

Effectiveness of Graphic Novels to Motivate Reading among ESL Learners: A Literature Review

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Abstract

This paper reviewed literature on the effectiveness of graphic novels to foster reading motivation among ESL learners in the educational framework of Malaysian schools. The research process involved two phases: (1) data searching and collection, and (2) assessing the quality of studies, where literature obtained from 2 databases (Google Scholar and Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC) were filtered, guided by a review question. The selection criteria of the past studies encompassed three aspects: (1) using specific search keywords, (2) language used and (3) year of publication (2019-2023). The keyword search focused on papers of (1) the impact of graphic novels on reading motivation, and (2) the effectiveness of graphic novels in motivating reading among ESL learners, specifically in Malaysia. From 98 papers searched, this review looked at 25 pertinent studies on how graphic novels may motivate ESL learners to read. Several effects have been identified, including increasing pupils' engagement; graphic novels as an effective tool; and enhancing reading motivation. The findings of this research may be advantageous for ESL teachers in integrating graphic novels into their classroom. Potential possibilities for future research could include investigating the influence of digital graphic novels on the motivation to read among ESL learners, as well as examining the effects of incorporating graphic novels alongside other instructional approaches (such as peer learning or cooperative learning) on the motivation to read among ESL learners.

Keywords: Effectiveness Of Graphic Novel, Teaching Tool, Esl Learners, Motivation In Reading, Pupils' Engagement

Introduction

The English language is generally seen as an essential skill and has been extensively researched across several fields, particularly in the realm of education, due to its widespread use as the predominant global language. Based on a report in the World Population Review

(2019), over 1,121 billion individuals, irrespective of their native or non-native status, are proficient in the English language. This language serves as a means of communication that connects individuals across various sectors. English is widely recognised as a language that holds significant importance in the realms of commerce, education, and communication. However, the continuous advancement of reading presents notable difficulties, which underscores the need of acknowledging the previous changes. Educators are faced with the need of recognising and addressing the current prevalent situation, and implementing instructional approaches that effectively support these dynamic changes.

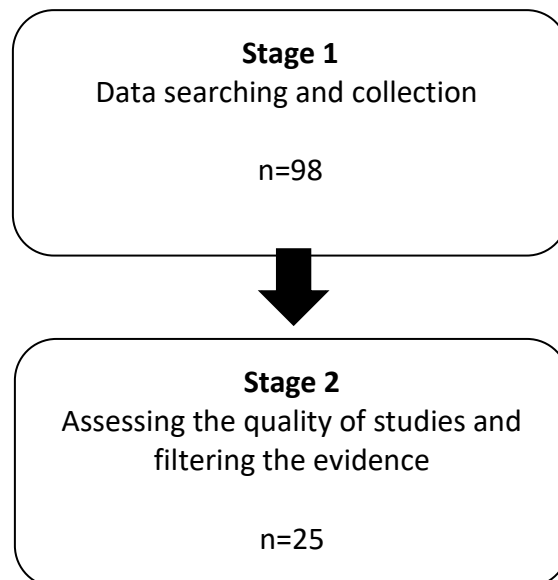
The reading lessons conducted in Malaysian English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms appear to be deficient in terms of providing an enjoyable learning experience. This can be seen in Mustafa's (2018) study where he observed that primary school students are largely interested in reading for the purpose of examination preparation, rather than seeking information and enjoyment. The issue is regarded as a growing concern among policymakers, educators, researchers, and the media within the nation and warrants significant attention. Their worries are acceptable because the acquisition of reading skills plays a vital role in an individual's cognitive and affective development, since it has a significant impact on their intellectual and emotional growth Baba & Affendi (2020). Consequently, proficient readers are more likely to expand their cognitive perspectives and enhance their prospects for achievement.

