

FOSTERING WRITING SKILLS OF STUDENTS IN THE FOUNDATION PROGRAMME AT DHOFAR UNIVERSITY-SALALAH OMAN EMPLOYING GRAPHIC ORGANISERS: AN ACTION RESEARCH

Dr. Umamaheswara Rao Bontha¹
Assistant Professor.
DhofarUniversity, Salalah, Oman

Dr. Syed Adil²
Former Professor, BSA Crescent University, Chennai, India,

Abstract

As students age, the expectations to use more complicated syntax and discourse structures in spoken and written language increase. Writing becomes more difficult for students in EFL environments because they find it challenging to understand cognitive techniques. The target learners must also acquire rules like language, spelling, punctuation, and syntax to generate a written essay. Graphic organisers help students create sentences and paragraphs with greater sensitivity to syntactic and narrative structures. Therefore, this study investigated the effectiveness of graphic organisers in assisting students in writing better. The intended audience consisted of 40 students of B.A. English majors at Dhofar University. The research was carried out in 2022–23 between September and November. It is the result of an action research initiative. By comparing spontaneously written tasks from the pre- to post-test, the effect of graphic organisers was evaluated seven weeks after the intervention. The findings imply that graphic organisers can be a valuable tool in the writing process for producing sentences and narratives with elaborate content and discourse structures. The study's results indicated that graphic organisers improved students' writing abilities in content and organisation. Furthermore, the student's mean scores, which climbed from 15.6 on the pre-test to 26.7 on the post-test cycle, show that they have improved after incorporating graphic organisers in the writing tasks. Eventually, the student feedback indicated that graphic organisers boosted their motivation levels. According to their input, they preferred using visual organisers when writing.

Keywords: *L2 writing, Graphic Organisers, content, organisation, validity.*

Introduction

According to Hyland (2003), "Speaking and writing are both seen as productive talents among the four macro linguistic abilities, with writing posing a more significant learning challenge than speaking. The differences between speaking and writing in certain areas demonstrate the intricacy of writing" (p.3). Detailed conventions must be followed while writing. Weigle (2009) states that written language is typically more formal than spoken language. The second factor, according to him, is vocabulary. Written language uses a broader range of linguistic elements than spoken language. "Although

writing can be challenging, this shouldn't be a justification for students to skip writing classes because the more practice writers get, the more proficient they become. (Al-Jarf, 2022, p.1) Students should learn how to write since it is a crucial ability. They will profit in specific ways in their future by having solid English writing abilities. Writing must be learned since it will be necessary for students' future career demands, academic studies, or personal communications. For career objectives, having strong writing abilities will help them land in a good position. These days, most employers demand that their staff members be proficient writers. The target learners are expected to complete their English writing assignments for academic purposes. Strong writing abilities can aid students with interpersonal communication. Therefore the target learners are expected to be proficient in writing communication to fulfil those objectives.

The researchers' personal experiences as an educator for twenty years served as the direct inspiration for this work. Effective writing pedagogy is one of the main areas of emphasis for an EFL teacher in the classroom. As children learn about the writing process, it is the responsibility of instructors to support them in becoming successful and gaining confidence. Organising their writing is a skill that many students find challenging, and they also frequently have trouble with creative word choice. This study's main objective was to aid students in these crucial areas so they might become better writers and enjoy the creative process. According to Behzadi & Gajdács (2021), two critical elements of writing are indicators of an excellent paragraph. Both substance and structure are essential. A well-structured text will aid readers in comprehension by demonstrating the relationships between sentences in a paragraph or rational progressions. Of course, vocabulary and writing techniques are also crucial.

At Oman, communicative competency is given prominence. They are expected to be proficient in both speaking and writing. Students' writing assignments should be cohesive and coherent, and they should know how to employ the linguistic conventions associated with each text type. In truth, students struggle with many parts of writing because of poor writing skills. They have a hard time articulating their views clearly. They frequently don't know what to write, which confuses them. "Mediocre written discourse is due to insufficient exposure and practices with the written text being learned. The next issue is related to organisation. Students frequently struggle to keep their compositions in the text's logical order" (Tortorelli, 2022, P.729). To address this issue, the researcher chose to undertake action research and use graphic organisers to resolve the problems. Graphic organisers visually represent the knowledge. Students can shape and arrange their writing using graphic organisers to serve their intended goal. Using graphic organisers in writing classes is hoped to benefit both the instructor and the student's writing abilities. The pupils themselves are the primary cause of their poor writing abilities of the students. Some pupils appeared to be less motivated and less genuinely engaged in learning how to write. They believed writing is challenging to understand due to its complexity.

