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VISUALIZING STORIES: USING COMICS AS A SCAFFOLDING TOOL IN EFL WRITING

The aim of this research paper is to investigate the effectiveness of using comics as a scaffolding tool in teaching writing skills to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. Writing is a critical aspect of language learning, enabling students to express their ideas, thoughts, and opinions coherently and effectively. However, EFL learners often face challenges in developing their writing skills due to limited vocabulary, difficulty in organizing ideas, and lack of confidence in their writing abilities. This study explores the potential of comics as a visual storytelling medium to support and enhance EFL students' writing performance.

Comics, with their combination of visual and textual elements, have gained attention as a valuable resource in language education. The visual nature of comics can aid in comprehension [2, p. 34], provide context, and engage students in the learning process. By incorporating comics into EFL writing instruction, this study aims to examine how this art form can scaffold students' writing development and improve their overall writing skills; to explore how creating comics based on a given story can enhance students' understanding of narrative structure, character development, and visual storytelling techniques; to examine the potential of comics in fostering students' creativity, critical thinking, and engagement in the writing process; to compare the writing outcomes of students who receive comic-based instruction before and after the project.

Overall, this research paper aims to shed light on the effectiveness of using comics as a scaffolding tool in EFL writing instruction, with the goal of providing evidence-based strategies to support and enhance students' writing development in the language classroom.

In recent years, second language teaching has shifted from grammar-based methods to communicative language teaching (CLT), largely influenced by Stephen Krashen's work. Krashen's input hypothesis suggests that learners acquire language most effectively through comprehensible input and authentic communication, while his affective filter hypothesis emphasizes the impact of emotional factors on language acquisition. These ideas have led many teachers to prioritize creating supportive classroom environments that encourage meaningful communication and reduce learners' affective filters, optimizing conditions for second language acquisition. [3, p. 12]

The use of comics and visual aids in language learning is grounded in theoretical perspectives such as the Dual Coding Theory (DCT) [5, p. 53] and the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (CTML) [4, p. 3]. DCT suggests that presenting information in both verbal and visual formats enhances processing, storage, and retrieval. CTML posits that learners actively integrate verbal and visual information to construct meaningful knowledge. Combining textual information with visual representations, like comics, can enhance comprehension and retention in language learning. In the past 10 to 15 years, the use of sequential art in education has exploded. Teachers in secondary and elementary schools, professors in universities, and

instructors of all kinds are using comics and graphic novels to illustrate points about gender, history, sociology, philosophy, mathematics and even medicine. It is no longer a question of whether sequential art should be used in educational settings, but rather how to use it and for what purpose. [6, p. 1]

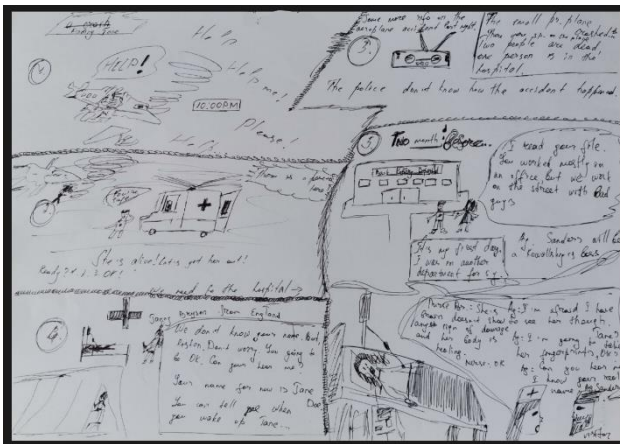
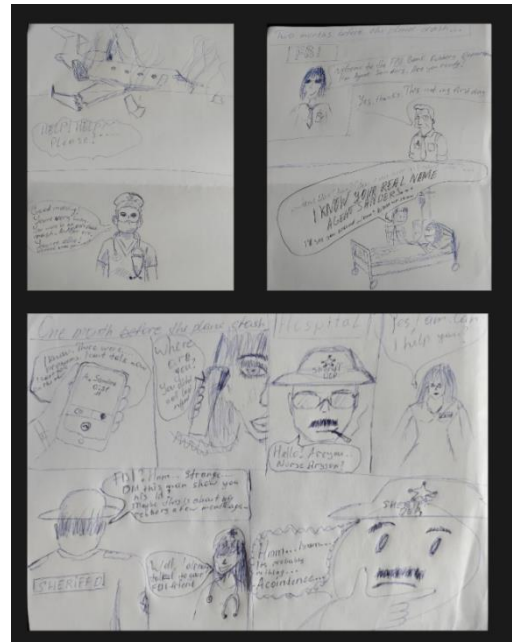
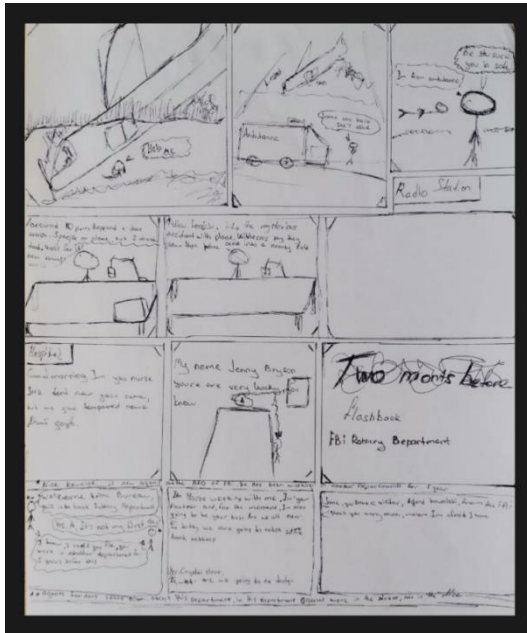
Leber-Cook and Cook write about the use of comics in education as part of a broader curricular shift towards fostering multimodal literacy among learners. Multimodal literacy refers to the ability to interpret and create meaning from various modes of communication, such as text, images, sound, and gestures. In this context, comics are recognized as multimodal texts that combine visual and textual elements to convey information and narratives.[6, p. 23]

