Graphic organizers as a reading strategy: Research findings and issues

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ABSTRACT:

Reading plays an important role in second language learners' academic achievement for many reasons. That's why understanding some important facts about reading instruction for teachers is essential to providing effective instruction in reading.

The aim of this paper was to make an analysis of different studies on the research findings and issues about using graphic organizers as a mainly used as a reading strategy. It highlights key concepts from reading research, reading second language, methods and approaches for teaching EFL, reading strategies, reading skills and the theoretical foundations of graphic organizers. Teachers play an essential role in helping students to increase their ability in reading comprehension. Students can use visual organizers as a support when interacting with peers in cooperative learning environments to learn more effectively as they have more significant understanding of what is being read. Additionally, students recall more central ideas when they learn from a graphic organizer than when they learn from a text. (Angela M. O'Donnell, Donald F. Dansereau,Richard H. Hall, 2002)The methodology used was based on a descriptive study through the analysis of several primary sources such as research papers on the topic that have been published in scientific journals, books among others. We can conclude by saying that there were great benefits from using graphic organizers as an instructional tool. Teachers should start implementing t this reading strategy in their classrooms and train students in using it as effective readers to develop their reading comprehension abilities and to promote their autonomous learning and attain higher levels of performance. Graphic organizers are valuable tools in teaching students how to become better readers and thus better learners. However, there have not been enough studies related to the topic. This study will stimulate further research and thinking about the use of graphic organizers as a reading strategy.

Key words: Graphic organizers, reading comprehension, reading strategies, better readers.

Organizadores gráficos como una estrategia de lectura: Resultados y temas de investigación

RESUMEN

La lectura juega un papel importante en el rendimiento académico de los estudiantes de un segundo idioma por muchas razones. Es por eso que entender algunos hechos importantes sobre la instrucción de lectura para los maestros es esencial para proporcionar una instrucción efectiva en lectura. El objetivo de este trabajo fue hacer un análisis de diferentes estudios sobre los hallazgos de la investigación y las cuestiones sobre el uso de los organizadores gráficos como una estrategia utilizada principalmente como lectura. Se destacan los conceptos claves de las investigaciones realizadas sobre la lectura, la lectura como segunda lengua, métodos y enfoques para la enseñanza de estudiantes de Inglés como segunda lengua, estrategias de lectura, habilidades de lectura y los fundamentos teóricos de los organizadores gráficos. Los estudiantes pueden usar los organizadores gráficos como un soporte cuando interactúan con sus compañeros en entornos de aprendizaje cooperativos para aprender más efectivamente ya que tienen un entendimiento más significativo de lo que leen. Además, los estudiantes recuerdan las ideas más centrales cuando aprenden de un organizador gráfico que cuando aprenden de un texto. (Angela M. O'Donnell, Donald F. Dansereau,Richard H. Hall, 2002).La metodología usada se ha basado en un estudio descriptivo de análisis de algunas fuentes de información primarias como: investigaciones acerca del tópico que han sido publicadas en revistas científicas, libros, entre otros. Podemos concluir diciendo que existen grandes beneficios de utilizar organizadores gráficos como herramienta de instrucción. Los maestros deberían implementar esta estrategia de lectura en sus aulas y capacitar a los estudiantes en su uso para ayudarlos a convertirse en apéndices independientes y desarrollar sus habilidades de pensamiento crítico. Los organizadores gráficos son herramientas valiosas en la enseñanza de los estudiantes a ser mejores lectores y, por lo tanto, mejores aprendices. Sin embargo, no ha habido suficientes estudios relacionados con el tema. Este estudio estimulará investigaciones futuras y reflexión sobre el uso de organizadores gráficos como una estrategia de lectura

Palabras claves: Organizadores gráficos, comprensión de lectura, estrategias de lectura, mejores lectores.

1. INTRODUCCIÓN

Current teaching practice is the result of combining some techniques and teaching materials which have had a significant impact in the teaching learning process over the years.

The current communicative teaching trends suggest a variety of effective teaching strategies in developing active, purposeful and independent learners. These strategies also provide innovative ideas for student-centered instruction classrooms and with students who have a variety of learning needs. Furthermore, certain strategies may require additional training, while others can be immediately implemented in the classroom according to the teaching context and teachers' professional experience.

According to (Brown, 2000) integrated approaches to language teaching highlight the interrelationship of skills. In this context, reading ability must be taught in association with writing, listening and speaking to promote an effective communication.

Suleiman (2012) defines reading as an "interactive" process between the reader and the text in which the reader interacts dynamically to elicit some meaning.