When prompted to write, they would experience anxiety. They felt unsure about what to write and how to organise their thoughts into effective sentences because they

were unfamiliar with writing techniques. The authors intend to convey a direct message that there is a lacuna in teaching writing skills. The text will be easier to grasp and get to the text's intended point if the idea is well-developed. A student's writing quality can also be determined by how well the content is organised. However, based on the researchers' observation, the target learners frequently had trouble keeping the composition in the text's logical order. According to Smith et al. (2022), "Various writing techniques need to be used when writing. They are including using pre-writing tools, writing fluently in the first draught, employing synonyms and paraphrasing, asking for input from peers and instructors, and revising and editing based on that feedback".(p.278). Teachers are crucial in the growth and improvement of these reading abilities. Teachers should give their learners engaging, real-world, and relevant literacy experiences. When students access these literacy experiences, their interest and engagement with their studies increases. Children learn to write best when engaged, are given the freedom to organise their thoughts, and are encouraged to think about their own experiences. Each learner has a unique way of learning. While some learners pick up the language quickly merely by watching and listening, others could take a little longer. Many students find it natural to develop written language more slowly. Teachers play crucial roles in writing skills since students' attitudes about writing will be influenced by their pedagogical expertise and innovative teaching methods.

Conceptual background

The conceptual framework used in this investigation was the genre-based approach. "The genre-based method, sometimes referred to as text-based instruction, uses texts as a tool for language learning. As a way to teach and learn how to write, the genre mixes the process and product approaches". (Negretti, & McGrath, 2018, p.13). People learn to write various kinds of academic writing in their college life. Each type of writing has its own rules and purposes for using language. Every day, educational and literary texts follow the same predictable patterns. These social purposes of text genres, in turn, determine the terminology used. In particular, schematic structure refers to the internal network or text organisation of the text type in the form of an introduction, body, and conclusion. At the same time, language features include syntax, lexicon, connectors, etc., that writers need to use to turn information or ideas into readable text. According to Ellis et al. (1990), each form or genre helps us learn and socialise differently. A genre-based approach views communicative competence as entailing the knowledge of many text genres. Text in this context refers to structured language sequences employed in particular circumstances and ways. Since this study focuses on improving content and organisation, the genre approach was appropriate to this study. There are five fundamental steps in this strategy. Table 1 illustrates the teacher's genre-based methodology.

Table-1 Steps in Genre based instruction

Establishing perspective	In step one the instructor establishes the perspective. Students are now exposed to the type of material being studied. Additionally, they should investigate the written text's goals and the characteristics. At this level, it
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	is also possible to explore the immediate background of the scenario. Communicating the situation through images, pictorial representations, audio recordings, etc., is one of the context-building actions that can be carried out in the classroom.
Simulation	At this step the instructor critically evaluate the language and structural aspects compared to other texts of the same genre.
Joint composition	Students start to assist in creating actual samples of the written text at this stage. As the students get closer to managing text type alone, the teacher gradually lessens their involvement in text construction. Teacher questioning, class discussion, instruction editing, board transcription, jigsaw puzzles, information gaps, small group text construction, and other joint construction activities are all possible in the classroom.
Evaluation	Students work independently with the material and the instructor throughout this phase. Performances are used to gauge student progress. Independent writing assignments that call for students to create and present the entire piece can be used as multiple decisions in writing classes.
Text-to-text linking	Students look into the application of what they have learned in this stage. The teaching-learning cycle may be connected to texts comparable or the same in context and to current or previous learning and teaching cycles.

Evaluation Rubric

A rubric is an assessment instrument that identifies achievement standards across all components of any student work, from written to oral to visual. When students get the rubrics before the task, their outcome is expected to be better. "Since rubrics clarify what is expected and what is needed, students recognise where they have to improve to get better grades. "A well-made rubric lets teachers compare a student's work. By using rubrics, teachers and students can create a suitable environment for evaluating work together". (Reddy & Andrade, 2010, p.236). The learners are encouraged to look beyond right and wrong and figure out what went wrong with a project or performance. Rubrics let students evaluate their work and also allow students to assess the outcome of their peers. During the activity, educators use the set of criteria as a guideline to judge their work and keep track of how they're doing.

