COMPREHENSION STRATEGY INSTRUCTION IN LANGUAGE LEARNING CLASSROOMS SELECTING AND USING CHILDREN'S PICTURE BOOKS FOR EXPLICIT READING COMPREHENSION INSTRUCTION

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ABSTRACT: *Comprehension strategy instruction was an essential requirement for developing reading comprehension at any language or literacy classroom. Despite its significance, considerable bodies of research documented a decline in comprehension strategy instruction, particularly in language learning classrooms. Part of this scarcity was due to the lack of appropriate materials that could support the initiation of explicit comprehension strategy instruction. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative exploratory study was to suggest some selected materials (i.e., children's picture books) to lead comprehension strategy instruction in language learning classrooms. Participants were four English language teachers from the fourth and fifth grades. Teachers were trained and then started using picture books to explicitly teach reading comprehension strategies for about ten days. Finally, all participating teachers were interviewed. Findings from the teachers' interviews indicated that picture books contributed to help teachers to increase the amount of comprehension strategy instruction in the fourth and fifth grade classrooms. In addition, findings showed that all the participating teachers affirmed the major criteria that were used for picture books selection in comprehension strategy instruction. These criteria included that picture books should be well-illustrated, high frequency words, easy, authentic, interesting, relevant to the students' needs and the teachers' objectives, relevant to the students' culture, and short.*

KEYWORDS: Picture Books, Comprehension Strategy Instruction, Selection Criteria, Language Teachers

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is the process of understanding a reading piece (Snow, 2002). It is considered a fundamental requirement for any reading and literacy program (Dole, Duffy, Roehler, & Pearson, 1991; Ness, 2009). Despite its importance, reading comprehension instruction is not receiving the appropriate attention, particularly in language learning classrooms. This is because reading comprehension instruction was considered a challenge facing many teachers and classroom instructors, especially in language learning classrooms (Lipka & Siegel, 2012). Thus, the difficulty to deliver frequent comprehension instructions in language learning classrooms contributes significantly to the decline of the learners' reading comprehension achievements (Quirk & Beem, 2012). One possible explanation for the paucity of reading comprehension instruction in language learning classrooms might be the lack of quality materials that could be used to initiate flexible and explicit reading comprehension instruction (Brown & Dewitz, 2014; McKeown, Beck, & Blake, 2009). To fill this gap, children's picture

books were suggested to support teachers' instruction of reading comprehension in language learning classrooms.

Throughout its long history, children's picture books had an increasingly significant place in reading and literacy development (Cho & Kim, 1999; Goodwin, 2008; Sharp, 1991). This is because picture books cover broad areas of topics, contain delightful words, comprehensible illustrations, unique styles, interesting cultural variations, and information density (Nodelman & Reimer, 2003). These attributes demonstrated considerably important effects on facilitating of teaching and learning different types of information (Heuvel-Panhuizen, Boogaard, & Doig, 2009). For example, illustrations and drawings in some picture books were considered motivating, engaging, and greatly supporting the learners' memories and information recall (Columba, Kim, & Moe, 2009; Paivio, 1971). Therefore, these two features could help readers remember and retain information. Thus, all the distinctive features of picture books could help to open new vistas of using picture books to teach reading comprehension explicitly in language learning classrooms. Consequently, the purpose of this study was to provide general guidelines to select and use children's picture books in reading comprehension strategy instruction. Specifically, the study was designed to answer the following research questions:

- What were the teachers' perceptions of using children's picture books to explicitly teach reading comprehension strategies?
- What were the main criteria English language teachers used to select children's picture books to explicitly teach reading comprehension strategies?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of picture books.
There has been a general consensus among children's literature authors and experts that a picture book is considered a genre of children's literature in which illustrations, design, and words usually tell the story (Culham & Coutu, 2008). According to Culham and Coutu, picture books were defined as the meaningful integration of illustrations, words, and design. Thus, in picture books, illustrations and words usually complement each other and readers often can understand the story by looking at the illustrations, reading the words, or looking at the illustrations and reading the words at the same time (Jalongo, 2004). Mitchell (2002) combined most picture books' features and definitions in her explanation to the meaning of picture books. She stated that:

