

## **STUDENTS' ACCEPTANCE TO USING GRAPHIC NOVELS IN LEARNING LITERATURE (L2): A MALAYSIAN CASE STUDY**

**Abu Yazid Abu Bakar** ✉; Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

**Dayang Nurfaezah Abang Ahmad**; Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

**Melior Md Yunus**; Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

**Abstract:** Research has shown that using graphic novels in the classroom is one of useful approaches to promote the understanding of learners especially for lengthy and difficult literature texts. This study reports the extent of graphic novel in facilitating students' understanding of literature and the students' perceptions towards using graphic novel in learning literature (L2) as compared to other genre of texts. This is a mixed method study which employs quantitative and qualitative methods to obtain data. The findings indicate that most students found that graphic novel helped them to enrich their vocabularies and understand the text better. The findings also reveal that students were attracted to the illustrations in the literature text in which this helps to boost their motivation to learn literature in the classroom. The findings provide useful insights for English as Second Language (ESL) teachers in incorporating and expanding the literature learning through graphic novels in the future. The findings also imply the need of ESL teachers to use graphic novels effectively in facilitating their teaching and learning of literature in L2 classrooms particularly to suit the 21<sup>st</sup> century teaching and learning.

**Keywords:** Graphic novels; literature; student's acceptance; teaching and learning.

✉ [yazid3338@ukm.edu.my](mailto:yazid3338@ukm.edu.my)

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## INTRODUCTION

Learning literature (L2) in the classroom can be interesting yet challenging. In L2 classroom, one of the main challenges in learning literature is caused by the text itself, such as the language of the text, especially when there is a mismatch between the texts selected and students' language ability (Ghazali et al., 2009). Literature also can even be difficult for proficient language users (Musa, 2007). Graphic novels are seen as alternative texts in teaching literature as compared to the traditional texts (Schwarz, 2006; Suriani et al., 2017). A recent study from the University of Oklahoma shows that graphic novels may improve memory and be more effective in teaching students than a traditional textbook (Price, 2013). This is to suggest that graphic novels could offer English language teachers opportunities to engage all students in a medium that expands beyond the traditional borders of literacy. As such, graphic novels have great transforming potential for English classroom and students. Additionally, graphic novels are suitable for the twenty-first century society because they combine the visual images with the traditional texts. Schwarz (2006) affirms that one medium that offers possibilities for learning and creating knowledge is the graphic novel. The graphic novel can drive current traditional curriculum goals, teach new literacy, offer new topics with which teachers and students can engage and enable new ways of learning. The graphic novel creates a new medium for literacy because it fuses art and text, the visual and the verbal.

According to Yunus et al. (2013), there are several benefits in using visual aids in teaching literature. Using visual aids in teaching literature creates strong engagement between students and the texts. The use of colourful pictures encourages students to read texts meaningfully, which allow them to understand the abstract ideas in the texts. Students are highly likely to have

full concentration on the texts which leads to their understandability of the story and flow of the texts. Yunus et al. (2013) further added that students will be more motivated in learning literature with the help of pictures. Felder and Solomon (2001) found that graphic novels are also suitable for struggling and reluctant students. Aziz and Nadia (2007) found that students in Malaysian classroom have no interest in learning literature due to the difficulties they encounter in the literary texts.

The Ministry of Education has embarked on a policy shift in year 2000 with the incorporation of literature in English language lessons in schools (Isa & Mahmud, 2012). Additionally, English is given emphasis as it is made as compulsory passing subject for SPM students by 2016 (The Star, 2013). Since the decision was made by the Ministry of Education, literature has been recognised as a vital component of language learning. The students were taught to understand the literature through selected poems, short stories and novels. According to Musa (2007) the literature materials employed by teachers in Malaysia is pre-determined and selected by the Curriculum Development Centre, Ministry of Education Malaysia. These materials were then adapted and simplified to make it easier for the Malaysian students to learn them.

The new genre of text which is graphic novel was first introduced to Malaysian English syllabus few years ago under Literature Component. The graphic novels were integrated step by step into the syllabus in which the students of Form 1 and Form 4 studied the graphic novel first, followed by students of Form 2 and Form 5 in 2011 and students of Form 3 in 2012. The assessment of the new literature component were carried out in 2011(PMR) and 2012 (SPM). Some examples of graphic novels studied in the literature component in English Language by Form 1 students are (1) *Black Beauty* by Anna Sewell – Kedah,

Perlis, Kelantan, Penang and Perak (2) *Journey to The Centre of the Earth* by Jules Verne - Johor, Pahang, Terengganu, Sabah, Sarawak and Labuan (3) *The Boscombe Valley Mystery* by Arthur Conan Doyle - Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya, Negeri Sembilan and Malacca. This fresh approach to teaching literature in Malaysian schools is aimed at providing students with an enjoyable learning environment as well as inculcating the reading habit among students by engaging them to understand the literature texts. When this study was conducted, only three graphic novels are available in the syllabus, one for each area in Malaysia which means that one graphic novel for the whole five years of learning literature in schools.

