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Carrera de Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros

The Use of Comics to Develop EFL Students' Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary Acquisition

Trabajo de titulación previo a la
obtención del título de Licenciada
en Pedagogía del Idioma Inglés

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2024-09-23

Resumen

El propósito de esta síntesis de investigación es analizar los efectos del uso de cómics para desarrollar la comprensión lectora y la adquisición de vocabulario en estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL, por sus siglas en inglés). Adicionalmente, se examinaron las actividades usadas en la aplicación de cómics en el aula de inglés. Además, buscamos conocer las percepciones tanto de profesores como de estudiantes de inglés hacia este tipo de material. Se seleccionaron veinte estudios empíricos relacionados con el área mencionada. Estos estudios fueron publicados en los últimos 15 años y encontrados en bases de datos tales como Scholar Google, EBSCO, y Scielo. Los principales resultados de los estudios analizados muestran que el cómic es una herramienta útil para mejorar las habilidades de comprensión lectora y para el aprendizaje de vocabulario. Estos materiales presentan soporte visual junto con el texto, lo cual facilita el entendimiento de su contenido. Entre las principales actividades realizadas por los estudiantes tenemos a la lectura, trabajo en grupos y la creación de cómics. Asimismo, tanto los profesores como los estudiantes perciben el uso de comics en el aula como una herramienta que puede traer beneficios en el proceso de enseñanza y aprendizaje de inglés como lengua extranjera.

Palabras clave del autor: cómics educativos, retención de vocabulario, percepciones de profesores y estudiantes, motivación estudiantil



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Abstract

The purpose of this research synthesis is to analyze the effects of using comics to develop reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition in students of EFL. Moreover, we examine the activities used to apply comics in EFL classrooms. In addition, we aim to understand the perceptions of both English teachers and students towards this type of material. Twenty empirical studies related to the mentioned area were selected for the analysis. These studies were published in the last 15 years and found in databases such as Google Scholar, EBSCO, and Scielo. The main results of the analyzed studies show that comics are a useful tool for improving reading comprehension skills and vocabulary learning in EFL students. These materials provide visual support along with the text, facilitating a better understanding of its content. Among the main activities performed by EFL students, we found reading, group work, and creating comics. Likewise, both teachers and students perceive the use of comics in the classroom as a tool that can bring benefits in teaching and learning EFL.

Author keywords: educational comics, vocabulary retention, teachers' and students' perceptions, student engagement



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Dedication

I dedicate this work and all my efforts to my family. In particular, I want to express my deepest gratitude to my brother Sebastian, who has been a constant source of support and encouragement throughout this process, always helping me persevere even when things got tough. Similarly, I am profoundly thankful to my parents, who have inspired me to strive for excellence and become a better person. Their guidance and values have shaped who I am today.

Maria Fernanda Perea.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my 23-year-old self for making the decision to become a teacher. Now, I am getting the results of that decision and all the effort I made to push myself to the end of this road. From now on, I will sow seeds of knowledge and awareness in other minds. Hopefully, blossoming plants will spring up.

Mayra Freire

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude to the people who supported me during the development of this work. Firstly, I would like to thank our tutor, professor Gerardo Esteban Heras Urgilés, for his valuable guidance and support throughout the development of this project. Furthermore, I would like to thank my classmate, Mayra Freire, who has shown commitment and responsibility for the development of this project.

Maria Fernanda Perea

Acknowledgments

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to those people who helped me to write this work. Many thanks to professor Esteban Heras, Mgt, for his guidance and help during this process. Thanks, should also go to Maria Fernanda Perea, my partner in creating this thesis, for being the perfect collaborator to work with. Without her help, the creation of this document would have been harder to accomplish. Lastly, I would like to mention my grandmother, who always motivated me to continue my academic development.

Mayra Freire

Introduction

Teaching reading comprehension skills and vocabulary in EFL classrooms can represent a significant challenge for educators. To address this challenge, the use of authentic materials such as comics has emerged as a promising educational tool. This research synthesis delves into the effects of comics on EFL students' reading comprehension skills and vocabulary acquisition, as reported in previous empirical studies. We also analyze the activities implemented by teachers when using comics in their classrooms. In addition, we aim to understand the perceptions of both English teachers and students towards this type of material.

Twenty empirical articles were used in the present research synthesis. They predominantly employ a quantitative approach and apply different research instruments such as interviews, itineraries, questionnaires, observations, and pre-test and post-test. These types of short stories are educational tools that are relatively new, especially in the Ecuadorian context and other Latin American countries, as demonstrated by the research discussed below. However, it has gained significant influence in other regions, such as Asian countries, and the growing interest in comics seems to continue to increase around the world.

This research synthesis is organized into six chapters. The first chapter presents the description of the study. The second chapter covers the theoretical framework. The third chapter presents the literature review. The fourth chapter explains the methodology used. The fifth chapter explores the results and discussions of the data collected from the studies. Finally, the sixth chapter presents the conclusions and recommendations.

Chapter 1

Description of the Study

Background

Comics (also called graphic novels and comic strips) are considered authentic materials that could be used in the teaching-learning process of EFL (Gorjian & Branch, 2016). These materials are considered important for English teaching since they provide comprehensible input and authentic language exposure (Casabay, 2006, as cited in Apriani et al., 2014). Gorjian and Branch (2016) also argue that students who learn a language through comics are exposed to real-life communicative experiences. By reading the interaction of the characters in the story, students are exposed to different expressions, idioms, and collocations used by native speakers. According to Casabay (2006, as cited in Hassannirokh & Yeganehpour, 2016), comic strips employ life-like situations that allow learners to be in contact with spoken slang and common expressions of native speakers. This author also states that comics often make use of sustained narrative, and they offer images that help readers interpret the context and the meaning of the story. Furthermore, the events, sequentially presented in the comics, provide aiding information that guides readers, giving them clues as to what the plot is. Plus, combining colors and exposure to popular characters can catch students' attention (Salazar, 2019). As explained by Hornby (2002, as cited in Apriani et al., 2014), comics contribute to language learning with brief narrative, regularly following a sequence of images with texts in balloons and captions.

