The effect of graphic organizer strategy on students' reading comprehension of grade eleventh of SMA YP HKBP 1 Pematangsiantar

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the effect of the Graphic Organizer strategy on students' reading comprehension of narrative texts, focusing specifically on literal and inferential understanding. The study employed a quasi-experimental design involving two eleventh-grade classes of SMA YP HKBP 1 Pematangsiantar. An experimental class was taught using story-map graphic organizers, and a control class was taught using conventional reading instruction. Both groups were given a pre-test and post-test to measure their comprehension before and after the treatment. The results of the descriptive analysis showed that both classes improved after instruction; the experimental class increased from a mean score of 63.81 to 85.71, while the control class improved from 75.00 to 89.52. Paired sample t-test results indicated significant improvement within each group. However, the independent sample t-test showed no statistically significant difference between the post-test scores of the two groups (Sig. = .228 > 0.05). This finding indicates that although the Graphic Organizer strategy helped students improve their comprehension and organize narrative information more effectively, it was not significantly more effective than the conventional method within the duration and conditions of this study.

Keyword: effect; graphic organizer; reading comprehension

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1. INTRODUCTION

Language is a system that people use to communicate either through speech, writing, or symbols. Wardhaugh (2021) defines it as "a system of arbitrary vocal symbols used for human communication." Language is very important in helping people share ideas, express emotions, and connect with each other socially. In language learning, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) refers to learning and teaching English in a place or country where English is not the main or official language. This means English is not used in everyday life but is still taught in schools or courses. Students most of the time interact with each other using their first language and use English only occasionally, mostly in the classroom. Richards and Schmidt (2010) explain that EFL describes the role of English in places like Japan or Indonesia, where English is learned for specific purposes such as academic needs, job opportunities, or international communication. Because learners are not frequently exposed to English, the use of effective instruction can greatly help them practice all four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Language skills refer to the main abilities that people have and use to communicate effectively in a language. These skills are generally divided into four main aspects: reading, speaking, writing, and listening. Reading and listening are categorized as receptive skills because both involve receiving and understanding language input. On the other hand, speaking and writing are categorized as productive skills because they involve producing and conveying messages. According to Brown (2001), these four skills are fundamental components of language competence and are interrelated in the process of language learning. Mastering these skills enables learners to understand and convey messages accurately and appropriately according to context.

In an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting, a well-balanced development of these skills is crucial for achieving communicative competence and effective language use.

Reading is the process of decoding written symbols to acquire meaning and understanding from a text. It involves not only recognizing written words but also actively interpreting meaning based on the reader's prior knowledge, vocabulary, and comprehension. According to Grabe and Stoller (2011), reading is the ability to draw meaning from the printed page and interpret this information appropriately. Reading is not only recognizing words but also understanding ideas, making inferences, evaluating information, and applying it in real-world contexts. As a receptive language skill, reading is very important for acquiring information and knowledge, expanding vocabulary, and developing overall language understanding.

Many students face various reading problems that hinder their ability to understand texts and read effectively. In most cases, reading problems may occur because of limited vocabulary, lack of reading fluency, poor decoding skills, and difficulty making inferences or understanding main ideas. These problems may arise due to insufficient exposure to language, ineffective reading strategies, or lack of motivation. Pang et al. (2003) state that reading difficulties can be caused by factors such as cognitive issues (poor memory or low comprehension skills) and linguistic limitations (grammar and vocabulary). Therefore, struggling readers may fail to monitor their understanding, leading to confusion and reduced retention. Hence, addressing these problems can help learners become confident and independent readers who are capable of accessing and analyzing information across various texts.

During the researcher's internship experience at SMA YP HKBP 1 Pematangsiantar, especially in the eleventh grade, several reading problems were identified, namely limited vocabulary, difficulty understanding texts, and difficulty identifying the main idea of a paragraph. These difficulties led to students' inability to understand the overall information in texts. This problem also caused students to lose interest in learning English because they perceived it as difficult and uninteresting. The situation became more serious during end-of-term tests, where only a few students were able to score above the minimum passing grade.