According to Saddler & Andrade (2004), "Rubrics are a great way to help students evaluate each other and learn how and where to give and get constructive feedback. It can be used to grade written assignments as well as overall grades"(p.48). The researchers determine which criteria or essential elements must be present in the student's work. The researchers opted to add two levels of achievement to the rubric. They were organisation and content. The researchers defined in detail the expectations for outcomes at each attainment level for each criterion. The answer scripts also included additional, personalised comments, general impressions, and a final grade.

Use of Graphic organisers

"A graphic organiser, also known as a content or concept organiser, is a visual representation of knowledge. It is a method of organising information or grouping critical parts of a subject or issue into a pattern by utilising labels". (Emerson and Maxwell 2011, p.1). Graphic organisers are diagrams or maps that explain how concepts relate to one another. Using them can help pupils form ideas and start to write down their thoughts. There are certain advantages to using graphic organisers as a visual pre-writing aid for the writer. Using graphic organisers helps in motivating students and draw their attention to writing class. They can also be used to plan writing tasks. Students can use graphic organisers to explore their writing creativity. They can also be utilised to assist pupils in formulating and organising ideas. Sharrock, (2008) states that "Graphic organisers are tools that provide suggestions for setting objectives, planning, and idea structuring. It boosts writing efficiency". (p.22)

Some scholars have researched the use of graphic organisers and found positive learning outcomes. Some prominent ones are (Miller, 2012; Hall & Strangman, 2002; Capretz et al. (2003). The Impact of Assistive technology by Dell et al. (2008) claimed that Graphic Organisers could assist writers in focusing on the topic while writing. According to them, they also help writers keep things in the correct chronological order, and according to their research, students treated with graphics organisers improved their writing skills. Implementing the graphic organiser as a planning process in a rich setting for kids' writing development at tertiary level classroom resulted in significant improvements in students' writing. Another study on the same subject by Hall & Strangman (2002) found that utilising graphic organisers can improve pupils' attitudes toward writing and their proficiency in word choice and organisation. Visual organisers can help learners create and structure their ideas in this scenario more creatively. Using graphic organisers, students can readily visualise their thoughts and make abstract concepts or ideas more transparent. It is a worldwide issue that EFL pupils' average writing skills are poor. Students with learning difficulties sometimes struggle with writing and may only have a rudimentary understanding of the skills required to write successfully. Writing is a cognitive ability frequently lacking in kids with learning impairments, and diverse motor skills are necessary for the various writing processes. Therefore graphic organisers can play an essential role in helping weak learners overcome writing issues.

Writing disabilities can also emerge from difficulty in comprehending or synthesising information in writing. Most students dislike or even detest writing. Despite the challenges learners have when writing, those who were taught specific writing process t performed better on tests, were more effective in academic contexts, and had enhanced literacy abilities. A literature review revealed many common characteristics of the methods used to gather information on students' writing achievement. Utilising questionnaires for students, instructors, and parents was one aspect of the studies that was consistently emphasised. The bulk of student surveys was conducted to ascertain their attitudes towards writing and their accurate understanding of the process of writing.

The studies' locations and goals mentioned in the literature review vary, but they were all pertinent to understanding how to improve student accomplishment through

writing. Most of the research included in this evaluation was conducted at the university level. Their goals varied from examining how to boost students' writing achievement to investigating writing organisation or writing process. Some studies put their research into practice using graphic organisers and other teaching techniques.

Harrington et al. (1998) focused on the impact of graphic organiser use on quality, planning initiation, and student progress toward independent abilities. They agreed that teachers should give students good educational experiences in risk-free environments and offer them positive feedback to boost their chances of academic success. Peterson (2007) recommended that teachers provide step-by-step instructions for students who are struggling with essays. Pham (2022) thought that creating a sense of community in the classroom and offering real-world learning opportunities were crucial. Although several researchers endorsed the use of graphic organisers, they also emphasised the need for a clear framework for their applicability to the writing process.