As explained by Salazar (2019), comics are considered innovative and enjoyable tools that help students in their English learning process. This author adds that comics are not only employed as a means for learning, but they also add refreshment and entertainment for the students to enjoy in the classroom. As reported by Gorjian and Branch (2016), comics can have a positive impact on the learning process of students. Comics promote students' engagement, and prolong their attention span.

It should be noted, however, that not everything is considered positive using comics as an aiding tool in the EFL classroom. For instance, Cimermanová (2015) claimed that comics have limitations related to lexical items used in the stories, such as idioms, accommodation, onomatopoeias, and so on. These might obstruct learners' reading comprehension since they do not have a literal meaning. Furthermore, the author claims that teachers must be careful with the sensitive topics that can be found in comics.

Despite the above-mentioned possible drawbacks, several researchers have found data concluding that the use of comics as an educational tool leads learners to improve their reading comprehension enjoyably and interestingly (Sudjana & Rivai, 2007, as cited in Kamil

et al., 2017). Reading comprehension involves cognitive processes like thinking and analyzing, which help learners to understand the implicit content of a text. This is supported by Gorjian and Branch (2016) study: “Comic strip use noticeably facilitated the reading comprehension of students at the intermediate level” and “incidental vocabulary acquisition in reading modes might be an effective tool to support vocabulary learning” (p. 9).

As can be seen, comics can be a great tool for EFL teachers to use in reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. However, as previously mentioned, there are two aspects that teachers should take into account. First, the chosen comic should be strongly linked to a specific topic, and second, students should not be exposed to sensitive content.

Problem Statement

Knowledge of vocabulary is the basis for comprehending written texts and expressing a complete thought in the L2 (Afzal, 2019). However, the lack of students’ vocabulary knowledge is an issue in EFL classrooms since it affects learners’ ability to comprehend and identify references in a text (Kamil et al., 2017). Furthermore, Afzal (2019) mentions that low vocabulary knowledge leads students to poor academic performance in the areas of reading comprehension and other language skills, such as speaking and listening. As Cain et al. (2004, as cited in Yildirim et al., 2011) reported, reading comprehension involves a complex process where many skills are applied, including an extensive knowledge of vocabulary.

Several researchers have claimed that comics could respond to learners’ needs related to the acquisition of vocabulary and the improvement of reading comprehension, among others. As Poai (2020) reported, the visuals of comics give support to its words and offer a first view of the content of the text, which makes the reading more understandable and facilitates the acquisition of vocabulary. However, we were not able to find one specific article that analyzes and compiles the effects of comics on students’ reading comprehension and vocabulary development, as well as the different activities that teachers (may) apply when using comics during their English lessons. Neither is there much information about teachers’ and students’ perceptions toward the use of graphic novels (comics) that would allow teachers to become aware of the strengths and weaknesses of this authentic material.

Thus, the purpose of this research synthesis is to examine the reported effects that comics have on EFL students’ reading comprehension and vocabulary development. In addition, we analyze the activities used by EFL teachers when implementing comics as ancillary teaching material. Moreover, the perceptions of both teachers and students toward the use of comics in the classroom are analyzed. We examined empirical studies that offer data about these topics.

Rationale

According to Rokhayani and Utari (2014), comics are considered an effective teaching tool in foreign language teaching and learning. Widayanti and Muntaha (2018) claim that digital comics may motivate students to learn a foreign language. These graphic novels can have a good impact on the development of all English skills and sub-skills (Gorjian & Branch, 2016). As Widayanti and Muntaha (2018) reported, “Webcomics can increase the students’ ability of reading comprehension”(p. 78). Furthermore, as stated above, reading comics increases learners’ vocabulary knowledge.

As can be seen, reading and vocabulary go hand in hand. Reading comprehension is an important ability since it helps students develop their critical thinking, reasoning, and analysis of texts. And the acquisition of vocabulary is strongly related to the development of all the other skills because it provides the first step to understand and produce a foreign language (Gorjian & Branch, 2016).

As previously stated, the purpose of this study is to offer an analysis of the effects of using comics on EFL students’ reading comprehension skills and vocabulary development. In Addition, this research will provide data about how to use comics in the EFL classroom. The data will compile different activities that teachers can use to help their EFL students in the language areas mentioned. We also aim to analyze the teachers’ and students’ perceptions toward the use of comics in the language classroom.

Research Questions

- What are the reported effects of applying comics in the EFL classroom to improve reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition?
- What are the activities teachers use when implementing comics in the EFL classroom?
- What are the teachers’ and students’ perceptions of using comics in EFL classrooms?

Objectives**General Objective:**

- To analyze the effects of the use of comics on EFL students’ reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition.

Specific Objectives:

- To examine the activities used by teachers when implementing comics in the EFL classroom.

- To analyze the teachers' and students' perceptions toward the use of comics in EFL classrooms to improve vocabulary and reading comprehension.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

As highlighted in preceding sections, the enduring popularity of comics has solidified over time, establishing itself as a unique form of entertainment for individuals of all ages (Salazar, 2019). Beyond their entertainment value, comics have garnered significant importance in education, emerging as dynamic tools employed across diverse disciplines with a notable impact on language teaching (Rokhayani & Utari, 2014; Gorjian & Branch, 2016). This versatile tool engages students through images and texts, allowing them to create a dynamic and fun learning environment. In this chapter, we will explore key terms and concepts related to comics and their relationship with education. This section is organized into five parts: comics for communicative purposes, comics in language learning, comics for vocabulary acquisition, comics for reading comprehension, activities used to teach a foreign language through comics, and limitations of comics in EFL classrooms.

