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THE EFFECT OF COMIC STRIPS ON TURKISH EFL LEARNERS' READING COMPREHENSION

Abstract

This study aims at investigating comic strips and assessing the probable effect of using comics as reading material for improving Turkish intermediate EFL learners reading, and finding out the probable effect of comics on students' comprehension of comics and accordingly other reading materials. 91 Turkish teenage intermediate EFL learners from fifth and sixth grade students at Final School in Erzurum were divided into control and experimental group. A Nelson Proficiency Test was ordered to define the similarity of the two groups. The analysis showed that the experimental group students' reading was improved significantly at the end of the reading program.

Keywords: Comics, Comic Strips, Reading Comprehension, EFL, Intermediate.

KARİKATÜRLERİN İNGİLİZCEYİ YABANCI DİL OLARAK ÖĞRENEN ÖĞRENCİLERİN OKUDUĞUNU ANLAMA BECERİLERİNE ETKİSİ

Özet

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Türkiye'deki İngilizce ders kitaplarında ihmal edilen bir tür olan çizgi romanların niteliğine ışık tutmak ve okuma malzemesi olarak çizgi roman kullanımının ortaokul seviyesinde İngilizce öğrenen Türk öğrencilerin üzerindeki muhtemel etkisini ortaya koymaktır. Bu araştırma için, ortaöğretim seviyesinde İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen Türk öğrencilerden iki grup seçildi. Katılımcılar Erzurum Final Ortaöğretim Okulu'ndan 91 beşinci ve altıncı sınıf öğrencisinden oluşturuldu. Bu iki grubun homojenliğini belirlemek için bir Nelson Seviye testi uygulandı. Analiz, öğrencilerin okuma programı sonunda önemli düzeyde artmış olduğunu gösterdi. Deney grubu öğrencilerinin okuma motivasyonunun çizgi roman okuma ile yüksek ölçüde ilişkili olduğu bulundu.

Anahtar Kelimeler : Komik, Komik Hikaye , Okuma Anlama, Yabancı Dil Olarak İngilizce, Orta Seviye.

INTRODUCTION

Reading, like other aspects of language competence, is complex and development of fluent reading abilities of L2 students is a challenging undertake (Schmitt, 2002). As the importance of reading is increasing in modern education and pedagogy, English language teachers, especially teachers of reading wish for new and engaging texts to enhance learning

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especially in formal classroom environments like state schools. On the other hand, publishers try to improve their materials as being authentic, but “many teachers consider that no problem how attractive scripts might be, they yet circle hypocrisy and are just an illustration of the factual thing” (Davis, 1997). Brown (2001) emphasizes on using a variety of reading texts instead of just focusing on variety of reading performances. However, among many characteristics of foreign language teaching course books, problems with reading passages and especially with topic selection are among the most important ones for filling this gap. Therefore, some materials should be introduced into classes that exhibit scholars, equally physically and emotionally, to the external universe, predominantly in EFL locations where bona fide effigies are seldom. In this way, comics can be especially useful in second and foreign language classrooms. “Comic strips are not only for amusing in a language course, but there are also organizational aims for educators who use them” (Casabay, 2006, p.26).

According to Ollers' (1983) episode suggestion, a transcript that has a story line and a reasonable arrangement is easier to evoke and recall. Therefore teachers can benefit from comics' story line to teach a variety of things - character development, dialogue, transitions, conclusions, and etc. Comics are multidimensional - they combine both words and images. Students are often immediately drawn in by the opportunity to play with images and language.

The point that comic strips are pictorial also donates to improve forthcoming proficiency (Casabay, 2006). As Casabay (2006) notes, comic strips apply life-like situations and expressions, and also they cause use of spoken slangs. According to Lin (2003) as technology advances, new ways of transmitting knowledge are developing rapidly. He notes that when we expand our methods of literacy instruction by including drama , multimedia , comics , and other formats , we may be able to reach more students in the language classroom and meet students' different learning styles than would be the case using purely traditional teaching methods (Lin, 2003).

