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# THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS IN COMPREHENDING LITERARY TEXTS

JUDY OOI SUAN CHOO



05-4506832



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Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah



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THIS DISSERTATION IS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work in this dissertation is my own except for quotations and summaries which have been duly acknowledged.

18 AUGUST 2006



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## DEDICATION

Specially dedicated to my beloved dad, mum, husband and  
my two wonderful children, Michelle and Alex.



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## ABSTRAK

Pelaksanaan pengajaran komponen sastera Bahasa Inggeris dalam sukatan baru Bahasa Inggeris telah mendorong penanaman budaya membaca dan peningkatan penguasaan dalam bahasa tersebut. Oleh itu, ia amat penting untuk semua pelajar di Malaysia, mempelajari sastera Bahasa Inggeris. Walau bagaimanapun, perkara ini menimbulkan masalah kepada kebanyakan pelajar kita kerana mereka amat kurang didedahkan kepada sebarang sastera Bahasa Inggeris di peringkat pendidikan sekolah rendah. Kajian ini bertujuan mengkaji penggunaan pengelola grafik sebagai suatu alat dalam meningkatkan pemahaman pelajar dalam teks sastera seperti novel. Ia juga mengkaji sama ada strategi pengajaran ini boleh dipraktikkan dalam bilik darjah untuk meningkatkan pemahaman teks tersebut. Aspek pengajaran dan pembelajaran adalah amat penting dalam kajian ini kerana perolehan pengetahuan yang lain bergantung kepada apa yang bakal berlaku dalam bilik darjah. Selain itu, kajian ini dijalankan dalam jangka 8 minggu dan semua dapatan kajian ini diperolehi melalui praujian, pascaujian dan soal selidik yang diberikan kepada kumpulan eksperimental. Dapatan kajian membuktikan keutuhan pengelola grafik sebagai alat bantu yang unggul dalam mengatasi masalah pemahaman pelajar dalam pembelajaran teks sastera Bahasa Inggeris selain daripada membina dan mempertingkatkan kemahiran berfikir mereka.





## ABSTRACT

The implementation of the Literature Component in the new Malaysian syllabus for English Language provides ample impetus for the promotion of a reading culture and improvement of competence in the English Language. Therefore, it is important for ESL students in Malaysia to study literature. However, this poses problems for most students as a majority of them have not been exposed to any genre of Literature in their six years of primary education. Thus this study was postulated to explore whether graphic organizers could be used as a tool in enhancing the learners' comprehension of literary texts such as a novel. It also attempts to find out if this teaching strategy could be utilized in the classroom to promote better comprehension of this literary text. Both the learning and teaching aspects are essential in this study as there is a wealth of knowledge to be gained from the proceedings in the classroom. Besides that, this study was conducted over a period of 8 weeks and the information required for this study was obtained through pre-test, post-test and the learners' questionnaires. The findings indicated that graphic organizers are essential tools to aid the learners in overcoming these barriers of comprehension. It also indicates that graphic organizers also help the learners to develop and enhance their thinking skills.





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## LIST OF SYMBOLS, ABBREVIATIONS AND NOMENCLATURE

<b>Dr.</b>	<b>Doctor</b>
<b>ELT</b>	<b>English Language Teaching</b>
<b>ESL</b>	<b>English as a Second Language</b>
<b>IT</b>	<b>Information Technology</b>
<b>KBSM</b>	<b>Kurikulum Baru Sekolah Menengah (New Secondary Schools' Curriculum)</b>
<b>N</b>	<b>Total number</b>
<b>SD</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
<b>SMJK</b>	<b>Sekolah Menengah Jenis Kebangsaan (National - Type Secondary School)</b>
<b>SPSS</b>	<b>Statistical Package for the Social Sciences</b>
<b>Vol.</b>	<b>Volume</b>
<b>%</b>	<b>Percentage</b>



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

Reading has become a more important skill in our school curriculum than it does today. This is due to the fact that appreciation and understanding of the rest of the world including other cultures and value system can be inculcated through reading of literature.

The above statement is supported by Huck *et al* (1993) whom described literature as the imaginative shaping of life and thought into the forms and structures of language. Besides that, in our country, Malaysia there is also a resurgence of interest in the study of literature to enhance the learning of English Language (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2000) in accordance with the implementation of Vision 2020.

