The Effects of Instruction Using Graphic Organizers on Reading Comprehension*

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Graphic organizers have been highly recommended as an instructional tool in teaching reading. Many studies have indicated their effectiveness; it has also been suggested that organizational patterns within texts play an important role in how readers process information. This paper investigates the effects of graphic organizers instruction on middle school students’ reading comprehension. It also searched for any potential relationships between different text structures and the use of graphic organizers. The performance of a group using graphic organizers with five different text structures was compared to that of a control group. The results of the data gathered over 10 weeks revealed that both groups improved in their post-tests, but the graphic organizers group performed significantly better than the non-graphic organizers group. This study also revealed that diverse learners could benefit from the use of graphic organizers, which suggests the effectiveness of implementing graphic organizers instruction in an EFL classroom.

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I. Introduction

In reading classes, language learners will often encounter challenging new materials which have different text structures. Several studies have demonstrated that text structures have an effect on reading comprehension and have shown that readers recalled and performed better on well-formed texts than over ill-formed texts (Carrell, 1985; Kintsch & Yarbrough, 1982; van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983). This indicates the importance of identifying and utilizing text structure in the reading process. Many studies reported that readers may have difficulty when the ideas in reading materials are poorly organized (Carrell, 1984, 1985, 1987; Kintsch, 1974; Meyer, 1975; Meyer & Freedle, 1984; van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983).

From the late 1970s to the present, a great deal of research (Gil-Garcia & Villeges, 2003; Grabe & Stoller, 2001; Pearson & Fielding, 1991; Weaver & Kintsch, 1991) has been conducted in order to assess the efficacy of teaching children text structures to enhance their understanding. Studies on explicit text structure instruction to first language students appear to support the effectiveness of text structure instruction. In fact, just being aware of how texts are organized plays an important role in the reader’s overall comprehension (Carrell, 1984; Jiang & Grabe, 2007; Meyer & Freedle, 1984). Thus, teaching students to be aware that texts have organizational patterns or rhetorical structures has been demonstrated to have a positive effect on comprehension. This has propelled language teachers to devise a variety of effective tools or techniques to draw students’ attention to text organization.

Along with the instruction on text structure, studies have also suggested that graphic organizers (GOs, henceforth) have been effective tools for reading instruction. Several studies reported that utilizing GOs greatly enhances reading comprehension (Chang, 2002; Clements, 2005; Goeden, 2005; Pruitt, 1993; Quist, 1995; Troyer, 1994). Graphic organizers, which are defined as a “visual representation of information in the text,” (Jiang & Grabe, 2007, p. 34) have been used to facilitate learners’ comprehension by