> "picture books" evokes images of brightly colored, beautifully illustrated books that beg to be read. No matter what our age, most of us still enjoy reading them because of their vibrant pictures, rich and evocative language, and poignant and meaningful themes. Picture books speak to us in the same way photographs do. They touch our emotions, delight our senses, appeal to our whimsy, and bring back memories of our childhood. Picture books invite us to curl up and read them. (p. 71)

Moreover, Lado (2012) added more elements to picture books' definition. These elements included aesthetic (i.e., beautifully and artistically designed), easy-to-read, flexible (i.e., they cover various topics using various styles simple, complicated, rhymed, and wordless), and

thematic materials (i.e., they could be used to teach different pieces of information). Additionally, Culham (2001) described picture books as that they are "short on pages, but long in meaning" (p. 2). These elements contributed significantly to the growing incorporation of children's picture books in different educational classrooms (Hsiu-Chih, 2008; Rule & Atkinson, 1994).

Rationale of using picture books in language learning classrooms

The rationale of using children's picture books to enhance language learners' abilities, particularly at elementary levels was overtly and covertly stated by many researchers and theorists including Rosenblatt (1994), Paivio (1971), and Ghosn (2002). According to Rosenblatt (1994), learners, particularly at beginning and lower stages need to transact with what they learn. Rosenblatt suggested two types of transaction; "efferent" and "aesthetic" (pp. 22-27). The "efferent" transaction was defined as the factual, analytical, and logical reactions of the learners as a result of quantitative aspect of readings. On the other hand, the "aesthetic" transaction was known as the emotive, affective, and qualitative transactions as a result of literary and narrative aspect of readings. Rosenblatt suggested that educators should put great emphasis on promoting "aesthetic" stance of learning because of its essential contribution to learners' interests, attitudes, and motivation. Hence, Rosenblatt used literary materials including children's literature to encourage initiating the aesthetic stance amongst readers. One the other hand, Paivio (1971) provided in his dual-coding theory important evidence about the role of illustrations and pictures (i.e., the important characteristic feature of picture books) in facilitating learners' understanding and comprehension of the text. According to Paivio (in Sadoski & Paivio, 2013), meaningful illustrations are very essential in promoting memory for processing the factual information in any text. Finally, Ghosn (2002) proposed four reasons to incorporate children's picture books in language learning classroom. These reasons included: 1. They are very good sources to motivate students' language learning, 2. They provide language in its natural context (i.e., authentic source for language), 3. They provide means to evoke students' literacy and critical thinking, and 4. They facilitate the emotional and cultural understanding of language. Consequently, children's picture books could play essential part in leading language learning instruction because of their rationale and their flexible use, particularly at beginning and lower achieving environments.

Research on the use of children's picture books in ESL/EFL classrooms.

Because of their various features and educational power, picture books found its place in many ESL and EFL classrooms (Early, 1991; Kooy, & Chiu, 1998; Lado, 2012; Reid, 2002). Picture books have been used in the language learning classrooms to teach various language skills including reading (Kasten, Kristo, McClure & Garthwait, 2005), writing (Heitman, 2005), speaking (Spencer & Slocum, 2010), and listening (Spooner & Woodcock, 2010). In addition, picture books were used to promote ESL/EFL learners' critical thinking (Kuo, 2005) and basic literacy skills (Manarino-Leggett, 1995). For example, Hsiu-Chih (2008) investigated the general benefits of children's picture books in Taiwanese classrooms where English is taught as a foreign language (i.e., EFL). The study placed a high emphasis on the teachers' perceptions of using children's picture books in the English language classrooms. Semi-structured interviews were used as a primary source to collect data from the teachers. Results showed that children's picture books have linguistic benefits in which learners can improve their vocabulary learning, reading, and critical thinking. Also, the illustrations in picture books could evoke students' motivation in language learning (Guthrie, Wigfield, & Perencevich, 2004; Taboada & Buehl, 2012).

