# IS GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS EFFECTIVE IN DEVELOPING STUDENTS' READING SKILL?

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#### ABSTRACT

Reading is probably the most important skill for second language (L2) learners in academic contexts. Reading is gradually being recognize as a valuable source of language input, particularly for students in learning environments (as in some EFL context) In reading, an individual construct meaning through a transaction with written text that has been created by symbols that represent language. Considering the important role of reading, the process of reading should be given a serious attention in the teaching and learning process. Although the processes of reading are often too dynamic and varied for different readers with the strategy applied on different texts to be investigated, it is generally accepted that the interaction between readers, reading strategy, and text variables is key to understanding the reading process. As a result, it has become common practice to divide reading related research into three separate factors: the reader, the strategy, and the text. Therefore, this study intends to find out whether graphic organizers strategy is effective in developing students' reading competency.

Keywords: reading comprehension, text types, graphic organizers

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The government policy in determining English as a compulsory subject in school is due to the practical consideration that English is formally acknowledge as an international means of communication, and the major goal of teaching English is enable students to develop their communicative competence in the four language skills; listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among all of the four language skills above, reading is one of the four basic skills in English that should be mastered by students. Through reading, students can enlarge their knowledge and experiences; they would be able to understand written text in target language if they have a good competency in reading.

Reading is gradually being recognize as a valuable source of language input, particularly for students in learning environments (as in some EFL context) in which fluent speakers of English are generally not available to provide other kinds of language input. In reading, an individual construct meaning through a transaction with written text that has been created by symbols that represent language. The transaction involves the reader's acting on or interpreting the text, and the interpretation is influenced by the reader's past experiences, background knowledge as well as the reader's purpose for reading (Sudarmawan, 2014). However, the expectation and intention when reading are to comprehend what we read. In addition, Grabe (2009) states that reading is a selective process. It means that reading is a process in which the information is made to be confirmed, rejected, or refined by the readers as reading progress.

Considering the important role of reading, the process of reading should be given a serious attention in the teaching and learning process since it has also become one of the language skills that should be mastered by the students in order to be able to perform target language well and to be competent (Sudarmawan, 2020). As a matter of fact, stated by National Reading panel in 2000, even though the teaching of reading has been developed in a longer period of time, it is still

considered a difficult problem in teaching at school. It can be proven by the students' limited ability and strategy in reading; they are not being able to comprehend the text they read. Therefore, it can be concluded that the students fail to perform the basic competency and indicator in order to administer the target language well.

Up to this point, it is obvious that the students' competency in reading comprehension should be improved because they could not be able to apply their knowledge in the target language appropriately; they do not have the ability to obtain general and specific information from the written text, they could not recognize the main idea and specific ideas in the text explicitly and/or implicitly, they could not guess the meaning of the words, phrases, or sentences based on the context, they could not make references, and the most important thing is that they unable to make use of their prior knowledge and experience to create a connection with the text they read.

In 2000, the National Reading Panel (NRP) reviewed 204 CSI (Cognitive Strategy Instruction) studies with students and concluded that there was enough evidence to recommend seven strategies: question generation, comprehension monitoring, summarizing, question answering, graphic organizers (diagrams), semantic mapping and multiple strategy approaches (NRP, 2000 as cited in Sudarmawan, 2020). More oddly, Rosenshine (1997) in (Dole, et al.,2008) mention several cognitive strategies which can be applied to activate prior knowledge, they are Class Discussion, Semantic Mapping, Pre-questions, Visual Aids, and Graphic Organizers. There are more than enough evidences for the experts stated above to recommend graphi corganizers as suitable strategy to be applied in teaching reading comprehension. Besides, graphi corganizers is also a cognitive strategy proposed by McKnight (2010) which is beneficial for enabling students to literally see connections and relationships between facts, information, and terms, remembering and connecting information, and facilitating the integration of longterm memory and new learning.