These problems may be caused by the teacher's instructional strategies in teaching English. In some cases, students lack interest in learning because teachers use conventional methods such as turns in reading, simple explanations, and translating entire texts. Furthermore, teachers may not utilize varied or interactive strategies in teaching English. As a result, students simply read texts and translate them using Google Translate or AI tools, where translations are often inaccurate. This practice leads students to read texts without truly understanding them.

To address these problems, graphic organizers can be used as an effective teaching strategy. A graphic organizer is a visual aid that helps students organize and understand information from a text. It allows students to break down what they read into several parts, such as the main idea, supporting details, or sequence of events, using charts, diagrams, or maps. This makes it easier for students to follow the text and remember important points. Graphic organizers can also help students who rely heavily on translation tools, which often provide inaccurate or confusing translations and do not support real comprehension. By using graphic organizers, students are encouraged to engage in active reading. They are required to think about what they read and demonstrate their understanding through visual structures. Students break down texts into smaller sections based on the type of graphic organizer they use. As Buehl (2001) explains, graphic organizers "make the structure of the text more visible," which supports better comprehension and recall. In addition, using graphic organizers in class can improve students' motivation and interest. When students find it easier to understand texts and the learning process becomes more engaging, they are less likely to feel bored or frustrated. According to Marzano et al. (2001), non-linguistic representations such as graphic organizers can increase student achievement because they help learners process and store information more easily. Through this strategy, students can develop stronger reading skills, become more confident in learning English, and improve their test performance.

Previous research by Elviyati (2016) examined the effectiveness of graphic organizers, such as KWL charts and fishbone diagrams, in improving reading comprehension among twelfth-grade EFL students at SMAN 23 Tangerang. Students reported that KWL charts helped them activate prior knowledge and predict content, while fishbone diagrams helped them identify main ideas and supporting details. These findings indicate that graphic organizers are effective strategies for enhancing reading comprehension. In another study, Lai and Mukundan (2023) explored the effects of graphic organizers, including concept maps and KWL charts, on Malaysian ESL students. By helping students set reading goals (Know–Want–Learn), reflect on prior knowledge, and think critically about texts, graphic organizers encouraged students to become more engaged and active during reading activities. This study shows that graphic organizers not only improve comprehension but also increase student motivation and participation. Similarly, a study by Rahat & Rahman (2020) in the Indonesian Journal of Education and Pedagogy revealed that graphic organizers improved comprehension among both high- and low-performing students. In their research with EFL university students, the

experimental group showed notable improvement in reading test scores, increasing from an average of 55 to 79 for higher-level readers and from 43 to 61 for lower-level readers. These results demonstrate that graphic organizers are effective reading strategies across different ability levels, helping students understand texts better.

The researcher is particularly interested in this strategy because it encourages active reading. After several practices, students can use it independently once they become familiar with graphic organizers. With proper guidance and practice, students can apply graphic organizers as a learning strategy even outside the classroom. This can help make reading less intimidating and more meaningful for students. Therefore, this research aims to explore how the graphic organizer strategy can be used to improve students' reading comprehension and how it can contribute to more effective and engaging English learning experiences.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

A. Research Design

The design of this study is a quantitative research design. It is a quasi-experimental study. According to Creswell (2012), an experiment is a form of quantitative research in which the investigator introduces an intervention and studies its effect on an outcome. It involves random assignment, control and experimental groups, and manipulation of independent variables. This research method involves collecting data that can be counted or measured. Creswell (2012) also states that in a quasi-experimental design, the researcher uses an experimental procedure but does not randomly assign participants to groups. These designs include pre- and post-test measures and control or comparison groups.

This research used two groups: one as the experimental class and one as the control class. The experimental class was the group that received the treatment, which was taught using the graphic organizer strategy. On the other hand, the control group did not receive the treatment and was taught using a conventional teaching strategy. Both groups were given a pre-test and post-test.