Reading plays an important part in second language learners' academic achievement for many reasons: First reading has a positive effect on student's vocabulary acquisition, spelling and writing. Several studies have investigated numerous factors determining reading ESL reader's comprehension and to determine how reading strategies contribute to effective reading. These studies have also shown how teachers can incorporate different meaningful strategies into reading instruction effectively to enhance reading comprehension.

Additionally, Praveen Sam D & Premalatha Rajan (2013) state that images impact EFL learners who are developing reading comprehension. EFL students can use graphics as information organizers while comprehending a passage for main ideas, supporting details, facts, opinions, comparisons and difficulties , dealing with vocabulary, facts, opinions and making inferences.

Consequently, the use of graphic organizers enhance reading comprehension tasks for EFL students and have a great pedagogical implication, as they are effective strategies to promote students' reading comprehension, improve their creativity and critical thinking skills as well.

That's why understanding some important facts about reading instruction for teachers is essential to providing effective instruction in reading.

The aim of this study is to summarize what research findings reveal about the effectiveness of using graphic   organizers as a reading strategy to facilitate reading comprehension. It also reveals issues about the benefits of integrating graphic organizers as a strategy instruction in language learning promoting autonomous learning and developing critical thinking skills. Before focusing on research findings, a brief reference is made to the concepts of research on reading second language, methods and approaches for teaching EFL, reading strategies and reading skills.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, the principal concepts of reading on second language, methods, and approaches for teaching English   are presented since it is the base to lay the foundation of language learning. Additionally, researches and issues about the benefits of integrating graphic organizers as a strategy instruction in language learning are analyzed.

2.1 RESEARCH ON READING SECOND LANGUAGE

(J. C. Alderson; A. H. Urquhart, 1986) state that reading is a critical aspect of literacy and provokes an interaction between the reader and the text.

Reading is a complex and   interactive process of extracting meaning from a context. In this regard, (Kiebra, 1995) states that students find difficulties when reading a complete text or chapter due to the numerous concepts and the relation between these concepts.

That's why understanding some important facts about reading instruction for teachers is essential to providing effective instruction in reading.

(S.Jay Samuel, Alan E. Farstrup, 2011)   point out that effective teachers of reading comprehension help their students develop into strategies to become active readers by teaching them how, when, and why to apply certain strategies to be used as effective teachers. They also consider that learning to read effectively is journey where the teachers are the tour guides towards to increasing the students' ability of understanding the wonderful reading landscape.

 For EFL students reading is the base that helps them to master the language and continue with their studies.

According to (Ching and Lin 2015) reading has been an important component   for EFL learners during the last forty years due to reading comprehension is useful for language acquisition. In contrast, (Brown, 2000) points out that three decades of research on

reading as a second language reveals some significant findings that affect the teachers approach to teach reading skills. Some of the highlights are reviewed here.

For ESL and EFL students reading is the base that helps them to master the language and continue with their studies. However, they are a particular population who needs special attention in reading development focus on how to read informational texts and how to obtain content-area knowledge as they become critical for their success. Reading to learn from texts involves abilities to remember main ideas and certain details, to link the text to the reader's prior knowledge, and to recognize and build rhetorical frames which organize the text information. (Xiangying Jiang and William Grabe, 2007)

(Harestad, 2010) also states that EFL reading benefit greatly English as a Foreign Language as it's considered as a gateway of learning and enjoyment.

According to (Hug and Thu) 2015 it's a proven fact that if students improve their reading comprehension they will also improve their speaking and writing abilities. In addition, people who read a lot will be able to write better, have more developed vocabulary and speak more fluently than the people who don't read much.

2.3 Methods and Approaches for teaching EFL

According to (Harmer, 2010) there have been lots of teaching methods and approaches through the history of teaching languages like Grammar-translation, Audio-lingualism, PPP,CLT, TBL,TPR. They have been tried and debated in order to see which methods or approaches help students to learn more effectively.

Moreover, (Freeman, 2010) states that different language teaching methods are a set of links between actions and thoughts that guide teachers' practice. The methods also reflect a diversity of views on teaching and learning process. Teachers choose the techniques and principles based on their students' learning needs, outcomes and context. She also points out that teaching methods have some characteristics in common, however they also have some fundamental differences among them and what makes a method successful is the teachers investment in it.

2.4 Approaches to EFL Reading

According to Cheol (2013) study about the Developmental approaches to the teaching of EFL reading there are some pedagogical implications and reading issues for learners' reading proficiency that teachers must consider in their instruction to help learners to become more effective readers.

