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The Use of Comics in EFL

A Literature review of the effects of reading comics on reading comprehension and motivation

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Abstract

Reading literature is and has always been considered one of the most important aspects of language learning. Comics, however, have long been frowned upon and not considered real literature. However, the interaction of image and text is more prevalent today than it was in the past due to the way social media has changed the way many communicate. This literature review aims to explore the existing research to find the potential effects that reading comics has on reading comprehension and motivation on EFL learners. The conclusions that can be drawn from the results of the studies suggest that reading comics can be an effective tool to increase reading comprehension. The results also suggest that motivation and engagement in students was higher when reading comics. Teachers' attitudes towards were, on average, positive but some were hesitant towards letting their students use comics.

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1 Introduction

Reading has been a staple part of the language classroom for many years. One of the most important goals of education is teaching students the ability to read texts of many different varieties. Traditionally, texts have been a key element in school work throughout the world. However, with society becoming more dependent on digital media, traditional texts might not be the preferred medium for every occasion that required reading. The term literacy has been broadened as different sorts of literacies have taken up space in the classroom such as computers and smartphones when it comes to digital tools. Furthermore, the use of multimodal texts such as comics and graphic novels more closely resembles the visual way many communicate through social media. This review will investigate the available literature on the use of graphic novels and comics in EFL and discuss whether the use of them has any effects on students' reading comprehension and motivation for reading in the English classroom. Due to the lack of research there is currently many unknown factors such as the attitudes towards comics from both students and teachers. The research that has been done has only studied a limited number of comics and graphic novels. This review will gather what is currently available and see where there is more research needed.

This literature review will first begin by giving a background on what constitutes a comic and then give some explanation on the view of the National Swedish Agency of Education regarding reading. In addition, the word literacy will be defined and how it appears in its current form. The research review will give a summary of existing research which will focus on the effects that comics has on reading comprehension in EFL and also the attitudes shown by both students and teacher. Last, results will be discussed to bring forth major issues, pedagogical implications and potential gaps for future research.

2 Background

2.1 What are comics?

There is little agreement about the definition of the term comics. While the definitions are similar they differ in small but important ways. McCloud (1994) defines comics as ““juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence intended to convey information and/or to produce aesthetic response in the viewer” (p.9). Harvey, however, disagrees with this definition and makes the claim that:

McCloud's definition relies too heavily upon the pictorial character of comics and not enough upon the verbal ingredient. Comics uniquely blend the two. No other form of static visual narrative does this. McCloud includes verbal content (which he allows is a kind of imagery), but it's the succession of images that is at the operative core of his definition. I hasten to note, however, that regardless of emphasis, neither sequence nor blending inherently excludes the other. (as cited in Cimermanová, 2014, p. 2454).

In spite of the different definitions used by different authors, the importance of both the visual component, the textual component and the way they uniquely interact are integral to what differentiates a comic from other mediums. When explaining the advantages of comic books, Williams (1995) presents important characteristics of the medium, three of which are relevant to this literature review. First, comics have a visual component that differs from movies due to the visuals being static instead of in constant motion. Second, the interaction between characters in comics lies in the here and now, meaning that it shares many aspects of authentic interactional dialogue. Third, the language found in comics lies halfway between real spoken language and that which is found in written text.

In addition to what is stated by Williams (1995), Liu (2004) lists five ways that visuals help the reader in understanding a text. First, representation, meaning that the visuals in a text repeat or significantly overlap with the text. Second, organization, meaning that the visuals enhance the coherence of the text. Third, interpretation, meaning that the reader is provided with more concrete information through the visuals. Fourth, transformation, meaning that the visuals focus on specific critical information and recodes it so that it is more memorable. Fifth, decoration, meaning that the visuals are simply used for aesthetic purposes so that they can spark an interest in the reader.

Levin, Anglin and Carney states that all of these categories except for the decorative facilitates memory (see Liu, 2004). The categories from Liu (2004) and key characteristics presented by (Williams, 1995) suggest that the visuals in comic books play a key role in creating a unique medium where visuals and text merge to create coherence and meaning.