Malaysian students have different levels of proficiency in English. Some students excel in English, while others face difficulty in their efforts to learn the language. Even before the Literature component was introduced, the lack of proficiency among students in Malaysia was already a problem to the Ministry of Education (Abdullah & Andrew Lim, 2008). According to Yunus et al. (2013), in the Malaysian English context, learning literature in English is not easy. This difficulty arises because learning literature (L2) in English as a Second Language (ESL) poses many language and cultural challenges. According to Aziz and Nadia (2007), students do not fully understand what they have learned and they do not know how to appreciate literature accordingly. Most of the students do not know how to appreciate the culture in the poem or short story and interpret the social, political, literary and historical perspective of a specific text. Aziz and Nadia (2007) added, students only see literature as an ordinary reading text and do not really discover the underlying principle of learning literature. To further understand these issues, this study was carried out to survey the use of graphic novels to facilitate the students' understanding of literature in L2

classroom. This study also explores the students' perception about using graphic novels in learning literature as compared to other genre of texts.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This is a mixed method study in which the quantitative study allows researcher to assess the magnitude and frequency of constructs and the qualitative study explores the meaning and understanding of constructs (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007).

### **Participants**

A total of 70 students from one secondary school in Selangor state, Malaysia were involved in this study and the selection of sample size was based on Krejcie and Morgan (1970). Earlier, a pilot study was conducted among a group of Form 1 students with similar level of proficiency who were not the respondents themselves.

### **Instrument and Data Collection**

A set of questionnaire was administered to the participants. The items in the questionnaire were developed with reference to Noor et al. (2010) and Abdullah et al. (2007). The questionnaire was distributed in the classroom and respondents were given 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

The questionnaire is divided into three sections, namely sections A, B and C. The items in section A focusses on the respondents' background. This includes the details such as form, gender, race, UPSR's grade score, exposure of English, time spent reading in English and others. Meanwhile, the items in section B, and C are based on the research question, i) students' understanding towards literature learning using graphic novel and ii) students' perception towards reading materials.

An interview session was conducted with five students to acquire supporting feedbacks to the preliminary findings from the questionnaire that administered earlier. The students were chosen based

on their high scores of the questionnaire. This interview is meant to deepen researcher's understanding towards students' opinions and perceptions regarding the topic. The questions in the interview are adopted and adapted from Chacko and Yahya (2007).

#### **Data Analysis**

Quantitative data was descriptively analyzed in terms of percentages, whereas qualitative data was thematically analyzed to find supporting data for crucial quantitative findings.

### **RESULTS**

Table 1 shows the percentage of gender among participants. All 70 respondents are Form 1 students, aged 13 years old. All of them answered the questionnaire and 5 of them participated in the interview session. There were 33 (47.14%) male students and 37 (52.86%) female students.

In term of race distribution, majority of the participants were Malays, followed by Indians, and Chinese. Table 2 shows the detailed race distribution of participants.

Each participant had different level of English proficiency and this is measured based on their Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR) English subject's results. Table 3 shows the students' UPSR English result (in percentage), based on grade. Grade A indicated excellent English proficiency, whereas grade B and grade C indicated fair and satisfactory levels, consecutively.

The quantitative data analysis also scrutinized the detailed percentage of participants' daily time spent in reading English materials, as shown in Table 4. Furthermore, this study revealed the percentage of participants' daily exposure to English language via different mediums, as illustrated in Table 5. In terms of understanding literature materials, more than 80% of participants rate themselves as having average to good levels of understanding. The

detailed percentages were shown in Table 6.

Table 7, on the other hand, stated the percentages of participants' views on the usage of graphic novels as literature learning (L2) materials. Overall, majority (more than 70%) of the participants agreed that graphic novel is efficiently useful as L2 materials in the classroom. This finding was supported by the qualitative support from interview which stated graphic novels had high resemblance of comics, in which the illustrations help them to understand the content faster than the plain text novels.

Besides that, in understanding literature using graphic novels, participants must first understand every word in the text in order to understand the full text. Table 8 showed the participants' agreement of understanding words commonly used in graphic novels. Over 50 percent of the participants agreed that words used in graphic novels were understandable; hence, facilitated the learning process of English literature. Moreover, qualitative feedbacks from interview revealed that the usages of simple words make it easier for reader to understand the literature content presented in graphic novels.

Table 9 depicted the percentage of participants' in understanding the literature components in graphic novels. Overall, more than 50 percent agreed that they understand the components, namely the theme, storyline, and moral values, presented via graphic novels used by the teachers in L2 classrooms.

Last but not least, Table 10 depicted the percentage of participants' overall learning motivation, whereby more than 60 percent of them agreed that the usage of graphic novels as teaching materials in the classrooms were convincingly effective in learning literature (L2) process.