Overall, teachers and students agreed that it was essential to instruct using organisers during the writing process. Most students wanted more time to discuss and put into practice using organisers and the preparation stages of writing. Finding studies with similar subject matter relevant to writing process training was the goal of the literature review, which was also done to learn what research was accessible based on a specific study topic. The research's different data collection methods, goals, use of graphic organisers as effective interventions, and, most crucially, teaching strategies all have practical implications. The usefulness of organisers as intervention tools led to clear evidence of more significant accomplishment.

There is a lot of study on the usage of organisers and how they directly relate to greater reading comprehension, but less on how they can improve writing performance. Using suitable media to help students enhance their writing skills is necessary. The students' writing abilities can perhaps be enhanced through action research. Using graphic organisers, students might be encouraged to plan and discuss their issues before starting to write. A graphic organiser uses labels to arrange the critical components of a topic or concept into a pattern as a graphical representation of knowledge. For students who struggle with knowledge organisation, graphic organisers visually depict essential facts and ideas. Because of this, visual organisers are now used extensively in many classrooms. Although using graphic organisers to teach children about the writing process can be very effective, teachers must use them carefully. It is essential to incorporate graphic organisers judiciously. When introduced in an engaging, imaginative way, graphic organisers are more apt to be used by students to improve learning. Unless graphic organisers are simple and obvious, they won't be an effective method of instruction. When using graphic organisers to teach writing, instructors should generate ideas before forcing writers to operate independently. Poorly created graphic organisers will cause students to be confused and disorganised in their knowledge. Teachers should carefully plan and prepare before utilising graphic organisers and provide enough modelling before setting the obligation on the learner. The most effective usage of graphic organisers is when pairs or groups of pupils are permitted to collaborate. Learning writing can be challenging. Students may understand the writing process by using graphic organisers to learn how to

organise their thoughts and thoughtfully select words for their writing. The accompanying research questions were developed in line with the study's goals.

Research Questions:

- How do Graphic organisers contribute to the development of content in writing among EFL learners?
- How do Graphic organisers contribute to developing the organisation in writing among EFL learners?

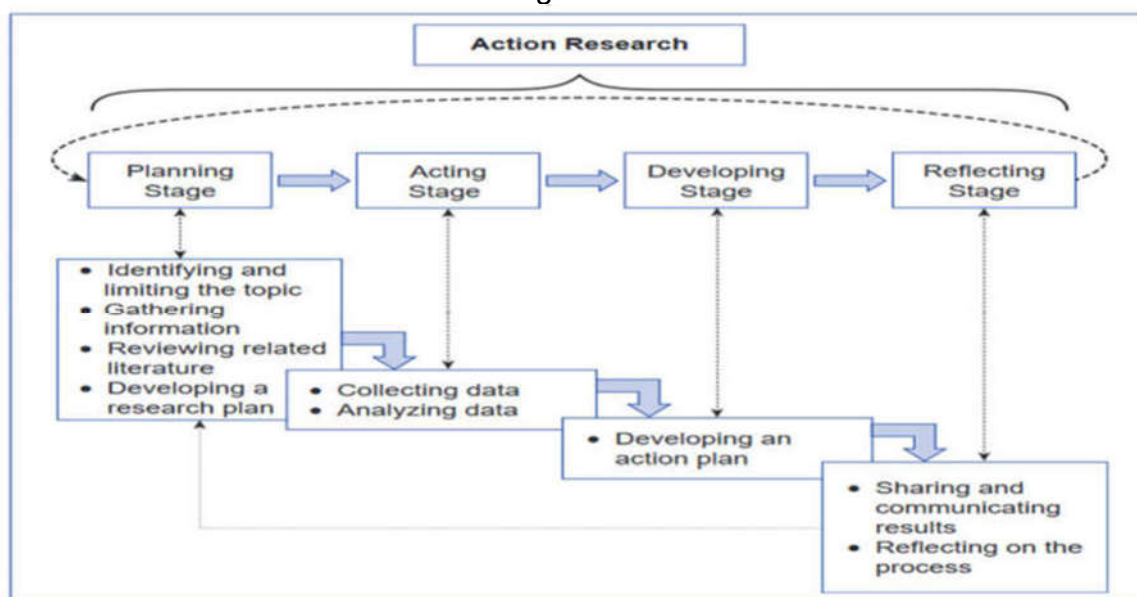
Based on the problem identified above, the researcher focused on improving students' writing skills, especially in generating and organising ideas.

