

Jordanian EFL Teachers' Use of Graphic Organizers in Teaching Reading Comprehension: A Case Study of Three Teachers in Jordan

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Abstract

This study reports a case study on the use of graphic organizers in teaching reading comprehension. It focused on teachers' application of graphic organizers in three areas: using semantic maps to teach and expand key words, using concept maps to help students extract information and understand relationships between ideas in expository texts, and using story maps to assist students in identifying the components of literary texts and ordering events chronologically. To collect data, an observation checklist designed by the researchers was used to observe three Jordanian EFL teachers who were purposefully selected from Zainab Bent Al Rasoul Basic School for Girls in the Bani Obaid Directorate of Education. The analysis of the checklist revealed that these teachers did not utilize the three types of graphic organizers (semantic maps, concept maps, story maps) in teaching reading comprehension. Several recommendations for future research are also proposed.

Keywords: Graphic Organizers, Reading Comprehension, Jordan.

1. Introduction

Reading comprehension is a necessary and significant skill since it is the best indicator for the effectiveness of the interaction between the reader on one hand and a certain type of reading text on the other. It is a key component of every EFL classroom in Jordan. It is also very vital for Jordanian EFL students' academic success.

Snow (2002) defined reading comprehension as an interactive process in which the reader constructs the meaning from the reading text through efficient interaction and involvement using beneficial skills and various sources of knowledge. Gagen (2007) believed that developing vocabulary and using reading strategies are very significant to reading comprehension because the reader interacts with the text using reading strategies and his / her vocabulary knowledge. She suggested several actions teachers can use to develop their students' comprehension. These actions include overviewing the reading material, helping the students to recognize the structure of texts and identify the main ideas, pausing students at specific paragraphs during reading, summarizing, expanding graphic organizers, and facilitating cooperative learning.

Therefore, to achieve successful reading comprehension, it is important that teachers should use appropriate strategies that help students improve their comprehension skills. According to the General Guidelines and General and Specific Outcomes for the English Language (2006) in Jordan, using reading strategies to understand reading texts is one of the purposes of teaching reading. These strategies should be useful and flexible to suit several types of reading texts or to suit different learning styles to support and increase students' comprehension of what they are reading. Otherwise, reading becomes pointless exercise.

The focus of this study is on teaching reading comprehension in Jordanian EFL classrooms, aiming at finding out the extent to which Jordanian EFL teachers use graphic organizers (semantic maps, concept maps and story maps) in teaching reading comprehension.

Graphic organizers can vary widely in their shapes according to types of reading texts (Hedgcock & Ferris, 2009). They, according to Gil-Garcia and Villegas (2003), appear in several different formats which may be hierarchical, conceptual, sequential, evaluative, relational, or cyclical to fit for organizing a particular type of information. These various formats may make organizing the information in a certain text attractive and flexible. In teaching reading comprehension, they are frequently referred to as semantic maps, concept maps and story maps (Manoli & Papadopoulos, 2012).

Semantic maps are some of the various forms of graphic organizers. They can be referred to as mind maps, spider maps or sunbursts (Manoli & Papadopoulos, 2012). Concept maps can be particularly used in teaching the main ideas in any reading text. They help students classify these ideas into main and supporting ones. These maps can also provide students with opportunities to connect learned knowledge and added information (Dye, 2000; Salehi, Jahandar & Khodabandehlou, 2013). Story maps are used in narrative texts to guide the readers and draw their attention to components of any story such as characters, plot, conflict, climax, and events. (Alagözlü, 2006; Manoli & Papadopoulos, 2012). They can be used before and during reading a text. They are used before reading a text to activate readers' prior knowledge, whereas they are used during the reading to help readers connect between the events. Additionally, they can also serve as a review after reading (Boulineau; Fore III; Hagan-Burke & Burke, 2004).

Graphic organizers may be beneficial for teachers. They may decrease the teacher's workload (Chang, Sung & Chen, 2002) since they are considered as organizational tools that organize necessary information and knowledge to be visually focused on in the classroom (Egan, 1999). According to Dye (2000), teachers can build their own graphic organizers following several steps: selecting the intended information in a certain text, deciding the necessary components such as the key vocabulary items, main concepts, ideas and events, transforming these components into graphic charts and finally helping the students to discover and understand the relationships between the components of the graphic organizer.

