

USING NEWSPAPER COMICS STRIPS TO IMPROVE READING AND WRITING AMONG MUET BAND 1 & 2 YEAR 1 STUDENTS OF FACULTY OF QURAN AND SUNNAH STUDIES, UNIVERSITI SAINS ISLAM MALAYSIA (USIM)

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Abstract

Globally, newspapers comic strips have been used as authentic language classroom materials. The use of its grammatically correct language and visual depiction of real dialogues and culture have made it enticing to any age group of language learners (Robson, 2013). Since 1985, Newspaper in Education (NIE) has been widely used by educators in improving reading and writing among students. Significant findings were recorded indicating the use of comic strips had improved reading and writing among USIM Year 1 students who enrolled in ECP (English for Communicative) course in their second semester. Questionnaires, class observations and customized oral and written tests (OWT) were used to get information from the respondents. The OWT was used in order to determine the students' competence and number of English vocabularies. The tests were administered to distinguish the implication of using comics in the newspaper to improve reading and writing among the respondents as well as to measure their achievements.

Keywords: Comics, NIE, OWT

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Introduction

Despite the fact that English language has been taught to students from the elementary to tertiary level, the level of language proficiency is still unsatisfactory. It is evident through the students' reading and writing abilities. Most graduates in Malaysia face difficulties in finding a secure job in established companies resulting from their inability to present and write fluently in English. Educators are constantly involved in Action researches and innovative

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teaching materials as attempts to enhance the language acquisition, particularly in students' reading and writing skills. One of them is by promoting the use of newspaper comic strips.

Comic strips in newspapers have been widely used as authentic classroom materials in language classes. Its standard features, such as cartoons, caricatures with real dialogues (sometimes with local slangs and often grammatically checked) have been well accepted by almost any age group of language learners (Robson, 2013). Similarly in Malaysia, with the first launching of Newspaper in Education (NIE) campaign back in 1985, teachers and educators have been using every part of the newspaper (headlines, editorial, comic strip and others) as classroom materials in improving reading and writing among the students. This paper intends to ascertain whether there is a significant difference in using comics in the newspaper to improve reading and writing among Year 1 students of Faculty Quran and Sunnah Studies (FPQS) in USIM. These first year students of MUET Band 1 and 2 have been selected as they are taking General English Proficiency Course, i.e. BIA 2012 English for Communicative Purposes in their second semester. Among the objectives of the Course are to improve students' accuracy and fluency in the target language (English) and to enhance student's comprehension on reading, writing, listening and speaking skills, as well as grammar and vocabulary.

Using Comics and Graphic Novels in the Classroom

According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2010), the definition of comics is to cause laughter. Clearly using comics can easily help the pupils to learn English in a fun way. Comics are a medium to express ideas through images. The words used and the funny dialogues often help the pupils to understand better.

Meriam-Webster Dictionary (2003) defines comics as any graphics with captions. Comics spark laughter or amusement that will have a great influence to attract students' attention in learning activities. It has been used excessively as one of the mediums to entertain or enlighten students' learning session. Apart from its popularity, Swain (1978) argues that comics are effective to be used as teaching materials in language classes as they do not refrain students from reading other materials. In a 1992 study conducted by Brunnell & Linnakyla (1994), from the population of 200,000 students of 32 different countries, findings revealed that the Finns were the highest readers of comic books. As a result, the Finns have been recorded as having the highest literacy rate (99%) as well as the leader in the number of library users.

As comics promise a lot of benefits such as bringing people together, teachers should see the potential of using comics in the newspaper as a tool to improve reading and writing among the students. In addition, using comics in education is similar to bridging literacy; hence, teachers and educators should anticipate students' enjoyment in sharing their experiences with comics, graphic novels and later to be used in language activities (upon teacher's instructions) as an in-and out-of-school literacy experience (Xu, Perkins and Zunich, 2005).

Newspaper in Education (NIE) in Malaysia

With its first launching in 1985, the Newspaper in Education (NIE) programme had received positive feedback from the massive campaign. In a joint collaboration with the New Straits Times, teachers and educators have been using every part of the newspaper (headlines, editorial, comic strips and others) as classroom materials in improving reading and writing skills among the students. Educational pull outs such as School Times, Niexter and Journalism on Campus have been specifically published with the objective of enhancing the English Language Proficiency among learners ranging from as young as seven until tertiary level (“New Straits Times NIE: Newspaper in Education”, 2013). Apart from the printed version, the NIE is also accessible online. Effective from August 7, 2001, the edutainment content can be accessed from <http://nie.nst.com.my> and has since become the one-stop page for learners and their parents (Andrew AK Kunek, 2002).

In a similar vein, The Star newspaper is committed in its support of the national goals; to have a generation of informed society who is proficient in the English language along with the inculcation of the reading habit among learners of all ages. The Star NIE, as cited in Andrew AK Kunek (2002), has provided ample resources and conducted workshops for fellow teachers and learners.

Using Comics in the Development of EFL Reading and Writing

In a research conducted by Claude Andre Drolet (2010), comics had been used as authentic materials in teaching reading and writing. The use of newspaper comics in language classrooms helps to build skills in vocabulary, reading, critical thinking, problem-solving, listening, speaking and writing. Teachers can carefully choose the articles, pictures, advertisements and comic strips to suit their teaching and learning objectives. Careful selection of comic strips suiting the students’ level of proficiency is necessary as ambiguous or unfamiliar context may lead to failure of using newspapers as instructional tools. This is due to students’ inability to understand the contents of the lesson.

