

Aspects of Using Graphic Narratives in EFL Classrooms

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Abstract:

The study has its focus on exploring literature related to the use of Graphic Narratives for EFL classrooms. The aims of the study are finding out the aspects, that make Graphic Narratives important for EFL classrooms and the things a teacher should keep in mind while using Graphic Narratives for EFL classrooms. From the available literature relevant to the study the researcher came to know that, the aspects, that make Graphic Narratives important for EFL classrooms are Motivation, Expanding Vocabulary, Pleasure, Providing Clues, Comfort, Presenting, Sociocultural Issues, Reducing the Anxiety and Descriptive details. The available literature also suggests that the aspects that a teacher should keep in mind while using Graphic Narratives for EFL classrooms are Simplicity, The proper way of reading visuals, Simple Sentences and Storytelling. To find out the generalizations regarding the area of study the available literature was analysed. As a result the researcher has come across some research gaps. Those gaps have been listed in the conclusion part so that they can be filled up by other researchers in future.

Keywords: Graphic Narratives, EFL classrooms, Graphic Novels, Language Learning, Language Teaching, English Language Teaching.

Introduction

Foreign Language Classroom in the respect of its Pedagogy has been transforming for last few decades. Where earlier it used to be teacher-centered now it is becoming student-centered. Usage of Graphic Narratives has played a very important role in this journey. Especially, in case of teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) it plays a vital role as the medium, through which the learners are expected to learn, are easily available. If we focus on the relevant literature, we will see researchers have used Graphic Narratives for language learning with so many approaches in last two or three decades. Especially whenever researchers have made an attempt to promote acquisition instead of rote learning of the target language, Graphic Narratives has played a significant role.

The available literature related to the study indicates that using Graphic Narratives in EFL classrooms has a positive effect on learners and the teaching learning process. Electronic databases have been used in this study. As a result, the researcher has come across some

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generalizations regarding aspects of using Graphic Narratives in EFL classrooms. After looking at the available sources, two types of studies are found. The first type experimental in nature. The other one is suggestive and theoretical in nature. The researcher has taken both types of articles into account.

Graphic narratives integrate sequential images with text. For examples of graphic narratives are comic strips, comic books, Manga, graphic novels, etc. Within the landscape of contemporary ELT especially in the field of multimodal language education, graphic narratives have a unique role. In the field of EFL and Language Pedagogy, to fulfil the diverse needs of the students, tools like graphic narratives become important. The reason behind that is there, the graphic narratives are a combination of verbal as well as visual information. This study takes into account the empirical contribution of the scholars who focused on employing graphic narratives as instructional materials.

Literature Review

Reema Aldahash and Sultan Altalhab in 2020 in their article designed and experimented activities using graphic novels for EFL learners. In their study it was proven that reading graphic novels has a positive effect on reading comprehension of the Saudi EFL learners. In the study “same reading comprehension questions were used for both tests, including multiple-choice, true-false, and fill-in-the-blank formats” (Reema Aldahash 21) As compared to control group the experimental group performed better. “Questions were designed to test the students’ ability to identify the central idea, prediction, recognition, and inference” (Reema Aldahash) The authors stated that the in experimental group, “the pictures helped students understand the text with ease and diminished their anxiety.” (Reema Aldahash 22)

Janic Bland in her article in 2018 talked about the different aspects related to usefulness of Graphic Narratives. She has talked about the multimodal quality of graphic fiction. She states that, “Although a graphic novel is a multimodal text in print medium, it can nonetheless connect the acquisition of literacies with the experience of digital natives, who of course are used to reading pictorial text alongside verbal text on the Web.” (BLAND 43)

In another article Bland about graphic novels said that, in graphic novels many educators have discovered that, “they enable the struggling reader, motivate the reluctant one, and challenge the high-level learner” (Bland 271)

Gretchen E. Schwarz (2002), argued that “in an increasingly visual culture, literacy educators can profit from the use of graphic.Novels in the classroom comma especially for young adults” (Schwarz 262) In the respect of using graphic narratives as instructional materials her arguments are one the most earliest and most cited scholarly materials.

Stephen Cary (2004), gave a theoretical framework and a set of practical activities to integrate comics in language classrooms. According to him “ unique mix of abundant, comprehension-building visuals and authentic text readily engages learners, contextualizes language, and offers a window into the culture” (Cary 2004) His study connects visual richness of comics with the process of language acquisition. He emphasised on learners of lower level of proficiency.