2. Review of the Related Literature

Some of the literature has raised questions about the graphic organizer's effectiveness on reading instruction (Chang, 2008, Jiang and Grabe, 2007 and Alagözlü, 2006). Chang (2006) stated that graphic organizers can be used as pre-teaching tools to introduce main ideas in a text and as post teaching tools to confirm ideas. He also concluded that visual organizers like maps can help EFL learners expand their vocabulary and clarify concepts. Therefore, EFL teachers should employ these tools in learning contexts. Jiang and Grabe (2007) recommended using graphic

organizers as instructional tools representing the discourse structures of texts to improve students' comprehension of reading materials because organizing information visually helps.

readers comprehend it better. The authors proposed a few generic forms of graphic representations such as definitions, descriptions, for and against, compare, cause and effect, process and sequence that apply to regularly recurring text structures. They defined these tools as “visual representation of information in the text” (page 34). Alagözlü (2006) also claimed that using graphic organizers in instruction of any reading texts helps students enhance their understanding and their cognitive development. She suggested that graphic organizers are suitable for teaching literary texts. She also recommended using graphic organizers as a post reading activity to help learners recall the information in the text.

Some literature has also discussed the functions of graphic organizers (Ciascai, 2009; Zaini, et al. ,2010). Ciascai (2009) describes graphic organizers as instruments that play a key role in representing, illustrating, and modeling information, classifying ideas, and systematizing knowledge to help students in comprehending the content. Zaini, Mokhtar and Nawawi (2010) stated that teachers should benefit from graphic organizers by implementing them in classroom and by training students in using them to be strategic learners. They focused on using graphic organizers as a reading strategy to activate prior knowledge, gain an insight into texts structure and connect the main information. They concluded that graphic organizers clarify, explain the relations between ideas, organize information into categories, define different concepts and support thinking facilitating in this way the process of comprehending.

In addition to the theoretical literature of the study, there are also several empirical studies conducted in the field.

Chang, Sung &Chen (2002) investigated the effect of concept mapping organizers to improve reading comprehension and summarization. They designed three concept mapping approaches: Map correction, Scaffold fading and Map generalization to determine their effects on the students' text comprehension and summarization abilities. The experimental results from 126 fifth grade students showed that the map-correction method enhanced text comprehension and summarization abilities and that the scaffold-fading method facilitated summarization ability, whereas the map generation in this study did not affect text comprehension and summarization which may be due to the lack of sufficient time for training.

Ermis (2008) examined the effect of using graphic organizers on second-, fourth-, and fifth-grade students' comprehension when reading informational texts. The findings of the study indicated positive results in favor of the experimental group of all three grade levels attributed to the use of graphic organizers since the posttest scores of the students who received the traditional read-and-discuss comprehension instruction were statistically lower than the posttest scores of the students who received reading comprehension instruction which included the use of graphic organizers.

Amoush (2012) investigated the effectiveness of semantic mapping strategy on fifty Jordanian University Students in Al-Balqa Applied University reading comprehension. The findings showed that the experimental group performed better than the control group in the pre-post reading comprehension test attributed to the use of semantic mapping strategy in reading process.

Zardak, Kazemi and Omidvari (2015) examined the effect of using graphic organizers on developing intermediate EFL learners' vocabulary. The findings showed that the experimental group performed better than the control group, concerning their vocabulary development and

revealed that this strategy improved the students' vocabulary development vocabulary items features: the word's spelling, pronunciation, part of speech, meaning in the first language, meaning in the foreign language, synonyms, and antonym, and using it in an example sentence.

In general, the literature on using graphic organizers has been very encouraging in improving readers' comprehension.

3. Methodology

The approach used in this study was collecting observation data from three EFL Jordanian teachers who were chosen purposefully from Zainab Bent Al Rasoul Basic School for Girls from Bani Obaid Directorate of Education while teaching reading comprehension. The researchers designed an observation checklist (See the Appendix) to investigate to what extent, the Jordanian EFL teachers use graphic organizers in teaching reading comprehension. It consists of 9 items in total. Each item includes a statement about the teachers' use of graphic organizers in teaching reading comprehension. All the items are categorized into three clusters including: teachers' use of *semantic maps*, teachers' use of *concept maps* and teachers' use of *story maps*. Table (1) shows the clusters of the items.