The Ministry of Education (MOE) has consistently prioritised the instruction and acquisition of English as a second language. Among the many objectives outlined in the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013-2025), one looks at cultivating students who possess the ability to comprehend language for diverse purposes, such as information acquisition and leisurely pursuits. In an ESL teaching and learning context, most teachers and learners approach the instruction of English as solely an academic pursuit, similar to other subjects, often overlooking the fundamental objective of language education, which is to foster effective communication skills. Consequently, a significant number of learners experience a decline in their innate motivation to acquire proficiency in the language, particularly in relation to their diminished enthusiasm for engaging in reading activities within that language (O'Brien, Beach & Scharber 2007). Nevertheless, teaching and learning worldwide was surprised by an emerging tool that was claimed to be effective at addressing this concern. In fact, the tool is regarded as pleasurable. Graphic novels which integrate vivid illustrations and compelling narratives, have demonstrated its efficacy as a powerful means of addressing the issue of reading motivation. Pishol and Kaur (2015) examined the perspectives held by both teachers and students with regards to the practice of engaging with graphic novels as a form of reading material. The findings of the research indicated that the incorporation of a multiliteracies framework into a reading instructional session, particularly through the utilisation of graphic novels, yielded a more engaging, enjoyable, and persuasive educational encounter. This graphic novel format effectively captivates readers by employing visual storytelling techniques, thereby immersing them in a vivid narrative realm that stimulates their imagination and fosters a deep enthusiasm for literature. Therefore, this review focused on past discussions on the effectiveness of using graphic novels to motivate reading among ESL learners. The potential impact of this review might be advantageous for educators teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) by facilitating the incorporation of graphic novels into their instructional practices.

Methodology

The review underwent two stages of filtering: (1) data searching and collection, and (2) assessing the quality of studies and filtering the evidence. Figure 1 shows the stages of filtering:

Figure 1. The stages of filtering.



Stage 1: Data searching and collection

In the first stage, two databases (Google Scholar and Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC) databases) were used. Google Scholar and ERIC are identified as effective tools for accessing contemporary and reputable academic content. In fact, Marina and Sterligov (2021) determined that Google Scholar has evolved as the predominant search engine employed by researchers for the purpose of accessing scholarly information. The review commenced by gathering relevant research papers on the efficacy of graphic novels in promoting reading motivation among ESL learners in order to create a comprehensive compilation of pivotal and interconnected scholarly publications. The selection criteria for this review were guided by the review question: What are the effects of graphic novels in motivating reading among ESL learners?

The keyword searches were compassed based on two main questions: past studies on (1) the impact of graphic novels on reading motivation, and (2) the effectiveness of graphic novels in motivating reading among ESL learners specifically in Malaysia. Besides that, the selection criteria also emphasise on past studies written in English and published between the years 2019 and 2023. The process of collecting relevant literature for this study is depicted in Table 1.

Table 1.*Steps in gathering literature on Google Scholar*

Step		Method	
1	Keyword Search	Keywords	Selection Criteria
		“graphic novels” “graphic novels to motivate reading” “motivation in reading”	1. Paper published 2019 up until present 2023 2. Papers written in English
2	‘Advanced search’ function	Keywords	Search Criteria
		“Effectiveness of graphic novels to motivate reading”	“with the exact phrase”

Meanwhile, for the ERIC database, the methods of data collection are shown in Table 2.

Table 2.*Steps in gathering literature on ERIC*

Step		Method	
1	Keyword Search	Keywords	Selection Criteria
		“Effect of graphic novels to motivate reading”	1. Publication date: 2019-2023 (last 5 years) 2. Descriptor: English (Second Language)

During the article search using Google Scholar on the efficacy of graphic novels to foster reading motivation, the following keywords were employed: "graphic novels", "graphic novels to motivate reading" and "motivation in reading" (Table 1). In order to refine the selection of articles to those that are pertinent, the criterion of publication year was established as 'since 2019', thereby facilitating the retrieval of articles published within the preceding five-year period (2019 to 2023). Subsequently, utilising the 'advanced search' feature, the search criteria 'with the exact phrase' were employed to exclude articles pertaining to English language instruction that did not include the term 'motivation in reading'. This was done to ascertain the efficacy of graphic novels in fostering reading motivation. In conducting ERIC searches, the keyword 'graphic novel' was used. Subsequently, two elements underwent refinement, namely the 'publication date' and the 'descriptor'. The chosen timeframe for the "publication date" is "since 2019 (last 5 years)", while the selected descriptor is "English (Second Language) (Table 2). In the first stage, a total of 98 journal articles were identified and subsequently selected.

