

Using Graphic Organizer Strategies in Developing Reading Comprehension Skill of Iraqi EFL Intermediate School students

Alla Jumaah Khalaf¹

Lect. Dr. Ahmed Rudhwan Selman²

Asst. Prof. Dr. Abd Ali Nayef Hassan³

^{1,2,3} College of Basic Education, University of Babylon, Iraq.

Abstract:

The research aimed to investigate the effect of Using Graphic Organizer Strategies on the Development of Reading Comprehension Skill for Iraqi EFL Intermediate School students. Graphic organizers (GOs) are visual frameworks assisting students in the comprehension of a text. The sample of the study consists of (63) students randomly selected from intermediate schools in Iraq, (32) students represent the experimental group has been taught by using GOs, and (31) students represent the control group has been taught with recommended approaches. The study adopts a pre-test post-test design to measure the influence of the strategy. The two groups were taught by the researcher himself and through using of Google classroom platform for school. The study exposed that using of GOs has had a great effect on the students' reading comprehension.

Keywords: Graphic Organizer, strategy, Reading Comprehension, EFL Intermediate School.

Introduction

Reading comprehension (henceforth RC) is a central element in any language teaching program whether native or foreign. In the foreign language learning situation, practice and exposure to the FL is not usually adequate. Hence, reading can compensate for that inadequacy since through reading the learner deals with most aspects of the language. There are many factors that affect comprehension, such as, a reader's decoding skills, vocabulary knowledge, background knowledge related to the reading text and ability to summarize the main idea.

1.1 Problem of the study

One of the main problems that many students experiment appear when they have to face long and complicated texts to be read, or a huge amount of paragraphs to be learnt by heart. May be, students do not know what those texts are going to be about, but the simple fact of having long and bored texts make students refuse trying to both understand or memorize them. Current students need things to be simple and, "there is considerable evidence that graphic organizers are ideal methods for presenting large amount of data in a simplified manner" (Gallavan and Kottler, 2007: 117-23).

Douglas, et al. (2011: 43) (demonstrate learning problems that can create barriers to gaining RC skills require the reader to use working memory, background knowledge, summarizing, and finding main idea.

Reading is an interactive process because learners make use of several sub skills to reach an understanding of written material such as recalling background knowledge, having an aptitude of text schema, lexical and grammatical awareness, L1-related knowledge and real-world knowledge, including their own personal purposes and goals (Grabe, 1991: 375 & Dehham, 2020).

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Ransom (1978: 14) defines reading as “a conversation between the writer and the reader.” Nuttall (1996: 4) regards reading as “the process of getting out of the text as nearly as possible with the message the writer puts into it.” Williams (1996: 2) states that reading is “a process through which one looks at and understands a written text.”

The reading comprehension skills are actions or decisions that the reader takes in order to make sense of a text, these skills determine the path the readers follow in order to achieve the purpose of reading (Afflerbach, et.al, 2008:364–373).

2.Theoretical Background

2.1 The concept of Reading Comprehension (RC)

Reading comprehension (RC) is how to get information during reading. Students have understood or comprehended the content of the subject that they read. According to Diaz and Laguado (2013:137), RC is about understanding a text which is read through the process of constructing meaning from a text.

Mikulecky and Jeffries (2004:74) state that comprehension is making a sense of what someone reads and connecting the ideas in the text to what he already knows. Comprehension is an essential goal of reading activities. In English class context, it should be explicitly taught by the reading teachers. Snow (2002 :11) defines reading comprehension as “the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language.”

Richards and Schmidt (2002: 99) say that comprehension is the identification of the intended meaning of written or spoken communication. They also add that contemporary theories of comprehension emphasize that it is an active process drawing on both information contained in the message (bottom-up processing) as well as background knowledge, information from the context and from the listener and speaker’s purposes or intentions (top-down processing).

2.2 The concept of Reading

Brown (2004: 189) states that reading activity is a process of negotiation of meaning. so reading is very important for English learners because reading can enlarge their knowledge, vocabulary, and information, They are able to get complete understanding of the text.