Comics for Communicative Purposes

Comics are a form of storytelling involving images and text presented narratively (Akcanca, 2020). This author maintains that the industry of comics has gone through many historical stages, and they have become popular over time. Furthermore, they started by being published in magazines and newspapers many decades ago. According to Akcanca (2020, as cited in Lo et al., 2019), the main purpose of comics is entertainment, and they were created for children, adults, and adolescents.

Comics can be used for educational purposes, as they offer authentic material exposed through pictures and dialogues, introducing specific situations that learners may appreciate. As Karagoz (2018) claimed, comics have added educational and informative elements to their purpose and content to place them in the educational field. Furthermore, the use of comics in the educational field is not new. As Wallner and Barajas (2020) reported, comic strips, comic books, and graphic novels have been present in education for many years. Nevertheless, some educators and parents believe that comics were created only for entertainment purposes and have little or no real educational and literary value (Lo et al., 2019).

As stated by Karagoz (2018), the introduction of comics in education has led them to be accepted as a new genre called educational comics. These comics have certain features that allow them to be used in educational activities (Şentürk & Şimşek, 2021). According to Lazarinis et al. (2015), educational comics can be created by the teacher or students. As not all teachers have painting and artistic skills, the internet could be a powerful tool to help them compose their educational comics. Students, too, can create their comics with the guidance of their teacher. The process of creating comics is a means to develop creative thinking,

personal expression, literacy development, and improving communication skills in learners (Lazarinis et al., 2015).

Comics in Language Learning

According to Clark (2017), comics may improve learners' language skills and contribute to a more effective teaching and learning process. These graphic novels offer a pedagogical approach beyond simply teaching the language. As Pazaer and Assaiqeli (2023) reported, comics are widely used for teaching and learning in every field and discipline in education. In language teaching and learning, comics put language into action, giving students meaningful contexts. Moreover, the value of comics as tools in language classrooms is emphasized by their easy readability and the engaging nature of their content. The relationship between comics and the improvement of learners' retention in foreign language learning is particularly noteworthy (Williams & Williams, 2015), underscoring the effectiveness of incorporating comics as a resource in language education.

In addition, this type of cartoons (comics) influence language learning through motivation. According to Kohnke (2018), motivation is crucial in self-development because it is closely linked to learning. One of the primary reasons children and adolescents are more inclined to choose comic books over traditional reading materials is their motivation to do so. As noted by Clark (2017), comics contribute to children's enjoyment of reading and their engagement in it for pleasure.

Comics for Vocabulary Acquisition

Vocabulary plays a fundamental role in language learning since it builds the basis for learning a foreign language (Sari et al., 2021). As a way to help students acquire vocabulary, teachers have been using comics in foreign language classrooms for quite some time. The sub-skill of vocabulary development contributes to improving main skills, such as reading. Also, Sari et al. (2021) pointed out that vocabulary acquisition is identified as a significant factor that influences students' ability to comprehend a given text. As asserted by Darsalina et al. (2016), "vocabulary holds a crucial position in the acquisition of a language, serving as the foundation for mastering language skills"(p. 52).

Comics for Reading Comprehension

According to Kamil et al. (2017), reading comprehension involves understanding of written language. As indicated by Manik (2019), comics may play a crucial role in enhancing students' comprehension during reading. This improvement is attributed to the visual elements present in comics. Moreover, Kamil et al. (2017) observed a significant positive impact of comics on learners' reading comprehension, emphasizing the role of pictures and storylines that captivate students' interest in reading.

According to Rengur and Sugirin (2019), there are five major elements to consider when using contextual visuals in combination with written text (p. 240):

- 1) Representation: visuals repeat the text's content or substantially overlap with the text.
- 2) Organization: visuals enhance the text's coherence.
- 3) Interpretation: visuals provide the reader with more concrete information.
- 4) Transformation: visuals target critical information in the text and recode it in a more memorable form.
- 5) Decoration: visuals are used for their aesthetic properties or to spark readers' interest in the text.

Activities Used to Teach a Foreign Language Through Comics

In the words of Richards and Rodgers (2014), (instructional) activities are classroom tasks that "focus on the acquisition of communication skills... They facilitate student-centered instruction. [They] require students to take active roles in the learning process..." (p. 158). Based on these ideas about instructional activities, in the present work, we use the term *activity* or *activities* to refer to those classroom tasks that contribute to the learning of reading skills and/or vocabulary in the EFL classroom.

According to Öz and Efecioglu (2015), comic books can enhance the teaching process in the realm of EFL learning. These graphic novels can assist both students and educators in developing effective language-learning activities. Salazar (2019) detailed a structured approach that included matching, identifying the main idea within a time constraint, answering detailed questions, and inferring word meanings from context.

Furthermore, Miranda et al. (2018) presented a multi-stage process for incorporating comics. In the initial stage, words are introduced through slides with visuals and context sentences. Subsequently, students engage with the comics through reading aloud and silent reading. The second stage involves individual worksheet activities, encompassing multiple-choice questions, matching, gap-filling, and sequencing. Then, students practice contextual word usage through interactive games like mimics and charades. The final stage requires students to create a comic strip, either retelling the story or inventing a new one using the acquired vocabulary.

Sanjaya (2017) introduced activities that encompassed implementing warm-up activities, such as discussing students' conditions, engaging in vocabulary drills related to a picture, participating in paired discussions about the picture's plot, and reflecting on vocabulary challenges during the closing phase. Additional tasks proposed by this author include placing emphasis on group discussions, fostering story creation, and incorporating peer presentations. All these activities aim to enhance student engagement and comprehension (Sanjaya, 2017).

Limitations of Comics in EFL Classrooms

As previously mentioned, comic strips can offer a meaningful learning process. However, there are three limitations to take into account before using comics. Firstly, Cimermanová (2015) expressed that comics contain a lot of colloquial expressions, slang, onomatopoeias, and real-world context, which might make it challenging to understand the meaning of some words and phrases. For this reason, students may need clarification.

