

The Use of Comics to Allow Creativity and Promote Higher Order Thinking Skills

(A Case Study in a Senior High School in Cianjur, West Java)

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Abstract

The study aimed to find out the effect of the use of comics on 11th elective program graders of SMAN 2 Cianjur in their Narrative text understanding performance as well as their attitudes towards it. The results show that visual images in form of student-generated comic strips allow for creativity where students can express ideas by images combined with text, and promote higher order thinking skills (analyzing, evaluating, creating) through student-centered work. From its findings, the study concluded that comics is: 1) effective for constructive activities such as writing and speaking and 2) benefitted slow learners as they can take advantage of visual guide to practice target-language use.

Keywords: *Comics, Narrative, higher order thinking skills*

Introduction

Bringing something students' familiar with into the language class may turn the lesson into extraordinary outcome and provide new learning atmosphere. At the same time, students are demanded to apply their intellectual skills which are grounded in lower order thinking skills. In other words, fun learning linked with prior knowledge of subject matter content facilitates room for students to develop their creative tendencies and divergent thinking skills. One of the familiar things to students is comics. Using comics for methodological purpose not only amuse and interest students but also they can be stored and recalled easily as they are episodically organized (Csabay, 2006). As Eisner (1985) wrote that comics are the arrangement of pictures or images and words to narrate a story or

dramatize idea, and they act as visual medium that combine the written word with visual concept (Tiemensma, 2009).

Comics in education is not something new. Many scholars have subscribed to the study of them. First, in 1940's, Sones (1994) conducted a series of study of using comic books and mentioned their usefulness. Then, it was reported that in 1970's teachers used comics in the classroom and in other area as well. As an example, the comic strip formats was also reported that they were used by the armed forces to present instructional material (Trent & Kinlaw, 1975). Since then, many studies conducted on this area. For example, in 1990, Stanulewizs reported that stories in pictures not only make writing more attractive and simulate discussion, they also bring an air of something unusual when boredom is about to knock at the door

of classroom. Even in 2001, Art Spiegelman won Pulitzer Prize for his book entitled “Maus” which proving that comics can be artistically mature and literate work. Seeing the vast use of comics, this study focuses on the use of comics in the classroom activities, more specifically in engaging students with Narrative text.

Comics as media of instruction create joyful learning. Yet, it is suggested that learning also, at the same time, allow student to comprehend the material and their cognitive competence improve. For these reasons, in this study the students were challenged to involve in creative thinking such as converting Narrative text into student-generated comics. Creative thinking in this study refers to the activity demanded ‘cognitive skills and abilities for coming up with solution to problem situation’ (Arends & Kilcher, 2010). In this study, the students unpacked the text into parts, then put them together to form a coherent comics which has different appearance from its original text. They also developed character profiles, imagined the words of characters, built a set of captions, used inking and coloring.

The purpose of the present study is to evaluate the utilization of student-generated comics, in the format of comic strips as contextualized strategies in language instruction as alternative methods at senior high school where English as foreign language. This study is relevant for teacher who is posted at senior high school who concern on students reluctance and their boredom learning Narrative text that always appear in form of long passages. This study is

designed to evaluate the effects presenting with the comic strips used in the instructional and investigate whether the students’ cognitive competence level improve.

Methods

The use of comics are designed to evaluate their effects on students’ competence in using English as foreign language at grade 11 of Elective Program of SMAN 2 Cianjur in Academic Year 2014/2015. The sample was taken from Elective Program (English-2). The instructional material was Narrative text to facilitate them to gain listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. The end of the lesson was hoped that students were able to analyze the social function of the text, to use the generic structure and language features of text. When they enrolled grade 11, their test results that was stated in report card for their English cognitive and performance competence is on a score 70 to 82. As reference for students’ competence, the minimum ‘criterion-referenced grading’ (a set standards and indicate to what degree students have achieved mastery of particular standard) for the students is 78. Based on the score the students gained, in this study they were categorized into three levels, namely basic, proficient, and advanced. Basic level was given to students who failed to reach the mastery or who score 70-75, proficient level was for students who score 76-85, and advanced level for students who score 86-100. Classroom instruction went for 2 hours per week. The study took 8 meetings.

The instruments for the study were four texts, they were: 1) The Skeleton in the Cupboard for listening activity and helped the students got the main idea of the text, 2) The History of Jack and the Beanstalk for reading activity and facilitated the students to get the social function of the text, the structure and language features of the text, 3) The Wolf and the Crane to assist students to comprehend language features used Narrative text especially direct and indirect sentence, and 4) Descriptive-Narrative text which created by students to escort them to higher order thinking skills. From each text, the students demonstrated their comprehension by presenting the text they were learning in the form of comics.