Table 1. Experimental Design

Subject	Pre-Test	Treatment	Post-Test
Experiments	✔	Using graphic organizer	✔
Controlled	✔	Using Conventional method	✔

B. Research Population and Sample

1) Research Population

Population refers to all people or objects that researchers are interested in studying as part of a particular research project. According to Creswell (2012), a population is a group of individuals who share the same characteristics and are the focus of a study. The population of this research consisted of eleventh-grade students of SMA YP HKBP 1 Pematangsiantar for the 2025/2026 academic year, with a total of 120 students distributed across four classes.

2) Research Sample

A sample consists of specific individuals selected from the population through a particular procedure. According to Creswell (2012), a sample is a subgroup of the target population that the researcher plans to study to generalize findings about the target population. In this research, the sampling technique used was purposive sampling. According to Jenson in Rai and Thapa (2015, p. 5), purposive selection refers to a method of choosing groups of units in such a way that the selected groups collectively mirror, as closely as possible, the characteristics of the entire population.

Two classes were selected as the sample of this research. Class XI-3 consisted of 31 students and served as the control class, while Class XI-4 consisted of 21 students and served as the experimental class. The selection of these classes was based on observations, interviews, and teaching practice experience indicating that both classes had difficulties in reading comprehension of narrative texts. Therefore, the researcher intended to help and find solutions to these problems. The experimental class was taught using the graphic organizer strategy, whereas the control class was taught using a conventional strategy.

Table 2. Research Sample

Sample	Status	Number of Students
XI-3	Control	31
XI-4	Experiment	21

C. Technique of Collecting Data

To determine the effect of graphic organizers on students' comprehension skills, the researcher used the following procedures:

1) Pre-Test

The pre-test was conducted for all participants before the intervention. Its purpose was to evaluate students' reading comprehension skills prior to the implementation of graphic organizers. Both the experimental and control groups were given the same reading texts. In this way, the researcher could measure students' initial reading ability and ensure that both groups had comparable skill levels before the intervention. The results of this pre-test served as the basis for further analysis of the effectiveness of graphic organizers in improving students' reading comprehension skills.

2) Treatment

The treatment was conducted with the experimental group using the graphic organizer strategy. This method encourages students to think independently, discuss their ideas, and present their conclusions to the class. The control group continued with traditional teaching methods.

Table 3. Activities of Teacher and Students in the Treatment Class

No	Teacher's Activities	Students' Activities
1	The teacher explained the material about narrative texts, including definition, social function, generic structure, language features, examples, and graphic organizers.	Students listened to the explanation and took notes of important points.
2	The teacher showed examples of narrative texts and the story-mapping graphic organizer that would be used to analyze the text.	Students paid attention and worked together to complete the organizer with guidance.
3	The teacher opened a question-and-answer session.	Students asked questions about difficulties and confusion.
4	The teacher assigned individual tasks based on the analyzed narrative text.	Students completed the task individually based on the lesson.
5	The teacher asked students to exchange answers with another row and discussed correct answers.	Students exchanged work, checked answers, and graded based on the discussion.

In classroom reading instruction, teachers commonly apply structured techniques to help students understand texts more effectively. Situmorang, Napitupulu, and Sitanggang (2024) reported that teachers guide students through reading activities using explanation, questioning, and text discussion to support comprehension. Based on this practice, the present study implemented graphic organizers as an instructional technique to assist students in organizing information from texts. This approach was expected to support students' comprehension at both literal and inferential levels during reading activities.

3) Post-Test

Following the treatment, a post-test was administered to assess students' reading comprehension skills. Both classes received identical reading texts to evaluate the impact of graphic organizers on comprehension. The post-test followed the same procedure as the pre-test.

