



Static Visual Narrative: The Quality Concerns and the Perspective of Teacher and Students on the Term Graphic Novel

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Abstract:

Visual narratives have been a powerful tool to arrest the attention of the viewer since the very beginning of time. The static form of visual narratives i.e. graphic novels or comics is indeed a popular way to speed up the learning process, especially in the post covid classroom scenarios, which parents, teachers, and students often complain of being very boring and monotonous. The introduction of a good-quality graphic novel can be a great way to help struggling readers strengthen vocabulary, build reading confidence, and develop a deeper appreciation for the art of narration. They can make complex ideas more relatable by compressing them into single images and help in inviting the readers in and keeping them engaged. This paper discusses the postscript of a focus group discussion organized by the researcher to analyze the graphic novel created by converting a textual chapter from the 11th standard book into a graphic novel as part of the doctoral dissertation. It aims at exploring the quality concerns of a good graphic novel and the perception of teachers, students, and field experts. Although there are still reservations and doubts as to their efficiency, especially in the Indian classroom milieu but the worth of graphic novels as a pedagogical tool has been proved by substantial evidence. In this article, different arguments concerning the quality of a good graphic novel as a teaching tool are discussed. This paper focuses on the assessment criteria of a graphic novel and what makes it worth using as a teaching tool in the classroom of senior secondary school students.

Keywords: Visual narrative, Static visual narrative, Graphic Novel, classroom, learning, language skills, a pedagogical tool

I. Introduction:

The cave paintings, the hieroglyphic language of ancient Egyptians, and famous sculptures on the historical site of Khajuraho temples, all have witnessed the amazing art of narrating a story by our ancestors and these are the ancient proofs of our inclination towards all kinds of visuals. We as humans are primarily sensory beings especially triggered by visual stimuli be it understanding the concept of an organ in a biology book or reading a user manual of a new product bought. We are required to visualize things around us for easing our understating of the concepts better, then why not in the classrooms. **Comics/Graphic novels are the amalgamation of images and words in a narrative style** and are a great way to arrest the attention of students, especially struggling readers across the age groups. We all have grown up with picture books and as a 90's kid would agree more on the importance of comics like Chacha Chaudhary, Nagaraj, and other diamond comics in their growing-up years. As children and adults, we like anything with visuals more and this has been proven in the present internet age too with the huge popularity of Facebook, Instagram stories, graphic novels, and webcomics among us. Research done by professionals in the field has proved that they may serve as powerful instructional tools in addition to their merits as works of literature. The graphic novel

has the depth of plot, character development, theme, etc. In short, it has the classic areas of study found in a prose text. It also has the elements of a dynamic visual narrative (a motion picture) the only difference being the images are frozen in the graphic novel. With graphic novels, we not only engage reluctant readers and help build important reading skills, but we also provide advanced readers a wonderful opportunity to think critically about a new form of storytelling—one that combines the most important elements of traditional novels: captivating plots, storyline, varied characters, dialogues, climax and excitement accompanied with visuals.

One of the ongoing challenges for any educator is to cultivate the ability to engage his or her students and encourage them to not only strive to learn in their classroom but on their own as well. It's because of this that many teachers attempt to use creative non-traditional methods when it comes to preparing their classroom lessons. One of those methods is the use of graphic novels in class.

A graphic novel is a book made up of comics content. Although the word "novel" normally refers to long fictional works, the term "graphic novel" is applied broadly and includes fiction, non-fiction, and anthologized work. It is, at least in the United States, typically distinct from the term "comic book", which is generally used for comics periodicals and trade paperbacks. The term graphic novel was first introduced in Eisner's *Contact with God* in 1978. Since then, it has been used to refer to longer, book-like comics. Eisner himself describes graphic novels as **“sequential art and a method of expression”**. They are also defined as “juxtaposed pictorial and other images intended to convey information and create an aesthetic effect on its reader” by Scott McCloud in his very popular book *Comic: An Invisible Art*. The term gained popularity in the comics community after the publication of Will Eisner's *A Contract with God* (1978) and the start of Marvel's *Graphic Novel* line (1982) and became familiar to the public in the late 1980s after the commercial successes of the first volume of Art Spiegelman's *Maus* in 1986. The demand for graphic novels has proliferated in the 21st century through the popularity of webcomics and Manga (Japanese graphic novels), especially among teens.