Graphic organizers are important and effective pedagogical tools for organizing content and ideas and facilitating learners' comprehension of newly acquired information. Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (2006) as cited in Sudarmawan (2014), posits that students are better able to learn and internalize information when more than one learning modality is employed in an instructional strategy. Because graphic organizers present material through the visual and spatial modalities (and reinforce what is taught in the classroom), the use of graphic organizers helps students internalize what they are learning.

Simply put, the application of graphic organizers is widely used during the process of teaching and learning especially when it comes to reading competency. The strategy allows the students to use multiple types of charts and designs which ease them in grasping with the idea of the written text they are reading. Thus, this paper will focus on finding out whether the application of the graphic organizers strategy is effective in developing students reading competency.

### 2. DISCUSSION

## 2.1 The Nature of Reading

Most of us think that reading is simple. For many students, it is simply an act of sounding out words to their teacher or to themselves depending on whether they are reading orally or silently (Byrnes, 2009) They do not have learned that reading is an exchange of ideas the author and them. In opposite, actually reading is a very complex process. Adams and Collins as Cited in Sudarmawan (2014) say that at one level, reading can be described as the process of translating grapheme strings into spoken words. However, what we really mean by reading is not the ability to decode words but the ability to extract the meaning both explicit and implicit from the written text.

Reading comes easily to some children, but most struggle with some part of the complex process that begins with phonemes and continues to comprehension of complex text. Reading is not a natural part of human development. Unlike spoken language, reading does not follow from observation and imitation of other people (Willis, 2008). Specific regions of the brain are devoted to processing oral communication, but there are no specific regions of the brain dedicated to reading. The complexity of reading requires multiple areas of the brain to operate together through networks of neurons. This means there are many potential brain dysfunctions that can interfere with reading.

Within the complex process of reading, six general component skills and knowledge areas have been identified (Grabe, 1991 as cited in Celce & Murcia, 2001).

- 1. Automatic recognition skills; a virtually unconscious ability, ideally requiring little mental processing to recognize text, especially for word identification
- 2. Vocabulary and structural knowledge; a sound understanding of language structure and a large recognition vocabulary
- 3. Formal discourse structure knowledge; an understanding of how texts are organized and how information is put together into various genre of text
- 4. Content/world background knowledge; prior knowledge of text related information and a shared understanding of the cultural information involved in the text
- 5. Synthesis and evaluation skills/strategies; the ability to read and compare information from multiple information from multiple source, to think critically about what one reads, and to decide what information is relevant or useful for one purpose
- 6. Metacognitive knowledge and skills monitoring; an awareness of one's mental processes and the ability to reflect on what one is doing and the strategies one is employing while reading.

When fluent readers read, they bring together all of these components into a complex process. Fluent readers recognize and get meaning from words they see in print, and use their knowledge of the structure of the language to begin forming the mental notion of the topic. They use the semantic and syntactic information from the text together with what they know from personal experience and knowledge of the topic to form hypotheses or prediction about what they are reading and what they are about to read.

### 2.2 Reading Competency

Grabe (2009) strongly argues that reading is process of communication from the writer to the reader. It involves the recognition of letters, words, phrases, and clauses and in some respect; it can be considered a simpler process rather than comprehension. Comprehension, on the other hand, is a process of negotiating understanding between the reader and the writer. The reader receives information from the author via the words, sentences, paragraphs, and so forth and tries to understand the inners feelings of the writer.

Reading must be about thinking and constructing meaning. It's much more than pronouncing words. Researchers today define reading as a complex, recursive thinking process. David Pearson and several of his colleagues have synthesized years of research on characteristics of proficient readers and isolated seven strategies used by successful readers of all ages (Pearson et al. 1992) in Tovani (2000):

- They use existing knowledge to make sense of new information.
- They ask questions about the text before, during, and after reading.
- They draw inferences from the text.
- They monitor their comprehension.