Moreover, using picture books was helpful to assist students to actively engage in the classroom when they learn from them. For example, Ghosn (2002) explored the use of children's picture books in developing the linguistic abilities of some language learners at primary grade levels. Ghosn proposed four factors to explain the rationale of using picture books in language learning classrooms at primary levels. First, picture books provide authentic "natural" language context that stimulates meaningful and motivating space for language learning. Second, the illustrations in children's picture books can facilitate the learning of new words through context. Third, children's picture books stimulate learners' communicative and critical thinking skills. Finally, children's picture books can enhance learners' attitudes towards learning the language.

Not only with young ESL/EFL learners, children's picture books demonstrated great success when they were used in adult language learning classrooms. For example, in a study conducted by Ho (2000), Chinese undergraduate English language learners were taught literacy and language courses using picture books for three years. The participants were divided into three groups and each group contained 20 students. The students were observed and interviewed after the end of the course sessions. The overall results of this study showed that students participated positively in most language, literacy tasks, and activities that included pronunciation, developing literacy competence, critical reading, and multicultural awareness. In addition, considerable amounts of studies were conducted to investigate the role of children's picture books in developing different language and literacy abilities of English language learners (Hsiu-Chih, 2008; Liaw, 2001; Mundy & Hadaway, 1999; Strasser & Seplocha, 2007). It is worth noting that most studies considered think-aloud, read-aloud, literature circles, retelling, and reciprocal teaching as the major instructional approaches for incorporating children's literature into ESL and EFL classrooms (Barkaoui, 2011; Heydon, 2003; Hu, 1995; Richardson & Carleton, 1996).

Research on the use of children's picture books to teach comprehension strategies.
Despite the fact that picture books are widely used for different educational purposes, their use in teaching comprehension strategies and improving comprehension remains relatively limited (Trehearne & Doctorow, 2006). Moreover, most research studies focusing on the use of children's picture books to teach comprehension strategies have been conducted in classrooms where English is taught as a native or first language (Baumann, Hooten, & White, 1999; Berne & Clark, 2008; Rich & Blake, 1994; Youngs & Serafini, 2011). For example, Berne and Clark (2008) examined the use of children's literature in teaching some comprehension strategies through discussion groups. Students were explicitly instructed to talk about the stories using various comprehension strategies. All students were placed in peer-led groups to talk about the stories. While they were engaged in talking about the stories, students practiced the use of some comprehension strategies. Results revealed that most students showed dramatic progression in strategy use because they learned strategies either from their teachers, or from their peers, or both. Berne and Clark's study indicated that stories could be suitable tools to motivate and engage students in conducting various tasks and thereby achieve learning. Similarly, Harvey and Goudvis (2007), Lado (2012), and Zimny (2008) emphasized the incorporating of picture books to scaffold reading comprehension strategy instruction in language learning classrooms. They recommended the use of picture books to teach a wide range of reading comprehension strategies

including summarizing, synthesizing, visualizing, determining importance, questioning, connecting and monitoring.

Types of picture books.

Based on the fact that authors of picture books use different styles, illustrations, designs, themes, and wordings when they write picture books, picture books were categorized according to these variations (Bolton, 2003; Huck, Helper, Hickman, & Kiefer, 2001; Silvey, 1995). Therefore, numerous types of picture books were produced that served multiple educational purposes. Hence, the most common types of picture books were alphabet books, counting books, wordless picture books, easy-reading picture books, concept books, rhymed books, multicultural picture books, pop-up picture books, informational picture books, fiction picture books, non-fiction picture books, folktales, digital picture books, science picture books, fair trade picture books, song picture books, and postmodern picture books (Bolton & Wait, 2007; Jalongo, 2004; Mitchell, 2002). Despite their variations, these types of picture books could be used differently to meet the learners' needs and objectives and the systematic selection of picture books could be fundamental to their effective use, particularly to teaching reading comprehension strategy in language learning classrooms.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical blocks of this dissertation were constructed using a combination of several previous approaches, insights, and propositional perspectives. Picture books comprise distinguished features that make them useful resources in teaching various school topics including reading strategies. These features were supported and determined by previous research, approaches, and theories. For example, Ghosn (2002), Paivio (1971), and Rosenblatt (1994) presented an important theoretical evidence of the role that can be played of picture books in any educational process. Rosenblatt's (1994) transactional theory advocated the incorporation of aesthetic materials that included children's picture books to evoke readers' efferent and aesthetic transactions (pp. 22-27). Besides, Paivio's (1971) dual-coding theory highlighted the powerful role of illustrations (i.e., one of the major attributes of picture books) in scaffolding the readers' working memory to process the understanding of the reading piece. Finally, the selection of interesting and appropriate picture books was informed by motivation theory (Grabe, 2009). The selection of interesting and easy-to-read materials could contribute to readers' interest to learn and hence develop their understanding abilities (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002).