2.2 The Swedish context

The Swedish National Agency for Education provides us with information about the state of the reading capabilities of Swedish students, through the PISA results from 2009, which tells us that over the last decade the overall level of reading comprehension has gone down. The reason for the overall levels of reading comprehension lowering cannot be simply explained away, due to many factors playing an important part. One of the factors stated is that the reading habits and the way we consume media and literature outside of school has changed (Skolverket, n.d. -b). The fact that we consume media in a different manner today points to our society no longer solely relying on text-based media. A divide existed where media was one format or the other. A person would either read or watch, but comics made us do both at the same time. It is also stated that comics have been looked down upon by both teachers and parents for many years, but that in today's society, where image and text constantly blend, comics should receive more attention as a tool to implement in teaching. It even goes as far as to say that the use of images and text together is a recipe for success (Skolverket, n.d. -a)

The syllabus for the subject English in Sweden states in the section called "Core content" that the content dealing with reception should include "Texts of different kinds and for different purposes, such as manuals, popular science texts and reports" (p.7). Comics are not directly mentioned in this phrase; however, it refers to giving your students a variety of texts. The syllabus also states that the core content should include "Strategies for listening and reading in different ways and for different purposes" (Skolverket, 2011, p. 7). Comics and graphic novels are a different medium than regular novels due to the visuals and the way it interacts with the text. The term literacy, which basically has been described as the ability to read and write a text, has recently been discussed concerning whether it is broad enough to represent all skills that is now associated with the broader meaning of text. Hammond states that a "text" is something with a wider definition and no longer referring to only text but also including every type of image, symbol, sound and gesture. To be able to be literate in today's society not only requires us to know how to read a traditional text but also understand images, sounds and symbols in different forms since that is how we currently consume our media. A comic book is an example of how images and texts blend or interact in order to create a multimodal text. Reading a comic cannot be truly done with the traditional definition of literacy as it does not include the ability to interpret images. A multimodal literacy or multiliteracy is required to interpret graphic novels or any other medium that includes more than just traditional text (Hammond, 2012).

2.3 The accordances and demands of comics

Stephen Krashen (2003) has been a prominent figure in research of second language, having introduced many different hypotheses such as the input-hypothesis, the affective filter and more. Furthermore, Krashen is an advocate of free voluntary reading and he argues that “free voluntary reading may be the most powerful tool we have in language education. In fact, it appears to be too good to be true “(Krashen, 2003, p. 15). Krashen then states that the vast majority, according to him 95 %, of regular conversation and television shows, consists of the most frequent 5,000 words. The fact that the low frequency words, that we need to learn, do not appear much in regular conversation, suggests that reading is a key component to furthering a learner's vocabulary beyond the most frequent words. Krashen develops this idea by arguing that “reading is the only way we become good readers, develop a good writing style, an adequate vocabulary, advanced grammar competence, and the only way we become good spellers” (Krashen, 2004, p. 37). This, in relation to Krashen’s statement that “light reading” such as comics, lies in between spoken language and academic language and this suggests that comics can work well for acquiring certain vocabulary. In contrast, there is also research arguing against Krashen’s view. As stated by Laufer (2005), comprehensible input is not sufficient for the acquisition of mid- and low frequency words and that form focused instruction is required in to reach the necessary vocabulary size and depth of knowledge.

Krashen (2013) proposes the pleasure hypothesis: pedagogical activities that promote language acquisition are enjoyable for the learner and those which do not promote acquisition are not enjoyable. Krashen specifies by saying that this does not mean that an enjoyable experience automatically promotes language acquisition. That brings into question whether comics are more enjoyable to read than regular texts and if they promote language acquisition more than other reading activities?

Society has, in the last few decades, changed rapidly and one of the key features to have transformed is the way we communicate. The days of hand-written letters are behind us and even electronic mail is something that younger generations use less and less, instead opting to use one of the new social media apps. Some of them function in the way that they combine images and/or videos in conjunction with small text messages. This is a new way for people to communicate where image and text work together to create meaning, instead of being kept apart. A text is described as print, image, sound or movement that combine in different ways. A text is no longer seen as print only and to be able to make use of these texts one needs to

use other forms of literacies. It is proposed that more attention should be given to multimodal literacies due to it referring to all available forms of creating meaning in communication (Hammond, 2009). The availability of multimodal texts is now much higher due to today's technology. Bomer states that readers are turning more to multimodal texts "where print and image do the work of meaning together, where sound and music contribute to the perspectives readers are asked to take, where bodily performance works in tandem with the written word, where print itself is animated and choreographed" (as cited in Hammond, 2009, p. 1). This suggests that our literacy is becoming more multimodal in the sense that what we consume has entirely different aspects to it that require different skills to understand.

