

USING COMICS IN IMPROVING B1 LEVEL LEARNERS' PRODUCTIVE SKILLS

Umida Abdumutal qizi Abdullayeva

EFL Teacher Department of English Language Kimyo International University in Tashkent, umidaabdullayeva0306@icloud.com

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Abstract

The article is aimed at presenting data about the conception of Comics and Productive skills, stating the close-knit connection between the two of them. Moreover, the article highlights the significance of comics in the academic process and the ways of lesson organizing by means of comics as preliminary warm-up activities and summative materials for the learners' with B1 level language proficiency.

Comics are a series of images with which the story is told any history. They are genuine materials, therefore, their use in the English language lesson will allow developing not only grammatical and lexical skills, but also to form speech skills, communicative competence itself, as well as expand the linguistic and cultural horizons of students.

Comics are diverse, but, as a rule, they contain a comic moment, therefore, their use for methodological purposes will have the same effect as games: in a creative and playful way to stimulate actual problems of linguistics and literary studies. The fact that comics have visual content components also contributes to the formation of communicative competence based on them. Comics use words and expressions peculiar to colloquial speech: idioms, abbreviated forms, individual slang phrases, as well as expressions that require background knowledge about culture.

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Introduction

Teaching is an extended process that includes plenty of components to fulfill the need for a proper knowledge. There are so many ways of conducting and organizing a GOOD lesson that sometimes teachers, tutors or instructors may encounter difficulty in opting for a better and more suitable method or material for their learners.

One of the effective techniques in developing productive skills is *Comics*. Through the academic development of this method, loads of definitions have been given to the notion itself. Leone Tiemensma, a teacher of ESL/EFL and child literacy advocate in South Africa, suggests a broadly-covered overview of the modern characterization of comics that is common among linguists and TESOL professionals. Tiemensma's definition can be briefly paraphrased as follows: Functionally, comics should have a clear narrative. Structurally, comics should combine words and multiple strings of

pictures, with pictures in a dominant role. Spatially, the panels should be separate with blank spaces between them, character language should be placed in word balloons, and narration should be placed in captions. Stylistically, comics should either use cartoony or realistic artwork. [1]

The definition above provides handy description of some artistic works of Jack Bradbury, whose comics such as “Maryland” comic book, “Supermouse” [2] (figure 1) and others have been used commonly by language arts classes and ESL classrooms.



Figure 1

Materials

The word *Comics* is formed from the word *comic* which means funny. Comics can be defined as drawn story or stories that are depicted in pictures. Comics can also be called graphic novels that contain texts and pictures that deliver information to readers. The study of comics as an art form and its capabilities and features, as well as its basic elements is described on the pages of S. McCloud's book "Understanding Comics". [3] Comics can also be considered as an educational medium. Thus, "Comics are a powerful tool for influencing a child and, of course, can and should be used in the field of education." [4] Advantages of comics in education. Comics provide a narrative experience for students. Students watch the beginning and the end stories, plot, characters, time and setting, building a sequence. The images support the text and give students important contextual clues to the meaning of the material being studied.

Methods

In order to identify the effectiveness of comics in the lesson, an experiment was conducted. The students were divided into two groups. The first group of students was given comics "A super mouse" by Jack Bradbury and the second group studied the traditional textbook. The topic was Objective pronouns. Total number of students was 26.

At the end of the lesson, students were given short-answer questions regarding the materials used in the lesson. It was concluded that students who studied comics better performed in the questionnaire than the students who studied traditional textbook.

Results

Moreover, the group of students who studied comics was asked to give their opinion on the usage of comics during the lesson. The result of this questionnaire showed that 80 percent of students mentioned that comics are beneficial and more effective in teaching.

Discussion

It is not a secret that English learners often need to be motivated to dive into the process of developing four language skills. Moreover, many teachers are inspired to be as creative as possible, in order to wake learners up to study English more effectively. However, the main obstacle that teachers may face while teaching productive skills (speaking and writing) is lack of interest among low-achieving ESL learners. In view of this, comics can be the well-opted method in enhancing pupils' productive skills. As the audience that we aim at is B1 learners, they will not find comics too complicated to understand. Furthermore, there are a number of significant characteristics of comics so that teachers can integrate comics into the teaching and learning process. According to Meskin (2007), comics involve two basic art styles, realistic and cartoony. [5]

As far as the strong points of comics are concerned, Yang (2003) [6] emphasized that human beings have a natural tendency towards picture, and this in turn leads to the easy caption of learners' interest and attention. In addition to this, as pictures in the comics illustrate the main events and characters in a particular story, learners may feel emotional connection between them and the story heroes. Finally, comics are readily-available and easily accessible. Especially, it is very simple to use them in any classroom as it does not require special equipment to implement.

Oxford University Press suggests some effective ways of using comics in the classroom: [7]

- 1) *Creating comics with a group*- this activity is expected to be very beneficial as learners may find it exciting to make their own comic strips. Ask the class to draw some pictures and attach speech bubbles to create a whole story. At the end of the activity learners should present their comic strips orally.

- 2) *Using comics to develop vocabulary*- let's imagine that you have just taught them the topic "Job interview". Learners should make up their own piece of comic strips on this topic using the new words and phrases that they have learned during the lesson.
- 3) *Creating character catalogue*- this part of the comics-teaching is very amazing. The task is to design a catalogue of characters that were created by the learners. This catalogue is created individually and the learners are supposed to provide description of each hero in their book using different adjectives, various grammar structures and wide range of vocabulary.
- 4) *Using comics to enhance speaking skill*- after finishing their comics, learners are asked to present their comics to the class. The presentation is conducted as a role-play activity. Learners should choose one of the characters in the comic strip and act out the whole story in front of the class. This way of demonstration not only develops speaking skill, but also creates very friendly and enthusiastic atmosphere in the classroom.
- 5) *Organizing comics strips contest*- undoubtedly, learners are greatly-motivated when there is a chance for them to achieve a prize or an award or when they can show off their ability in the class. Organizing a comic strips contest would be a very rewarding experience to improve learners' productive skills.

In addition, comics are able to solve the problem of motivation, interest in learning, without which there can be no real educational activity. A dry, academic school textbook does not cope with this task. Studying for our children is not a joy, but a test. Comics, on the other hand, fascinates, inspires, stimulates creative activity, makes you engage in self-education, turning study into a joyful, meaningful activity. The teacher is lucky if ready-made educational comics is already included in the content of the textbook and are of interest to children. It becomes clear the fear of some teachers that "the attitude to the comic book in Uzbekistan is very specific, it is a priori suspected of inferiority, in some terribly destructive influence on the emerging personality of the child, underestimated, ignored. All conversations about the genre are still exclusively emotional in nature and conducted at the level of assumptions, conjectures and fantasies.

When we talk about a comic book, we usually do not mean the genre as such, but those poor, cheap samples of it, we do not share the form and content of the comic book, grain and chaff. It is difficult for us to discern the advantages and disadvantages of the genre, its specifics, and even more so the didactic potential, which has been successfully used in educational systems of many countries of the world for a number of years.

Conclusion

All things considered, although some may state that comics are not serious and permanent activities to achieve high results in the academic process, it should be noted that this way of designing the teaching process may become a satisfaction if the method is arranged appropriately. Teaching is not a policy that requires seriousness. Teaching is growing. And your "seed" will become a huge and a strong tree when you give your attention and affection to it.

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