METHODOLOGY

In order to obtain an in-depth and authentic understanding of the participants' experiences and perceptions as they selected and responded to children's picture books, this study was built on the paradigm of qualitative inquiry (Merriam, 2009; Ragin, 1987; Thiem & Dusa, 2013). Qualitative methodology was employed because it could help to obtain holistic, naturalistic, and thick understanding of the phenomenon under study (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014).

Design

Qualitative exploratory design was implemented to investigate the participants' perceptions and experiences of some picture books that they selected to explicitly teach some basic reading

comprehension strategies to language learning learners. In qualitative research, exploratory research designs are used to elicit better and in-depth understanding of the problem under investigation (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2006).

Participants

Four elementary ESL teachers participated in this study (Table 1 shows the demographic details of the participating teachers). The participating teachers were graduate students in University of Colorado at Boulder who volunteered to teach the fourth and fifth grades in North America Libyan School at Denver, Colorado. Purposeful sampling was implemented because it was considered feasible in making the focal groups representative of the school's populations. Also, the selected teachers shared general attributes that included English language level, reading comprehension experience, and the experience of teaching by picture books.

Table 1
Demographic Details of the Participating Teachers

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Nation of origin	Native language
Hytam	Male	38	Libya	Arabic
Asma	Female	32	Egypt	Arabic
Omar	Male	37	Libya	Arabic
Allya	Female	30	Morocco	Arabic

Data collection instruments

Semi-structured interviews were implemented in order to obtain general views of teachers' experiences in picture books' selection to explicitly teach reading comprehension strategies. The following two questions were used to guide the teachers' interviews: 1. What do you think of using children's picture books in teaching reading comprehension strategies? and 2. What criteria do you think be considered most in the selection of children's picturebooks to teach reading comprehension strategies to ESL learners? The rationale of using these two questions to lead the teachers' interview was that they were piloted in previous research study (Al Khaiyali, 2013), and they were informed by the major inquiries of this study.

Materials

Four children's picture books were used to initiate reading comprehension strategy instruction in the participating classrooms. The picture books were selected according to different criteria and guidelines that were borrowed from previous research and reaffirmed by the participating teachers (Goodwin, 2008; Jalongo, 2004; Lado, 2012; Mitchell, 2002; Valentine, 2008). These criteria included authenticity (i.e., addresses topics relevant to the students' life and world), artful/well-illustrated, meet the lesson's objectives, meet the students' needs, aesthetically presented, motivating, culturally appreciable, easy-to-read, use high frequency words, comprehensible, cover various themes and cultural appreciation, short, and not time consuming (Table 2 shows a detailed description of the selected picture books).

Table *2 Details of the Selected Picture Books*

Title	Author	Illustrator	Year of Publication	Publishers	Synopsis
The Giving Tree	Silver stein	Silverste in	1964	Harper & Row, NY	This story is about a tree and a boy. At the beginning of the story, both the tree and the boy loved each other and that made them very happy. The tree grew up, and the boy was getting older, but the tree was still giving the boy what he needs in order to make him happy and maintain their mutual love. At the end of the story, the boy 'now an old man' asked the tree to set on its trunk because it has nothing to give. The tree accepts the boy's request, and it all ended happily.
Fish is Fish	Lionn i	Lionni	1974	Dragonfl y Books, NY	A minnow and a tadpole were close friends who were living together in a pond. Both friends grow up, and the tadpole became a frog who went out the pond to discover the world. The frog met his friend the fish when he came back and told him about what he saw outside the pond. The fish became curious to see what he heard and tried to get outside the bond but lost his breathe and became in danger. The frog saved him and turned him back to the bond. Finally, the fish discovered that everyone's world is unique, and he loved where he lived.
Free Fall	Wies ner	Wiesner	1991	HarperCo llins, NY	This wordless story describes an adventure of dreaming boy who was dreaming of conquering dragons, roaming castles, and finally soaring over the fields
The Gard ener	Stewa rt	Small	2007	Square Fish, NY	The gardener 'a young girl' tells her story through letters she wrote to her family when she left them and lived with her uncle. Throughout this story, the young girl realized that her uncle was always nervous and sad. She prepared a surprise to him in order to draw a smile in his face. At the end of this story, she called her uncle upstairs and surprised him with a colorful garden of flowers.