Literature study is also highly valued in many countries around the world as it can provide students with access to the culture of the people whose language they are studying. Therefore, by exposing our students to literature in English, we are preparing them towards achieving the mission of our education philosophy because





through literature learning, the sense of trust and love for others can be cultivated. Furthermore, the sense of hostility and distrust can be diminished while instilling positive thoughts for peace, love and harmony in accordance to the goal of quality education for all as in our national development plan. Hence, reading comprehension is taught in all schools in Malaysia but it is not an easy skill to teach.

Few people know how to read properly and we are not talking about super reading techniques at thousands of words a minute. Therefore, the approach used in teaching literature to students is equally important because by merely teaching literature and exposing literature to students is not sufficient. In order to sustain students' interest in literature, visual/graphic organizers were chosen as the intervention strategies in my teaching since I felt that all students should be given the opportunity to explore and discover their own learning styles and build their thinking skills at their own pace and ease. It is also hoped that visual/graphic organizers could help teachers to promote better reading comprehension, good reading habits and exploration to other kinds of literature.

Visual/Graphic organizers which are interesting with the use of short words, pictures, images and designs will help the students to comprehend better which later leads to better memory. Like the saying, a picture in your mind map is worth a thousand words. Thus, it is pertinent that teachers explore and use appropriate teaching strategies to enhance students' skills in reading.

Reading comprehension is also not an inborn skill and it has to be inculcated through the teaching of certain reading comprehension strategies. Some of these reading comprehension strategies such as semantic map, mind map, synthesis map and concept map will definitely promote better understanding of a text or task.

Furthermore, teachers have to take into considerations the different learning





styles of their students. They ought to recognize that each and every one of them is gifted with different kinds of intelligence, as propounded by Gardner (1983) in his Theory of Multiple Intelligences presented in his book, *Frames of Mind*.

## 1.2 Statements of Problem

Reading ability is an asset which most of us cannot do without because we depend on this skill to do our daily chores. We need to read different kinds of texts and for all kinds of purposes such as reading the label on the bottle to remind us about the dosage of medicine to take or reading the bus schedule to know when a bus is leaving. Besides that, books are always referred to as men's best friends and companion. Material wealth and possession can be taken away from you, but if you are literate, a man of knowledge, no one can steal this knowledge from you. Simultaneously, reading can help one to gain insights into oneself, strengthening interpersonal relationships, understanding life in our daily living, with a vision toward a new millennium.

The ability to read is crucial to the success of students in school and important for a satisfying life for adults. The ability to read affects students' success or failure in school. It has a profound effect on how much he is able to learn in his class, how he feels about himself as a student, the courses he will be able to take in advanced grades and secondary school. The above statements about the importance of reading are strongly supported by Newman & Newman (1997), which mentioned that reading is the most significant intellectual skill that develops during middle childhood because it opens the door to so many others. They also believed that reading provides access to new information, new uses of language, and new forms of thinking. Likewise,





children are limited in their ability to learn Mathematics, Social Studies, and Science if they cannot read. Once a child can read fluently, the possibility for all manners of independent inquiry expands significantly.

All these statements are further supported by Smith (1978), who said that, “There is very little we can learn about reading without reading”. So, the most useful tool in this process is reading and of course reading comprehension. However, reading comprehension is not an inborn skill and it has to be inculcated through the teaching of certain reading comprehension strategies. Some of these reading comprehension strategies such as semantic mapping, mind mapping, synthesis map and concept map will definitely promote better understanding of a text or task. Among these strategies, graphic organizers, in language teaching and learning in Malaysia are still very limited. Research literature in this area is minimal as there is not much study being carried out on the topic. Hence, this study is designed to inquire the effectiveness of visual/graphic organizers in reading comprehension of the novel, *The Prisoner of Zenda* among the Form Three students in an ESL classroom.

Apart from that, studies have shown that the technique of mind mapping, which is part of visual/graphic organizers would also indirectly enable our students learn how to read effectively (Armbruster & Anderson, 1982). This would make their everyday tasks much easier, and not only this may happen, its structure, laws and the fact that visual/graphic organizers uses both sides of the brain ensure better results in terms of recollection, comprehension and speed which will lead to better grades in other subjects and more free time for relaxation and other healthy activities. Thus, this study is also more concerned with whether or not the use of visual/graphic organizers







would bring about a marked improvement in students' reading comprehension in the

- literary text that is the novel used in Form Three.

