

ARTICULO DE REFLEXIÓN

Improving Reading Skills in Beginner Learners by means of Graphic Organizers and the use of English Leveled Readers

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Abstract

Previous research has discovered that effective reading requires strategies for learners to improve comprehension. But little attention has been given to graphical argumentation aids to support the reading process. The present qualitative action research study will use reading tests, lesson plans, teacher's journal and surveys to collect data on how graphic organizers support the organization of ideas and affect reading comprehension of second-graders in a bilingual school in Bogotá-Colombia. Data will be analyzed using the grounded theory approach, and it is expected that the students understand leveled readers and give reports. This would lend support to the notion that graphic organizers is an effective approach to improve reading comprehension in beginner learners in which case it should be more widely adopted by the educational community.

Key words: reading comprehension, English leveled readers, graphic organizers.

Introduction

Reading is considered as one of the most complex skills, even more when it is in a foreign language, however, reading in a foreign language brings benefits like the improvement of lexical and grammar structures. Word knowledge is an integral element in learning a language. Without it, there are gaps in understanding (Braker, 2013, p. 31), the person who reads increases his knowledge and is able to improve other skills. Reading was selected as the skill to work on during this study due to the profits for the learners. Second grade students, level A1 according to the CEFR (Common European Framework) from a bilingual school in Bogotá. It also contributes to the language learning process considering that language and reading share many of the same basic competencies and the development of both are interrelated (August & Shanahan, 2006, p. 349). Reading and language learning are processes in which the person is constantly exposed to receive input. In order to face these processes more effectively; the learners must use strategies to improve their capacity to receive new information.

The English teacher did different activities that addressed to the different skills in order to determine the hardest difficulty in English learning process. Listening, writing, speaking and reading activities were done during the second semester of 2016. The results have evidenced that the students did not handle a strategy that could be useful for them to understand all what they read and improve their results in reading comprehension tests. Comprehension is the ability to take in information, analyze it in its respective segments, and come up with an understanding of the input in a cohesive and accurate manner (Lin, 2010, p.170). The participants could answer some questions and could extract some

specific information but they did not report the text nor the main idea, they had the information disorganized and not clear, then their results in reading tests were low.

Theoretical Framework

Graphic organizers were used in order to deal with the problem; the purpose was to teach the participants how to organize their ideas and information they extract from the reading. The students need to receive input concerning the way to systematize information (Raymer, 2010, p. 24) and regarding the population of this research study, the learners had difficulties to organize their ideas so graphic organizers fit appropriately to solve this problem. Regarding the type of texts that the students had to read, English leveled readers were used as valuable sources of authentic language in order to expand language awareness and encourage interaction and text analysis (Clandfield & Foord, 2006).

Some studies have explored ways to help students improve their reading comprehension (Cooke, 2009; Kayiran & Karabay, 2012; Lysaker, Tonge, Gauson & Miller, 2011) by means of the use of English literature and guided processes. Studies using graphic organizers (Raymer, 2010; Robinson et al., 2006; Berkley & Jefferies, 2000) have explored their connection with reading comprehension in beginners; however, little work has been done on using graphic organizers with English leveled readers to improve reading comprehension skills. No studies have explored the use of English leveled readers and graphic organizers to improve reading comprehension in beginner learners. The current study purposefully selected English leveled readers as authentic material for the students to extract information and systematize it in graphic organizers.

Reading requires strategies for learners to understand what they read. Beginners tend to avoid reading activities since they are not motivated or do not know how to give evidence of what they have understood. The research study tried to help students by providing a strategy that they could use in the future when they have to face different types of texts and need to organize their ideas, so this study would lend support to the notion that graphic organizers is an effective approach to improve reading comprehension in beginner learners. According to Gallavan & Kottler (2007), graphic organizers have a huge incidence into reader's ideas organization since they are useful for reading difficult material, highlighting information, valuing cultural diversity, meeting needs of special populations, and supporting language learning (p. 120-125). Additionally, this document also expects to be a useful resource for researches who work on improving reading comprehension skills by means of a systematization tool in similar contexts and who know about the benefits of English leveled readers to promote reading in the students. Also for teachers who are aware of the importance to work on alternatives that support the improvement of reading comprehension skills considering the big amount of input that readers can receive when they face authentic material.