Procedure

Teaching procedures. The fieldwork of this study lasted for ten days. In the first three days, the four teachers were introduced to the study. In this stage, picture books were introduced to the four teachers, and they were showed why and how these picture books were selected. Teachers were asked to review the selected picture books and confirm or disconfirm their suitability to their teaching goals. Then, some basic reading comprehension strategies were introduced to the teachers. These reading comprehension strategies included the following: summarizing, synthesizing, retelling, determining big ideas, visualizing, questioning, predicting, inferring, and monitoring. I explained to the teachers the rationale of selecting these reading comprehension strategies that was summarized in their frequency use in most research studies and approaches (National Reading Panel, 2000; Oczkus, 2004; Pressley & Wharton-McDonald, 2006). Finally, I introduced the basic comprehension strategy explicit instructions that teachers could follow in their daily instructional routines. The explicit reading comprehension instruction was based on the following steps: explaining new words, overviewing the picture books, reading the picture book aloud, providing an opportunity for students to discuss and read the picture book aloud, introducing a reading comprehension strategy, explaining what, when, and why the strategy should be used, modeling the strategy using think aloud to explain the picture books, and finally, reading responsibility by providing an opportunity to the students to use, model, and practice the strategy collaboratively and then independently (Almasi, 2003). Teachers were encouraged to scaffold the students' discussion and provide feedback as needed.

Data Collection Procedures.

 As the teachers completed the short training program, they started teaching one class period (i.e., 45 minutes) every day to each class for seven days. Teachers were asked to record any notes they might have on the selection and use of picture books in their teaching practices. At the end of the fieldwork of this study, all the participating teachers were interviewed. Interviews were semi-structured and lasted for about 15 minutes for each teacher. All the interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and displayed. The interview transcriptions were double-checked by the individual teachers in order to make sure that transcripts were as recorded and not mistranscribed.

Data analysis

Data that were collected from the teachers' interviews were firsthand analyzed. Specifically, all the collected data were transcribed, condensed, displayed, and finally, verified and reported (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). The processes of data condensation and data representation implied the preliminary coding of the transcribed interviews. Based on the emerging codes, categories were determined and connected to the major inquiries of this study. Moreover, ATLAS.ti 7 (2013) was implemented to affirm the codes that were emerged and demonstrate the major findings of this study (Friese, 2012).

FINDINGS

The overarching purpose of the current study was to explore the selection guidelines of children's picture books when they were used to initiate comprehension strategy instruction in language learning classrooms. Additionally, the study attempted to obtain the general views of

ESL teachers of using children's picture books to explicitly teach reading comprehension strategies. These purposes were intertwined and combined into the following research questions:

- What were the teachers' perceptions of using children's picture books to explicitly teach reading comprehension strategies?
- What were the main criteria English language teachers used to select children's picture books to explicitly teach reading comprehension strategies?