Secondly, many comics show pictures with violence and inappropriate words for students. That is why teachers, in most cases, have to create their own comics or examine many comics beforehand to find one that contains pictures and text suitable for their audience (Kamil et al., 2017).

Thirdly, free web tools can help students create a story, but these websites have some restrictions, such as the size of the panel and the number of balloons allowed per page. If people want to access other benefits of the sites, they have to pay for them. As a result, sometimes students cannot complete the plot of a story (Lazarinis et al., 2015).

Chapter 3

Literature Review

In this chapter, we thoroughly examine various studies that explore the effects of employing comics in EFL classrooms to enhance reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. This section is structured into two segments: the impact of comics on EFL learners' reading comprehension and the impact of comics on EFL students' vocabulary acquisition.

Effects of Comics on EFL Learners' Reading Comprehension

In a research study, Aldahash and Altalhab (2020) found that comics have a positive impact on reading comprehension, emphasizing their significant influence on intermediate school students' reading skills. The study involved 66 participants divided into an experimental group, where comics were used, and a control group, where comics were not included. The results showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group, achieving superior reading test scores. In the same way, Mei-Ju et al. (2015) concluded that comics and comic books contributed to enhancing learners' reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. The participants were twenty-eight 8th graders in a public junior high school. The results demonstrated notable improvement in reading comprehension across all students. Moreover, the study by Mei-Ju et al. (2015) revealed that 86% of participants considered English comic books to be a beneficial tool for instruction. Additionally, 79% expressed an increased preference for reading English comic books, indicating a positive impact on learner motivation.

Motivation is a key factor when teaching and learning a second or foreign language (Hassanirokh & Yeganehpour, 2018). Exploring the relationship between comics and learners' motivation, it was found that "comic strips, with their humorous nature and pictorial narrative design, motivate students to read" (Hassanirokh & Yeganehpour, 2018, p. 283). Hassanirokh and Yeganehpour's (2018) research revealed a robust correlation between reading comic strips and heightened student reading motivation. The study involved two groups from a Turkish school, comprising 45 fifth-grade learners and 45 sixth-grade students. Through the application of pre- and post-tests, the research compared students' perceptions of learning with and without comics. The findings indicated that students exposed to comic strips as reading materials reported significantly higher levels of motivation compared to those working with texts lacking comic strips.

Similarly, Rengur and Sugirin (2019) analyzed the application of comics as a medium for enhancing learners' reading comprehension. This quasi-experimental study involved an experimental group, which was the only one where comics were implemented, and a control

group; both groups belonged to the eighth-grade. The results indicate that the use of comic strips was indeed more effective than conventional media. Aligning with these findings, Hassanirokh and Yeganehpour (2018) also underscored the correlation between comics and motivation. Building on Rengur and Sugirin's (2019) discoveries, Hassanirokh and Yeganehpour (2018) established that comic strips are the most effective medium due to their incorporation of visually engaging pictures and compelling storylines, which inherently capture students' interest in reading.

Effects of Comics on EFL Students' Vocabulary Acquisition

Many studies have been conducted to examine the effects of the use of comics on students' English vocabulary learning, taking into consideration learners' ages, nationalities, levels, and so on. Most of the researchers included in this work have agreed that comics engage and motivate students in reading; these authors have also mentioned that comics help students master their vocabulary. To quote Sari et al. (2021) "the use of comic books should be considered as an alternative technique to be used by English teachers since it is effective to improve students' vocabulary" (p. 69).

Ahmadi et al. (2017) focused on analyzing whether listening to comic strip stories and watching photos of the story helps students to acquire vocabulary. The results of this study showed that "incidental vocabulary acquisition in listening modes by using various methods can indeed occur, and comic strip story might be an effective tool to support vocabulary learning" (p. 62). Ahmadi et al. (2017) affirmed that the use of comic strips indeed has a positive effect on the vocabulary acquisition of EFL learners.

Salazar (2019) explored the effects of using comic books with 12 EFL university students. A pre-test and post-test were administered. There was an experimental and a control group. The first group read complete comic strips, while the other one read the story without images. Data were collected through a survey, an itinerary of activities, and an interview. The results showed that the participants of the experimental group performed better at reading comprehension and vocabulary recognition than the control group did. Furthermore, the bright colors and popular characters that comics contain attracted learners' attention and motivated them to continue reading and move on to more challenging reading, enhancing their vocabulary acquisition. Additionally, the images helped readers to examine the relationship between the script and visuals.

Miranda et al. (2018) analyzed students' performance before and after a comic-based didactic sequence followed by the PPP (presentation, practice, and production) approach to teaching

English vocabulary. The participants were 11th and 12th graders. To analyze the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process, the researcher compared the students' vocabulary test results of the pre-test and post-test. The findings showed that both research groups, 1 and 2, had a significant improvement in their command of vocabulary. The PPP approach had multiple high-quality words in use. The activities carried out during the practice stage motivated students to participate in them. The association of images made it easy to remember words and to predict what was going to happen in the story.

Sanjaya (2017) analyzed EFL students' vocabulary knowledge before and after using comics. A group of 20 students in the first grade was considered to participate. The classes were divided into two cycles, each cycle was observed and analyzed by the researcher. After analyzing the first cycle, the author concluded that the topic and the pictures were not interesting enough. Also, there were many new words, and the teachers needed to focus more on students who were weak in vocabulary. Afterward, the researcher made adjustments for the second cycle. To collect data, the researcher took a pre-test and post-test and made observations on students' motivation. The results showed that the learners who used comics improved their motivation in speaking activities, vocabulary, grammar, and their performance based on the context of the situation. According to the author, "the use of comics through peer work as teaching strategy could improve vocabulary ability significantly..." (Sanjaya, 2017, p. 188).