3 Effects of reading comics

There is a large amount of research dealing with the effects of extensive reading in foreign language learning, however, the effects of comics on English foreign language learners has not been thoroughly researched. This section will give an overview on existing research. First it will present quantitative studies. Second, the qualitative studies will be presented. If a study contains both a quantitative and a qualitative section then it will be covered under the quantitative subheading due to the quantitative section being the dominant one in those studies.

3.1 Quantitative studies

An empirical study by Cook (2015) seeks to find evidence of the possible effects of using graphic novels in the English language classroom. The study, which consisted of a reading comprehension test and interviews, was conducted with high school students and teachers in the United States. Cook (2015) utilized a 3x4x2 factorial design where there were three different groups, one control group and two experimental groups that were then further separated into the participants' respective grade levels. The grade levels of the participants ranged from the ninth grade to the twelfth grade. The groups were also separated by gender (male and female). There were twelve groups with approximately 15-20 students in every group and there was a total of 217 students (113 females and 104 males) voluntarily participating in this study. All groups also had an almost equal number of males and females in them. A sample of the participants from the experimental groups were selected to be interviewed (16 from each experimental group). Five teachers also participated in the study to

instruct the participants and they were also interviewed by the researcher. The different groups received identical instructions from the participating teacher only differing in the reading material provided. The participants in the control group received the original text of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado". The experimental groups were given a graphic novel adaptation of the same text which was, after thorough investigation of ten different adaptations, deemed to be the highest quality adaptations to which no radical changes were made. The second experimental group was given both the graphic novel and the original text so that there could be further comparisons made between the experimental groups. After reading their text the participants immediately took a reading comprehension test created by the researcher.

The results of Cook's (2015) study suggest that using the graphic novel was the more efficient method of instruction as both experimental groups significantly outperformed the control group. The second experimental group had a slightly higher result on average than the first experimental group but Cook suggests that this difference was not very significant and the most important factor was the graphic novel itself. There were noticeable differences in proficiency when it comes to grade levels. The 10th, 11th and 12th grade all outperformed the 9th grade. The 12th grade also scored significantly higher than the 10th grade. Cook speculates that this result can be due to the higher-grade levels having more experience with reading strategies or more knowledge of metacognitive strategies. There were also differences in gender as the girls, on average, outperformed the boys. Cook believes this to be the most interesting finding due to the regular stereotype that graphic novels or comic books are meant to be read by boys. This concludes the quantitative portion of the results. The interviews with the student participants suggest that the majority believed the graphic novel to be a better reading experience. They felt that it was easier to understand the content due to the pictures helping them. Some participants were more negative towards the comics stating that it was difficult to understand the story due to them having difficulties understanding the images. The participants who were negative towards comics was, however, a small percentage of the larger group. When the second experimental group was questioned about the differences in the two texts almost all students commented favorably. Many participants stated that the graphic novel helped them understand the confusing parts of the original and that it was more engaging and interesting. One participant stated that "The graphic was easy to understand while the traditional was more informative." (Cook, 2015, P. 91). There was another who wished for the graphic novel to be more informative and descriptive in the writing. When asked about their preferences, the students were uncertain. Some preferred the graphic novel

and others the original text. One stated, when questioned about the graphic novel, that “I would actually want to read it” (Cook, 2015, p. 93) implying that the original text would not make the participants willingly read it.