- They use "fix-up" strategies when meaning breaks down.
- They determine what is important.
- They synthesize information to create new thinking.

In addition, they also agree with the term "Reading Is Thinking". When readers construct meaning, they do so by way of deliberate, thoughtful cognition. They must do more than decode words. Decoding is important, but it is only one part of the process by which readers comprehend. They must also understand concepts and register subtleties. They need to determine what is important as well as connect their knowledge and experience to what they read (Tovani, 2000). As an expert in reading, he also mentioned several factors which makes Text becomes inaccessible.

Text becomes inaccessible when students:

- Don't have the comprehension strategies necessary to unlock meaning.
- Students who have only one or two strategies for making meaning struggle to understand difficult text.
- Don't have sufficient background knowledge.

Students who don't already know something about what they are reading can't make connections. What they read seems disconnected and unimportant.

• Don't recognize organizational patterns.

Students who don't understand how text is organized usually don't know what is important. They can't prioritize and therefore don't establish a cognitive framework. They have no way to organize and store their thinking.

• Lack purpose.

Students who don't have a purpose when they read usually lose interest in what they are reading and fail to construct meaning. It's hard to glean anything from the text when you don't know why you're reading it.

However, Keene and Zimmermann in their book Mosaic of Thought (1997) as cited in Seravallo (2010) synthesized a great deal of research and distilled all of the reading skills mentioned down to the following seven.

- 1. Activating prior knowledge before, during, and after reading a text. Proficient readers think about what they already know about a text's structure or topic before they read; they make connections to their lives, other books, and the world as they read; and they think about these connections after they are finished reading.
- 2. Determining the most important ideas and themes in a text. Proficient readers understand the most significant events in a fiction story and use the significant events to retell, and when reading nonfiction can determine the main idea of a passage, section, or chapter.
- 3. Creating visual and sensory images before, during, and after reading a text. Proficient readers have a "lost-in-a-book" feeling when reading and are able to describe the multisensory experiences they have across the course of reading the text. It is not simply about visualizing, but also hearing, seeing, smelling, and feeling what is described in the text.
- 4. Asking questions. Proficient readers read with curiosity. They question the text, often including the characters' actions or motivations, their own reactions to what's in the book, and even the author's decisions of what to include and what not to include.
- 5. Drawing inferences. Proficient readers constantly read beyond what's literally in the text. They are able to form judgments, make predictions, and determine the theme or message of a story, and they have their own ideas and critiques about a text.

- 6. Retelling and synthesizing. Proficient readers can figure out how parts of a text fit together. One way to use that knowledge is to retell a text in sequence, chronicling what happened first, next, and finally. Readers can also put parts of the text together to understand cause and effect, character change, or how all of the nonfiction features on one page fit together under a single main idea.
- 7. Using fix-up strategies when comprehension breaks down. Proficient readers monitor their own understanding as they read and have strategies to fix confusion as it arises. These strategies include the ability to understand new vocabulary.

It is often so challenging to assess comprehension because it is invisible— without a student writing down what is going through their head, or talking to another about what they are thinking; it becomes challenging to see the reader's processing. Comprehension skill assessment is also so complicated because none of these seven skills is static. The way in which a reader uses each of these skills depends upon so many variables including but not limited to genre, text level/ difficulty, the reader's prior experience with the topic, and the text structure.

Shahin in 2006 in his article has examined tips and guidelines for implementing a theory of reading which will help to develop the learner's abilities.

- Text characteristics
- Pre-reading tips
- During-reading tips
- After-reading tips

These tips can be viewed in three consecutive stages: before reading, during reading, and after reading. For instance, before starting to read a text it is natural to think of the purpose of reading the text. As an example of the during-reading techniques, re-reading for better comprehension can be mentioned. And filling out forms and charts can be referred to as an after-reading activity. These tasks and ideas can be used to enhance reading comprehension.