Stage 2: Assessing the quality of studies and filtering the evidence

Later, inclusion and exclusion criteria were employed in Stage 2 to determine the final selection of journal articles to be reviewed, as depicted in Table 3.

Table 3.*Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

Elements	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Year of publications	Papers published 2019 up until present 2023	Papers published before 2019
Language	Papers written in English	Papers written in other language
Keywords	Papers related to keywords related in the search	Papers that are not related to keywords in the search

The selection criteria in Stage 2 were determined by 3 aspects: (1) the year of publication, (2) the language in which the papers were written, and (3) the use of certain keywords in the search. During the first stage, the search was conducted using various search terms, such as 'graphic novels', 'graphic novels to motivate reading' and 'motivation in reading. Subsequently, a comprehensive examination was undertaken through the implementation of an advanced search methodology.

At the end of Stage 2, a total of 25 papers pertaining to graphic novels remain. It is important to understand the criteria used to determine which papers are included or excluded in this selection. The selection process involves the identification and inclusion of values and other scholarly papers pertaining to graphic novels. Nevertheless, the screening process yielded a mere 25 papers that were found to be relevant to the topic of graphic novels. These papers were selected based on an advanced search utilising a combination of keywords. However, it is important to note that papers obtained from the search using a combination of keywords are also included in the analysis. This is because relying solely on a single keyword search may result in a limited number of sources. By employing a single keyword search strategy, the articles undergo a rigorous review process, and the subsequent section presents and examines the analysis.

Findings from the Literature Review

Based on the findings, the effectiveness of graphic novels on reading motivation, have indicated three directions: (1) increasing pupils' engagement (2) facilitating reading instruction and (3) enhancing Reading Motivation. In order to see the effectiveness of graphic novels on reading motivation, past studies have indicated three directions in terms of effectiveness:

Increasing pupils' engagement

According to Furrer and Skinner (2003), engagement can be defined as the active, goal-directed, flexible, constructive, persistent, and focused interactions that take place within social and physical contexts. Guthrie et al. (2004) put forth a conceptualization of engagement that comprises two distinct elements: time allocation to the task, which involves directing one's attention towards comprehending the text, and affective engagement, which involves actively interacting with the surrounding environment. Engagement, as described by

Fredericks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004), is a multifaceted construct encompassing various components, such as students' affective responses, behavioural patterns, and cognitive processes. The aforementioned information encompasses the individual's disposition, level of involvement, focused behaviour, level of commitment, and ability to self-manage. The degree of engagement demonstrated by students is regarded as a crucial determinant of their academic achievement. According to Handelsman et al. (2005), there exists a positive correlation between active student participation and the overall effectiveness of the learning experience.

In recent times, there has been a notable increase in the popularity of graphic novels, which offer a visually engaging alternative to traditional literary works. By incorporating both visual and textual components, these materials possess the capacity to provide an enjoyable reading experience for students. According to Yunos et al. (2013), the utilisation of visual aids in literature instruction has been found to enhance student engagement with the texts. Begoray and Fu (2015) assert that the combination of textual and visual elements within graphic novels yields a unified and immersive literary encounter. According to Rajendra (2015), it is evident that a graphic novel is a type of multimodal text that employs various semiotic resources to convey meaning. It is crucial to acknowledge that graphic novels encompass a multitude of modalities that are concurrently organised and presented. To fully understand how modalities contribute to the communication of meaning, it is crucial to analyse their interaction with the reader, as suggested by Hammond (2009).

Additionally, the incorporation of graphic novels as a supplementary pedagogical resource has the potential to cultivate a collaborative educational environment for the entire student body. The inclusion of graphic novels in educational settings has the potential to foster a shared experience among students. The phenomenon of "flow" occurs when a reader engages in a particular task with a high level of involvement, resulting in a state of complete mental, emotional, and even physical immersion in the reading process. This cognitive state can alternatively be characterised as a persistent commitment to attaining a thorough comprehension of the text being perused (Kelly & Grace, 2009).