Scholars argue that by introducing comics in the classroom, educators can help students develop the skills necessary to navigate and succeed in a world increasingly dominated by multimodal communication. The ability to analyze and create meaning from the interplay of text and visuals is becoming an essential competency in the 21st century. The scholarly attention given to comics since the mid-1990s has shed light on their nature and potential as educational tools. Researchers have explored how comics can be used to engage learners, enhance comprehension, and foster critical thinking skills. They have also examined the ways in which comics can be integrated into various subject areas, from language arts and social studies to science and mathematics. By recognizing comics as multimodal texts and incorporating them into the curriculum, educators can provide learners with opportunities to develop a range of literacies, including visual literacy, media literacy, and critical literacy. This approach prepares students to effectively navigate and communicate in a world where information is increasingly presented through multiple modes and media. [6, p.23]

Our empirical studies have demonstrated the positive impact on writing performance, motivation, and engagement. These findings underscore the potential of integrating comics and visual scaffolding into EFL writing curricula to facilitate language acquisition and writing development. The findings highlight the benefits of incorporating visual storytelling techniques into language instruction to enhance students' proficiency and communicative competence. The structured nature of comics, combined with their visual appeal, creates a supportive and engaging learning environment for EFL students. [2, p.32]

All participants in the project have an intermediate level of English proficiency. The group of students works on the project over the course of six weeks (6 sessions) as a part of the regular lesson. In the first session of the project, students listen to the story «The Survivor» created by the British Council [1], one episode at a time. The approximately 5-minute episode is played once, and students are encouraged to take notes, do the online tasks and discuss the main events and characters (Figures 1, 2, 3). In the subsequent sessions, students create their own comics based on each episode. They are provided with blank A4 paper and are instructed to create a minimum of six panels, including drawings and written text for each episode. The comics should depict the key events and characters from the story. (Figures 1, 2, 3)

After completing their comics, students use them as visual aids to retell the story to their peers. They practice their speaking skills by narrating the story, describing the characters, and expressing their thoughts and opinions about the story's events and predict the following events.



The final summary of each episode was eventually written as a text. The students' writing became more cohesive and coherent. The students gained more confidence in putting their thoughts in writing in a logical way. As the story was very engaging, the students were also motivated to speak, to discuss and predict the events. Most of the students admitted that they felt more confident in writing and discussing the story by the end of the project and enjoyed the overall experience.

Based on the positive results, it is recommended that EFL teachers consider integrating comics and visual scaffolding into their writing instruction. Comics can serve as effective prompts for writing tasks, guiding students in organizing their ideas and expressing themselves more coherently. Furthermore, using comics as visual aids during speaking activities can boost students' confidence, fluency, and overall communicative skills.

In conclusion, this study provides empirical evidence supporting the integration of comics and visual scaffolding into EFL writing instruction. By using the power of visual storytelling, teachers can create engaging and effective learning experiences that foster students' language growth and communicative competence. The significant improvements observed in students' writing and speaking skills highlight the potential of this approach in enhancing EFL teaching practices. Future research could also investigate the effects of creating EFL students' own comics on their language development and motivation.

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