• Text characteristics

Good readers expect to understand what they are reading. Therefore, texts should contain words and grammatical structures familiar to the learners (Van Duzer, 1999 in Shahin, 2006). In texts where vocabulary is not familiar, teachers can introduce key vocabulary in pre-reading activities that focus on language awareness, such as finding synonyms, antonyms, derivatives, or associated words (Hood et al., 1996; cited in Sudarmawan, 2014). The topics of texts chosen should be in accordance with the age range, interests, sex, and background culture of the students for whom they are intended. Pre-reading activities that introduce the text should encourage learners to use their background knowledge. Class members can brainstorm ideas about the meaning of a title or an illustration and discuss what they know.

• Pre-reading Tips

Before the actual act of reading a text begins, some points should be regarded in order to make the process of reading more comprehensible. It is necessary to provide the necessary background information to the reader to facilitate comprehension. In addition, as stated by Lebauer (1998 in Shahin, 2006)), prereading activities can lighten students' cognitive burden while reading because prior discussions will have been incorporated.

### • During-Reading Tips

Several tips during reading are summarizing, reacting, questioning, arguing, evaluating, and placing a text within one's own experience. These processes may be the most complex to develop in a classroom setting; most attention is often paid to dictionaries, the text, and the teacher. Interrupting this routine and encouraging students to dialogue with what they are reading without coming between them and the text, presents a challenge to the EFL teacher. Duke and Pearson (2001) in Shahin (2006) have stated that good readers are active readers. Hence, they use the following strategies:

- Making predictions: The readers should be taught to be on the watch to predict what is going to happen next in the text to be able to integrate and combine what has come with what is to come.
- Making selections: Readers who are more proficient read selectively, continually making decisions about their reading.
- Integrating prior knowledge: The schemata that have been activated in the pre-reading section should be called upon to facilitate comprehension.
- Skipping insignificant parts: A good reader will concentrate on significant pieces of information while skipping insignificant pieces.
- Re-reading: Readers should be encouraged to become sensitive to the effect of reading on their comprehension.
- Making use of context or guessing: Readers should not be encouraged to define and understand every single unknown word in a text. Instead they should learn to make use of context to guess the meaning of unknown words.
- Breaking words into their component parts: To keep the process of comprehension ongoing, efficient readers break words into their affixes or bases. These parts can help readers guess the meaning of a word.
- Reading in chunks: To ensure reading speed, readers should get used to reading groups of words together. This act will also enhance comprehension by focusing on groups of meaning-conveying symbols simultaneously.
- Pausing: Good readers will pause at certain places while reading a text to absorb and internalize the material being read and sort out information.
- Paraphrasing: While reading texts it may be necessary to paraphrase and interpret texts subvocally in order to verify what was comprehended.
- Monitoring: Good readers monitor their understanding to evaluate whether the text, or the reading of it, is meeting their goals.
- After-reading Tips

It is necessary to state that post-reading activities almost always depend on the purpose of reading and the type of information extracted from the text. Barnett (1988) in Shahin (2006) has stated that post-reading exercises first check students' comprehension and then lead students to a deeper analysis of the text. In the real world the purpose of reading is not to memorize an author's point of view or to summarize text content, but rather to see into another mind, or to mesh new information into what one already knows. Group discussion will help students focus on information they did not comprehend, or did comprehend correctly. Accordingly, attention will be focused on processes that lead to comprehension or miscomprehension. Generally speaking, post-reading can take the form of various activities as presented below:

- Discussing the text: Written/Oral
- Summarizing: Written/Oral
- Making questions: Written/Oral

- Answering questions: Written/Oral
- Filling in forms and charts
- Writing reading logs
- Completing a text
- Listening to or reading other related materials
- Role-playing