The teachers’ response to the study during the interviews suggests that the use of comics or graphic novels is very rare. Four out of the five participating teachers had never used a comic during their teaching. One of those four admitted having only used an image once or twice in their career. Their overall response was positive and they all agreed that their students showed more engagement and seemed to comprehend the content better. One teacher said that “Those students of mine that read the graphic novel believed it was easy; whereas, the students who read the traditional text were anxious and concerned” (Cook, 2015, p. 94). A second teacher was positive but voiced concern by saying “. However, I do not know that the text itself stretched the students thought processes as much as a straight text would.” (Cook, 2015, p. 95) This teacher was one of the four who had no experience with graphic novels and Cook goes as far to say that “this statement is very stereotypical of those who do not consider graphic texts to be on par with traditional texts. “(p. 95)

Basol (2011) also studied the effects of graphic novels on reading comprehension. The method used was an experimental study where the test results between a control group and an experimental group were compared. The participants consisted of students from a Turkish university where they were studying English. The control group consisted of 32 freshmen students and the experimental group consisted of 35 freshmen. The participants took a General Reading Comprehension test or GRC that was developed to test the participants for the ability to answer question about certain passages in the text, main ideas and inferred meanings of passages. This GRC test was given as a pre-test and as a post-test. The participants were also given a reading comprehension test that was directly designed to relate to the novel and graphic novel. The reading comprehension test that dealt with the novel directly was given as a second post-test after the GRC test. The period between the pre-test and post-tests was eight weeks. During that time, there was classes given where the student received instruction on different reading strategies. These lessons lasted for three hours once per week. During the eight weeks of class instruction, the students were at some point also given a questionnaire to answer.

The test results from the collected data indicates that the use of comics is at least equally efficient as regular texts. The findings from the pre-test show that the different groups were on the same level at the time of the pre-test. Both of the groups performed better on the

post-tests than what they did on the pre-test, and, there was no significant difference between the two groups. There were, however, some question where the experimental group as a whole significantly outperformed the control group yet the overall correct scores were on the same levels between the two groups. It could be argued that the images are more helpful if the reader has not developed enough reading strategies. A developed reader does not depend on the images in the same way an undeveloped reader does.

The results from the questionnaire that the participants answered indicates that they did not read a lot in general. Regarding the question on which types of comics they read, the majority answered the comic strips that you usually find in magazines. There were not many participants who answered that they read graphic novels or mainstream comic book series in the questionnaire. The response to comics was generally positive and a common attitude among the participants was that the visuals in the graphic novel was very helpful in understanding the story. Most of the participants answered positively when asked if graphic novels should be included in the curriculum. Comparing the response from the questionnaire and the results from the reading comprehension tests suggests that reading comprehension does not necessarily improve if the participants feel positive towards graphic novel although more research needs to be conducted to see the effects of positive responses over a longer period of time.

A study by Liu was done where they would test adult ESL in the United States. The method was a 2x2x2 factorial design where participants, texts, and visual support was divided into two types. The participants were divided according to their English proficiency level (High/Low), the texts were divided according to the complexity (high level /low level) and the visual support was divided by the presence of visual support next to the text or without. The participants were sorted and mixed into four groups, named T1, T2, T3 and T4, after testing the participants' proficiency through an essay test and parts of the Comprehensive English Language Test (CELT). The groups were as follows:

T1: Low level text only

T2: Low level text with comic strip

T3: High level text only

T4: High level text with comic strip

The participants' reading comprehension was tested with Immediate Recall Protocol (IRP) which means that the participants will read a text and immediately write down everything that they remember from the text. Liu goes into the benefits of using IRP instead

of other methods such as questions that are multiple-choice and makes the argument that IRP is the preferred method to measure reading comprehension.

The results of Liu's (2004) study show that the comic strips had a strong positive effect on the low-level proficiency participants who in general all performed better than their counterparts that did not receive a comic strip. For example, low-level participants that received a high-level text had an average recall of 19,41% correct recalls which Liu measures as poor recall while those with the same level of proficiency scored an average of 38,70% on the same text but with the added support of a comic strip. Liu (2004) explains this through the Dual Code theory that explains we have at least two different coding systems. One of these coding systems is a verbal process and the other is a non-verbal process. Images which are non-verbal cannot be processed in the verbal system and the opposite as well and connections can be forged between the systems that could help in comprehension. This would explain why those from the low-level group performed better with a comic strip. However, this effect was not the same for high level participants where the comic strip did not have a significant effect on reading comprehension. A possible explanation for high-level participants not scoring higher is provided by Marcus, Cooper and Sweller (see Liu, 2004) where an image is more easily interpreted due to it providing an image instead of the reader having to create a mental image. The image would then assist the reader help the reader create this mental image. The scenario of this study shows that the comic strip acts as a transitional step in helping the reader be able to create mental imagery. Liu adds, however, that if the visuals do not reach the complexity of the text it represents then it interferes with the reader's ability to create a mental image that is as complex as the text itself.