2.4. Humanistic Approaches: The humanistic principle is learner-centered and voluntary approach. In this approach learners are willing to being exposed and read interesting and meaningful materials. They have intrinsic motivation and positive attitudes towards reading in this context, reading acquisition occurs naturally.

2.4.1 Meaning-based approaches : In this approach, reading is meaning-focused, not form centered. Learners read for pleasure not for obligation so they can choose what to read, at their own level and pace. Through reading they get more knowledge of the world and develop their critical thinking skills as well.

2.4.2Task-based approaches : Learners are able to understand texts in meaningful situations in which they are asked to produce and comprehend instructions effectively.

2.4.3Integrative approaches : Reading should be meaningful for learners in natural and meaningful settings. Teaching reading requires learners' exposure to interesting reading materials and the teacher should create a pleasant environment where learners can interact about their opinions and ideas about what they have read. In addition, learners have to be able to integrate reading with the other skills like writing and speaking in a more effective way.

2.5 Learning strategies

(Zare 2012) defines language learning strategies as the specific actions taken by the learner to make his learning process easier, faster, and more enjoyable and more effective.

He also concludes in his study that language learning strategies play a crucial role in the process of language learning as these strategies facilitate and improve language learning and assist language learner in different ways to help them to become good learners.

In this regard, language teachers need to train the students to apply the appropriate strategy for a specific purpose or a specific skill area, and encourage them to use the strategies as frequently as possible. Students can learn to use language learning strategies to improve their language skills.

2.6 Reading strategies

Researchers have come up with different definitions that look at the concept from different views.

(Ching 2015) defines reading strategies as conscious or unconscious actions, techniques, or behaviors that readers apply when they have problems with their comprehension and interpretation of a text.

ESL/EFL reading strategies have also been divided into several different types.

Ching (2015) based on Goodman (1970) divided SL/FL reading strategies into two types of processing: bottom-up and top-down.

Bottom-up strategies include recognizing a multiplicity of linguistic signals, such as letters, morphemes, syllables, words, phrases, grammatical cues, and discourse markers, and applying linguistic data-processing mechanisms to impose order on these signals.

On the other hand, top-down strategies involve drawing on one's own intelligence and experience to understand a text through a puzzle-solving process, or inferring meaning to decide what to retain and what not to retain. Ching (2015) points out that Duke and Pearson (2002) proposed six SL/FL reading strategies: prediction or prior knowledge, using think-aloud strategies to monitor comprehension, using text structures, using visual models including graphic organizers and imagery, summarizing, and questioning and answering questions while reading.

All these strategies are valuable tools in teaching students how to become better readers and thus better learners.

2.7 Reading skills

Harestad (2010) defines reading "skills as valuable tools in teaching students how to become better readers to enhance their understanding. There are a number of different skills that help learners to become good readers. These are some:

- Activating prior knowledge
- Answering questions and Elaborative Interrogations
- Constructing mental images
- Forming questions
- Scanning
- Skimming
- Summarization
- Text-structure awareness and story grammars
- Using graphic organizers

Teachers should be able to teach students how to develop and use these reading skills so learners can become better readers in a second language and enjoy reading as well.

In addition, they can develop other skills that help them to develop their critical thinking skills.

2.8 Reading comprehension texts

It is the fact understands the text being read. On the one hand the concept can be a simple part but on the other hand, the fact itself is difficult for this reason should be developed before, during and after strategies of that person reads a particular text.

It has two elements of this process: the notion of vocabulary and understanding of the text. The reader should be able to know the vocabulary is presented in the text, but can also draw on new words to enrich their vocabulary. The understanding of the text is a bit more complicated than the previous item because at this point you need to use text comprehension strategies to develop it.

2.9 RESEARCH ON GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS

Graphic organizers were primarily initiated by Richard Barron in 1969, but they have their root in Ausubels' work. .According to Ausubel's cognitive theory of meaningful verbal learning (Ausubel, 1960) the use of graphic organizers enhances students learning and retention of unfamiliar but meaningful materials. He also assumes that the new information is acquired when it is linked to the learners' already existing cognitive structure. According to (Tomlinson, 1999) teachers can modify three aspects of teaching:

Content, Process, and Product. By using graphic organizers, teachers modify the product in a differentiated instruction approach which makes learners succeed in their learning progress.

Among the numerous reading strategies, graphic organizers provide readers with new approaches to reading that are different from traditional, linear text presentation. Students can use visual organizers as a support when interacting with peers in cooperative learning environments to learn more effectively as they have more significant understanding of what is being read. Additionally, students recall more central ideas when they learn from a graphic organizer than when they learn from a text. (Angela M. O'Donnell, Donald F. Dansereau,Richard H. Hall, 2002)

Echeveii and McNulty (2013) state that graphic organizers help learners to develop higher thinking skills for reading comprehension texts. In their findings they showed that many learners enjoyed using this strategy as they find very helpful to learn more and understand better when they are reading.