Numerous scholarly studies have extensively examined the positive effects associated with the incorporation of graphic novels into the educational environment. The comprehension of students' involvement in graphic novels is imperative for educators who are contemplating the utilisation of graphic novels as a pedagogical resource for reading instruction. In their study, Pishol and Kaur (2015) undertook an investigation into the perceptions held by both teachers and students with regards to the activity of reading a graphic novel. The findings of the research indicated that the incorporation of a multiliteracies framework into a reading instructional session, particularly through the utilisation of graphic novels, yielded a heightened level of engagement, enjoyment, and persuasive educational encounter. Educators have the ability to involve their students in a range of activities, including assigning them the responsibility of arranging and conducting interviews or embodying the facial expressions of characters portrayed in a graphic novel. To accommodate the preferences of tactile learners, the teacher may encourage them to generate a visual depiction, such as a sketch, that aligns with the central theme or specific events portrayed in the graphic novel. Educators possess the opportunity to assign students with the task of constructing a scaled-down representation or model of the setting portrayed in the illustrated literary work. The utilisation of a graphic novel in the English language classroom offers a wide range of effective activities. According to the study conducted by Ibrahim et al. (2022), these

activities possess the capacity to accommodate a wide range of learning styles and the specific needs of individual learner.

Facilitating reading instruction

Martinez and Plevyak (2020) argue that teachers have the capacity to significantly influence the attitudes of students, particularly those who exhibit a pronounced dislike for independent reading. Graphic novels serve as an exceptional pedagogical resource for facilitating reading instruction. Their capacity to effectively engage students, enhance comprehension, and heighten reading enjoyment has garnered substantial recognition within educational spheres.

Various pedagogical methodologies can be utilised to incorporate graphic novels into the realm of reading instruction. Graphic novels possess the capacity to augment the comprehension abilities of readers who encounter challenges in the realm of reading. The integration of visual cues in conjunction with written language can enhance students' comprehension of narratives, facilitating their ability to identify key plot elements and make inferences about underlying meanings. According to Lewis (2014), the visual elements present in graphic novels have the ability to captivate the reader's attention and enrich the overall significance of the narrative. Evidently, this platform holds a strong appeal for young readers, fostering their development as proficient visual learners. Hence, it is imperative for educators to incorporate this form of literature within their instructional practices to effectively cultivate students' abilities in reading comprehension and visual interpretation. Graphic novels have the potential to expose students to a wide range of vocabulary. The utilisation of complex terminology that is integrated into the fabric of the text enhances students' ability to infer meaning, particularly when accompanied by visual aids and relevant textual content. This instructional approach supports students in effectively utilising and expanding their existing knowledge and vocabulary in diverse ways (Fitzgerald & Graves 2004).

The acquisition and development of visual literacy competencies are of great importance in the contemporary era, as it increasingly relies on visual communication. The integration of graphic novels within educational settings holds promise in enhancing students' understanding of visual information, fostering deductive reasoning abilities, and promoting the development of logical deductions. Proficiency in the analysis and comprehension of visual data is an essential aptitude in the present-day epoch. In addition, it is worth noting that graphic novels possess the inherent ability to successfully engage individuals who exhibit reluctance or encounter challenges when engaging with traditional forms of literature. For these students, the narratives and character development depicted in such literary works may seem less daunting, regardless of their intricacy.

Enhancing Reading Motivation

The presence of visual assistance is a graphic novel's main benefit. Schwarz (2002) posits that graphic novels possess the capacity to function as a source of motivation and involvement for individuals who encounter difficulties with reading and demonstrate a hesitancy to engage in activities associated with reading. A vast number of rarely utilised phrases and expressions can be readily depicted through the utilisation of illustrations. Moreover, it serves as a means of improving the textual content of the narrative. The utilisation of visual aids in the form of graphic novels can be beneficial for readers, as it facilitates the comprehension of complex vocabulary. By providing illustrations that clarify various concepts, readers are less reliant on dictionaries compared to situations where no

visual aids are available. The incorporation of vibrant illustrations serves as a catalyst for stimulating students' engagement in critical interpretation of texts, thereby facilitating their comprehension of the texts' abstract concepts