II. Scope and significance:

Visual narrative is one of the types of multimedia knowledge artifacts. Generally, a visual narrative can be described as a story told with images, and the typical examples of it can be infographics or animation, picture books, comics, etc. Visualization is proven to be a powerful support for learning and understanding, while the narrative is acknowledged as a primary way of capturing human experience and constructing shared knowledge context (Crossan et al., 1999)

The Static Visual Narrative as a term comprises a set of images, illustrations, variety of drawings on a motionless medium, which presents the content (story) through a mechanism of temporal and spatial visual representation. It is executed on a medium that occupies the surface area. For example, an illustrated comic book runs over many pages, or a mural painting may cover an entire wall. Information by itself does not generate any value: to become knowledge, it should be understood, interpreted, judged, and enriched with tacit insights – in other words, it should reach the minds of people (Dav-enport and Prusak, 1998; Choo, 2006; Teece, 2001). Thus the use of eye-catching visuals married to their textual counterpart make enriching learning experiences in a classroom. For this purpose, a class teacher should know what are the significant features of a good quality graphic novel, hence this study can be an enriching one for the personnel associated with the learning circle.

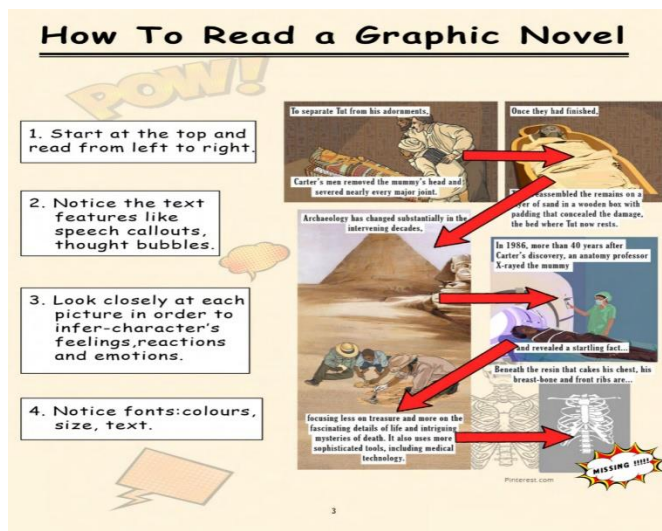


Image 1: A page showing how to read a graphic novel also showcases a few elements of a graphic novel. (Created by the investigator)

III. Research questions:

1. What are the different dimensions /quality concerns for determining a graphic novel?
2. What is the perception of teachers towards the qualities of a good graphic novel?
3. What is the perception of students towards the qualities of a good graphic novel?
4. What is the perception of the experts towards the qualities of a good graphic novel?

IV. The Objective of the Study:

The objective of the study is to ascertain teachers, students, and experts in creating graphic novels' disposition towards the graphic novel quality as a teaching tool in the classrooms. The present study aimed at investigating the Static visual narrative in reference to the term Graphic Novel usage in the classroom.

V. Review of Literature

During the process of reviewing the previous studies on the use of the Graphic novel usage method in teaching language skills, the researchers found some studies that showed positive effects of reading Graphic novel usage on developing phonological awareness among kindergarten and second and fourth-grade students (Rabahah, 2017; the same result has been found in the work of Al-Juhani, 2015; Baby & Awwad, 2010). Other studies demonstrated a positive impact of using Graphic novel usage in developing reading comprehension skills (Tetri, 2016; Morris, 2005), while others demonstrated the effectiveness of the Graphic novel usages method in developing some literary skills among fourth-grade students (Jaber, 2015). Other studies found out that Graphic novel usage was an effective instrument used in improving the oral competencies of students (Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer & Lowrance, 2004).

VI. Research Methodology

Wildermuth (2009) states that a survey study "supports the collection of a variety of data, including the beliefs, opinions, attributes, and behaviors of respondents" (p. 256). The researcher in the present study used the survey method to find out the quality concerns and perceptions of teachers, students, and field experts on static visual narrative. For the collection of data, a focus group discussion was organized on a virtual platform. The survey used in this study was short and easy for respondents to complete using google forms and rubrics for the assessment of the quality dimensions of a graphic novel was created. It was divided into two sections: Pedagogical Concern Dimensions and Media Productivity Dimensions to get the essential data, and classification questions to be able to group respondents appropriately. The questions were close-ended, clearly stated, and unbiased.