### 1.3 Purpose of the Study

This research sought to examine the significance of visual/graphic organizers and their relationships in enhancing students' comprehension in reading the English novel, *The Prisoner of Zenda* in a secondary school in Penang. This main aim was postulated in the belief that visual/graphic organizers can assist students, especially those average or low proficient ones, to comprehend their reading text with ease and have better understanding of the reading text.

Secondly, it also sought to find out whether visual/graphic organizers can help to develop and enhance students' thinking skills. It is predicted that visual/graphic organizers can assist students to develop critical and creative thinking skills by requiring them to think, explore and extract the relevant information from the novel they have read.

### 1.4 Rationale

The rationale for an exploration into the Literature component in the Malaysian English Language Curriculum arises from the importance of literature as a medium for language learning among ESL students. With the emphasis on Literature in the secondary school curriculum beginning 2000, Malaysian students nationwide are left with no choice but to engage themselves in the demanding task of reading extensively regardless of their level of proficiency in English. This poses problems for a majority





of the students who have not been exposed to Literature in their six years of primary education as our present primary school English syllabus do not include any genre of literature. Whilst many students have little or no exposure to any genre of literature, most of them are also unable to recognise the transition of ideas, connection between main and supporting details, shifts in arguments and the overall or holistic construction of an argument. For these reasons, the implementation of appropriate strategies to rectify this deficiency would help students in their reading comprehension skills. Therefore, I have adopted the strategy of visual/graphic organizers as a step to enhance the teaching and learning of literature in Form Three.

In addition, it is believed that by learning literature, students would be able to develop their reading skills so that they can read on their own and become readers for life. As mentioned by O'Sullivan (1991), literature can be perceived as an agent for language development and improvement since the focus is on authentic language and authentic situations. There is also a need to cultivate interest in reading in ESL learners and literature generates creativity in language and imagination that aids in the learning process as it is enjoyable and has the element of discovery in it (O'Sullivan, 1991). Consequently, an exposure to various cultures and issues of life would further enhance the students' mind and preparation for the real world after secondary school (Literature Syllabus, Ministry of Education, 1999). Therefore, this research was purely to test if visual/graphic organizers could be of any help to average and low proficient students in enhancing their comprehension of literary texts such as in a novel and to seek whether this strategy develops and enhances thinking skills.





### 1.5 Significance of the Study

The implementation of the Literature Component in the new Malaysian syllabus for English Language provides ample impetus for the promotion of a reading culture and the improvement of competence in the English Language. Besides that, an in-depth understanding may perhaps help the researcher and maybe other teachers and educators to make changes in their teaching methodology and improve their confidence in teaching Literature.

In addition, it will also provide learners the opportunity to articulate their views, thoughts and feelings on this subject matter and to get some insights into their own language learning strategies, thus helping to improve their style of learning literature. Therefore, this study attempts to determine whether visual/graphic organizers could be used to enhance the students' comprehension in the novel, *The Prisoner of Zenda* and also to find out if this teaching strategy could be utilized in the classroom to promote a better comprehension of this literary text. Both the learning and teaching aspects are essential in this study as there is a wealth of knowledge to be gained from the proceedings in the classroom.

Consequently, it is also hoped that students will learn to love and appreciate all kinds of literature after learning how to use visual/graphic organizers effectively in enhancing their reading comprehension skills.

Finally, the use of visual/graphic organizers in teaching the literature component have the potential of developing critical thinking skills among students in an English Language classroom. Therefore, it is hoped that the findings of the study would enable teachers and educators to consider the significance of this strategy that they could employ to help the students acquire confidence, express views and value their own responses. It could not be denied that it is only through well-planned





strategies that the students will be assisted in developing independent thinking and can be more interested and open to other perspectives, be it for individuals or groups.