As can be seen, most of the articles show a positive impact of comics on learners' vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, and even motivation. Many studies have been carried out in different parts of the world to analyze the effects of the use of comic strips on EFL learners' language proficiency, showing that comics can be a good alternative for teachers who want to try something new with their students.

Chapter 4

Methodology

This study is a research synthesis, a systematic secondary review of accumulated primary research studies. This has tremendous potential value for helping those interested in language learning (LL) and language teaching (LT) “make sense” of research (Norris & Ortega, 2006, p. 4). The established criteria to manage the selection of different resources in this research synthesis were as follows. First, the methods used could have been qualitative, quantitative, or mixed studies with no approach restrictions. Second, all the studies had to be written in English since the focus of this research synthesis lies in the learning of English. Third, the studies were to be empirical in order to collect reliable outcomes from primary sources. Fourth, the studies had to focus on the use of comics in EFL classrooms to enhance reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition, mainly. Finally, all the studies used were to be published within the last 15 years and found in relevant databases such as Scholar Google, EBSCO, and Scielo. Furthermore, the terms that allowed us to select accurate resources regarding our topic were the following: comics, graphic novels, reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition.

The journals selected during the research process were *Yulök Revista de Innovación Académica*; *The International Academic Forum*; *Sintuwu Maroso Journal of English Teaching*; *Procedia, Social and Behavioral Sciences*; *The Journal of English Literacy Education: The Teaching and Learning of English as a Foreign Language*; *Research in English and Education Journal*; *The Journal of International Education Science*; *KnE Social Sciences*; *Research in English and Education Journal*; and *InterSedes*. These sources allowed us to gather enough information to achieve the goal established in this research synthesis. The information obtained from these resources was categorized into different themes regarding benefits, limitations, and activities that the use of comics produces on reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. Furthermore, additional categories that emerged from the analysis of the data itself were considered.

Chapter 5

Results and Discussion

This chapter includes the data analysis from the selected 20 research studies published in the last 15 years to answer the research questions, which were the following:

1. What are the reported effects of applying comics in the EFL classroom in order to improve reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition?
2. What are the activities teachers use when implementing comics in the EFL classroom?
3. What are the teachers' and students' perceptions of using comics in EFL classrooms?

The analysis of these articles was carried out by dividing it into the following categories: research approach, research instruments, research location, effects of comics on vocabulary development, effects of comics on reading comprehension, activities used to teach vocabulary and reading comprehension through comics, and teachers' and students' perceptions towards the use of comics in the classroom.

Research Approach

Table 1
Research Approach

Approach	Author/ Year	N	%
Quantitative	Saputri et al. (2021); Damanik & Harianja (2022); Golding & Verrier (2020); Pazaer & Assaiqeli (2023); Darsalina et al (2016); Kamil et al. (2017); Gorjian & Branch (2016); Girsang & Rini (2021); Puti et al. (2023); Apriani	11	55

	et al. (2014); Hassannirokh & Yeganehpour (2016)		
Qualitative	Miranda et al. 4 (2018); Cimermanová (2015); Poai (2020); Novanti & Suprayogi (2021)	25	
Mix Method	Castillo & Quiñonez 5 (2022); Salazar (2019); Satriani et al. (2022); Erina et al. (2017); Sanjaya (2017)	25	
Total	20	100	

Table 1 presents the 20 studies classified in terms of their approach: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods. As can be seen, 55% of them are quantitative studies; also, 20% of the articles are qualitative, while 25% are mixed methods. Most of the mix-methods and quantitative articles found that the use of comics builds up vocabulary and clarifies grammar structures that help learners comprehend texts. It does not matter if comics are used as warm-up, follow-up, or if they are the main focus of the lesson or unit (Gorjian & Branch, 2016; Salazar, 2019). Likewise, according to Erina et al. (2017), visualizing graphics while reading texts offers keys to the meaning of words in context. Besides, these graphics catch students' interest in learning vocabulary. Kamil et al. (2017) as well as Golding and Verrier (2020) mentioned that visualizing images increases students' reading comprehension and makes the classes more enjoyable and interesting for students. Thus, learners can feel motivated to continue learning the foreign language and acquire a reading habit (Apriani et al., 2014).

Research Instruments

Table 2
Research Instruments

Instruments	Author	N
Interview	Salazar (2019); Cimermanová (2015); Novanti & Suprayogi (2021)	3
Itinerary	Salazar (2019)	1
Pre-test and Post-test	Gorjian & Branch (2016); Manik. (2019); Apriani et al. (2014); Kamil et al. (2017); Darsalina et al. (2016); Miranda et al. (2018); Golding & Verrier (2020); Damanik & Harianja (2022); Girsang & Rini (2021); Sanjaya (2017); Puti et al. (2023); Satriani et al. (2022); Erina et al. (2017); Castillo & Quiñonez (2022); Assaiqeli (2023)	15
Questionnaire	Salazar (2019); Novanti & Suprayogi (2021); Castillo & Quiñonez (2022)	3
Observations	Poi (2020); Cimermanová (2015); Hassannirokh & Yeganehpour (2016); Novanti & Suprayogi (2021); Cimermanová (2015)	5

Table 2 presents the different research instruments used to gather information about the use of comics in EFL classrooms. The articles were classified based on five instruments: interview, itinerary, pre-test and post-test, questionnaire, and observation. However, it should be noted that certain studies utilized more than one instrument. As can be seen, Salazar (2019) employed three research instruments: questionnaires, interviews, and itineraries. Through the application of these instruments, the researchers found that comics can have a positive impact

on EFL students' overall knowledge. Similarly, Cimermanová (2015) employed two research instruments: interviews and observations. Through the use of these instruments, the researcher observed that students predominantly relied on visual and pictorial cues when performing the analysis of unknown words, which significantly facilitated their understanding of unfamiliar vocabulary. Finally, Novanti and Suprayogi (2021) used two different instruments: interviews and questionnaires.