Sample:

Total Sample size: 20

Sample areas/school: A local CBSE affiliated school in Trivandrum city.

Sample study: Senior secondary school students and English teachers

The sample frame of the present study comprised senior secondary school teachers, students & field experts (artists, professional creative experts) who were selected to gather data through a google form. Keeping in mind the nature of the problem, the purposive sampling technique was used for the collection of data because the data was collected from those students & teachers who were available online.

- Self-made questionnaire on Google Form used for the purpose of data collection.
- Rubrics were created for the assessment of qualities of a good graphic novel
- The Percentile-based statistical technique has been used for this study.

Rubrics: Assessment of quality concerns of Graphic Novel

The Association for Library Services of Children (2008) defines quality literature in terms of (a) interpretation of the theme or concept; (b) presentation of information including accuracy, clarity, and organization; (c) development of a plot; (d) delineation of characters; (e) delineation of a setting; and (f) appropriateness of the style. Within the graphic novel format, authors are clearly able to meet these criteria. A graphic novel embodies visual and textual content with elements like panels, frames bleed, speech bubbles, onomatopoeic words, and many more. Hence in the present study to do justice to the quality concern of a good graphic novel, rubrics were designed with the following dimensions:

A. Pedagogical Concern Dimensions

A1. Purposefulness: Selected text Relevancy, Coverage, and Comprehensibility

A2. Story Delineation

A3. Bias Freeness.

A4. Age Appropriateness (Visuals, Language)

B. Media Productivity

B5. Design Congruousness.

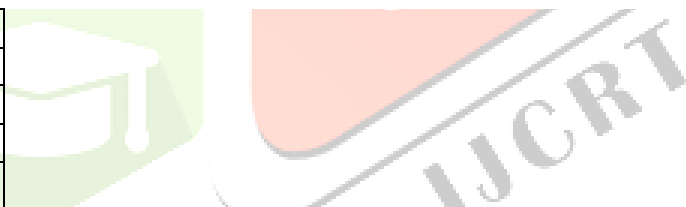
B6. Generation and Organization of Content.

B7. Illustration Richness.

B8. Balance of Aesthetics and Elements.

Participants were asked to rate the dimensions in the ascending order of the quality of the graphic novel with reference to the rating criteria as follows:

Outstanding (4)
Excellence (3)
Good (2)
Satisfactory (1)
Need improvement (0)



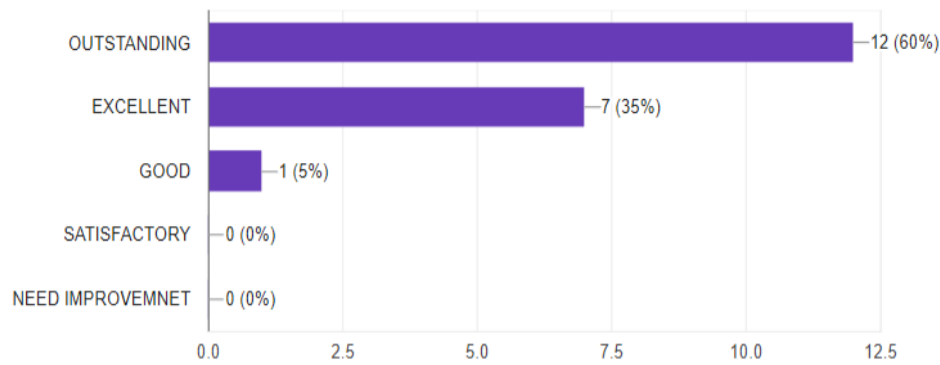
VI. Data Analysis and Interpretation:

Combining the benefits of visualization with powerful metaphors and character-driven narratives, static visual narratives have the potential to make scientific subjects more accessible and engaging to a wider audience (Farinella, M. 2018)

With the new perspectives and opportunities, they offer, graphic novels are transforming the ways we instruct students. They have the power to meet the needs of the new generation born and raised on visual media. By challenging the traditional teaching and learning methods graphic novels have already started to gain recognition in many fields of education. For the time being it is difficult to claim that educators can keep up with the change offered by this innovative medium.

Analysis of the selected response against significant statements.