Christian W Chun (2009) used the specific graphic novel *Maus* with English language learners in secondary school. He adopted a multimodal approach combined with critical literacy. He said, “intellectually substantive graphic novels that foreground racism and immigrant otherness often resonate with ELL Students” (Chun 145). According to him, graphic narratives can play the role of a powerful bridge between language acquisition and critical thinking.

Razvan Radan in 2017 in an article talked about the importance of comics in Second language teaching. He focused on the fact that visual communication as a part of reading comics is more helpful than non-visual text materials. He also talked about how visual communication works in the case of comics.

In 2016 in a study Mike P. Cook used graphic adaptation of a traditionally taught text “The Cask of Amontillado” by Edgar Allan Poe for improving the ability of reading comprehension. After the post interviews of the participants the result was positive.

Ahmet Başal, Talat Aytan and İbrahim Demir in 2016 in a study proved that graphic narratives can be used to teach idioms. “Forty most figurative idioms selected randomly from the Michigan Academic English Spoken Corpus (MICASE) were used in a script and the script was converted to a graphic novel with the use of a computer software.” (Ahmet Başal 95)

In 2015 Hüseyin Öz and Emine Efecioğlu proved that using graphic novels for English Language Teaching can greatly shape and influence “the critical thinking and literary devices, and vocabulary learning skills of participants.” (Hüseyin Öz 75) They did the experiment on two groups of 10th grade class students, one experimental and another control group. Both the groups studied *Macbeth* for various classroom activities.

H. Calgary Basol and Ece Sarigul (2013), in his experimental framework, replaced traditional text with graphic novels. In his experiment the group involved with graphic novels showed better engagement in pre , reading , during reading and post reading activities. He reached a conclusion to consider graphic novels as “an authentic material can be adopted to EFL classrooms to improve critical (critical) reading skills” (Basol and Sarigul 1622). Along with the methodological contribution, the study provides a replicate template for designing activities for EFL classrooms.

Evangelia Moula in 2012 in a study integrated comics in literary study to, “engage students in a creative process and enhance not only their cultural and critical literacy, but also their literary competence and linguistic performance.” (Moula 174)

Chryssa Themelis and Julie-Ann Sime (2020) In their research examined how comics can be used as a medium for making the language classrooms inclusive and technology enhanced. They mentioned that comics can be used as to “spark student motivation, heighten vocabulary acquisition, promote writing activities, reinforce understanding, enhance multiple literacies and teamwork, reduce examination anxiety, and improve multimodal skills” (Themelis & Sime 2020, 93) The research derives findings from cognitive psychology, neuroscience and educational theory in order to understand the role of comics as a productive tool for learners with difficulties like dyslexia.

Gretchen Schauer (2022) in a study portrayed graphic novels as a source of pragmatic input for language learners. He observed, “graphic novels should be a rich source of pragmatic input for ill to learners as they tend to contain a considerable amount of direct speech” (Schauer 2022) He showed a new point of view of looking at graphic narratives. He presented graphic narratives beyond reading comprehension and vocabulary accusation. Connecting with the domain of pragmatic competence he gave direction for future research.

Sun Lina (2023), in an exploratory study published in China, a four month graphic noble reading program for secondary fl school was organized. Sun used a critical literary framework and found that\n With explicit guidance from teachers, students can develop “ high-order reading/thinking skills , multiple perspectives , historical empathy” and linguistic performance(sun 2023, 88). The study places graphic novels within an context of efl in Asia and demonstrates the importance of structured pedagogical scaffolding.

Research Questions

1. Which are the aspects of Graphic Narratives that make them important for EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms?
2. What are the things that a teacher should take care of while using Graphic Narratives for EFL classrooms?
3. The previous studies related to the field of using Graphic Narratives for Language Teaching has left some gaps. Those should be addressed in the future by other researchers. What are those gaps?

Methodology

The study explores the electronic databases to find out relevant literature related to the usage of Graphic Narratives in EFL classrooms. Electronic Databases used by the researcher in this study are Scopus, Web of Science and Jstore. Websites for Academicians like Academia and Research Gate were also used. Most importantly, Search Engine like Google Scholar was used to locate the relevant literature. The available literature has been analyzed by the researcher and as a result generalized aspects related to usage of Graphic Narratives in EFL classrooms were found out. Finally, the research gaps were found out so that they can be filled up by other researchers in future.

Aspects of Graphic Narratives that make them useful for EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms

Motivation: “This method also enhances motivation and encourages self-regulated learning” (Reema Aldahash 19) Introducing Graphic Narratives in EFL classrooms motivates the learners to learn the language from their own perspective seeing things.