Merc and Kampusu (2013) replicated the study conducted by Liu (2004) on a group of Turkish EFL university students. In general, the study was identical and the results found by Merc and Kampusu (2013) matches the results found by Liu's study. The results from Merc and Kampusu (2013) show that even high-level students reading with visual support benefitted. Every group that had visuals with their text performed better than the groups without. That differs from Liu's study where only the low-level participants showed better performance. The different results could be explained by the different ways of assessing the students' proficiency. Liu (2004) used an essay writing test and parts of CELT while Merc and Kampusu (2013) used something called: Michigan placement test. These different manners of assessing students could be the reason why the results differed.

A study by Roozafzai (2012) investigates the impact the use of comic material on the reading comprehension of EFL students in Iran. The method that was used involved an

experimental design where a control group and an experimental group were given reading materials. The experimental group was given comic materials while the control group read general material which in the context would indicate traditional texts where no visuals are added. The participants were 60 adult female EFL learner between the ages of 18-30. The participants' language proficiency was assessed through an interview that tested their pronunciation, language use, fluency, discourse, communicational ability, vocabulary and grammar. They were then divided into the control group and the experimental group. Both of the groups participated in almost identical classes studying the same course book, the only difference being the reading sections. The control group read the material given in the course book while the experimental group were given comic materials instead. At the end, a test was given to all participants that included 20 items to test reading comprehension. The reading section included ten true or false questions and ten that were multiple-choice.

After the data collection and analysis, the results show that the experimental group performed better on the test. Roozafzai (2012) concludes by stating how comic material has a positive impact and that as teaching material, it is better to use comics than general materials. Roozafzai (2012) also argues that the reason comics were more efficient was due to its innate ability to motivate and draw the attention of the student. This study argues for the view that lower level students benefit more from the images than higher level students do yet at the same time argues that this needs further research to be confirmed. Roozafzai's (2012) study also agrees with the Dual code theory similar to the study by Liu (2004).

The limitations of the study are as follows: The group consisted of all females of similar ages. Roozafzai (2012) explains this choice by stating that it was done to increase the internal validity but goes forward with saying that to make the study more generalizable you would have to add more variables such as sex, age, language proficiency level.

3.2 Qualitative studies

Hammond (2009) studies the response readers have to graphic novels. As a librarian, she noticed that graphic novels and comics were becoming more popular and that led to her collecting and using graphic novels in classes that she taught at the time. Hammond (2009) wanted to see the response of her students had to graphic novels and how they formed meaning. The study lasted eight classes where she held lectures about comic conventions to a 12th grade class in high-school. The students read "American Born Chinese", a graphic novel written by Gene Luen Yang, which they were to respond to with spoken interviews and with written text. They also filled out questionnaires and had group discussions.

The results of the study show that student engagement was high and the response to the story was positive. The results also show that the answers the students provided about the story was similar to the way they answered with traditional text novels. Hammond (2009) suggests that it could be that the students' answers do not change when the format does. The students were able to follow the plot of the story without much difficulty. Hammond (2009) states that their responses could have been shaped by the way the questions were formed. Hammond (2009) wanted to see how much of the graphic novel they would understand by looking at the images and pointing to the fact that it is difficult to measure how much of the responses come from the images in the story or the words. The students made comments that could only have been understood by interpreting the images and not the text. A part of the story was different in the way that it portrayed a character as a very stereotypical Chinese man. Most of the participating students understood this as being the author's intent to create discussion. The reason why many understood this was because the images whereas drawn to evoke the style of a sit-com. Laughs and hand-claps were drawn on the images to which many students responded that it felt like there was an audience similar to a sit-com. The students thought that this would be more difficult to understand if it was a traditional text. The participants realizing what the graphic novel intended suggest that the use of images can convey a specific atmosphere that traditional texts cannot without word heavy exposition. The student's knowledge of sit-com conventions helped to make the connection. The fact that the participants were able to make this connection by seeing the images might indicate that it is easier to make connections between visual mediums such as the graphic novel and television than it is between a traditional text novel and television due to the added element of visuals in graphic novels. These findings also give support to the notion of multiliteracy and that students today are more accustomed to interpreting a mix of image and text. When filling out the questionnaires and during group discussion, it was mentioned that when they read the graphic novel a second time they spent more time on the images because they realized that the images carried a big part of the plot. When asked about the teaching of comic conventions such as format and things that are exclusive to it such as speech bubbles and the "gutters" between the images, the students said that it was not difficult to pick up even though many of them did not have much or any experience of graphic novels. However, after learning of these conventions and applying them when re-reading the graphic novel, they mentioned how it helped them understand the story on a deeper level. This statement suggests that teaching comic conventions is beneficial when using comics and graphic novels to further comprehension of the text. When connecting this to EFL teaching it is important to note the

