected item-total correlation	Item	Corrected item-total correlation
1	0.445**	16	0.355**	31	0.359**
2	0.515**	17	0.333**	32	0.390**
3	0.306*	18	0.375**	33	0.313**

4	0.284**	19	0.318*	34	0.447**
5	0.307**	20	0.343**	35	0.433**
6	0.328**	21	0.334**	36	0.428*
7	0.312**	22	0.377**	37	0.378**
8	0.354**	23	0.313**	38	0.366**
9	0.300**	24	0.345**	39	0.376**
10	0.363**	25	0.333*	40	0.384**
11	0.336**	26	0.405**	41	0.398**
12	0.354**	27	0.310**	42	0.549**
13	0.369**	28	0.364**	43	0.422**
14	0.373**	29	0.492**		
15	0.368**	30	0.350**		

**Significant at 0.01 level

The reliability coefficient of the test score was determined by using Cronbach's alpha method according to Danesh, and Nourdad (2017: p236). The data obtained was calculated and the reliability coefficient was found (0.786), which was considered acceptable. Chow and Chan (2008: p462) illustrated that the test should have a reliability coefficient ranging from (0.70) and preferably closer to (0.90) to be considered useful and reliability.

Duration of the Experiment

The experiment was carried out during the first term of the school year 2017-2018. It lasted for 13 weeks, two hours a week, for a total of 32 hours, including testing time.

Results

The hypothesis of the study predicted that there was statistically significant difference between the mean scores obtained by the experimental group and control group on the post administration of the reading comprehension test (favoring experimental group). Analysis of the collected data using t-test showed that the experimental group achieved a higher degree of improvement than the control one on the reading comprehension test as t-value (53,312**) is significant at the (0.01) level. Thus, the hypothesis is accepted.

Table (2) Mean Scores and t-test Values of the Post Administration of Reading Comprehension Test.

Group	Dependent Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	t. value	df	Sig.
Experimental	Reading Comprehension Skills	٣٩,٢٥٤٢	٧,٦١٠٣٢	٥٣,٣١٢	٥٨	,٠٠٠
Control		٨,٢٠٣٤	٣,٦٩٤٢٦			

** Significant at (0.01) level.

It is clear from the table (2) that the calculated t-value was (53,312**) significant at (0.01) level, and P. value was equal to (0.000) and this is less than the level of significance (0.01). this indicates that there is a statistically significant difference (favoring the experimental group) between mean scores obtained by the experimental group and control group on the post administration of the reading comprehension test.

As a complementary procedure to ensure the effect of CSS based manual on second year preparatory school students' reading comprehension, the effect size of the manual was tested using the Eta Square formula (η^2). As shown the Equation above, the (η^2) the value is (0,98), which is considered highly effective.

Discussion

The afore-mentioned results obtained on the post tests of reading comprehension confirmed the second hypothesis was accepted. Consequently, this confirmed the effect of CSS based manual of study. It showed that the manual enhanced the level and the performance of the experimental group participants' reading comprehension.

Liu (2004) in his article talked about the role of comic strips on ESL learners' reading comprehension. He has two different students' levels of proficiency (low & high) with and without a comic strip. The outcome of the present study is compatible with.

This result is consistent with Shaaban (2006) who found good effects of using Jigsaw II cooperative learning (CL) model and whole class instruction in improving learners' reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition and motivation to read.

Bowkett's (2011) book, which in his book the author uses children's interest in pictures, comics and graphic novels as a way of developing their creative writing abilities, reading skills. The book's strategy is the use of comic art images as a visual analogue to help children generate, organize, and refine their ideas when writing and talking about text. He agrees in reading comic books children are engaging with highly complex and structured narrative forms.

Karakas and Sariçoban (2012) in their study, considered the impact of subtitled animated cartoons on incidental vocabulary learning, and found out that the target words were contextualized, and it became easy for participants to elicit the meanings of the words. Their results were in related to the current study which the general findings of this study supported the common assumption that subtitles and captions are powerful instructional tools in learning vocabulary and improving reading comprehension skills of language learners.

Moreover, Merc (2013) considered the effects of comic strips on reading comprehension of Turkish EFL learners. In his study students

read the texts given and wrote what they remembered about the text on a separate answer sheet. The results of the quantitative analyses show that all students with a comic strip effect, regardless of proficiency and text level, performed better than the ones without the comic strips.

Recommendations of the study:

Based on the results of the present study, the researcher recommends the following:

1. Reading activities in preparatory schools should be assessed throughout the whole term.
2. Attention should be directed to the use of vocabulary strategies.
3. The second-year preparatory schools should receive more semantic and directed training in vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension.
4. Students should be given real opportunities for reading comprehension. Tests of vocabulary and reading comprehension should be developed and used.
5. Teaching vocabulary should be emphasized in EFL syllabus for preparatory schools' students.
6. Teachers' role should be changed from being the main source of information to becoming a facilitator, monitor, and consultant.
7. Teachers should monitor students' performance in reading on a regular basis and make instructional plans to reflect their needs.

Suggestions for Further Research:

In the light of the results of the present study, the following topics are suggested areas that need further investigation:

1. The present study can be replicated with a large sample of 2nd year preparatory schools.
2. The present study can be replicated to the first year of preparatory schools' students.
3. A study to investigate the effect of using CSS on teaching other English language skills such as creative writing and critical reading.
4. A study to investigate the effect of using CSS on developing students' motivation and self-esteem can be conducted.
5. A study to investigate the effect of using CSS on students with special needs can be conducted.
6. A study to investigate the effect of using CSS on developing students' creative thinking can be conducted.

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