Data were collected within a-6-week span. The student participants were given specific task corresponding to the usage of comics. The use of comics applied during the treatment. The students were given texts in different forms (text 1-4) and then changed them into comics to depict their content understanding of the text. Besides demonstrating their comprehension in the form of comics,

for text no. 1 and no. 2 the students were asked to use comics they created to accompany them during monolog presentation. The rests were comics as tool to allow students creating new text.

To analyze data collected, the students' comics were scored and categorized into three level of core proficiency of English (basic, proficient, and advanced). Meanwhile, the students' monolog were scored based on rubric for speaking adapted from Thornburry (2000).

Results and Discussion

The students' overall English productive performance, as shown by their comics, writing and monolog level from Text 1 to Text 4, is presented in Table 1. Table 1 indicates an improvement in students' proficiency level. A comparison of the students who post in basic level or ones who fail to achieve mastery of narrative standard are none. It can be concluded that Comics project promoted the students' writing and speaking proficiency. The progress is elaborated in the subheadings below.

Table 1 Participants' Proficiency

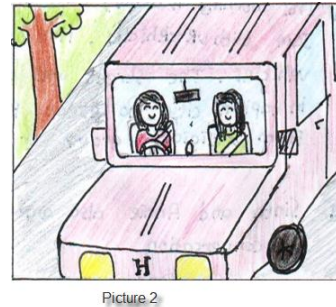
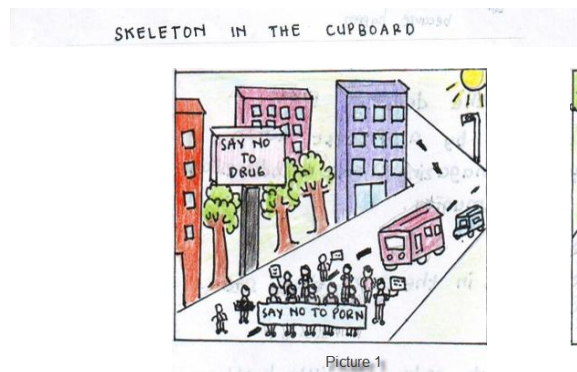
	Text 1			Text 2			Text 3			Text 4		
	Comics 1	Writing 1	Speaking 1	Comics 2	Writing 2	Speaking 2	Comics 3	Writing 3	Speaking 3	Comics 4	Writing 4	Speaking 4
Basic	8	9	7	8	6	6	0	0	0	0	0	0
Proficient	14	15	15	12	15	14	17	18	0	19	15	0
Advanced	13	11	13	15	14	15	18	19	0	16	20	0

Text 1: Skeleton in the Cupboard

Text 1 was entitled The Skeleton in the Cupboard intended to provide listening practice. Upon the the completion of listening activity the

students collected their work in the form of comic as shown in Sample 1 as follow.

Sample 1. Visualization of Text 1



Sample 1 show two things, to say the least. First, creating Comics has an effect on critical thinking of students. The comics were created to depict “it was a busy day, as usual. The traffic circle began to get scorched in the strengthening heat of that morning as a protest was taking place. People in a long wavy line were staging outcry against the issue of Playboy magazine-Indonesian version. They were jamming up the well-known capital city of Jakarta (Picture 1). The condition was indeed troublesome for Sinta and her friend who were among those who were trapped in that awful situation, behind steering wheel (Picture 2).

Picture 1 provides information of the sun’s heat by the picture of yellow sun at the top right corner. Besides, to show people who were protesting, it has cars, and people who held banner

with ‘say no to porn’ on it. Meanwhile Picture 2 represents that there were two people in a car and one of them was behind a steering wheel.

Secondly, Comics becomes tool for building better writer. This means that comics encourage what so called ‘fluency before accuracy’ (Denne-Bolton, 2013). Fluency is gained through comics writing to communicate what the students’ understood about the passage with the absence of pressure. Then, the experiment and play with language that the students did during creating comics allow them to learn independently both cognitively and linguistically. As shown in the writing upon the completion of comic strips (Sample 2) below.

Sample 2. Student’s writing to Communicate Comics

- 1) • It is a hethic day as usual, I and Annie were in a public cab to our campus University of Indonesia but unluckily, we're trapped in a protesting about playboy magz. Indonesia version. The people were jamming up, in a wavy-line. They were from local community reader and religious group. to protect the issue.