The primary research instruments utilized by the researchers, as indicated in Table 2, were the pre-test and post-test, accounting for 75% of the articles analyzed, which amounts to 15 studies. This approach provides researchers with comprehensive insights into the diverse impacts of employing comics. By implementing these graphic novels, researchers have confidently confirmed their positive influence on reading comprehension and vocabulary enhancement. Gorjian and Branch (2016) further substantiate this notion by asserting the statistically significant impact of comic strip stories on language learners' acquisition of vocabulary. Regarding observations, they were implemented in 25% of the examined articles.

The works by Poai (2020), Hassannirokh and Yeganehpour (2016), Novanti and Suprayogi (2021), and Cimermanová (2015) enabled a deep examination of the role of comics in identifying grammatical structures and deducing contextual meaning, thereby contributing significantly to the students' English proficiency. Furthermore, interviews, employed by 15% of the researchers, including Salazar (2019), Cimermanová (2015), and Novanti and Suprayogi (2021), facilitated the monitoring of students' progress with comics.

Research location

Table 3
Research Location

Location	Author/ year	N	%
Central America	Salazar (2019)	1	5
South America	Miranda et al. (2018); Castillo & Quiñonez (2022)	2	10

Asia	Gorjian & Branch (2016); Poai (2020); Apriani et al. (2014); Kamil et al. (2017); Hassannirokh & Yeganehpour (2016); Darsalina et al. (2016); Damanik & Harianja (2022); Saputri et al. (2021); Sanjaya (2017); Pazaer & Assaiqeli (2023); Puti et al. (2023); Satriani et al. (2022); Erina et al. (2017); Girsang & Rini (2021); Novanti & Suprayogi (2021)	15	75
Europe	Cimermanová (2015); Golding & Verrier (2020)	2	10
Total		20	100

Table 3 presents a comprehensive geographical distribution of studies exploring the use of comics in different EFL educational settings. Eighty percent of the analyzed articles concentrate on Southeast Asia, with Indonesia emerging as a focal point for research in this area. Scholars such as Poai (2020), Apriani et al. (2014), and Manik (2019) have contributed significantly to this body of literature, conducting their projects within Indonesian schools and high schools. Furthermore, Darsalina et al. (2016), Puti et al. (2023), and Satriani et al. (2022) have enriched the body of knowledge in this field by investigating the efficacy of comics in Indonesian educational contexts. Additionally, Sanjaya (2017), Damanik and Harianja (2022), along with Girsang and Rini (2021), have offered valuable insights into the utilization of comics for educational purposes in Indonesia. Expanding beyond Asia, 10% of the studies have been conducted in various European countries. Cimermanová (2015) conducted a study in

Slovakia, emphasizing the use of comics in diverse educational settings. Golding and Verrier (2020) carried out research in England, involving a considerable number of participants from primary schools. Lastly, Hassannirokh and Yeganehpour (2016) explored the impact of comics in Turkey, particularly among fifth and sixth-grade students.

In America, studies by Salazar (2019), Miranda et al. (2018), and Castillo and Quiñonez (2022) demonstrate a growing interest in using comics for educational purposes in the region. Miranda et al. (2018) conducted their research in Chile, engaging with students from both public and semi-public schools, while Castillo and Quiñonez (2022) explored the educational potential of comics in Ecuador. Additionally, Salazar (2019) conducted a study in Costa Rica, contributing to the understanding of how comics can be integrated into the educational landscape of Central America. This diverse geographical distribution underscores the global appeal and relevance of doing research on comics as educational tools. However, this also suggests that research on the utilization of comics for educational purposes is relatively new in America and Europe in comparison to Asia.

Effects of Comics on Vocabulary Development

Table 4

Effect of Comics on Vocabulary Development

Effects		
Author/ Year	Inference of meaning	Lexical Processing and acquisition
Poi (2020)	X	x
Darsalina et al. (2016)	X	x
Miranda et al. (2018)	X	x
Puti et al. (2023)	X	x

Satriani et al. (2022)	X	x
Erina et al. (2017)	X	x
Sanjaya (2017)	X	x
Novanti & Suprayogi (2021)	X	x
Castillo & Quiñonez (2022)	X	x
Salazar (2019)	X	x
Gorjian & Branch (2016)	X	x
Pazaer & Assaiqeli (2023)	X	x

Table 4 presents a valuable view of the influence of comics on vocabulary development. Through our research, we have identified two primary effects: inference of meaning and lexical processing and acquisition. This suggests that comics can be a valuable tool for language learners seeking to enhance their lexical proficiency.

Inference of Meaning

All the studies present a favorable view regarding the integration of comics for enhancing English language skills, including vocabulary. The studies demonstrate substantial disparities in terms of vocabulary acquisition before and after the implementation of comics in EFL classrooms. According to Poai (2020), students encountering difficulties in comprehending

written text find assistance from the visuals presented in comic strips as they navigate through the material.

In the study conducted by Darsalina et al. (2016), students' progress was assessed using pre-tests and post-tests. After the post-test, it was revealed that out of 21 evaluated students, 19 achieved scores meeting the standard set by the school, indicating an improvement in their vocabulary following the utilization of comics. Similarly, in the study conducted by Miranda et al. (2018), it was concluded that comic-based intervention was successful in teaching new vocabulary, since comics facilitated the inference of meaning of new words through the visual representations present within them.

In the Ecuadorian context, Castillo and Quiñonez (2022) conducted their study with 262 public high school students aged 12 to 14 years. Through this research, it was found that the vocabulary performance of students who were in the experimental group improved significantly after the use of digital comics. The pre-test and post-test scores in the experimental group exhibited statistical differences, indicating that the utilization of digital comics enhances vocabulary acquisition. This is attributed to the nature of comics, which are characterized by visual elements, characters, and scenarios that aid students in understanding the meaning of words.