Methodology

The study was a qualitative action research that was carried out with a group of 27-second grades learners. During the first session, the students completed a comprehension test in which they had to do some activities based on a short reading, they had one hour to comply with this activity. At the same stage, they answered a pre-survey where they expressed their perceptions concerning reading comprehension, English leveled readers and

the tools they use to deal with reading comprehension tests. Then, the students received two sessions of training in which they learnt to use graphic organizers as a strategy to deal with reading texts and improve reading comprehension. During the two sessions, they practiced with two different types of graphic organizers; (Problem Solution) and (Network Tree), they had a real contact with the shape of each graphic by exploring their parts and functions. The use of technology was essential at this point since one of the graphic organizers (fishbone map) required the students to use a digital tool to explore how a real fishbone was composed and filling the graphic organizer digitally. Those who innovate in using ICT'S (Information and Communication Technology) are encouraged to share their successes and challenges to research their practices, so that all teacher educators can benefit from their efforts (McClanahan, 2017, p.20). By using the digital tool, the population could explore the benefits of using this resource adapted by the teacher. At the end of these two sessions of training, they took a second reading comprehension test in which they had to complete some activities based on a short text but using one of the graphics taught during the lessons. This time the results of the reading comprehension tests were better comparing them with the first test.

After the implementation of the second test, the students received training on two more types of graphic organizers; (Fishbone Map) and (Spider Map), they had the opportunity to interact with them and do some reading exercises in order to be ready for the final reading comprehension test. To complete the last test, the students were required to choose one of the graphic organizers used during the training sessions, complete it and continue with the activities. At the same final stage, the students had to answer a post survey in which they

expressed their insights face the tool they used during the sessions and the reading comprehension test. This was a research study that involved teachers and students, having as an objective to improve their reading comprehension. Action research is a cyclical and continuous process in which community members and researchers are melded into a unified working group (Glassman, Erdem, & Bartholomew, 2013, p. 276). The students worked as the population of the research study and teachers as guides and observers during the process.

After collecting data throughout the intervention stage, it was organized using charts and a codification method that contributed to determine categories and a core category. The data analysis provided the research question with an answer and determined the influence of the strategy implemented in the population that was part of the research study. The results of this study have shown that the strategy implemented with second grade students, graphic organizers, supported the reading comprehension improvement in tests. The students had the capacity to classify the story elements by using the visual aid. Four different types of graphic organizers were shown to the students, at the end of the process, they had the capacity to select the graphic that best fit into the needs to complete the reading comprehension test.

Conclusions

Today's learners in different social contexts are having difficulties regarding how to deal with reading comprehension. Especially, because of the testing process they have to face along their academic and professional life. The findings of the present research study demonstrate that graphic organizers supported the reading comprehension skill in second grade students. The strategy fit into the gap the students had regarding the story elements organization, the English leveled readers motivated them to read them because of the additional support they include. The methodology implemented with the students contributed to make them understand how a graphic organizer works, how they can use it, the benefits they bring to their learning process and the multiple options (Variety of graphics) they have to work with this supporting aid.

After implementing the grounded approach, two categories were defined after the data analysis. The first is related to the support of Graphic Organizers to improve reading comprehension (Table 1) and the second with Difficulties of using Graphic Organizers to improve reading comprehension (Table 2).