Table (1): Clusters of items in the observation checklist

Clusters	Items
Teachers' use of semantic map	1-3
Teachers' use of concept map	4-6
Teachers' use of story map	7-9

The researcher administered the observation checklist to collect data from three English Language teachers who taught different classes at Zainab Bent Al-Rasoul Basic School for Girls. Table (2) shows basic information of the three classes.

Table (2): Basic information of the classes

Teachers	Class	Titles of reading texts	Number of periods	Duration of each period
Teacher A	8th Grade	Seven-year-old saves family from attackers Rufaida Al Aslamiya Mansour and the Candle	3	40 minutes
Teacher B	9th Grade	Employee of the mouth The science fiction Story Guliver's Travels	3	40 minutes
Teacher C	10th Grade	Ibn Al Haitham Jordan, A Pioneer in higher education Treasure Island	3	40 minutes
Total 3	3	9	9	360 minutes

Content Validity of the Observation Checklist

To ensure the content validity of the observation checklist, it was given to five university professors, two English supervisors and one EFL teacher to investigate its content. In the first draft, there were ten statements. After validating it, they suggested deleting one statement which was not related directly to the research topic. They also drew the researcher's attention to the importance of using the verb use in each item of the checklist instead of encouraging or helping. As a result, the researcher deletes the done statement and used the verb use instead of encouraging or helping to describe teacher's use for graphic organizers.

4. Study Results and Discussion

The analysis of the observation checklist revealed that none of the three teachers used graphic organizers (semantic map, concept map or story map) while teaching reading comprehension.

It was observed that teachers did not use any type of graphic organizers while teaching reading comprehension. However, it was observed that they had several strategies in common while teaching reading comprehension. For example, they introduced the reading text by asking students to read the title of the main passage and discuss its meaning before starting to read it. They also asked students to skim through the passage individually. After that, they introduced the unfamiliar words, but they used different strategies for that. For example, teachers A and Teacher B asked students to read the passage individually and underline the key words. They always encouraged students to use their dictionaries to confirm and clarify meanings of words. Teacher C taught the key words by writing them on the board in a list. She then asked students to check the meanings of words in the Activity Book glossary working in pairs.

Regarding the literary texts (Mansour and the Candle, Gulliver's Travels, Treasure Island), the researchers observed that the three teachers did not use story maps while teaching reading comprehension. All the three teachers introduced the titles of the literary texts and discussed them with the students. They asked the students to read the texts individually and silently to answer the comprehension questions. They went around the students offering help when needed such as explaining the meanings of unfamiliar words if any student asked for that. Only, teacher C held a post reading general discussion of the literary text.

The researchers think that teachers did not use graphic organizers because reading comprehension instruction may not include direct strategy instruction that asks or encourages teachers to use graphic organizers while teaching reading comprehension. The teachers also may not be trained in implementing graphic organizers while teaching reading comprehension.

5. Conclusion

It is important to acknowledge some limitations in this study. This study was limited to the EFL teachers at Zainab Bent Al- Rasoul Basic School for Girls, so the results are generalized to teachers teaching in similar contexts. A large sample of participants from other schools could be employed for farther validation of the findings of this research.

The following recommendations are suggested for further research in the field of EFL:

1. Conducting a content analysis on Action Pack series for Jordanian students to examine the inclusion of graphic organizers in reading comprehension activities.

2. Investigating the effect of training Jordanian EFL teachers on using graphic organizers in teaching reading comprehension.
3. Exploring Jordanian EFL teachers' attitudes towards using graphic organizers in teaching reading comprehension.
4. Investigating the effect of using graphic organizers in improving students' reading comprehension skills.
5. Exploring Jordanian EFL teachers' use of graphic organizers in teaching writing skill. This type of research is needed to gain additional insight into implementing graphic organizers by teachers on other language skills.

Appendixes

- [Appendix \(1\)](#)

Conflicts of interest statements

All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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