Derrick (2008) believes that one of the methods that ESL/EFL trainers can intensify the amount of period their learners read is by using “comics “and graphic tales. Apparently comics with their visual nature and usually colorful settings help to motivate students to read.

Another interesting and considerable point regarding the use of comics in EFL/ESL classes is the positive impression that this type of genre holds. According to Templer (2009) comics and graphic narrative materials are exceptional means to diminish the” affective filters” of nervousness and shortage of assurance obstructive learner desire in L2 education. They can spark students' interest, thus increase acquisition of L2 and invigorate kids to become “autonomous acquirers” (Krashen, 2004).

On the other hand, while comics can make hybrid changes in the second and foreign language classrooms, unfortunately, they are often-overlooked genre in most ELT classes, especially in Turkey. Not only in the formal school classes, but also in institutional settings they have been totally ignored. Every day in our class teachers are faced with demotivated students, most of them are really tired of reading long texts in a totally bookish format. Hence, we should notice the idea of using comic strips as a learning device and to add an element of fun to our language classes and language learning process.

The result of study by Liu (2004) revealed that the low-level students receiving the high-level text with the comic strips scored significantly higher than their counterparts receiving the high-level text only. Adding comic strips to the high level text for the more proficient learners, however, did not enhance this group's recalls. Interestingly in another study, Arlin & Roth (1978) found that comics did not help poor readers. They acknowledged that children were interested in comics but they felt that the time spent looking at the pictures in comics was distracting (Arlin & Roth, 1987).

Liu (2004) explains that according to Dual Coding Theory (DCT), the process of reading involves at least two coding systems: a verbal system and a nonverbal system. These two systems are interconnected but independent. DCT holds that pictures are stored only in the nonverbal code and language is stored only in the verbal code, but referential connections may be forged between them. The pictures in the study could not be stored in the verbal code because they are not verbal, but they could be stored in the nonverbal code and associated with their respective text descriptions in the verbal code. According to Liu (2004) DCT helps to explain why the comic strip that reiterating information from the text facilitated comprehension of the text, but DCT does not explain why the high-level students did not benefit from the comic strip presented with the high-level text.

As Liu (2004) notes the commonly held assumption is that comic strips can improve students' reading comprehension. On the other hand, the differential effects of comic strips on the reading comprehension of learners at different levels challenges this assumption, " thus calling into question Sadoski and Paivios' (2001) claim that the DCT is universal" (Liu, 2004).

Having these points in mind, in the present study, the possible effects of comic strips on Turkish teenage students' reading comprehension scores have been studied.

Research Questions

The current study aims at providing preliminary answers to the following questions:

1. Does the use of comic strips have any effect on EFL learners' reading comprehension scores as measured by eight interval tests?
2. Does the use of comic strips have any effect on EFL learners' general reading comprehension scores as measured by two final tests?

Null Hypotheses

H01: The use of comic strips does not have any effect on EFL learners, reading comprehension scores, as measured by eight interval tests.

H02: The use of comic strips does not have any effect on EFL learners' general reading comprehension scores, as measured by two final tests.

METHODOLOGY

In the first place, for initializing the study, the students in both the experimental and the control groups were selected based on a standardized proficiency test (Flower & Coe, 1976). After ensuring the homogeneity of the participants in the two groups through an independent sample T-test, they were assigned as the experimental and the control group in a random selection. After selecting the participants and informing them about the study purposes behind the treatment the students were asked to participate in a ten-session course of reading.

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After collecting the pre-test data, the researcher started to work with the students in a ten-week period. Each session lasted 40 minutes and was held one time a week. In each session the researcher worked on one comic for the experimental group, and one text for the control group. Each session went through 3 main stages including warm-up, engagement and follow-up.