Lexical Processing and Acquisition

According to Poai (2020), comics have the potential to help memorize and acquire new vocabulary due to the pictures used in them. The visual elements found in comic books engage students' senses, aiding in the processing of information presented within the setting and storyline. Similarly, Puti et al. (2023) suggest that students comprehend comic story content better due to the illustrations and character portrayals. Comics typically consist of three components: a series of images conveying a narrative, text integrated into the images, usually in the form of speech balloons, and characters depicted within the pictures.

In the study conducted by Satriani et al. (2022), it was found that the use of authentic materials, such as comics, significantly improved students' vocabulary mastery, particularly regarding word forms. Comics were effective in the first semester of English instruction at a university, as they allowed students to relate the language to real-life situations. Moreover, Erina et al. (2017) asserted that comics facilitate vocabulary acquisition by enabling students to infer word meanings from context and visuals. Additionally, the authors concluded that comics provide opportunities for critical thinking, making it easier for students to connect new words with their prior knowledge.

Effects of Comics on Reading Comprehension

Table 5

Effects of Comics on Reading Comprehension

Author/ Year	Effects	
	Contextual Understanding	Inference and Critical Thinking
Cimermanová (2015)	x	x
Apriani et al. (2014)	x	x
Kamil et al. (2017)	x	x
Hassannirokh & Yeganehpour (2016)	x	x
Golding & Verrier (2020)	x	x
Damanik & Harianja (2022)	x	x
Girsang & Rini (2021)	x	x
Saputri et al. (2021)	x	x
Salazar (2019)	x	x

Gorjian & Branch x
(2016)

Pazaer & Assaiqeli x
(2023)

Table 5 shows the different effects of comics on students' reading comprehension development. Through our research, we have identified two main effects: contextual understanding and inference and critical meaning. This suggests that comics are valuable tools to enhance reading comprehension in general.

Contextual Understanding

As can be seen, comics have a positive impact on reading comprehension. According to Gorjian and Branch (2016), comic strips noticeably facilitated the reading comprehension of students at the intermediate level. One of these positive effects is contextual understanding. Through comics, students are able to understand different types of vocabulary used in context. As Cimermanová (2015) claimed, if learners are trained in exploiting images, visuals, and fonts, they are more sensitive to reading the textual context. All subjects who participated in Cimermanová's research stated that they feel more confident now even though they do not understand all the words; this enhanced their reading skills, leading to increased autonomy.

In Kamil et al. (2017)' study, it was found that students exposed to comics increased their reading comprehension skills. This occurs because teachers use them to establish effective communication with students. This material also serves teachers as a resource in delivering information to students. Similarly, Hassannirokh and Yeganehpour (2016) found a statistically significant difference between the performance of the experimental and control groups on reading comprehension tests, showing that students in the experimental group had significant improvement in reading comprehension skills, since, again, visuals helped students understand text from the context.

Inference and Critical Thinking

Furthermore, inferring and critical thinking in the process of reading are others-effects of the use of comics. According to Golding and Verrier (2020), comics facilitate the inference of text since they are characterized by the juxtaposition of text and images. However, even if images help students infer the meaning of words and the thread of the story, comics may be hard to

understand, in some cases, as they contain a lot of real-life language, such as idioms and slang. Similarly, Damanik and Harianja (2022) claimed that it is easier to understand comics' content because comics are always accompanied by visuals and use simple language. Moreover, because of the visuals, readers understand the contents more easily. Many reading comprehension studies have found that the use of visuals, any graphic display that accompanies the text, help readers better comprehend the information.

Regarding critical thinking, Cimermanová (2015) found that the ability to construct meaning from images is not a skill, but rather uses skills as a toolbox. It is a form of critical thinking that enhances one's intellectual capacity. Moreover, Salazar (2019) states that incorporating text and visuals causes readers to examine the relationship between the two and encourages deep and critical thinking.

Activities Used to Teach Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension through Comics

Table 6

Activities Used to Teach Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension through Comics

Activity	Author/ year	N
Reading	Sanjaya (2017); Salazar (2019); Gorjian & Branch (2016); Apriani et al. (2014); Hassannirokh & Yeganehpour (2016); Darsalina et al. (2016); Pazaer & Assaiqeli (2023); Puti et al. (2023); Golding & Verrier (2020); Damanik & Harianja (2022); Girsang & Rini (2021); Erina et al. (2017); Kamil et al. (2017); Cimermanová (2015)	14

Using web tools	Castillo & Quiñones (2022); Apriani et al. (2014); Widayanti & Muntaha (2018); Saputri et al. (2021); Novanti & Suprayogi (2021)	5
Vocabulary memorization	Miranda et al. (2018); Sanjaya (2017); Novanti & Suprayogi (2021); Poai (2020); Gorijan and Branch (2016); Salazar (2019)	6
Peer/group work	Poai (2020); Sanjaya, (2017); Satriani et al. (2022); Golding & Verrier (2020)	4
Creating a story	Miranda et al. (2018)	1

In table 6 we can observe the different activities applied to collect data about the effects of comics on EFL students' reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. There are 5 main activities used: 1. reading, 2. using web tools, 3. vocabulary memorization, 4. peer/group work, and 5. creating a story. The activities were applied individually or mixed with others. This depended on what teachers planned for their classes. First, in reading, students had to scan and skim the content, identify the main idea, identify the reference, and so on. Later, students had to do activities such as matching, answering closed or open questions, filling in the gaps, brainstorming, inferencing, and so on (Salazar, 2019).

As we live in a technological era, the use of comics through web tools also has some advantages. During the COVID-19 pandemic, some researchers took advantage of the situation and used free web tools to apply comics in class (Castillo & Quiñones, 2022; Novanti & Suprayogi, 2021; Saputri et al., 2021; Widayanti & Muntaha, 2018). The researchers used Webtoon, KWL (Know-Want-Learn) and Toondoo to help students read and create comics. In order to do that, the use of technology was critical since the creation of characters and the

plot took less time, and it was easier to express emotions, movements, and continuity in a comic story.