In order to elicit in-depth and thick explanations from the teachers' experiences of using picture books to explicitly teach reading comprehension strategies, the participating teachers were introduced to some reading comprehension strategies using picture books for about ten days. After they finished the practical experiences with fourth and fifth grade classes, all teachers were interviewed. The teachers' semi-structured interviews were informed by several questions that were emerged in a previous pilot study. These questions included: 1. What do you think of using children's picture books to explicitly teach reading comprehension strategies? 2. What do you like about this experience? Why? 3. What do you dislike about this experience? Why? 4. What do you think of the selection criteria of the assigned picture books? and finally, 5. What do you think the appropriate guidelines of picture books selection in teaching reading comprehension strategies? The interviews were administrated independently, and each interview was recorded, transcribed, and member-checked by the participating teachers. Then, the transcripts were coded and categorized into the following themes:

Some benefits of using children's picture books to explicitly teach reading comprehension strategies.
Data that were collected from the teachers' interview responses indicated that picture books have some benefits in the overall process of teaching reading comprehension strategies to English language learners. These benefits were summarized in the following:
1. Children's picture books provided more opportunities to the participating teachers to use, model, and affirm the assigned strategy(ies). Hytam, a fourth grade teacher, explained this relationship in his interview response by stating, "The way that picture books are written and illustrated inspired me to introduce, explain, model, and train my students to effectively use reading comprehension strategies." In the same vein, Allya, a fifth grade teacher, emphasized the important role of picture books in facilitating the strategy modeling when she put it, "The cool thing about the use of picture books as instructional tools is the way that helped me model and remodel the strategy using authentic illustrations and simple words in a short period of time." Additionally, Omar, the fifth grade teacher, explained how illustrations in picture books were important in facilitating the students' understanding of the text and using of the comprehension strategies when he said, "picture books helped me save time in demonstrating some strategies to my students, they were short and full of illustrations, illustrations were helpful in showing the meaning of the writing scripts despite my students' knowledge of vocabulary." Therefore, the depth of picture book illustrations and their short interesting style enable teachers to explain and model strategies frequently in a good amount of time.

2. Children's picture books were used to teach all the assigned reading comprehension strategies. The four teachers used children's picture books to teach all the selected reading comprehension strategies in isolation and then multiple strategies instruction was implemented. For example,

Asma, a fourth grade teacher, indicated that she used *The Giving Tree* to model all the assigned strategies that included summarizing, synthesizing, retelling, determining importance, questioning, inferring, visualizing, connecting, and monitoring. She explained the way of explicitly instructing these strategies in isolation and then in chunks according to their relevancy using this picture book. The process started with introducing new words, activating students' background knowledge by asking the students several questions about the theme of the story, reading the story aloud, introducing a reading comprehension strategy, modeling the strategy by thinking aloud, and providing the students an opportunities to use and practice the assigned strategy using the story. On the other hand, Hytam, a fourth grade teacher, used *The Gardener* to model predicting, inferring, and determining importance. He explained the process of modeling predicting by saying, " I first introduced the new words of *The Gardener* to the class, then I read the story out loud, give the students an opportunity to read and discuss the story in groups, then, I explained the story aging using predicting strategy." Hytam indicated that he used the pictures of the story, the title, the subtitles, and some key words as clues to help the students predict some incidents from the story.

3. Children's picture books were helpful in motivating and engaging the students to use and practice reading comprehension strategies. There was a consensus among the four participating teachers that the use of picture books to explicitly teach reading comprehension strategies increased the students' interest to use and practice the assigned strategies. Allya, the fifth grade teacher, explained how her students' showed motivation and engagement in learning to use picture books in her following interview response, "I noticed that most of my students spent good time in discussing and practicing strategies using picture books and participate actively in most classroom assignment which were evident signs of their motivation and engagement." Similarly, Hytam, the fifth grade teacher, pointed out that illustrations and interestingness of themes were the major elements that increased the students' motivation and engagement when they were taught using picture books. He stated, "most students showed increasing motivation and active engagement when they saw the illustrations and loved the stories they read." The participating teachers affirmed that these materials were great means to help students motivate and engage in their learning and thus contributed to develop their reading comprehension achievement.