Additionally, Praveen & Premalatha (2013) state that using graphic organizers in reading comprehension has some benefits as they help learners to:

- Organize information in a paragraph for better understanding
- Construct meaning of difficult words and sentence dividing into lexis

- Understand the context by associating with prior knowledge

(Kuo-En Chang,Yao-Ting Sung,Ine-Dai -Chen, 2002) findings showed that graphic organizers can be helpful by most learners as an effective strategy to enhance reading comprehension. Furthermore, graphic organizers give students alternatives to respond to the comprehension questions after reading a text that may avoid the time-consuming process of thinking in their first language and then translate it into English. In contrast to students' usual approach to reading or comprehending a passage by using graphic organizers students classify the content of the passage and then try to decode it in a more effective way.

Although various researchers affirm the effectiveness of graphic organizers when applied to reading comprehension they require training of students and demands effort and time consuming (Kuo-En Chang,Yao-Ting Sung,Ine-Dai -Chen, 2002)

(Kintsch, W., & Rawson, K. A, 2005) state that graphic organizers help readers to develop their reading comprehension abilities and to promote their autonomous learning and readers also attain higher levels of performance.

(Xiangying Jiang and William Grabe, 2007) in their research findings highly recommend the use of graphic organizers as an instructional tool for students reading improvement. However, they also suggest that using graphic organizers on reading comprehension require consistent exposure, practice and extended instructional training from the teacher which allow learners to recognize discourse structure in new reading texts and apply this knowledge to reading comprehension.

(Tracey Hall, Nicolle Strangman, 2008) also state that graphic organizers make the curriculum more supportive for students and teachers for their effectiveness in improving learning outcomes.

(Bernhardt, 2010) points out that learning through visuals helps students to better organize and recall information and overall reading comprehension from passages and stories more effectively than other reading strategies like skimming, scanning and answering questions. Students also demonstrate growth in their ability to use graphic organizers independently to respond reading comprehension questions.

(Polyxeni Manoli, Maria Papadopoulou, 2012) findings provided further evidence that graphic organizers are an effective strategy for checking students' comprehension of a text. Moreover, (Condidorio, 2010) states that graphic organizers support readers to process and retain information more effectively. Additionally, students pointed out in her study that graphic organizers was effective in recalling information on tests as on tests

they have to retain longer information. Furthermore, graphic organizers assist readers to arrange information systematically and maximize some of the challenges when they go deeper into the text.

(Mohammad PİRİ ARDAKANİ1, Anita LASHKARİAN, 2015) their findings clearly demonstrates that using graphic organizers is an effective strategy on reading comprehension process and enhance reading speed. Moreover, teachers should not do too much intervention in the process as students can lose their confidence and may not enjoy the process when using graphic organizers to understanding a text. They also suggest that teachers should group students before applying the graphic organizers technique in order that students can organize and discuss their ideas from their reading comprehension from the text and organize well their ideas in the graphic organizers. Lastly, students can present to the class their graphic organizers then teachers can give a reward to the most interesting one.

3. RESULTS:

An extensive search of the professional literature between 1969 and 2015 provided a picture of the effectiveness and benefits for EFL learners of using graphic as a reading comprehension to understand a text However, further research is required.

4. CONCLUSIONS:

This paper has covered research findings and issues about using graphic organizers as a effective reading strategy. Graphic organizers can be used as tools to facilitate student understanding. In using them teachers can help students to develop effective strategies in approaching difficult texts. The process of implementing the use of graphic organizers to recall information and improve reading comprehension on a text has begun to take shape in EFL classrooms with great success. Additionally, graphic organizers as reading strategies have been applied and the results are very valuable and beneficial for students. Finally, we can conclude by saying that there were great benefits from using graphic organizers as an instructional tool. Teachers should start implementing this reading strategy in their classrooms and train students in using it as effective readers to develop their reading comprehension abilities and to promote their autonomous learning and attain higher levels of performance. Graphic organizers are valuable tools in teaching students how to become better readers and thus better learners. However, there have not been enough studies related to the topic. This study will stimulate further research and thinking about the use of graphic organizers as a reading strategy.

Consequently, allowing the benefits of graphic organizers teachers should implement this strategy in EFL classrooms and train students in using them to become more effective learners, become better readers and autonomous learners

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