During the warm-up, the instructor provided the students with explanations required to complete the reading task, e.g. drawing upon some new words in the text or the problematic structures. In this stage the instructor also tried to motivate students to go through reading and active their background knowledge about text. In the second stage which was the engagement, the instructor used silent reading. The final stage of each session was the follow-up. After a general review of the main idea of the text and drawing conclusions, the students had to answer to questions. As the class management characteristic and reading strategies used were almost the same for both the experimental and the control group, the same reading comprehension questions were administrated to the students of both groups at the end of the session. The researcher was present at all the data collection processes to ensure that the participants did not talk to each other when answering the comprehension question. In this way, the students' scores on all tests were collected. Finally, the researcher came up with 8 sets of scores at the end of the reading course.

After completing the main phase of the study, the researcher administrated two reading comprehension passages to the students of both the experimental and the control group. The purpose underlying the use of these two readings was to check the general and final effect of reading comprehension ability. As a result, the researcher collected two other sets of reading comprehension scores.

Finally, the data obtained from the comic strips and the reading passages were organized for necessary comparisons and discussions.

Data Analyses

Research Question 1

In order to find out whether the experimental and control group were homogeneous and thus the results of the study were not affected by factors other than the ones in the research questions, a Nelson proficiency test that selected from Fowler & Coe (1976) was administered to 105 students studying in Final school. The results' analysis led to the exclusion of 91 out of 105. The rest of the students were assigned into two groups. In this way, of the 91 students, 44 were exposed to the comic strips as the reading materials (experimental group), and 47 students only read the same texts without comics (control group).

The raw data collected from the proficiency test fed into the LIZREL and an Independent Sample T-test was run to ensure about the improvement of participants in the two groups.

To answer the first research question, the data was gathered from 8 sets of reading comprehension scores. In this way the participants in the experimental group read 8 comic strips as their reading material and in a parallel course the participants in the control group read 8 texts (the same texts without cartoons). Therefore, the research aimed at comparing the scores of the students in two groups to see whether the use of comic strips had any effect on the students' reading comprehension scores or not.

Data analyses were needed to determine whether the manipulation of comic strips as reading materials (independent variable) produced significant differences in the experimental and control groups' performance on reading comprehension (depend variable). In this way the design of the study was a between-group design. Therefore, an independent Sample T-test was used to compare the mean scores of the experimental group and that of the control group in reading comprehension to determine whether the difference between the means of the two groups was due to the independent variable, or not. The first null hypothesis states that “the use of comic strips doesn't have any effect on EFL learners reading comprehension scores as measured by eight interval tests”. That means there is no significant difference between EFL learners' reading comprehension scores in two groups. In following section we will provide statistical description of experimental and control group who participated in the study (Table 1,2, and 3).

Table 1. Between-Subjects Factors.

	N
Group 1	
without comic (0)	47
With comic (1)	44

Table 2. Pre-test. Descriptive Statistics. Independent T-test

group1	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
.00	4.2396	.99523	47
1.00	4.9034	.89873	44
Total	4.5593	1.00211	91

Table 3. Post-test. Descriptive Statistics. Independent T-test

group1	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
.00	8.2194	3.05658	47
1.00	10.3111	2.94883	44
Total	9.2308	3.16772	91

As the tables indicates the mean of the experimental group (with comic strip) is higher than that of the control group (without comic strip). The results indicate that there was significant difference in the reading comprehension performance of the control and the experimental groups. The average performance of the control group (M= 8.2194, Std= 3.05658) was different from that of the experimental group (M= 10.31111, Std= 2.94883).

The finding of Independent Sample T-test rejected the first null hypothesis that “the use of comic strips doesn't have any effect on EFL learners, reading comprehension scores as measured by eight interval tests”. Therefore, we can conclude that there was a significant difference in reading comprehension performance of the experimental group (with comic strips) and the control group (without comic strip).

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Research Question 2

Does the use of comic strips have any effect on EFL learners' general reading comprehension scores as measured by two final tests?

In the second place and in order to check the general effect of reading with comics and their parallel texts on the students' reading comprehension ability, the participants in both the experimental and the control groups were tested by two final reading materials at the end of the treatment. The important point is that both groups received the same set of test questions that were without comics.