Action Research Design: Rationale

Action research entails collecting additional information about a classroom through monitoring and surveys as a professional development tool for teachers. In this study, Action research was employed to address particular issues with L2 writing pedagogy. The researchers conducted action research to determine what is effective and ineffective in the classroom. "With so many options available, teachers must choose the ones that will work best for them and their students rather than merely adopting the most recent fad in education. Learning what works best in one's classroom is one way to help teachers improve student learning through classroom action research. While many educators engage in formal empirical research on teaching and learning, others engage in personal reflection. In contrast, more casual and intimate than traditional approaches, classroom action research is more systematic than individual reflection" Burns, (2007).

Classroom action research aims to enhance teachers' instruction in their classes and institution. Although the results are not necessary to be extrapolated to other contexts, they can advance our understanding of the subject. In addition to using research methods like systematic review, group comparisons, data gathering, and analysis, classroom action research extends beyond self-reflection. The researchers used an action research design for these reasons.

The researchers at Dhofar University followed the action research process mentioned in figure 1.



Source: Adapted from Mertler and Charles, 2011. (Reproduced with permission)

Initially, the research issue was determined in the first stage (The students writing difficulty was identified). After selecting the sample, a thorough analysis was done. Thirdly, a research strategy was created. The acquired data was then examined during the performing stage. An action plan was performed during the developing stage. Finally, the findings were presented during the reflection phase, and the direction for the following research was outlined. This study sought to develop pupils' writing abilities using graphic organisers.

Description of the Study

At Dhofar University, this study was performed with 40 English major undergraduate students. The study took place between September and November 2022. During the action study, the students and the researcher met for an hour each day, three days a week. Twenty-five hours were spent in total, including the assessment. To gauge their writing abilities, the researcher first administered a pre-test. Then there came the graphic organiser-based instructional intervention. The researchers concentrated on how the intended learners' writing abilities improved following the educational intervention. Their writing was evaluated using a writing rubric. There are two categories in the writing evaluation criteria. They are organisation and content. Because students need the most practice learning how to structure their writing and choose the right words and phrases, the researcher decided to concentrate on these two aspects of the writing rubric. There were two phases to the action research. Phase one included the pre-test and post-test, while Phase two included the participant's feedback. The data was collected from FPE-

100 level students. The study is based on exam scripts and in class worksheets, Figure 2 shows a sample activity for a classroom utilizing graphic organizers.

Figure-2
Sample Task

Writing Task
Choose ONE of the topics below.
☐ Write about your food. OR
☒ Write about your studies.

Write notes about your topic. For Topic 1, fill in the pyramid with kinds of food. For Topic 2, fill in the chart on the next page.

Topic 1

Topic 2

Write a paragraph of at least 50 words about your topic.

My name is Ali. I am 13 years old. I am a law student in Dhofar University. In the evening, I will be waiting about my studies.

I study English, Math and IT. I start classes at 4:00 pm. I finish classes at 10:00 pm. In the evening, I play with my friends. After that I go to sleep.

Finally, I hope my writing is clear and useful.

Exactly all right

Phase-1 The performance tests

Tests

Testing during the research took the form of pre-tests and writing assignments. Before the action was implemented, a pre-test was given to determine how well the target learners could write. After using graphic organisers, students' writing skills were tested again to see if they had improved. Each test's score will be analysed to see if there has been any improvement. The students' comprehension of the materials utilised in the research was evaluated using writing exercises and examinations. The outcome takes the form of writing test results for the students. Table 2 provides the test results.

Table2 -Test performance in content and organisation

Pre-test			Posttest	
Grade	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Content Development	9.58	1.72	15.98	3.83
Organisation	8.67	1.78	16.89	3.48

According to the test results, the organisation of the writing assignments received an 8.22 gain score, and the content development portion received a gain score of 6.4. A paired-sample t-test was carried out using SPSS version 27 because descriptive statistics alone were insufficient to produce definitive results. Table 3 displays the outcomes of the inferential statistics. The importance of the test is indicated by an alpha value smaller than 0.5. Given that both the content development and organisation scores were less than 0.5, it can be said that the employment of the visual organiser was successful.