Another activity used was vocabulary memorization. Here, the students used repetition, meaning in context, synonyms and antonyms, realia, mimics, and charades. These helped students to memorize new vocabulary, but teachers had to apply other activities to clarify doubts on meaning. Finally, peer and group work activities together with creating a story showed that learners were motivated and encouraged to use the language. Many learners had to create or retell short stories in which students had to use the vocabulary learned. Some learners had to present that story in class in a role play or a description of the story. Thus, the students practiced their writing and speaking and used their imagination to develop their stories (Miranda et al., 2018; Poai, 2020; Puti et al., 2023; & Sanjaya, 2017)

Teachers' and students' Perceptions on the Use of Comics in the Classroom

Table 7

Teachers' and Students' Perceptions on the Use of Comics in the Classroom

Perceptions		N° of Studies	Authors
Teachers' Perceptions	Positive Perceptions	2	Pazaer & Assaiqeli (2023); Novanti & Suprayogi (2021)
	Negative Perceptions	0	
Students' Perceptions	Positive Perceptions	3	Saputri et al. (2021); Novanti & Suprayogi (2021); Castillo & Quiñones (2022)
	Negative Perceptions	0	

As can be seen in table 7, few researchers collected data about teachers' and students' perceptions regarding the use of comics to teach vocabulary and reading comprehension. In

all of these papers, the researchers found positive perspectives on the use of comics in the classroom. In the research by Pazaer and Assaiqeli (2023), the teachers agreed that comics can be used to teach all four main English skills, but the most positive effect of using comics was on the reading skill, as vital information is captured through images. Something important mentioned by the authors is that comics could be used with students with disabilities or special needs, such as autism, since this material keeps students' attention on the text and images.

About students' perceptions, most of them agreed that comics could be a good tool, since this is a material that they never or almost never use in order to improve their reading comprehension or learning of vocabulary in their L2 class. The reasons why they agree with the use of comics are the following. First, attractive appearance; they can watch characters' experiencing different events. The variety of features such as reading, creation, and differentiated evaluation materials breaks the monotony inside the classroom. Second, comics are interactive tools; teachers can ask students to role-play different themes. Third, comic strips offer a variety of materials and information that can be expressed through animation and pictures. Fourth, comics are original resources that help learners to acquire new vocabulary (Castillo & Quiñones, 2022; Saputri et al., 2021). In another research, students gave their opinion on the use of comic strips. Most of them felt comfortable reading for fun, while at the same time they learned new vocabulary and understood the context. Learners thought that the application is not complicated, the genres are not boring, and images helped them to understand the meaning (Novanti & Suprayogi, 2021).

Chapter 6

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The aim of this research synthesis was to analyze the effects of comics on vocabulary and reading comprehension development of EFL students. Moreover, we examined the activities applied when using comics. In addition, we analyzed the perceptions of teacher and students on comics, and how they can be applied in EFL classrooms.

The analyzed studies show that comics have a positive impact on vocabulary development due to several factors. First, comics facilitate the inference of new words through the use of visuals and text. According to Miranda et al. (2018), presenting words accompanied by images could help learners better understand the meaning of those words. Different authors have concluded that comics improve learners' vocabulary command. Next, it can be mentioned that comics are an effective tool which can be used to improve learners' reading comprehension. As Golding and Verrier (2020) claimed, the structure of many comics can aid in the comprehension of the texts.

The effects of comics not only involve linguistic aspects, but also have a significant impact on non-linguistic areas, such as motivation. Most of the studies included in this work demonstrated that comics make the learning process more enjoyable. Motivation is indeed one of the significant effects reported when students employ comics for learning vocabulary. All authors of the studies analyzed in this work agree that comics create a learning environment that fosters student motivation. According to Erina et al. (2017), employing English comics as a teaching medium creates a positive atmosphere in the teaching-learning process. Similarly, the motivation created by using comics may help students develop the habit of reading. Comics are simple and easy to understand, which is why they motivate students to learn or even to develop reading habits. For example, according to Girsang and Rini (2021), reading to confirm expectations is a highly motivational and successful technique since it interests students, creates expectations, and gives them a purpose for reading.

Furthermore, based on the results, we claim that many activities may be used in order to apply comics in the classroom. Among these activities, we have listening comprehension, guessing the end of the story, guessing the meaning of keywords, creating new comics, and guessing the stories behind the images. They can be carried out individually, in pairs, or in small groups. These activities increase motivation because most students see them as playing games rather than attending a class. They seem to be more fun than traditional lessons and could be seen

as a strategy to engage students in reading exercises which might be quite successful in improving their comprehension and vocabulary acquisition.

Moreover, we can conclude that both teachers and students agree that using comics in the EFL classroom is a good alternative for teaching and learning EFL that may have a positive impact on students' motivation. Specifically, teachers believe that all four language skills and sub-skills can be improved by using comics. Additionally, students perceive that comics provide engaging content for learning a second language in a fun and enjoyable manner.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research synthesis, the following recommendations can be mentioned. Teachers who would like to incorporate a different and entertaining teaching material, particularly to improve their students' reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition, should try using comics. It is important to emphasize that the implementation of comics should be accompanied by different activities, particularly, peer work, since students can support each other's ideas while doing the activities. Furthermore, peer work allows students to use the language and become active learners. In this research synthesis, we have focused on the effects of comics on the development of reading comprehension and vocabulary. It would be interesting to publish the results of another research synthesis or an empirical study that has examined the effects of this material on speaking, for example.

We also think it is important to develop more research in South America, particularly in Ecuador, on the application of comics in the EFL classroom, as comics have a significant impact on students' motivation to learn and to create reading habits. Additionally, they are resources that help instructors create more productive lessons.

Finally, it would be interesting to carry out more research on the effects of using comics focusing on a large range of populations, such as students with autism or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). It has been shown that this tool catches students' attention, and it could help teachers to create meaningful lessons for students with disabilities, too.

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