According to Wixson, et al.(1987:749-755), reading is the process of creating meaning that includes: (a) the reader's existing knowledge; (b) the text information; and (c) the reading context. Grabe (1991 as cited in Alyousef 2005:143-154) defines reading as an interactive process between readers and texts that result in reading fluency. Readers interact with texts as they try to extract meaning and there are different types of knowledge: linguistic or systemic knowledge (bottom-up processing) and schematic knowledge (top-down processing) (Dehham,2021).

2.3The concept of Graphic Organizers (GOs)

GOs are visual and spatial displays that make relationships more apparent between related facts and concepts (Hughes, Maccini, & Gagnon, 2003:101-111). They are intended to promote more meaningful learning and facilitate understanding and retention of new material by making abstract concepts more concrete and connecting new information with prior knowledge. Zaini, et al., (2010:17-23) claim that GOs can be very effective in helping second language learners achieve meaningful learning.

There are types of GOs such as story maps, matrix, semantics maps, Venn diagram, knowledge maps and tree diagrams. The teacher should read the text carefully and decide on the best GOs that represents the structure. Doing this with students using think-aloud activities may also help students to improve their reading comprehension (Dehham,2021).

While constructing a GOs for a text, the student reads the text and go through GOs finds the title, sub-titles, illustrations and summaries. The student then decides on what is important in the text and how the ideas are related. S/he decides on the most appropriate GO. S/he reads the text again and complete the GO. Finally, s/he revises it to check if there is any missing information(Jones, Pierce, & Hunter, 1988-1989).

Grabe and Stoller (2002: 221) mentions “it is worthwhile to train students to use simple graphics through a series of exercises that will move them from teacher-generated graphics, to teacher-guided student graphics and finally to student-generated graphics”. As Grabe(1997: 10) states “getting students to produce useful visual representations of text structure is not an easy undertaking and requires considerable practice”. Therefore, teachers should plan instruction of GOs very carefully to achieve the best results.

Jones, et al. (1988-1989) explains the steps in instruction process. First, the teacher should present a good example of a completed graphic outline which is similar to the type of GO that s/he is going to teach. Second, s/he should model how to construct a GO. While doing this, the decision making process should be discussed clearly. Providing procedural knowledge is the third step. Students are informed about why they should use that type of GO and conceive their responsibilities in their own learning process. Fourth step is coaching students. Here, students work in as a whole class and then in smaller groups. They discuss about their GOs and see each other’s work. Feedback of the teacher is crucial here. Finally, students should be allowed to outline their GOs individually. Following these steps, students are supposed to overview a reading material and choose the best fit GO to present the main points in a given text individually.

3. Methodology

As the aim of the study was to determine the effects of Using Graphic Organizer Strategies on the Development of Reading Comprehension Skill for Iraqi EFL Intermediate School students. The present study adopts a quantitative research design.

The research method in the present study is an experimental one. The population of the present study consist of (32) schools of the second intermediate grade for male in the center of the province of Misan for the academic year (2020-2021)".

The two samples were randomly selected from Delta Al –Rafidain intermediate school for boys. The size of the sample is (63) second intermediate students allocated into two classes, class (A) represents the experimental group(EG) taught through using GOs in teaching reading comprehension and class(B) represents the control group(CG)is taught according to the guide book (teacher book) for the 2nd intermediate class in teaching reading skills to the CG.

Equivalence of the Two Groups

After choosing the sample of two groups and before implementing the experiment, the researcher tried to control some of the variables that may affect the results of the experiment. The participant of the two groups have been equated on the following variables:

1.The participants' age in Months. By applying t-test formula for two independent samples, it is found that there is no significant difference in age between the EG and CG. see table (1)

Table (1) The T-test Statistics for the Age Variable

Group	No.	Mean	SD	t-value		DF	Level of Significance
				Computed	Tabulated		
Experimental	32	164,45	10,06	0.223	2	61	0.05
Control	31	164,06	11,13				

2- The participants' scores in the pretest. By applying the t-test formula to compare the mean scores of the EG and CG in the pre-test, it indicates that there is no statistically significant difference between the achievements of the two groups in RC. see table (2).

Table (2) T-test Statistics of the Students' Score in the Pre-Test.

Group	No.	Mean	SD	DF	t-value		Level of Significance
Experimental	32	21.90	3.43	61	computed	Tabulated	0.05
Control	31	20.97	3.20		1.12	2	

3- The Participants Parents' educational attainment. By applying chi-square for Parents, it indicates that there is no statistically significant difference between the two groups in this variable. See table (3).