Table3 Results of paired t-test

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Content development	12.387 10	1.89169	.33976	3.08097	1.69322	17.026	40	.000
Organisation	12.677 42	1.75854	.31584	3.32246	2.03238	18.447	40	.000

Data analysis

The Data analysis process comprised of collection, coding, comparison, development of meanings and interpretations, and reporting results. All of the information was gathered by the researcher in the classroom. The data were examined to identify broad trends, concepts, and general information. The researcher began honing the comprehensive data by categorising the information into more precise patterns or groups. The students were able to write more effectively through the use of graphic organisers as visual pre-writing tools. They improved the quality of their idea generation by using visual organisers. Before the start of the action study, the students lacked ideas and appeared unsure about what to write. The content and organising aspects of the assignment slightly improved once the graphic organiser was used. They knew the type of data they should include in visual maps and how to arrange it based on the general layout properly. It can be seen from the writing samples shown above that there were a few clear improvements. Compared to the pre-test, their writing improved in the posttest. The comments from the students also revealed that they preferred graphic organisers. The study's principal goal was to implement graphic organisers to improve writing skills. The researchers also

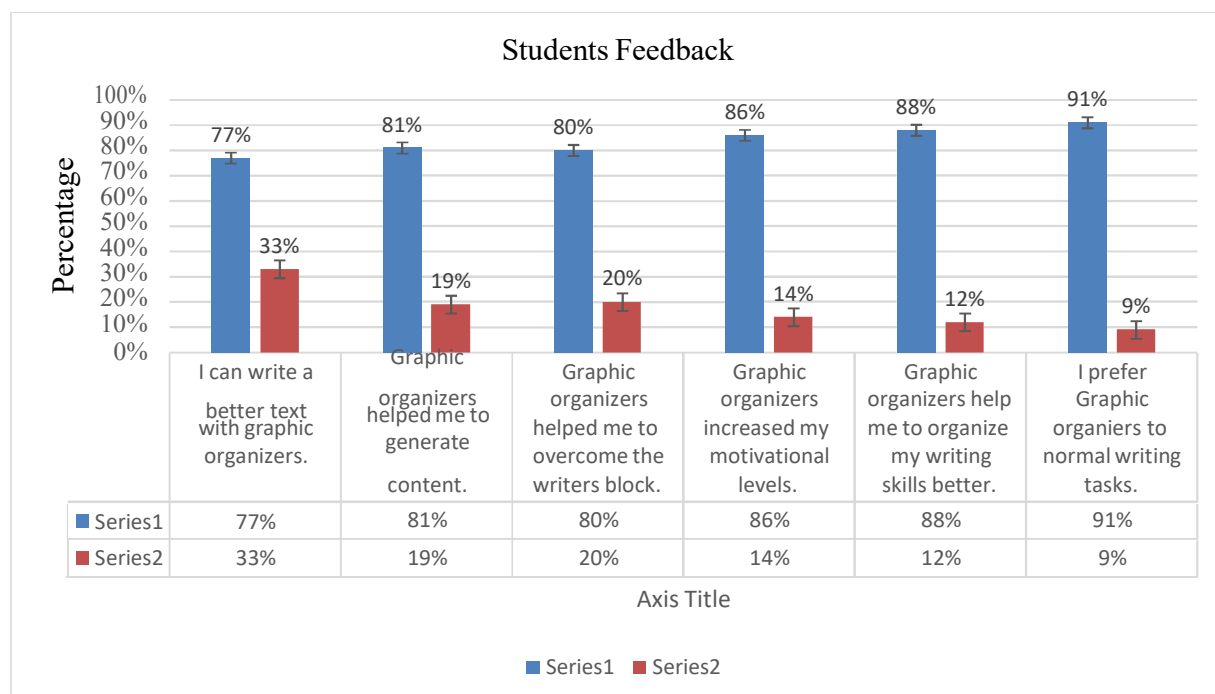
provided feedback to the pupils. The students will be able to identify their mistakes by using this supporting action, and they will be able to revise them depending on the feedback received.