Table 1 *Support of graphic organizers to improve reading comprehension, codes*

Surveys, Teacher's Journal and reading comprehension tests					
Categories and descriptions	Codes				
Support of Graphic Organizers to improve reading comprehension. The students could use graphic organizers as a strategy to identify the elements of a story, organize the information and give well-structured reports of a story read and obtain better results in reading comprehension tests.	MA	CSA	FC	AL	UGOT
	UV	GORCT	MER	MFS	GOUT
	UT	CWGO	FER	UTRC	SUSO
	GORL	IGOICT	GER	AGO	
	RE	AGO	UET	MGOL	
	URCT	CSGO	AELR	EGO	
MA	Motivation towards the activity proposed				
UV	Students understand the vocabulary				
UT	Appropriate use of time				
GORL	Students associate real life elements with graphic organizers				
RE	Students recognize elements from a story				
URCT	Students identify and understand the structure of a reading comprehension test				
CSA	Students' capacity to give complete and well structured answers				
GORCT	Students find graphic organizers useful to deal with reading comprehension tests				
CWGO	Collaborative work to build graphic organizers				
IGOICT	Interaction with graphic organizers by means of ICTS				
AGO	Students autonomous work towards graphic organizers				
CSGO	Students' capacity to select the most suitable graphic organizer				
FC	Familiarization of concepts				
MER	Motivation towards English Reading				
FER	Frequent English reader				
GER	Good English reader				
UET	Understanding of English texts				
AELR	awareness in terms of English Level readers concept				
AL	Awareness of Literature concept				
MFS	Motivation towards Fantasy stories				
UTRC	Use of tools for reading comprehension				
SUSO	Students find useful the strategy in other subjects				
MGOL	Motivation towards graphic organizers learning				
EGO	SS enjoyed the experience using graphic organizers				
UGOT	SS found useful to use graphic organizers with English texts				
GOUT	Graphic organizers helped students to understand English texts				

Table 2 *Difficulties of using graphic organizers*

Surveys, Teacher's Journal and reading comprehension tests		
Difficulties of using Graphic Organizers to improve reading comprehension: Students had to face different difficulties before and during the implementation process. Language problems, time management and low capacity to follow instructions impeded the normal achievement of the purpose in each stage.	LM	FTER
	LSA	FUET
	ITM	LAELR
	LASC	LAL
	FICTS	LMFS
	LGW	NUTRC
	NFI	LAGO
	LMER	LMGOL
		NUGOT
		NGOUT
		NSUSO
		LASV
		MSPL
		SA
		LTR
LM	Lack of materials to comply with the activities	
LSA	Low capacity to give well structured answers	
ITM	Inappropriate time management	
LASC	Lack of awareness of specific concepts (elements of a story)	
FICTS	Few training towards ICT's management	
LGW	Low tolerance towards group work	
NFI	Students do not follow instructions	
LMER	Lack of motivation towards English Reading	
FTER	Few time devoted to English Reading	
FUET	Few understanding of English texts	
LAELR	Lack of awareness in terms of English Leveled readers concept	
LAL	Lack of awareness of Literature concept	
LMFS	Lack of motivation towards Fantasy stories	
NUTRC	Non-use of tools for reading comprehension	
LAGO	Lack of awareness in terms of graphic organizers as a tool	
LMGOL	Lack of motivation towards graphic organizers learning	
NUGOT	SS did not found useful to use graphic organizers with English texts	
NGOUT	Graphic organizers did not help students to understand English texts	
NSUSO	Students do not find useful the strategy in other subjects	
LASV	Lack of awareness of specific vocabulary	
MSPL	Students misspell some words	
SA	Students' lack of syntax awareness	
LTR	Use of language transfer	

The codes and categories were established because of the data analysis, now, a core category shows up to become the answer of the research question established at the beginning of the study. As a core category, the utterance that best fits into the findings is: Graphic organizers support second graders' reading comprehension by providing them with an organization model. The evidence is growing that both content and strategy approaches are effective in teaching reading comprehension (Van Rijk, de Mey, de Haan, van Oers, & Volman, 2017)

Moreover, writing skills were also positively affected since the reading comprehension tests results improved and the writing production was clear and coherent. Further research need to be done in order to find a better connection between graphic organizers and ICT's considering today's students' characteristics. Additionally, how effective is the strategy in order to make the students more autonomous on their own learning process.

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