### 1.6 Research Questions

The aim of this study is to answer these questions pertaining to the use of visual/graphic organizers as a reading comprehension strategy to enhance students' reading comprehension levels in literary texts mainly the novel, *The Prisoner of Zenda*. They are as follows:

1. Do the scores of the post-test for reading comprehension show a significant difference from the pre-test after the treatment using visual/graphic organizers?
2. Are visual/graphic organizers an effective teaching strategy to promote better reading comprehension in literature?
3. Does the visual/graphic organizers technique employed in the study help students to develop and enhance their thinking skills?

### 1.7 Limitations of the Study

First of all, this study only focused on the novel, *The Prisoner of Zenda*. Other types of genres including short stories and plays were not included in the study. Thus, any finding from this study is limited to only one literature genre.

Secondly, this study involved only a group of seventy Form Three students from SMJK Chung Hwa Confucian, Penang. In addition, the sample consisted of mainly Chinese students as the chosen school is a Chinese school. As such, the





findings of this study could only be applied to the Form Three students of that school, and did not represent the whole population of that school. Therefore, the results of the study would not be a representative of the country's whole population.

The practical part of the research took place within 3 months. Due to the time constraint shouldered by the researcher, the number of experiments and treatments that were carried out was limited to seven each, for both the control group as well as the experimental group. Finally, in accordance with the directives from the Ministry of Education, a single period of English Language is allocated for Literature per week. Therefore, the findings of this research were limited and not applicable to the available population as the researcher only carried out seven forty-minute lessons for the whole duration of research. This might also be too limited a time for the students to successfully accept, adopt and practice a new and unknown strategy. For a more conclusive answer on the validity of visual/graphic organizers, a longer period is needed both for teaching and monitoring.

### 1.8 Definition of Terms

In this study, there are three terms which need to be defined according to their areas of specification.

#### a) Literary text

For the purpose of this study, the context of literary text refers to a novel. A novel is actually a piece of fiction in prose form. It is longer than a short story and its length ranges from 80 to more than 100 pages. It usually has a main plot and a few sub-plots. Its setting varies as the plot develops and it also has at least two or three themes. In addition, it covers a number of issues relating to life, man and society. Its events





usually happen over a longer time, for example, a few months or years. The readers too learn a few values about life from the novel.

Likewise Cheah (2002), refers a novel to a long story which is a piece of fiction. According to her, it could be autobiographical and tells the true-life story of the author or semi-autobiographical, part real-life and part fiction. She also said that a novel has many characters and focuses on the development of characters and the relationships between people. Lastly, issues and conflicts arise in the story and some kind of ending or resolution to these conflicts can be expected at the end.

In this study, the said novel refers to the literary text, *The Prisoner of Zenda* that has to be learnt as part of the English Language component as stated in the KBSM English Language syllabus for Form Three students. Consequently, this text was chosen because it is also the compulsory text selected for the northern states of Malaysia by the Ministry of Education.

#### b) Visual/Graphic organizers

Graphic organizers are visual frameworks or visual displays such as figures, diagrams, charts, and mind maps that are used together with a reading text and specifically for the purpose of organizing or generating ideas as well as bridging relationship between them (Bahagian Pendidikan Guru, 1995; Gunning, 1998). In addition, according to Shumin Kang in her research report published in the ELT Journal (2004), visual/graphic organizers are visual systems of using spatial frameworks to organize and present structural knowledge in a content domain. They are also a creative technique used to present information through graphic depictions of the relationships between concepts. For this study, visual/graphic organizers refer to story maps, mind maps, character traits maps, plot diagram and circle maps.





### c) Effective

Effective refers to the level of improvement achieved after using a certain form of tool. In this study, if the subjects obtained an increase in their scores in the post comprehension test given after the treatment, then the tool used in this experiment is said to be effective.

## 1.9 Summary

This chapter attempts to provide some valuable insights to students and educators on the use of visual/graphic organizers to enhance students' understanding of the literary text that is the novel in this study. It also dispels any notion that teaching and learning of reading comprehension of literary text is difficult and unpleasant.

The next chapter of the study, Chapter 2, is on the review of related literature pertaining to the study. Chapter 3 focuses on the research methodology employed in the study whereas Chapter 4 is on the statistical analysis of the results obtained in the pretest, posttest and questionnaires. The last chapter, Chapter 5, is on the conclusion drawn from the study, its implications and suggestions for future research.