Figure 1: Pedagogical Concern Dimensions: Purposefulness: Selected text Relevancy, Coverage, and Comprehensibility



In the pedagogical dimension, under the heading purposefulness of the selected text its relevancy, coverage, and comprehensibility, 60 percent of the respondents were of the opinion that the graphic novel that was presented to them was outstanding in terms of the purposefulness and comprehensibility of the visual content and central theme exploration. About 35 percent of the respondents agreed that the work was excellent and the presentation logically and visually enhanced the readers. About 5 percent of the respondents rated the work as good and which means that the graphic novel had a balance between textual and visual content that fulfills the purpose of the relevancy of the story.

Figure 2. Story Delineation

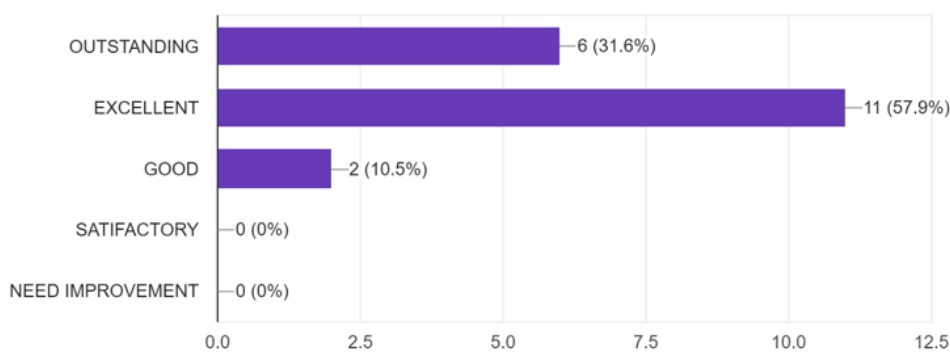


Figure 2. The most striking feature of any narrative stylebook is its storyline and in the case of a graphic novel, this task becomes complex as visuals must be effectively able to distinctly visualize the characters and background. Under the heading of story delineation, 57.9 percent of the respondents rate the work excellent which means the story had essential elements like emotions and expressions to convey the story effectively. 31.6 percent of the responses rated the work as outstanding which meant that the contextual presentation of the story is accurate and educational and also at par with the original text.

VII. Result & Discussion

In the words of one of the respondents, “Additional information is provided to quench the thirst of those who want to delve deep into the topic” proves that the graphic can be effectively used in place of normal text in classroom teaching. Visual storytelling enables the connection of facts and feelings (Laine et al., 2015), and with the use of appropriate visuals in accordance with the text, readers were provided enough context and action to keep moving through the story. The illustration was made effective through the choice of color pallet (pastels, primary colors, sepia tones) and with the reference to the chapter. Static Visual Narratives are those visuals that are motionless, like frozen in time. They also allow readers to experience complex narratives in a way that’s more engaging than a textbook and in the present study, the complex storyline revolves around the life of King Tut, a famous Egyptian Pharaoh. Few related activities were included to develop students’ aesthetic sense.

VIII. Conclusion

Many teachers use graphic novels and comics in the classroom. There are amazing books on the subject that include useful tools on how to effectively implement these resources for learning. The main thing teachers need to consider is purpose. I know, we love books and tools, but as with technology, sometimes we get wrapped up in the tool instead of first thinking about the purpose. Here are some reasons why you might select a graphic novel or comic to read, or why you might have students create their own. Thinking about these reasons will help you focus on your purpose in your instruction. However, the ongoing trend indicates

that soon they will become one of the most efficient teaching tools, particularly in the field of language arts, social and historical studies, and science. Although most of the argument for the use of graphic novels seems to be based on their positive effect on reading comprehension skills, graphic novels have much more to offer teachers and students in the classroom. They provide an invaluable teaching tool for the improvement of writing, speaking, and listening skills along with their potential to develop critical thinking skills. Graphic narratives have the potential to support students, whose lack of confidence and anxiety inhibit their progress in the target language. Graphic novels can arouse interest and thereby enhance the acquisition of the new language and encourage kids to become “autonomous acquirers”. Teachers should conform to the principle that no text should be dismissed “without fully understanding or searching for its possibilities or merits”. With their unique qualities that cater to the dominant learning habits and styles of our age, there is no doubt that graphic novels deserve a chance in our classrooms for the good of our students.

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