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de Redes-I3CE de calidad,
innovación e investigación
en docencia universitaria**

**Memòries del Programa
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innovació i investigació
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210. Graphic novel as a didactic resource: dependence of the results on the academic level of the students

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ABSTRACT

This research implements graphic novel as a vocabulary learning resource. The experience has been carried out at three different levels of English language proficiency: (1) basic level (A2-B1) with VET students of Administration and Finance, (2) intermediate level with first-year students of the degree in English

Studies at the University of Alicante (level B1) and (3) advanced level with fourth-year students of the degree in Translation and Interpreting at the same university (level C1-C2). The exercise had two parts: the first in graphic novel format and the second presented as a plain text. Students were asked to detect the meaning of 20 words, 8 of which appeared in the graphic novel part, 8 in the plain text part and 4 words that did not appear in the texts, to detect possible self-learning. The students answered the test before and after the session. Later they also filled in a satisfaction questionnaire. The results show that students learn vocabulary introduced with visual support better, especially at lower levels. The satisfaction survey manifests that most of the students liked the experience. Considering these results, we conclude that the use of graphic novel for teaching vocabulary is an effective resource, especially for lower-level students.

Key words: vocabulary, graphic novel, language learning

1. INTRODUCTION

Linguistic competence in several languages is an essential element for the personal, academic and professional enrichment of students, broadening their options for mobility, access to different types of education and better integration into the labour market. Despite the good intentions of educational programmes and the desire of families and society for students to learn English the linguistic competence of Spanish students is still quite poor. Spain's failure in the teaching of English should lead us to reflect on teaching methodology and search for alternative. As a small contribution to the search for alternative methodologies, in this paper we show an experience based on the use of graphic novels as a didactic resource, especially to try to improve students' reading skills and the learning of new vocabulary. The use of graphic novels as a didactic resource is not new but the objective of this work is to check the effectiveness of the procedure and analyse the extent to which its usefulness may be different depending on the initial level of the students' knowledge.

2. OBJECTIVES

1. To motivate students to read in the English language.
2. To encourage students to read as a means of learning as well as entertainment.
3. To help students learn vocabulary in a new, more motivating way.

3. METHOD

3.1. Description of context and participants

The experience has been carried out at three different levels of English language proficiency: (1) basic learner level (level A2-B1) with students of higher vocational training in Administration and Finance, (2) intermediate level with students of the first year of the degree in English Studies at the University of Alicante (level B1) and (3) advanced level with students of the fourth year of the degree in Translation and Interpreting at the same university (level C1-C2).

3.2. Instrument used to evaluate the educational experience

The texts used composed an entire chapter of a graphic novel. One half of the chapter was photocopied from the original and the other half was converted into plain text describing the scenes depicted in the vignettes and reproducing the dialogue. The words for the pre- and post-test were selected on the basis of their complexity, assuming that most of them would be unfamiliar to the students.

The pre-test and post-test were administered to the students in paper, and the responses were then entered into an online form created ad-hoc to automate the tabulation.

The satisfaction survey was carried out using online forms and questionnaires from the University of Alicante.

3.3. Description of the experience

After an exhaustive review of the literature, to find out about other similar experiences carried out by other teams, a meeting was held among the members of the network to select the chapters of graphic novels to be used, in accordance with the linguistic level of the group and its speciality / area of knowledge and with the grammatical and lexical aspects to be worked on.

The experience consisted in administering, as a normal class activity, a reading exercise in two parts: the first in graphic novel format and the second presented as a plain text. These two parts formed a complete chapter of a graphic novel. In each of the parts, students were expected to learn eight new words, idioms or expressions. In order to analyse the effectiveness of the procedure, a vocabulary test was designed in which the students were asked to detect the meaning of those 20 words: eight words were taken out of the graphic novel, eight more from the plain text and four words that did not appear in the text and were not mentioned in class, whose purpose in the test was to detect the possible self-learning of the students, that is, to what extent they are able to and eager to look up the meaning of new or unknown words, without the need for the teacher's explanation. The students did the test before and after the session. Afterwards, and by means of another questionnaire, they were asked about the degree of acceptance and enjoyment of the activity. Learning was quantified by measuring the increase in the number of correct answers in the final test compared to the initial one.

4. RESULTS

Statistical analysis of the results shows that students learn vocabulary introduced through the graphic novel better than through plain text: there was 24.04% increase in the number of correct answers for words introduced through the

graphic novel and 18.50% for words introduced through plain text. Segmentation by level shows that the difference is mostly at the lower levels, but the effect is almost irrelevant at the more advanced levels.

The results show that the improvement differs according to the level of the students. Vocational training students, who are not very familiar with the English language, show very little improvement in vocabulary knowledge when there is no teacher intervention, but they are the ones who improve the most when the graphic novel is used as a resource. First-year English students, who are more inclined to study the language, improve with or without the teacher's intervention, although they also show better results when vocabulary is explained using the graphic novel. Translation and Interpreting students improve in all cases, with and without didactic intervention

5. CONCLUSIONS

The experience has been positive from a pedagogical point of view and has also been well accepted by the students. The analysis of the results has shown that the higher levels of English proficiency have acquired a self-learning capacity that makes them less dependent on the didactic resource used. Proof of this is that in the Translation students there was an improvement of more than 20% in the number of correct answers in the words that were not explained at any point. This percentage is one third lower for the students of English Studies and 75% lower for the vocational training students. If lower-level students get no explanation, there is no improvement in vocabulary knowledge, and there is no motivation, but when a traditional teaching model is implemented, they improve their performance and when this is done with a didactic resource that motivates them, they improve their performance much more than the students at higher levels.

In view of these results, we conclude that the use of graphic novel for teaching vocabulary is a possible and effective resource, especially at low levels of language proficiency.

6. TASKS CARRIED OUT IN THE NETWORK

NETWORK PARTICIPANT	TASKS THEY PERFORM
Veronika Dubová	Text writing, research, communication
María Gloria Zaragoza Castelló	Text writing, research
Andrew Revis	English proofreading
María Mercedes Palmero Cabeas	Final revision of the text and format issues
Juan Antonio Formigós Bolea	Statistical analysis and preparation of communication

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