### 2.3 Graphic Organizers

One way to help make a curriculum more supportive of students and teachers is to incorporate graphic organizers. Graphic organizers come in many varieties and have been widely researched for their effectiveness in improving learning outcomes for various students (Hall and Strangman, 2002). Graphic organizers are a visual representation of the material a student is learning. The organizer assists the student in brainstorming and/or organizing information to make it easier to understand how ideas connect. Organizers also create a connection between different ideas, allowing a student to grasp how large concepts work together. Hall and Strangman in 2002 have stated that a graphic organizer is a visual and graphic display that depicts the relationships between facts, terms, and or ideas within a learning task. Graphic organizers are also sometimes referred to as knowledge maps, concept maps, story maps, cognitive organizers, advance organizers, or concept diagrams

Drafke in 1993 defines graphic organizer as a diagram or illustration of a written or oral statement.Examples include matrices, hierarchies, and continua. The goal in using graphic organizers is to organize ideas and examine relationships. In doing so, people engage more of their core thinking skills and process information more intensely, improving long term recall. Graphic organizers are especially helpful to average, under-achieving, and struggling learners. The process of reviewing information and organizing it appears to help learners arrange the material in their minds.

Graphic organizers are often used to activate preexisting knowledge. In schema theory it is noted that new information must be connected to prior knowledge. Once a student has activated his or her prior knowledge he or she will use that knowledge to help increase the comprehension of new knowledge (McGilL et al, 2010). They argue that many researchers believe that information that is stored in the students' existing schema is more easily understood, learned, and retained than information that is not. Teachers can help students learn more information if he or she can help the student link new information to background knowledge. Using graphic organizers is a beneficial way to help student make the connection between prior knowledge and new knowledge.

Graphic organizers are important and effective pedagogical tools for organizing content and ideas and facilitating learners' comprehension of newly acquired information. Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (1993, 2006) as cited in McKnight (2010), posits that students are better able to learn and internalize information when more than one learning modality is employed in an instructional strategy. Because graphic organizers present material through the visual and spatial modalities (and reinforce what is taught in the classroom), the use of graphic organizers helps students internalize what they are learning.

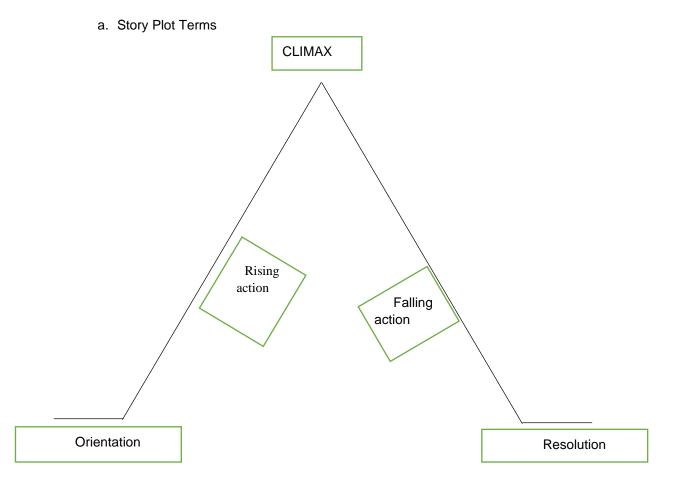
Graphic organizers are great tool teachers and students can use to promote comprehension. This is an excellent strategy that can be implemented to encourage the organization of thoughts. It also enables students to make connections to existing schema. It also gives students reinforcement in making linking key concepts to deepen comprehension. Teachers can use graphic organizers to examine the students' thinking and learning. In that vein, for today's classroom, nothing is more essential to successful teaching and learning than strategy-based instruction. It is through the use of specific teaching strategies and learning tools that students can be more successful learners. Graphic organizers are teaching and learning tools; when they're integrated into classroom experiences, students are better able to understand new material. Creating a strong visual picture, graphic organizers support students by enabling them to literally see connections and relationships between facts, information, and terms.