Attributes of children's picture books.
The participating teachers affirmed some important attributes that distinguished the selected picture books and made them appropriate to explicit reading comprehension strategy instruction. These features included rich illustrations, frequent used words, multicultural, interesting, short, thematic, and authentic. Specifically, Allya, the fifth grade teacher, reported some features she found in the picture books that she read by saying, "I found that illustrations, easy-to-read, and interesting are among the most important features that picture books have and that might not be in any other convention materials." Likewise, Omar, the fifth grade teacher, pointed out, "illustrations in picture books are the major feature that help readers to understand and sustain understanding even if they do not know what the words mean." Both teachers emphasized illustrations and validated the role of illustrations in facilitate their teaching of the comprehension strategies when picture books were used (Figure 2 demonstrates ATLAS.ti 7

summary of the major attributes of children's picture books as elicited by the participating teachers).
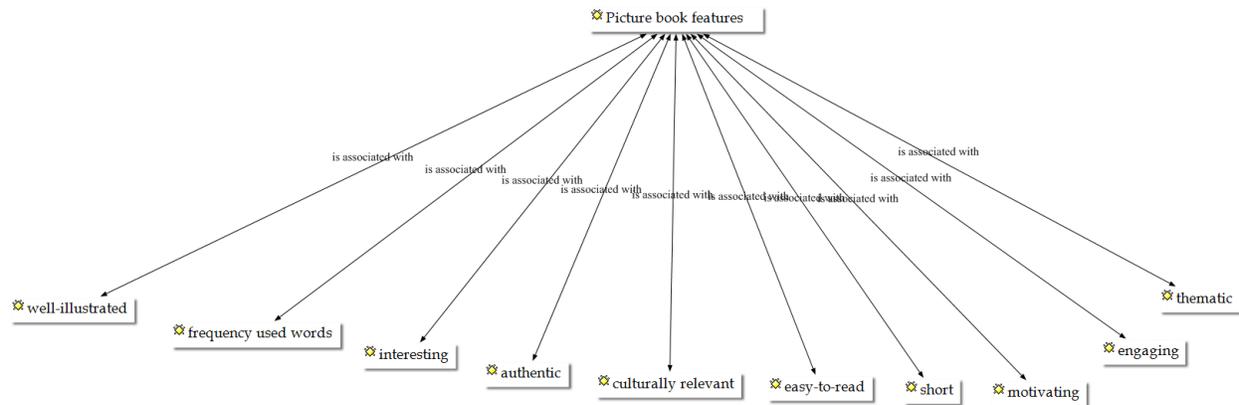

Figure 1. Attributes of Children's Picture Books

As shown in Figure 1, the highest frequent feature was "well-illustrated" and teachers listed the features according to their importance. Also, based on these features, teachers determined and affirmed the selection criteria of picture books that should be used to explicitly teach reading comprehension strategies.

Guidelines for picture books selection to explicitly teach reading comprehension strategies. The teachers' interview responses reconfirmed some of the selection guidelines that were indicated in previous research studies. Asma, the fourth grade teacher, indicated that, "picture books should be interesting, well designed, delightful, motivating, and well-illustrated." In addition, Hytam, the fourth grade teacher, pointed out, "I think the selection of the appropriate picture books is a very hard and complicated task because of the increasing numbers of picture books, but I think good picture books should be well-designed, meet the students' learning objectives and cultures, and purposeful." Moreover, Omar, the fifth grade teacher, thought, "Good picture books should be readable, easy, not consume time, short, well-illustrated and designed, meet the students' objectives of learning, interesting, and relevant to the students' real world and life." Finally, Allya, the fifth grade teacher, affirmed, "Good picture books should be colorful, easy-reading, well-illustrated, cover various topics, interesting, relevant to the students' life, meet the lesson objectives, and not stereotypical." Consequently, the teachers' selection guidelines were summarized as the following: 1. The picture books should be well illustrated, colorful, and layout, 2. They should include easy and high frequency used words, 3. They should meet the students' needs, the teachers' and the lesson objectives, 4. They should be thematic, purposeful, and cover a wide area of topics, 5. They should meet the culture of the target population, 6. They should be authentic in which they reflect the students' life and world, 7. They should be interesting, 8. They should be motivating and engaging, 9. They should be short and not time consuming, and finally, 10. They should be accessible.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences and perceptions of ESL teachers in the selection and using of children's picture books to explicitly teach reading comprehension