For any type of learning motivation is very important and “comics can motivate a reluctant learner to read in the target language” (Radan 137)

Cary (2004) talked about the motivational impact of comics as a result of their accessibility and cultural familiarity. Thompson (2023) elaborates that graphic novels serve all the

components of intrinsic motivation such as curiosity, competence, internalised motivation and autonomy.

Expanding Vocabulary: Graphic novels while being used in language learning classrooms can also be effective in expanding the vocabulary. “Graphic connections of words and expressions with meaning help learners expand their vocabulary:” (Reema Aldahash 20) “In building vocabulary, graphic novels images gave learners the ability to make informed guesses or, in many cases, to understand the meaning of unfamiliar words” (Reema Aldahash 23) Öz and Efecioglu (2015) said that graphic mobiles had an important role in vocabulary. Accusation, it was used alongside Macbeth by Shakespeare. Basal etc all. (2016) found out that idiomatic expressions in graphic novels help EFL learners retain more efficiently than conventional teaching methods. Schwarz (2002) said, graphic novels “offer value, variety, and a new medium for literacy that acknowledges the impact of visuals” (Schwarz 262). It helps in contextual vocabulary learning.

Pleasure: “Graphic novels can also make reading a pleasure, particularly for reluctant readers”. (BLAND 43) In Graphic Narratives texts being accompanied by pictures make the activity of reading effortless and entertaining. In this way the learners who are not interested in reading becomes more inclined towards reading because they receive the pleasure of looking at the pictures.

Providing Clues: “Visuals accompanying texts can provide clues that shed light on the meaning of an unfamiliar word or grammatical structure” (Ahmet Başal 97) While reading something in second language the reader may face a problem for not understanding the unknown words, phrases, sentences etc. In this case visuals in graphic narratives may give support for understanding the linguistic elements of language. As the visuals provide a part of the meaning conveyed they may give clues for understanding the unknown words, phrases, sentences etc. Radan (2017) argues that comics with the help of visual discourse acts as a system of meaning making. Comics scam convey the information that verbal text cannot do. The combination of text and image enhances the comprehension of language learners.

Comfort: For any type of learning comfort is a very essential thing and “graphic novels help students to develop reading skills in a comfortable way and provide opportunities for developing higher order thinking skills.” (Ahmet Başal 97)

Presenting Sociocultural Issues: Graphic narrative in language teaching can help in understanding the different things directly or indirectly related to language teaching. With the help of visuals students get to know more than different structures of language. For example, graphic novels can serve as a means for presenting sociocultural issues in language learning. For example, “The Four Immigrants Manga (Kiyama, 1999) depicts the life of four Japanese immigrants in San Francisco, California from 1904 to 1924. Not only is this graphic novel funny to read, but it also gives the reader deeper insight and understanding of the struggles of these immigrants in terms of economic and social issues. EFL learners reading these types of novels could learn language and culture simultaneously.” (Hüseyin Öz 77)

Chun (2009) from the lens of social cultural lens said that graphic novels with themes like migration, otherwise and cultural identity often resonate more with English language students. It helps in strengthening the identity and engagement of the learner.

Reducing the Anxiety: “Krashen (2004b) too maintains that graphic narrative materials are an excellent means of reducing the affective filters of anxiety and lack of confidence blocking student pleasure in learning L2.” (Hüseyin Öz 77) As the graphic narratives can provide pleasure of looking at the pictures, they can also be responsible for handling the anxiety of learning a new language. Instead of just reading text and learning grammar if the students are given the opportunity to understand the meaning through looking at the visuals, they may take it as enjoyment and the monitoring grammatical rules will not create hesitation. Added to that the teacher will not have to force them as “kids love comics and they never feel forced when looking at the pages.” (Hüseyin Öz 77)

Aldahash and Altalhab (2020) in their empirical study reported that the pictures in graphic novels help the Saudi EFL students in reducing their anxiety and enhancing their comprehension. Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982) described the positive effect of low anxiety and high motivation for optimizing language acquisition. Graphic narratives help the anxious language learners in getting desired outcomes.

Descriptive details: Text reading materials do not give descriptive details of the facial expressions and body language of the characters. In the case of graphic narratives, the visuals support to understand the details the author is intended to convey. “Descriptive details, like facial expressions and body language, or the use of different fonts, enlarged, presented in bold or in a different color, convey meaning that can be attributed into words.” (Moula 178) According to Bland (2018) graphic novels help digital native learners in bridging pictorial and verbal literacy.

Things a teacher should keep in mind while using Graphic Narratives for EFL classrooms

Careful Section of the content: “Graphic novels must be carefully selected, and they need to find content and materials that fully support the objectives of their lessons.” (Reema Aldahash 23) If the graphic novel selected is full of “inappropriate images or words” (Reema Aldahash 23) the materials provided will be unsuitable for educational purpose. So the teacher or the researcher should choose the content wisely keeping suitability in mind.