Table 4. Scoring Rubric (Adapted from Barrett, 1976)

Domain	Score	Level	Description
Literal Comprehensions	41-50	Excellent	Fully understands literal content with accuracy and clarity.
	31-40	Good	Generally accurate, with minor misunderstandings.
	21-30	Fair	Partial comprehensions, mixes correct and incorrect facts.
	0-20	Poor	Weak understanding, shows guessing or fundamental misconceptions.
Inferential Comprehensions	41-50	Excellent	Fully understands inferential content with accuracy and clarity.
	31-40	Good	Generally accurate, with minor missing subtle ideas.
	21-30	Fair	Partial comprehensions, mixes correct and incorrect inferences.
	0-20	Poor	Weak understanding, shows guessing or fundamental misconceptions.

D. Technique of Analyzing Data

Data analysis plays a critical role in quantitative research. After collecting pre-test and post-test scores, the researcher analyzed the data using SPSS 24.

1) Grading Students' Assessments
Students' reading assessments were graded manually according to the scoring rubric.

2) Determining the Average Test Score
The average score for each group was calculated using SPSS 24 through descriptive statistics procedures.

3) Determining Data Normality
The normality test was conducted to determine whether the distribution of test scores was normal.

4) Determining Homogeneity
The homogeneity test determined whether the two groups had equal variances.

5) Analyzing Data Using the t-Test
The t-test was used to determine whether there was a significant difference between the experimental and control groups. Paired sample t-tests were used to compare pre- and post-test scores within groups, while independent sample t-tests were used to compare post-test results between groups.

3.　RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to determine whether the use of the Graphic Organizer Strategy had a significant effect on students' reading comprehension of narrative texts. Based on the results of the data analysis, several findings were obtained. The paired sample t-test for the control class showed a significance value of .000, which is lower than 0.05. This indicates that there was a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores. The students improved their reading comprehension after being taught through conventional instruction. Similarly, the experimental class also showed a significance value of .000 (< 0.05), which indicates a significant difference between its pre-test and post-test scores. The improvement in the experimental class was higher than that of the control class, suggesting that the graphic organizer strategy helped students better understand the texts.

However, the independent sample t-test comparing the post-test results of both groups produced a significance value of .228, which is higher than 0.05. This means that there was no statistically significant difference between the post-test scores of the control and experimental classes. Although the experimental class achieved a slightly higher mean score, the difference was not large enough to be statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) was accepted, and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) was rejected. In summary, both groups improved significantly after instruction, but the difference between the two classes was not statistically significant. This indicates that while the graphic organizer strategy positively affected students' reading comprehension, it was not significantly more effective than the conventional method within the scope and duration of this study.

The purpose of this study was also to determine whether using graphic organizers, especially story maps, could help students understand narrative texts better at both literal and inferential levels. Graphic organizers are visual tools that help students organize information, see connections between ideas, and remember what they read more easily. Based on schema theory and cognitive learning theory, students understand texts better when they activate prior knowledge and visualize the structure of information. As Grabe (2009) and Anderson (2012) explain, organizing ideas visually can support clearer comprehension. For this reason, the use of story maps in this study was expected to help students identify characters, settings, plot structures, and cause-and-effect relationships more effectively in narrative texts.

The findings revealed that both the experimental and control groups improved in reading comprehension from pre-test to post-test. The experimental class increased from a mean score of 63.81 to 85.71, while the control class increased from 75.00 to 89.52. The paired sample t-test showed significant improvement within both groups, indicating that the learning activities—whether using graphic organizers or conventional methods—were effective in improving students' comprehension. However, the independent sample t-test demonstrated that there was no statistically significant difference between the post-test scores of the two groups (Sig. = .228 > 0.05). This result indicates that the Graphic Organizer strategy did not outperform the conventional method at a statistically significant level within the time frame of this study, even though the experimental group showed noticeable improvement.

The findings of this study show similarities with several previous studies that examined reading comprehension using pre-test and post-test designs focusing on literal and inferential levels. Like Elviyati (2016), this study used multiple-choice and true/false questions to measure students' understanding before and after the use of graphic organizers. The results also support the study by Lai and Mukundan (2023), who found that visual supports can improve students' ability to understand both explicit and implied meanings in a text. Likewise, Rahat & Rahman (2020) showed that using structured visual tools in reading lessons can help students perform better at both literal and interpretive levels, which aligns with the improvement observed in this research.