strategies. In order to elicit in-depth and thick views from the participating ESL teachers, semi-structured interviews were applied. Data that were collected from the teachers' interviews were transcribed, member-checked, coded, categorized, and finally, reported. Specifically, the interview findings suggested that all the participating teachers in the fourth and fifth grades realized that picture books could be adequate materials to explicit comprehension strategy instruction. This finding was determined through the progression that most fourth and fifth students showed in using and practicing some reading comprehension strategies. Allya, the fifth grade teacher, asserted this by saying, "most of my students showed greater engagement and higher interest when I used *The Giving Tree* to teach summarizing and synthesizing…they also showed good abilities in using these two strategies in other different reading contexts." Thus, children's picture books can provide meaningful context for students' engagement and motivation to the learning of reading comprehension strategies. In addition, the use of picture books contributed to the students' internalizing of strategies and reusing them in different reading settings. In the same vein, findings from the teachers' interviews revealed that the selection of appropriate children's picture books was fundamental to effective reading strategy instruction. Most of the participating teachers underscored that illustrations, readability, authenticity, relevancy, and interestingness were among the basic criteria for the selection of picture books to explicitly instruct reading comprehension strategies in language learning classrooms. Specifically, illustrations were considered the essence of the selection of picture books because the participating teachers thought that illustrations could help students compensate any deficiency in vocabulary and facilitate the use of strategies. Asma, the fourth grade teacher, explained the power of picture books illustration in her reading comprehension instruction by saying, "illustrations are fundamental in picture books selection because they work as a backup to the students' paucity of vocabulary and contributed to their interest to learn." These findings were consistent with findings of previous research in first and second language classrooms. For example, Costello and Kolodziei (2006) suggested some guidelines to be considered when selecting picture books to support teaching different art and content area topics. These criteria included identifying the purpose of using the story, meeting the lessons' objectives, considering the students' needs and cultures, containing rich vocabulary, and comprehensible illustrations. On the other hand, Moss (1995) highlighted picture books' "interest-ingness" (p. 123) to the student and their relevancy to the curriculum. Lado (2012) added certain criteria that should be considered when picture books are used to teach English as a second language learners. These criteria included easy-to-read (i.e., has fairly simple language), appropriate in length, interesting, motivating, use a greater proportion of high-frequency words, thematic, well-illustrated, containing simple vocabulary, "tell-able" (p. 4), and comprehensible.

LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study was built on exploratory-qualitative inquiry because it aimed to provide precise research rounds to future investigations (Merriam, 2009). Four ESL teachers from the fourth and fifth grades participated in this study. This small sample size limited the generalizability of the findings of this study to other contexts and populations. Moreover, the use of semi-structured interviews to obtain data from the participating teachers limited the triangulation and hence the trustworthiness of the findings of this study (Maxwell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). Despite these limitations, the results of this study could offer promising implications toward the selection of

materials to explicit reading comprehension instruction in English language learning classrooms. Findings of this study indicated that children's picture books could be appropriate materials to initiate reading comprehension strategy instruction in English language classrooms. Nevertheless, teachers should select the appropriate picture book to meet these expectations.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of English language teachers in fourth and fifth grades of using children's picture books to teach reading comprehension strategies. Also, the study was an attempt to determine what criteria should be considered by English language teachers to appropriately select picture books in reading comprehension strategy instruction. Teachers were provided an opportunity to use some selected picture books to teach reading comprehension strategies for about ten days and then they were semi-interviewed. Findings showed that well-selected picture books could be used to initiate effective reading comprehension strategy instruction. Moreover, teachers indicated that reading comprehension strategy instruction should be explicit, flexible, and reciprocal. In addition, findings from the teachers' interviews indicated that the appropriate selection of children's picture books were fundamental to the quality of comprehension strategy instruction. Picture books were considered important resources to support the teaching of various language skills to English language learners. In order to make the use of picture books in reading comprehension strategy instruction more effective, picture books should be precisely selected. Therefore, several criteria to select picture books in elementary language learning classrooms were suggested. Despite the fact that all the suggested criteria are vital, the context and the condition under which learning takes place determine the guidelines priorities (i.e., which criteria are more important). Finally, examples about some selected picture books for teaching some language learning skills and strategies were provided.

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