

EFL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE EFFECTIVENESS IN USING GRAPHIC NOVELS

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World communication has shifted to more visual content and consumption. English as a foreign language educators can embrace this shift with the use of graphic novels is crucial to developing engaged readers and contextual thinkers. The visual nature of graphic novels results in a familiar format for readers to acquire information (Yang, 2008). For EFL learners, this is crucial for the advancement of their literacy skills. In addition, graphic novels combine images and text to convey critical and contextual storytelling elements (McCloud, 1993). This transfers to EFL learning by giving support to readers and strengthening their comprehension of the text. As visual information processing becomes more important to learning, graphic novels bridge the gap between reading and images and offer EFL educators a strong tool to build literacy and reader engagement in their classes.

Extensive reading components in EFL classes have recently increased in national curricula, like South Korea. To assist teachers in effectively teaching the curriculum change, the researcher investigated how graphic novels can be used as the materials for extensive reading. After collecting graphic novels and creating an instructional guide for teachers to use in their own classes, the researcher conducted teacher training workshops to in-service secondary EFL teachers in South Korea. The aim was to introduce graphic novels and practical classroom strategies to increase the effectiveness of reading in EFL classes.

In the workshops, participants saw a variety of graphic novels and how they act as a medium for literacy development by appealing to visual learners. Participants examined the graphic novel adaptations of traditional literature texts and compared them with modern stories written in graphic novel format. After reviewing the materials, participants experienced how to apply them in the EFL classroom, specifically focusing on extensive reading strategies, classroom activities, and performance-based assessment. In addition, participants discussed their students' needs and made connections to practical classroom applications of graphic novels. The teacher training workshops were designed to give participants a foundational understanding of graphic novels and techniques to adapt to their own classes to best fit the needs of their learners.

Once teachers completed the trainings, they returned to their classes and applied the techniques presented. After the classes concluded, the researcher sent a questionnaire to the participants about the results of using graphic novels. The teachers reported an increase in the number of

students who read the assigned graphic novels and completed the accompanying activities. One interviewee, who used *The Great Gatsby: The Graphic Novel* by F. Scott Fitzgerald and Fred Fordham, reported “the ideas of the novel, supported by the graphical aspect, appealed to my students.” Two middle school teachers commented on how the smaller amount of text assisted by the drawings helped “students feel less burden while reading.” They used *El Deafo* by Cece Bell and *The City of Ember: The Graphic Novel* by Jeanne DuPrau and Dallas Middaugh. When reflecting on the effectiveness of graphic novels in terms of their students’ engagement, all the interviewees agreed that they are “good to motivate them to read” and that they “showed interest in reading.”

The last questions in the questionnaire addressed effectiveness of the linguistic and cultural aspects of the graphic novels. The language levels appropriately matched their students’ English levels, a teacher commented that they “[did not] have to explain a lot of actions or context because they (graphic novels) were vividly visual.” However, some teachers reported that the cultural relevance was low. One interviewee found their students struggling because it was “not a familiar topic for them so I had to provide some information.” To bridge the cultural understanding gap, some teachers highlighted the internal character struggles in the story because “identity formulation is something with which many of [their] students struggle.” While the graphic novels are effective for students’ linguistic background, they are lacking in relevance with their cultural background. After attending the teacher training workshop and applying the use of graphic novels in EFL classes, the interviewees unanimously agreed to continue using them as reading materials and explore more graphic novels that will be a better fit to their students’ needs and reflect their cultural interests.

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