points Hammonds makes to the level of engagement with the students. As the study shows, the students' engagement levels were high. This is important because they would improve the more they read. If using graphic novels is increasing the amount of reading that they do then it might lead to better reading skills and even other aspects of language such as vocabulary and spoken language.

A case study by Cimermanová (2014) looks at the reading strategies used by students to comprehend a comic book. Cimermanová (2014) mentions the difficulties that exists with EFL learners when trying to read authentic texts and that comics can be a way of bridging that gap by letting the images assist comprehension. Four students participated in the study where they would read comics materials during one to one teaching and explain what they understood by translating them. The time period was irregular but occurred once or twice a week for a total of 8-12 lessons. Two of the participants were 10 years old and the other two were 16 and 20. The proficiency level of the participants also ranged from A1 to B2. Cimermanová (2014) displays awareness of the limitations of the study by mentioning the unsystematic procedure, small sample size which leads to difficulties in making generalizations. This, however, does not exempt it from being used in research as the results in the study can still be compared and provide a varied perspective to the field. The study comes to the conclusion that the lower level students displayed higher dependency on the images for understanding the context. As soon as there were unknown words in the text they would turn to the images to "fill the gap". This was not the case with the higher-level students where the vocabulary was not as much of a problem and the use of the images was not to understand the context through the images but how the images would support the context provided by the text. This strongly agrees with the results from Liu (2004). Cimermanová points out that all the participants showed higher motivation for reading foreign texts which correlates to other studies concerning motivation and comics such as Aamodt Brænden (2015) which will be covered later.

Aamodt Brænden (2015) conducted a survey study with her own students where they would receive questions regarding reading novels, graphic novels and reading in general. They would also assess what reading proficiency they currently have by using the reference levels from CEFR. These students would receive a pre-reading questionnaire and a post-reading questionnaire. The students were tasked with reading a graphic novel adaptation of a novel called *The Kite Runner* by Khaleid Hooseini. 41 students participated where 22 of them were boys and 19 were girls. Six of the students were asked to read both the novel and the

graphic novel. The answers from the pre-reading were, after the reading had been completed, compared to the answers from the post-reading questionnaire.

Boys were more positive towards the idea of reading graphic novels than the girls. Many of the boys were reluctant readers and showed significant change in attitude when comparing their responses to their attitudes to regular reading. Girls did not like the graphic novel as much. This, however, was not the case when they answered a question about their attitude towards reading in general without referring to graphic novels. The results there show that the girls had a positive attitude and most of the boys had a negative attitude. Aamodt Brænden believes this might be due to the girls in general having higher reading proficiency and thus having negative attitudes such as graphic novels not being real books. Some of neutral responses illustrated that it could be both fun and boring to read, emphasizing the importance of choosing to read for oneself.

Aamodt Brænden mentions the fact that many of his reluctant readers stopped enjoying reading in 4-5 grade. That was the time when they began to be introduced to more complex literature and perhaps some canonical works. This change in what kind of literature pupils are supposed to read might be too much of a jump in difficulty for many pupils, which might explain why so many stop enjoying reading, and become reluctant readers, as Aamodt Brænden puts it.

In the article, Aamodt Brænden (2015) mentions that the pupils consistently refer to two different types of English. The pupils refer to that which is learnt in school and that which they use outside of school and stating that they are very different. One could argue that the more authentic dialogue found in comics (Williams, 1995) is better relatable to the type of English that students use outside of school and as such might appeal more to them.