This study's test design also follows the approach used by Megat Abdul Rahim et al. (2017), who applied WH-questions and multiple-choice items to assess factual and inferential comprehension. Their work supports the idea that measuring these two levels is appropriate for identifying students' reading progress. Similarly, Imsa-ard (2022) and Albufalasa (2019) suggested that combining literal and inferential

(Brooklyn Fransius Bonatua Silalahi)

comprehension provides a more comprehensive picture of students' reading ability, especially for EFL learners. In addition, Öztürk (2012), who based his research on Barrett's taxonomy, confirmed that comprehension develops from understanding explicit information to making inferences, which supports the two-level reading focus used in this study.

The findings also differ from several previous studies due to variations in research design, text type, graphic organizer type, and participant characteristics. For example, Elviyati (2016) used classroom action research with descriptive texts and semantic maps, allowing repeated instructional cycles that strengthened students' improvement, whereas the present study used a quasi-experimental design with narrative texts and story maps within a shorter treatment period. Studies by Lai and Mukundan (2023) and Öztürk (2012) mainly used expository texts supported by concept maps, which focus on identifying main ideas and logical relationships; this contrasts with the narrative focus of the present research, which emphasizes sequencing and story structure.

Likewise, Rahat & Rahman (2020) and Rahim et al. (2017) included additional variables such as reading habits and learning styles, which provided deeper analysis and may explain their stronger results, whereas this study focused solely on comprehension scores. Imsa-ard (2022) also employed KWL charts with expository texts, targeting prior knowledge activation and summary skills, which differ from the narrative-based strategy applied here. In contrast, although Albufalasa (2019) used story maps similar to this study, his participants were university students with higher reading proficiency, which may explain why his study reported more significant gains than those found in the present research. These methodological and contextual differences help explain why the present study showed improvement but not a statistically significant difference between groups.

The results also reflect several challenges that may have influenced the findings. Students in the experimental class initially struggled to understand how to read and interpret the story map, which reduced the effectiveness of the early treatment sessions. Some students also had limited vocabulary, making both literal and inferential questions difficult. In addition, the short duration of the treatment may not have been sufficient for students to fully adapt to the new strategy. These challenges were addressed through guided practice, teacher modeling of the story map, and repeated explanations of how to connect plot elements visually. Once students became familiar with the organizer, their performance improved, although not at a level that exceeded the control group significantly.

Overall, the findings indicate that graphic organizers are helpful for improving students' reading comprehension, but their effectiveness depends on factors such as student familiarity, duration of instruction, text type, and classroom support. Although the strategy did not produce a statistically significant difference compared to the conventional method, the improvement within the experimental group suggests that story maps remain a valuable instructional tool for supporting narrative comprehension in EFL classrooms.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion of this research, several conclusions can be drawn as follows:
1. Both the control and experimental classes showed significant improvement in their reading comprehension after the teaching and learning process. This indicates that both conventional instruction and the use of graphic organizers were effective in improving students' understanding of narrative texts.
2. The experimental class, which was taught using the Graphic Organizer Strategy, achieved a higher mean gain between the pre-test and post-test scores compared to the control class. This suggests that the strategy had a positive influence on students' reading comprehension by helping them organize information, identify main ideas, and understand the structure of the text more effectively.
3. However, the result of the independent sample t-test showed that the difference between the post-test scores of the two classes was not statistically significant. Although the experimental class performed slightly better, the difference was not large enough to conclude that the graphic organizer strategy was significantly more effective than the conventional method.

Overall, the findings indicate that the use of graphic organizers is beneficial in supporting students' comprehension of narrative texts. Even though the effect was not statistically significant, the improvement in the experimental class demonstrates that this strategy can still serve as a helpful instructional tool for enhancing reading skills in EFL classrooms.

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