(It is a hectic day as usual, I and Annie were in a public cab to our Campus

University of Indonesia but unluckily, we're trapped in a protesting about playboymagz Indonesia Version. The people were jamming up, in a wavy-line. They were from local community and religious group, to protest the issue)

One aspect worth noticing from Sample 2. Student's writing above is that the students created a new and different text, yet it had similar meaning as expected given the original text. This condition was also found in the stage when the students were asked to present the text in monolog. It is safe to say that comics empowering students, since comics seem to give them great help to be confident in presenting the text in monolog and a room for independence of thought. Their Sample 3. Student's opinion

The draw is really affected me, it make me ~~more~~ more creative .. ~~that~~ that is possible to make student not bored and more like art .

experience during creating comics provide knowledge to be shared in spoken form with almost no hesitation and comics they made acted as guidance during the presentation.

Based on the results of text 1, it can be inferred that the use of comics had a positive influence on students writing and speaking proficiency. This is supported by the student's positive point of view towards using comics in the lesson, as shown in Sample 3 below.

The draw is really affected me, it make me more creative..that is possible to make student not bored and more like art.

Text 2: The History of Jack and the Beanstalk

Text 2 facilitated students to comprehend a passage. It was carried out by reading a passage then the students were asked to do student-generated comics of what they have

understood from the passage. The results of text 2 in form of comic strips imply that the use of picture-text combinations give a great help to represent reading comprehension (see Sample 4) and they scaffold speaking skills by using comic strips as visual aid.

Sample 4. Visualization of Text #2



Sample 4 indicates that generating comic strips improve the students' ability in writing narrative text. The improvement is in the content which was facilitated by generating sequence of narrative in each strip, dialogue in the bubble, caption for each panel, and picture to reflect event(s).

In other words, student-generated comics makes the generic structure of

narrative text applied as the comics strips presented in chronological order. Sample 4 shows that the orientation is provided in the caption of panel 1 (In the days of King Alfred there lived a poor woman. She was a widow and had an only child named Jack). The orientation is significant part of a narrative text that in this

sample include when, where, who, what and why.

Sample 4 also indicates that student-generated comic strips are helpful for student in re-writing story with appropriate generic structure of narrative text. This was supported by students' opinion on using comics to comprehend the text (Sample 5).

Sample 5. Students' opinion about using comics

I Yes, I think drawing helping me to understand the story, because without the image we can't understand the story, so therefore the image is helpful to understand the story, made like comic story line, make us understand

Yes, I think drawing helping me to understand the story, because without the image we can't understand the

story, so therefore the image is helpful to understand the story, made like comic story line, make us understand.

Text 3: The Wolf and the Crane

Text 3 was to help students understand the language features of narrative text. One of the major features used in it such as direct and indirect speech. Based on results of

this study, it was found out that student-generated comics acted as effective medium for students in applying, analyzing, and synthesizing target language grammar as shown in Sample 6 below.

Sample 6. Converting Direct to Indirect Speech



don't fly away. I need your help. I'm in a great trouble". The sentence was converted into "The wolf asked the Crane not to fly away, he needed the crane's help because he was in a great trouble".

Text 4: Student-generated Text

Text 4 was dedicated to invite students to create a text based on

comics provided. Retelling comics served students with fun, interesting and motivating atmosphere to

incorporate target language culture and their pragmatic intelligence. The data from the students' writing show that the students passed the criterion-reference grading. The students-generated text comprised of orientation, complication, and resolution. The text also applied the appropriate language features of narrative text such as the use of direct-indirect speech, past tense, adjective, and adverbial phrase. In short, the use student-generated text based on comics provided facilitate student-centered and student-directed learning.

Conclusion

The use of both student-generated comics and student-generated text allow students to gain more understanding about the text comprehensively and improve students' core proficiency in narrative text. The student-generated comics based on written and spoken narrative text aid the students to apply generic structure and language features of the text appropriately. It also provides room for student to experience independent thinker and to maximize the activity of analyzing, synthesizing, and creating text (higher order thinking skills) as student act as illustrator or writer of comics. Meanwhile, student-generated text based on comics gave the students chances to practice and produce a narrative text in personal and creative way. By using comics as the procedure in this study show that the students who are in basic level eventually improve their performance and proficiency. It is assumed, there is correlation between the ability to represent the text comprehension by

depicting it in the comic strips with the ability to present it in the form of written and spoken form of language. Further, the use of student-generated comics to represent reading comprehension provided the basic level students room to gain improvement in another language skills such as writing and speaking.

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