Data analyses were needed to determine whether the manipulation of comic strips as reading materials produced significant differences in the experimental and the control group students' performance on final readings. As the design of the study was a between-groups design, an Independent Samples T-test was used to compare the mean scores of the experimental and control groups on final readings to determine whether the difference between the means of the two groups was due to the independent variable (comic strips) or not. In this part we will provide the statistical analysis of the two experimental and control groups on final reading test (Table 4, and 5).

Table 4. Between-Subjects Factors .Independent Samples T-test

	N
Group 1	
Control group (.00)	47
Experimental group (1.00)	44

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics. Dependent Variable

group1	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
.00	9.4894	4.55819	47
1.00	10.3617	3.89774	44
Total	9.9255	4.22796	91

The results indicate that there was not any significant difference in the final reading performance of the control group and the experimental group when the questions are the same and without comics. The average performance of the experimental group was ((M= 10.3617, Std=3.89774) and control group was (M= 9.4894, Std=4.55819). we can logically conclude that the difference of performance of both the experimental and control group in final readings was not statically significant.

The second null hypothesis states that "The use of comic strips does not have any effect on EFL learners' general reading comprehension scores as measured by two final tests". The findings of the Independent Sample T-test failed to reject the second null hypothesis. Therefore, there was no significant difference in the general reading comprehension performance of the experimental group and the control group.

FINDINGS

In the first place, to determine whether or not there is a statically significant difference between the performance of the experimental and control group on reading comprehension tests, a T-test for independent sample was conducted. When the results were compared significant difference was between performances of the experimental group (with comic strips) and the control group (without comic strips).

Even if generally comic strips had not any effect on students' reading comprehension or it was less than expected amount, the point is that the presence of cartoons and visuals, generally, has not any disadvantages to students' comprehension of the texts. Indeed, pictorial cartoons had a beneficial effect on performance when information related to the content of the text is boring.

The other important finding of this study was providing the students with different, engaging and motivating types of genres and texts made them much more motivated to learn. In the spirit of relating theory and research to EFL pedagogy, the present study demonstrated that new types of reading passages (i.e., comic strips) would yield a positive outcome when applied to intermediate EFL learners.

The results of this study emphasizes that it is time for comic strips and comic books to gain some degree of attention in our schools' curriculum. The suggestion is that teachers can see comic strips as a learning tool and scholars can view them as an effective subject for educational research.

CONCLUSION

Most of English teachers use different textbooks not only to follow the administrative decisions of the schools and institutions working with, but also because of their belief in the textbooks as valuable teaching materials. According to Arkian (2008) "textbooks present a smooth running curricular program for the teaching of essential and necessary items of the language with which one cannot lose his or her way as a teacher" (p.71).

Arkian (2008) asserts that "textbooks still continue to be the single most important resource in the language classroom throughout the world" (p.71). Hence, the importance of textbooks in the professional lives of the ELT teachers and of course their student is obvious. According to Arkian (2008) "In many classrooms, textbooks and their components make up the only instructional material used in the classroom" (p.71).

Having the importance of textbooks and their contents in mind, we can conclude that searching for new and interesting forms of materials, especially, reading materials is of an utmost importance in any curriculum developing program. Consequently, English language teachers and most importantly materials developers must identify the gaps in the genres and topics that our textbooks present and try to fill these gaps by adapting and producing materials that are interesting and sometimes challenging for the students and readers.

In sum, there is a need to develop some curriculum workshops and academic research programs for examining the positive and probably negative points of including graphic materials, especially comic strips in EFL pedagogy at all levels. This can involve some joint projects among teachers of EFL, art, history, social studies, moral education and other disciplines. With initializing these types of programs, our educational authorities can bridge

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across different subject areas and enhance a key component in teaching and learning English language to have important pedagogical changes in our educational system.

Since this study focused on the use of comic strips as a reading material, it is hoped that the results will have significant consequences for making practical decisions in materials development and writing. Educators and material developers will be able to use the results of the present research to incorporate comics in their curriculum.

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