Table (3) The Level of Fathers for Both Groups

Group	No.	Academic Levels of Fathers				Chi-square		DF	Level of significant
		Primary and below	Intermediate	Preparatory	Bachelor and more.	Computed	Tabulated		
EG	32	11	8	8	5	0.467	7.82	3	0.05
CG	31	10	9	6	6				

4- The participants' achievement in English in the mid-year examination. Applying the t-test of two independent samples, the results indicate that there is no statistically significant difference between the achievements of the two groups in English in this variable. see table (4)

Group	No.	Academic Levels of mothers				Chi-square		DF	Level of significant
		Primary and below	Intermediate	Preparatory	Bachelor and more.	Computed	Tabulated		
EG	32	12	6	8	6	0.696	7.82	3	0.05
CG	31	10	8	6	7				

Table (4) The Level of Mothers for Both Groups

Results

Statistical analyses were conducted to find out the results of the study. Firstly, the data from the pre-test, which was given to both groups before the instruction of GOs in the experimental group, was analyzed to statistically prove that there was no significant difference between the experimental group and the control group before the treatment. The results are shown in Table (2)

The data from the post-test, which was given to both groups after the instruction of GOs in the experimental group, was analyzed to statistically prove that there is significant difference between the experimental group and the control group before the treatment. The results are shown in Table (5)

Table (5) T-test Statistics of the Students' Score in the P0st-Test.

Group	N	Mean	SD	DF	t- Value	Level of
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							significance
EG	32	26.22	2.93	61	Computed	Tabulated	0.05
CG	31	23.8	2.64		2.69	2	

As it is shown in Table 5, the Mean for the experimental group was much higher than the mean for the control group. The findings of the research indicate that GOs had a positive effect on the reading comprehension achievement of English language learners.

Instructional Material

For the present experiment, the researcher adopted all required material from English for Iraq for 2th intermediate students ((Unit: Five, Six, Seven, and Eight).), for the second course including the activity book and student's book.

Instrument

The achievement test was designed in order to assess language ability in which someone has been learnt during course (Mousavi,2012: 7).The achievement test was structured by next these procedures:

1. The pre-test intended to measure students’ reading comprehension before implementing the experiment (GOs).
2. The post-test was designed to measure students’ reading comprehension after implementing the experiment (GOs).
3. The scoring is done by giving a mark for every correct answer and a zero for any incorrect answers. The highest possible score is (30) and the lowest one is zero.
4. Test validity is achieved by validating it by a jury members of language specialists, who instructed some corrections and amendments which were followed accordingly.
- 5.The test items were statistically analyzed. The item difficulty ranges between (0.41-0.65), item discrimination ranges from (0.38-0.65). The statistical results demonstrate that the test is valid.

Conclusion

According to the results obtained, some conclusions have been down:

- 1.After analyzing the data of the study, the aim of this research was to find out the effects of using GOs on reading comprehension achievement of EFL student has been achieved since the results of the posttest indicated that the performance of the EG is higher than the CG. In other words, the results show that EG develop their RC skill.
- 2.It was found that the GOs promoted reading comprehension and developed reading strategies, and enhanced Content and Language Integrated Learning. These tools allowed the learners to analyze the texts, to select important information and to organize the content developing lower and higher thinking skills to construct knowledge.
3. They also fostered meaningful learning by making the learners relate concepts, and construct meaning and knowledge.
- 4.Use of GOs may be useful for foreign language readers to improve their text comprehension and be better readers.
- 5.They also fostered meaningful learning by making the learners relate concepts, and construct meaning and knowledge.

Recommendations

- 1.EFL teachers should have deeper training in graphic organizers to have better results when implementing this tool as a reading strategy.
- 2.Teachers should give students time with their graphic organizers at home with the intention to give them the opportunity to apprehend the information they select and thereby to be more successful at the moment of talking about what they have understood.

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3. More information should be given to students about how to prepare graphic organizers from other points of view and different from the ones provided in this thesis.
4. Cooperative learning should be developed with the help of graphic organizers.
5. EFL teachers should be trained in the use of graphic organizers to make reading comprehension more effective, enjoyable and rewarding.

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