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Comic Strip and Geoforensics in CLIL English Language Classes – Students’ Attitudes

Extended summary

This paper discusses the concept of integrating comic strips (*scientific comics*) and geoforensics into CLIL-based English classes at university level and its potential and relevance to modern-day university education. Our assumption is that comics can greatly help in the introduction of geoforensics to young forensic scientists by offering a new kind of language work.

As modern teaching is more demanding than that which relies entirely on the traditional pedagogical system, language teachers today, especially CLIL teachers, need to include as many different sources as possible to organize a high-quality and exciting teaching process. As motivation is one of the important drivers, we believe that instructional programme based on comics can in many ways entertain those students who learn through their sense of sight. Additionally, today’s students want to enjoy the benefits of learning immediately. The payoff for them is to be able to successfully combine newly presented content and language with their prior knowledge to create new meaningful knowledge.

However, there are several challenges in the application of comics, such as: teachers should balance the use of comics so that they achieve academic purposes, rather than just being fun and casual reading. Teachers must also be creative in the use of comics because there are many possible procedures in their implementation, and the tasks must correspond to the proficiency, readiness and interest of students in order for them to be motivated to use comics in the best possible way.

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Our study involved 54 respondents, 41 first-year students and 13 second-year students. As is the case at most faculties, our group of respondents consisted of heterogeneous students with different levels of English language proficiency, from B1 to C1. A questionnaire designed for this research consisted of 10 open-ended questions. The questionnaire which was anonymous, contributed to the validity of the study, because the students gave honest and meaningful answers, which was primarily the intention of the research. Using qualitative and quantitative analyses, common attitudes as well as positive and negative observations were identified and sorted.

Our first hypothesis that integrated learning of geoforensics, foreign language and comics encourages students to read content with greater motivation than when it comes to working on a text only has been confirmed. Although reading is sometimes erroneously called a passive skill, in the case of comic strips reading proves to be an active process requiring students to activate their background knowledge in order to recreate intended meaning.

Our second hypothesis about openness, curiosity, and interests for learning via comics has been confirmed and it somewhat coincides with the previous hypothesis. Theoretically and practically, we encouraged the use and transfer of their prior knowledge to make new meaning and knowledge, keeping both their attention and eyes on verbal and visual materials. It is worth mentioning that students showed a visibly greater interest in the comics from the field of their studies.

Our third hypothesis about students' competency to discern and use adequate register in potential diverse real-life situations can be considered confirmed. Namely, students realize that connection made between the new information and communication is crucial. It should provide a bridge that links geology and interlocutor or a number of interlocutors for the same event: the police, media, experts, business entities, laypersons, etc.

At the end of this study, we conclude that comic strips, despite their advantages, are not sufficiently analysed and represented in teaching. The concluding remarks are such that comic strips cannot be applied suddenly and quickly. Consequently, the need for comics to be introduced at all teaching levels of university study is yet to be analysed, and requires careful planning so that it could be successfully achieved. According to this one-year study, comic strips model is very useful and students recognise its linguistic, scientific and aesthetic values. Believers in comic strips, as we are, maintain the idea that well-prepared comic is more than a good teaching material that adheres to curriculum; rather it is an effective and powerful tool that activates visual perception towards a plethora of linguistic, creative and critical utterances.

Keywords: CLIL method, geoforensics, comic strip, linguistic-methodological goals, students' attitudes

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