We know from learning theory that the human mind naturally organizes and stores information. Our minds create structures to store newly acquired information and connect it to previous knowledge (Piaget, 1974 in McKnight, 2010). The graphic organizers featured in this research are visualizations of these mental storage systems, and serve to support students in remembering and connecting information.

When students are able to remember and assimilate information, they can delve into more critical thinking. The visually stimulating nature of graphic organizers draws the learner's attention. As learners, we attend to what is novel and visually intriguing because the brain is more equipped to process images than text. Because graphic organizers integrate text and visual images, learners are having more whole-brain experiences (Willis, 2008). He argues that graphic organizers are used to reinforce the learned pattern.

### 2.3.1 Design of Graphic Organizers

Mcknight (2010) in his book entitled Big Book of Graphic Organizers presents about a hundred designs of graphic organizers suit for teaching comprehension and another study skills. In this research, his design will be used and also take another design from Dorn and Stoffos (2005) due to the types of text; narrative, procedure, and recount, since each design of graphic organizers belong to specific types of text or task.



## 2.3.2 Syntax of Graphic Organizers

In addition, for all learners, but for adult learners in particular, graphic organizers facilitate the integration of long-term memory and new learning. Adult learners generally have more background and long-term knowledge, and graphic organizers bridge what adult learners already know with what they are learning. Graphic organizers actually trigger long-term memory and promote synthesis with new information (Materna, 2007 in McKnight, 2010). In relation to the previous statement, (Manzo, 2004 in Srianing 2011) is also posits the usefulness of graphic organizers in reading comprehension; graphic organizers are a visual representation of the material a student is learning. The organizer assists the student in brainstorming and/or organizing information to make it easier to understand how ideas connect. The steps are as follows:

- 1. The teacher selects the type of text and the topic based on the curriculum
- 2. The teacher selects the key vocabularies words and concepts in the text given
- 3. The teacher arranges the key words into a diagram picture or charts (based on the type of text) showing how the key words interrelated. In this step, the teacher only does the chart partially and the rest will be completed by the students within the teacher's guide
- 4. The teacher adds few familiar words (related to the text) to the diagram so that students can recall their prior knowledge and make connection with the new information
- 5. The teacher presents the graphic organizers on the blackboard and then explains the relationship that comes across in the chart. In this step, the teacher gives the chance to students to show their idea related to the chart given
- 6. Students are encouraged to explain how they think the information is related (how their prior knowledge connected to the new information)
- 7. The students read the text referring as needed to graphic organizers
- 8. After reading, the students may return to graphic organizers to clarify and elaborate concepts. In this step, they may do it individually or in group
- 9. Review the students' graphic organizers. There might be different result on students' work. For that reason, the teacher should guide them so that they will have the same concept / perception about the text.

## 3. CONCLUSION

The discussion of this paper concerns on whether graphic organizers strategy effective in developing students' reading strategy regarding the nature of reading and the applicability of graphic organizers strategy in dealing with reading activity. From the elaboration above, we could see that reading is a complex and recursive thinking process; the students need to determine what is important as well as connect their knowledge and experience to what they read. When fluent readers read, they bring together all of these components into a complex process. Fluent readers recognize and get meaning from words they see in print, and use their knowledge of the structure of the language to begin forming the mental notion of the topic. They use the semantic and syntactic information from the text together with what they know from personal experience and knowledge of the topic to form hypotheses or prediction about what they are reading and what they are about to read.

Meanwhile, graphic organizers enable students to make connections to their existing schema. It also gives students reinforcement in making linking key concepts to deepen comprehension. By creating a strong visual picture, graphic organizers support students by enabling them to literally see connections and relationships between facts, information, and terms. Through the use of specific

pattern of graphic organizers to catch up with specific text types, students can be more successful learners and build comprehension of the passage. Thus, Graphic organizers are teaching and learning tools; when they're integrated into classroom experiences, students are better able to understand new material. Up to his point, it can be concluded that graphic organizers is effective in developing students reading competency.

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