Added to that, an exceedingly rational benefit of integrating graphic novels within the educational environment is to stimulate students' inclination towards reading. Agnes (2018) posits that the incorporation of literary text and visual imagery has the potential to augment students' personal growth and individual competencies through the facilitation of meaning construction. This particular approach has the potential to foster student engagement with a narrative by stimulating their capacity for empathy towards the characters' situations. Agnes proposed the implementation of a pedagogical approach that fosters creativity through the examination of various components within a narrative, such as the emotional states and aspirations of the characters.

Research has indicated that graphic novels possess the potential to offer advantages to individuals who exhibit resistance towards reading or encounter challenges during the reading process. The integration of visual elements in a written text can provide contextual signals that aid in the comprehension process. According to Kelley (2010), the integration of text and image allows students to effectively assess their own understanding, which can be challenging when presented with solely textual information. This is because students may experience cognitive fatigue when faced with an overwhelming amount of text. The incorporation of extensive visual aids and textual content within graphic novels has the potential to significantly enhance the educational experience for students (Rajendra, 2015).

Conclusion

A review of past studies indicated that using graphic novels is effective in fostering reading motivation among ESL learners; besides being an effective teaching tool, it increases pupils' engagement and enhances reading motivation. Thus, this suggests graphic novels are effective tools in fostering reading motivation among ESL learners. The incorporation of visual elements within graphic novels serves to enhance both comprehension and engagement, offering them a highly suitable tool for the process of language acquisition. The integration of visual elements and text offers a contextual framework and facilitates the acquisition of vocabulary, enabling learners to overcome language barriers and enhance their reading abilities. The interactive and engaging qualities of graphic novels also cultivate a favourable disposition towards reading, resulting in heightened motivation and interest among ESL learners.

The implications of the study's findings have significant relevance for educators and curriculum developers who are engaged in working with ESL learners. To begin with, the integration of graphic novels in these classrooms can prove to be a highly advantageous approach in fostering increased interest and participation in reading activities. Educators ought to contemplate the incorporation of graphic novels into their instructional frameworks, while also providing students the chance to investigate and engage in discourse surrounding these literary works. This approach has the potential to foster a dynamic and inclusive atmosphere for reading. In addition, it is imperative for educational institutions and publishers to acknowledge the inherent value of graphic novels within the context of ESL education. Consequently, they should endeavour to create educational materials that are specifically designed to cater to the unique requirements of ESL learners of fostering reading engagement among ESL students.

Although there exists an expanding volume of scholarly literature investigating the efficacy of graphic novels in enhancing reading comprehension skills among ESL learners, there is an absence of study pertaining to the influence of graphic novels on reading motivation. Furthermore, a majority of the existing studies pertaining to the utilisation of graphic novels in the context of ESL education have mostly focused on students enrolled in primary and secondary educational institutions. Further research is needed concerning the utilisation of graphic novels as a means to enhance reading engagement among adult ESL learners. There is an undeniable truth that graphic novels are beneficial in motivating ESL learners. Potential possibilities for future research could include investigating the influence of digital graphic novels on the motivation to read among ESL learners, as well as examining the effects of incorporating graphic novels alongside other instructional approaches (such as peer learning or cooperative learning) on the motivation to read among ESL learners. In conclusion, it is recommended that additional research be undertaken in order to investigate the enduring impacts of graphic novels on the reading aptitude of ESL learners, as well as their overall linguistic advancement. Gaining insight into the effects of prolonged exposure to graphic novels and their influence on the cultivation of advanced reading strategies in ESL learners has the potential to enhance the continuous improvement of teaching methods and learning resources in the field of ESL education. Through the utilisation of the distinctive attributes of graphic novels, educators and stakeholders have the ability to maximise their potential in order to stimulate reading engagement, improve language acquisition, and empower ESL learners as they progress towards achieving proficiency in reading.

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