Drolet (2010) findings revealed that learners enjoy the simple style and amusing characters of the cartoon strips. Through the language activities using the comics, students could express what they have seen and read and pour their ideas into writing. Writing creatively equips students with the communication and thinking skills. Students who know how to write can participate effectively in any situation just like the situations they read in comics.

Improving Students’ Writing Skills through Textless Comics

In a study conducted with the Indonesian primary school children, Eni Rahmawati (2014) has introduced a new technique that is by using textless comics. As English is a foreign language to the locals, the challenge comes in terms of engaging the EFL learners to master oral communication and written communication competence in the four language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. Reading and writing are important language skills as both can help learners to express themselves. Furthermore, these skills can be a great tool to help them know more about what and how they think.

Writing can also generate ideas and thoughts and later allow the writers to reflect on them better than if the ideas remained boggling in their heads. Writing skill is one of the ways that can be used to translate someone's thought for another people. Some people are comfortable to express themselves via writing than in any other form. Since language learners in Indonesia are having difficulties in writing good sentences, Eni Rahmawati (2014) had used textless comic as a substitute to textbook in hopes that the learners would be able to write better English sentences. Findings revealed that the respondents participated actively in classroom and were able to express their minds, ideas and imagination. By creating a fun atmosphere in the teaching and learning process, learners were interested in English language, particularly in writing.

Methodology

This study was a replication of a similar study conducted by Rosmaizi Mohd Ali (2016) onto his primary school pupils of SK Taman Seri Mawar Seremban. Considering the level of proficiency of the Year 1 students of Faculty Quran and Sunnah Studies (FPQS) whom are the Band 1 and Band 2 MUET holders, these 60 students (25 males, 35 females) were selected as the participants for this study. The data were obtained through an experimental research involving two groups of students who have enrolled for English for Communicative Purposes (ECP) course in their second semester, 2015-2016 sessions. Questionnaires, class observations and customized oral and written tests (OWT) were used to get information from the students (respondents). The OWT was also used to state the implication of using comics in the newspaper to improve reading and writing among the respondents and to measure their achievement in both skills. The OWT was used to record the students' competence before and after the experimental process.

The researchers began by finding ways to tackle the problem through a set of questionnaire to see students' interest in reading the newspaper and doing activities related to reading and writing using the newspaper. Next, the researchers gave out the OWT to evaluate their abilities to read and write. Thirdly, the researchers observed the class (Group 1) that used the comics in the lesson and compared to the other class (Group 2) that did not use the comics.

Results and Discussion

For the questionnaire, the researchers have gained 100% return questionnaires. 100% or 60 participants have returned the questionnaires for analysis of the effectiveness of using comics in the newspaper to improve reading and writing among the Year 1 FPQS students. Apart from that, the returned questionnaires helped the researcher to measure the quantity of gender differences in their preference of using comics in language classroom. Finally, the OWT scores have been the indicator as to the improvement of the participants' reading and writing skills (vocabulary testing – usage in writing).

Research Question 1:

1. Are using comics in the newspaper improves reading and writing among the First Year FPQS students?

In Table 3.1 below, the number of students interested in reading comics in the newspaper on average was at 3.4 with a standard deviation of 00:47.

Construct Review	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Reading and Writing	60	3.4	0.47

2. Are there any gender differences towards the use of comics in the newspaper to improve reading and writing among First Year FPQS students?

T-test was used to determine differences based on gender. Table 4.3 below shows the level of gender differences. The study found the score for females was higher (mean = 3.0987 $sp = 0.4445$) compared to males (mean = 2.9595, $sd = 0.4465$). This difference was found to be statistically significant at the level $\alpha = 0.05$ with t equal to $t(298) = -2.672, p, 0.01$

Gender	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	T	Dk	P
Male	25	2.9595	.44647	-.672	298	0.008
Female	35	3.0987	.44445			

3. What is the relationship between using comics and improving reading and writing skills?

Construct Review	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Fondness of Using Comics	35	3.4	0.47

Female students showed great affection in using comics in the newspaper to improve their reading and writing skills. Table 4.3 shows the number of female students who love using comics to improve their reading and writing skills.

Conclusion

Based on this study, the researchers conclude that using comics in the newspaper as teaching aids in teaching and learning process can improve the Year 1 FPQS students in reading and writing skills, as well as motivate the students in appreciating narrative texts with graphics. As comics bring out the fun and laid back learning environment, it helps to improve learners' reading and writing skills. Not only comics have become a platform for the learners to use their higher order thinking skills, the former also brings out the learners' creative side. Evidently, we can see from the last activity, where the participants were given comics in their group activity and they work collaboratively to complete the given tasks. Based on the t-test, the t-score 5.191 was higher than t-table 1.66. It means that H_a was accepted and H_o was rejected. Since the t-score was higher than the t-table, there was a significant difference in the achievement between students in Group 1 who were taught reading comprehension and writing skills using comics in the newspaper and students in Group 2 who were not taught

with the help of the comic strips. The average score of experimental group was 71 and the average score of control group was 51. It means that the experimental group (Group 1) was better than the control group (Group 2).

This research is useful to the English instructors and the readers to improve their abilities in teaching reading and writing skills. The learners can enrich their vocabularies and reading comprehension through the use of comics in the newspaper. Last but not least, exposing learners with authentic materials such as comic strips from the newspaper is effective because the materials are so close to the heart.

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