Simplicity: Simplicity should be one of the first priorities while choosing the text. Without that the learners mind will get engaged in understanding the text instead of learning the language. In a study “Apollo 12 was chosen because the text and the language offer very similar meanings and this can help less proficient learners deal with the overall text. It can therefore be considered an “easy” text”. (Radan 141) “The second comic selected for this analysis is the graphic novel Persepolis by Marjane Satrapi.” (Radan 141) “It is a graphic novel that on the surface seems simple and approachable” (Radan 141)

Basol and Sarigul (2013) noted that readability of the chosen graphic novel will determine whether learners can freely engage with the learning process or not. Complex materials can

cause pre occupation with decoding the complex visual compositions and cultural unfamiliarity.

The proper way of reading visuals: “It is impossible to examine the use of graphic texts in educational settings without first considering how to read visuals. Graphic novels place an emphasis on images as major narrative components; thus, one must “read” the visuals in order to understand the written text.” (Cook 7) To make the most out of graphic narratives one will have to read the texts and look at the visuals at the same time simultaneously. Without that at the time of language learning the learners will not be able to integrate the extralinguistic features of language with the linguistic features. Cary (2004) used practical classroom activities such as panel detectives and missing panels to train learners actively in interpreting the relationship between texts, and images, instead of treating them as separate information. Here, visual literacy has been used ever prerequisite skill for language learning.

Simple Sentences: “Emphasising the benefits of graphic novels for young EFL learners or those who have lower reading levels compared to their peers, Krashen (2004b, pp. 59-60) states that “the simple sentences, visual or context clues, and educated guessing allow them to comprehend some, if not all, of the story”.” (Hüseyin Öz 76) Along with other things to be kept in mind the language teacher or the instructor should keep one thing in mind that the learners should not face any type of problem while trying understand the structure of the sentence. In the case of complex and compound sentences the reader may not be able to freely go through the text. She/he may get involved in trying to understand the grammatical structure of the language instead of going for the meaning. This can result in hesitation of the learner while speaking. That’s why the teacher should provide materials containing simple sentences.

Storytelling: The language teacher should always give opportunity to the students to tell stories after seeing wordless picture as this will allow the them to create new sentences and phrases in the target language by themselves. “Students working together in pairs may each be given a set of numbered wordless pictures that tell a story.” (Moula 179)

Moula (2012) developed activities aligned with the acquisition hypothesis of Krashen (1982) normal's use the target language in order to express and respond. Activities with visuals help them move from passive learning to active learning. Cary (2004) noticed that to produce authentic and meaningful oral output, wordless comic strips helps learners develop the skill of meaning making.

Conclusion

Usage of Graphic Narratives for language teaching classrooms is something which has been in practice for years, so this research has not tried to prove its importance in EFL (English as a foreign Language). It has focused on the different aspects related to it on the basis of available literature. The aspects dealt with in last two subheadings are the answer to the first two research questions 1. Which are the aspects of Graphic Narratives that make them important for EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms? and 2. What are the things that a teacher should take care of while using Graphic Narratives for EFL classrooms? Two subheadings (i) Aspects of Graphic Narratives that make them useful for EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms, and (ii) Things a teacher should keep in mind while using Graphic Narratives for

EFL classrooms, included in the study will help the future researchers, ELT (English Language Teaching) trainer and Language teachers in their journey of designing activities of using Graphic Narratives in EFL classrooms, if they use it as reference.

Now in this section the research question 3. The previous studies related to the field of using Graphic Narratives for Language Teaching has left some gaps. Those should be addressed in the future by other researchers. What are those gaps? will be answered.

1. The previous studies rarely used any pre-established approaches of English Language Teaching while planning the experiments.
2. Not all the studies include practical experiments and if the experiment is done the rate of development is not recorded in all the studies.
3. No research until now is found where it is mentioned that the samples can read and write in English but are not capable of Communication for example Listening and Speaking.

Most of the studies available so far are primarily from middle east, turkey and select European countries. It leaves a significant gap in research from South Asian countries including India. Sun (2023) fills this gap with her key study in a single school in China. Thesmelies and Sime (2020) represented comics in language teaching as a tool of inclusive classroom. This field also has studies that examine graphic narratives for students with special educational needs. Very few studies have also examined the long-term effect of graphic narratives on language skills. In future researchers can design longitudinal studies using graphic narratives employing established ELT frameworks such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) or Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) to diversify the geographical scope of the experiments to include South Asian countries.

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