4 Discussion and concluding thoughts

In this review, some of the available research on comics has been looked over and analyzed in order to understand whether the use of comics has any effects on reading comprehension and motivation in EFL. A background on comics was used to explain exactly what comics are. Comic books as defined by e.g McCloud (1994) as images in sequence in order to convey meaning and an aesthetic response from the viewer. Harvey (as written in Cinermanová, 2014) argues against McCloud by saying that this definition does not go far enough because it focuses too much on the visual aspect and does not explain the cooperation between image and text that occurs in order to create this unique medium.

A number of studies were reviewed in order to find evidence on the efficiency of the use of comics. Despite the fact that this review is small scale and thus does not present a very large number of research in the field, it is still worthy to note that there is a lack of research studies on comics in EFL. There were not many empirical studies available and also a lack of quantitative studies. The field of Comics in EFL requires more research.

Even if more research is needed, the review has been able to highlight important findings to date. First, the quantitative results from Liu (2004), Merc and Kampusu (2013), Cook (2015) and Roozafzai (2012) and Basol (2011) show that comics have a very positive effect on reading comprehension. In all but Liu's study the results were solely positive. Liu (2004) showed positive results when using comics when it came to the participants in the lower level bracket of language proficiency but the high-level group showed no significant improvement or slightly lower scores. One can speculate that this is due to how the images that accompanied the text did not meet the same level of complexity that the text represented. Liu suggests that the image being of low-level complexity could have been responsible for hindering these students from forming their own mental image leading to lesser reading comprehension. This study was replicated by Merc and Kampusu (2013) where everything was identical except the placement test the participants had to go through in order to be divided into their respective groups. The results in this study shows that the groups using comics outperformed the groups who did not. The finding from Merc and Kampusu (2013) goes against Liu's findings where it was suggested that images should represent the complexity of a text. The differing results can also be due to another placement test being used and the proficiency level being interpreted differently. It could also be due to the method not being reliable. This merits further research. What these two studies had in common and the results agreed upon was that lower level students using comics consistently outperformed the group without comics. These results were connected to the Dual Code Theory where it is stated that we have different coding system, one verbal and one non-verbal. The higher results of the students using comics strengthens the view of the DCT which is that we can more easily interpret information when it is processed through more than just the verbal coding system. The Dual Code Theory gains more support from Roozafzai (2012) whose study agrees with the DCT with the higher test results from the group with comics. The results of Cook's (2015) study also agrees with DCT.

Second, Basol (2011) concluded that the efficiency of comics in the test results were equal to that of the regular novel. Basol does point out that the experimental group as a whole performed significantly better on some questions but overall the results were slightly lower

than for the control group. This suggests that comics can be the better medium for those specific questions but also it brings up the issue of the validity of the questions in the reading comprehension test and whether they favored one medium over the other. Basol (2011) mentions that despite the differing scores on some questions the results show no significant differences between the control group and the experimental group. It could be speculated that the level of reading comprehension that a student has is an important factor. There were instances where the images had different effects depending on the level of reading comprehension. Liu (2004) shows that participants with higher level of proficiency did not benefit from the images as the others did. Cimermanová (2015) reached the conclusion that the participants with more knowledge of reading strategies were less dependent on the images to understand the text but instead analyzed how the images helped develop the story that comes with the text.

Surveys and interviews were carried out in some studies in order to gather perceptions and attitudes towards comics and reading in general. The data collected suggests a common view in that the use of comics had a very positive effect on motivation. Aamodt Brænden's (2015) study revealed that the majority of the participants were positive towards the idea of reading comics. Many of the participants who admitted to not like reading novels at all had after reading the graphic novel a different attitude. This was not the same for those that were used to reading. The fact that reluctant readers stating that they enjoyed reading the graphic novel more than regular reading suggests that graphic novels do not present as much of an obstacle to overcome as regular novels. The increased levels of motivation and engagement shown by participants in studies by Cook (2015) and Aamodt Brænden agrees with the theory of Krashen's Free Voluntary Reading theory. Quotes such "I would actually want to read it" (p. 93) from one of the participants of Cook's study suggests that this student would actually want to read this while the original novel would not be considered. This strongly suggest that Krashen's theory that free voluntary reading is beneficial. Krashen (2003) argues that light reading such as comics would be more beneficial than reading classic literature. To give students light reading material instead of that which is considered to be "real" literature could in fact benefit time on task. The key to developing reading competence seems to be that they have less apprehension towards reading if it is not seen as heavy or difficult. Letting students indulge in light reading can give the students the input they need to develop their reading abilities.