The researchers choose to continue doing this in the writing sessions depending on the reflection throughout the action research. The use of graphic organisers to enhance pupils' writing abilities proved beneficial. The students gained a thorough comprehension of writing with the use of graphic organisers in this cycle, and they were able to produce more content. Using a visual organiser helped the students better plan their assignments and enhanced their writing abilities in several ways. Students could generate ideas and put their thoughts down on paper with the aid of graphic organisers. Using graphic organisers in writing lessons encouraged and helped students stay on task. The results of the research mentioned above allow one to conclude that the use of graphic organisers improved students' writing abilities. This study revealed that using visual organisers helped enhance students' ability to generate ideas for writing.

Feedback Questionnaire

A feedback survey was sent out following the test performed to demonstrate the impact of the learner's selection for visual organisers. The results are depicted in figure -3.

Figure-3
Students Feedback



Analysis of Student Performance

For the first question, 77% of the students responded that they could write more effectively using graphic organisers. A staggering 81% of the students said that using graphic organisers had aided their ability to create content. 80% of them claimed that it had assisted them in overcoming writer's block. According to 86% of them, it has raised their motivation levels. 88% said that it improved the structure of their work. The majority of the students (91%) have said that they like visual organisers above other teaching methods. The improvement of the students is evident from the quantitative data. Students' ability to generate ideas for their writing may increase with the usage of graphic organisers. As a result of their ability to develop the information utilising graphic organisers, their writing's content was acceptable and pertinent. Their answer scripts were more structured than before. From the exercises given to the students, they also learned more about the text, the graphic organiser, and the grammatical conventions of the text.

Moreover, the behaviour of the students improved. When taking writing classes, they were more engaged and motivated. If they encountered difficulties, they were no longer afraid to seek the teacher for help.

Pedagogical Implications

The conclusions could have some additional ramifications. The following was a presentation of the research's implications. Using graphic organisers in instruction may enhance students' writing abilities, particularly in idea generation. The results of the study were in agreement with other recent studies, namely (Woodhouse & Wood, 2022; Wulandari, 2022 & Tanrikulu, 2021).). Therefore, when engaging in writing activities, it's crucial to use suitable media. The visual organiser is one useful pre-writing tool that can assist learners in developing ideas and keeping those concepts in front of them as a guide. Creating a welcoming environment in the classroom may increase students' enthusiasm to study.

This suggests that a conducive environment will increase their self-assurance and motivation to learn. They will be able to write more freely and with less nervousness. According to the findings of this study, graphic organisers are a valuable tool for helping pupils develop their writing abilities. As a result, teachers can incorporate visual organisers into their lessons, especially those focusing on writing. To modify the materials and meet the demands and circumstances of the pupils, the instructor may further design and research the efficacy of graphic organisers. The teacher should also make the most of the school's resources to aid learning and teaching. The visual organiser was a useful pre-writing tool that helped the students develop original ideas for their writing task. To help the students develop their concepts in an organised manner, they should continue writing while using graphic organisers as a guide. The graphic organisers can be changed to suit their requirements. The researcher discovered specific issues with pupils' writing abilities, which led to the conduct of this study. Due to their limited time and skills, the

investigator has not yet found solutions to all issues. Future researchers may carry out more studies to examine other writing specialties. Anyone who desires to undertake similar research can utilise this work as an additional reference. In addition, this research gave the students advice on how to maximise their writing abilities for academic success. Ultimately, the study has increased the writer's and reader's understanding of writing techniques and the application of graphic organisers in writing instruction. The researchers assumed that by using graphic organisers to teach writing, the students would enjoy the process more and develop their writing skills in terms of organisation and word choice. Teachers will be informed by the study's findings regarding the efficacy of employing graphic organisers to teach other levels of learners in the writing process. The research study gave helpful information on the application of technology interventions and graphic organisers in the writing process. Research has shown that graphic organisers aid in writing comprehension. This strategy could be applied to other macro skills, such as reading and speaking. This study aimed to help the researchers better understand how technology and graphic organisers affect writing processes. Reading comprehension concerning written language is a common area of difficulty for students with learning difficulties. The study found that pupils' success levels increased when given graphic organisers to use when writing. Students can use visual organisers to scaffold education in the future so they may learn on their own. Studies examining the effectiveness of graphic organisers, particularly in the pre-writing phase for undergraduate students with cognitive disabilities, were lacking in the review of literature. There is scope for future research in this context.

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