**Table 1.** *Participants' Gender*

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Male	47.14
Female	52.86

**Table 2.** *Participants' Race Distribution*

<b>Race</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Malay	42.86
Indian	35.71
Chinese	21.43

**Table 3.** *Participants' English Proficiency based on UPSR Result*

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
A	58.57
B	32.86
C	8.57

**Table 4.** *Participants' Daily Time Spent in Reading English Materials*

<b>Daily Time Spent Reading English Materials</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Less than an hour	48.67
1 - 2 hours	38.57
3 - 4 hours	7.14
5 hours and above	5.71

**Table 5.** *Participants' Daily Exposure to English Language via Different Mediums*

<b>Medium of Exposure to English</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Television and Radio	38.76
Internet	30.61
Interaction with Friends	20.41
Daily Use at Home	10.20

**Table 6.** *Participants' Understanding of Literature Materials*

<b>Understanding Literature Materials</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Poor	8.57
Average	41.43
Good	41.43
Excellent	8.57

**Table 7.** *Participant's Views on the Usage of Graphic Novels as Literature Learning (L2) Materials*

<b>Item</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree (%)</b>	<b>Disagree (%)</b>	<b>Agree (%)</b>	<b>Strongly Agree (%)</b>
I like reading graphic novels	5.71	17.14	65.71	11.43
I am interested to read graphic novels before the lesson	12.86	14.29	48.57	24.29
I am motivated to complete my homework related to graphic novels	17.14	15.71	57.14	10
I enjoy reading graphic novels compare to other genres	14.29	10	60	15.71
I learn many things using graphic novels compare to normal text	7.14	20	54.29	18.57
The illustrations in graphic novels do affect my interest in learning literature (L2) compare to the normal text	4.29	14.29	68.57	12.86
I do not mind reading graphic novels during my free time compare to the normal text	12.86	14.29	57.14	15.71

**Table 8.** *Participants' Understanding of Words Used in Graphic Novels*

<b>Item</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree (%)</b>	<b>Disagree (%)</b>	<b>Agree (%)</b>	<b>Strongly Agree (%)</b>
I understand all the words that are used in graphic novels	17.14	30	48.57	4.29
I am less dependable on dictionary when reading graphic novels	20.00	22.86	50	7.14
The use of graphic novels helped to enrich my English vocabulary	7.14	12.86	62.86	17.14

**Table 9.** *Participants' Understanding of Literature Learning (L2) Components in Graphic Novels*

Item	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)
I am able to extract the theme from the text	11.43	31.43	54.29	2.87
I understand the storyline of the graphic novels	8.57	11.43	72.86	7.14
I am able to identify the moral values in the text	11.43	11.43	62.86	14.29

**Table 10.** *Participants' Motivation towards the Usage of Graphic Novels as L2 Teaching Materials*

Item	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)
I like learning literature (L2) using graphic novels	7.14	17.14	57.14	18.57
I am motivated to learn literature (L2) using graphic novels	10.00	11.43	62.86	15.71
I like to participate in classroom activities when teacher use graphic novels in literature learning (L2)	5.71	17.14	62.86	14.29
I am having fun learning literature (L2) using graphic novels	12.86	14.29	62.86	15.71
I prefer to use graphic novels in learning literature (L2)	5.71	5.71	62.86	20.00
Literature lessons are easy to follow when I learn using graphic novels	10.00	22.86	60.00	5.71

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, the findings in this study are consistent with previous findings that graphic novels help students to understand literature lesson (Price, 2013). It also increases the motivation of learners to read the literature texts better. In this context, as mentioned earlier, L2 learners have limited knowledge of the social, political, literary and historical perspective of a specific text (Aziz & Nadia, 2007). Hence, most students treat literature as an ordinary

reading text and unable to discover the underlying principle of learning literature.

This study investigated the extent of graphic novels in facilitating students' understanding of literature and the students' perceptions towards using graphic novel in learning literature as compared to other genre of texts. The preliminary findings indicate that most students found that graphic novels helped them to enrich their vocabularies and understand the texts better. The

findings also revealed that students were attracted to the illustrations in the literature texts in which this helps to boost their motivation to learn literature in the classroom.

Graphic novels are helpful resource for teachers especially in L2 classrooms. It can serve as interesting reading materials for the students because it is comprehensible and appealing. Thus, the teaching of literature in classrooms could be less stressful for teachers as well as the students. However, several limitations were found in this study. Firstly, the findings in this study do not represent larger group of students. Secondly, the study could have explored what other ways that could increase the motivation of students in learning literature in ESL classrooms.

Nevertheless, this study raises awareness among teachers and policy makers to carefully select the literature texts which are suitable for students in L2 classrooms and graphic novels are one of helpful resources to enhance students' motivation and understanding of the literature texts. This study also suggests the use of graphic novels in teaching and learning literature (L2). Therefore, it is recommended that future studies examine how teachers could use graphic novels effectively in the classrooms.

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