Although most of the responses from the various studies were positive towards the idea of using comics there were some criticism or concerns. Some were from the students feeling

that they thought it was strange to read a graphic novel and due to that feeling that it was difficult. This could be due to their inexperience with reading graphic novels. This suggests that in order to teach using comics and graphic novels, some knowledge of reading strategies and comics are necessary. There were teachers who Cook (2015) interviewed that voiced concern whether this would be as mentally challenging as a regular text would. This suggests that there are some biases in favor of traditional text and that they are seen as superior reading material for some teachers. The fact that the majority of teachers that were participating in the studies had very little experience with comics shows that it is currently an underused medium.

Connecting these finding to the pleasure hypothesis that was presented by Krashen (2004) suggests that comics promote reading comprehension more than regular text do. Many participants stated that they enjoyed the comics more and several studies showed that comics improved their reading comprehension more than regular texts did. It is possible that the higher test results and higher enjoyment from the participants suggest that comics and graphic novels promotes reading comprehension more than regular texts. This is most likely not the case for every comic book as there will always be those of higher and lower quality. Basol's (2011) finding suggests that might not be accurate as the student were highly motivated and reported higher enjoyment when reading the graphic novel even though that did not lead to higher test results on the comprehension test. This is only speculation at this point and thus requires more research.

What does the available research imply for teachers wanting to work with comics or graphic novels? When considering using comics the teacher still has to follow the basic guidelines for literature and that is to always choose appropriate texts for the students' level. As with any novel or text, the teacher still must scrutinize and read for themselves the material they intend to use in the classroom. The benefit from using comics is that the medium allows you to choose adaptations of novels that might have been too complicated due to it being only text but as there is a visual component accompanying, it bridges the gap allowing students to overcome that.

Another aspect that has not been covered here but can be equally important is that creators of textbooks could be advised to include more texts that are similar to graphic novels or comics. As reported by Hammond (2009), students were able to understand comics more after understanding the conventions of comics such as different types of speech bubbles or the role of gutters. This implies that instructions about the conventions of comics are needed especially for students who do not have previous experience with reading comics and graphic

novels. The teachers themselves will also have to study the medium in order to understand the roles these conventions hold and what they might mean for the story that is being told.

What we can conclude from this is that comics shows great potential to be a highly effective tool for teachers to use in their classrooms. This currently underused medium shows in the research positive effects in the quantitative studies in terms of the groups using comics having outperformed the groups who did not. The research also shows that many of the participants including both students and teacher were positive towards the idea of using comics.

Possibilities for future research in this research field is high due to it being vastly unexplored. The current research available focuses on comparing comic adaptations to their original versions and while this is a perfectly valid way of testing the effects of comics it would, however, be interesting to have research on the literature that are not adaptations. The world of comics, graphic novels and Japanese manga have many original stories where the original intention was to create as a graphic text. The potential differences of these works compared to adaptation are currently unknown. This suggests an issue as well where an original graphic novel does not have a regular text to be compared with. In addition, it would be of utmost importance to conduct research on the long-term effects of reading comics. Traditional texts are not going to disappear and further research is needed to ascertain whether the use of comics can properly prepare students for heavy texts such as academic papers.

In conclusion, it can be said that when using comics, participants have shown reading comprehension levels that are at least equal to those reading traditional text and in several cases outperforming them. This indicates that this medium of literature is worthy of being explored in language classrooms by both teachers and students and researched further by academics. Comics have also shown to increase the motivation to read and in some cases making a student consider reading it at all, something the traditional novel could not do. While this review focused on the effects comics have on reading comprehension, the medium has possibilities of being used as an independent art form and thus, be used to teach other aspects such as writing, storytelling, literary analysis and drawing. The potential of this medium exists for those who wish to use it.

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