

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF COMIC BOOKS IN ENHANCING EDUCATIONAL EQUITY FOR AUTISTIC STUDENTS: A FAMILY PERSPECTIVE

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I make my own comics on certain topics, with visual pictures and words, I sometimes draw these up on my digital pad, and use them with planned events like a social story, I am able to use my sons favourite characters in comics which keep him interested, I made a superhero one for behaviour he really enjoyed, and I even put him in the comic, I find it easier to be able to use words he understands rather than struggle with those in comics.



I think there is a place for basic comics in some education but as not all children enjoy them, making them part of all learning and not just an optional read seems quite narrowing in how we educate. In general comics tend to be written and marketed to boys, not exclusively so but mostly. I worry that there will be enough variety to interest and represent girls. I know that not all girls will want traditionally female subject matter etc and vice versa, but the comic world is heavily marketed with males in mind.



I think that seeing the character saying the words will be easier for some children than trying to visualise the story in their heads and make it easier to follow along. Also the pictures are much more fun to look at than lines of text, which can be hard to follow.

My child doesn't like to read normal books. Only comics. But he has his own favourite comics books and always waiting for new chapters. It is a good source of information, because the visual helps children to understand better and keep the concentration

SCHOOL CONTEXT

The school at the heart of this study is a state-maintained special school in Liverpool, catering to a broad demographic of students between 3 to 19 years old. These students all share the experience of living with autism, along with a host of associated learning differences, which include variations in communication, interaction, social skills, imagination, sensory perceptions, and diverse learning needs. The institution prides itself on its commitment to providing tailored education and support, ensuring that every student is afforded an inclusive learning environment that appreciates their unique capabilities and potential.

PROBLEM IN FOCUS

Understanding family views is vital, as home environment and parental involvement often significantly influence a child's educational outcomes. Additionally, studies have not fully explored the potential of extending the use of comic books beyond the classroom, for instance, as a tool for at-home learning. This study aims to fill this research gap by investigating the perspectives of families on the use of comic books in education, and the possibility of their extended use at home.



How often do you think we should include comics in our school lessons?

Use them in class teaching	4.7
Set them as homework and reading tasks	3.65
Offer them as optional reading choices	4.14

The responses "As often as possible," "Often," "Sometimes," "Rarely," and "Never" are assigned numerical values of 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1, respectively.

How effective are comics books in helping students in these areas of reading competence?

How effective are comics books in helping students in these areas of reading competence?	% of parents perceiving it as effective
A) Learning new words	83.64%
B) Understanding what they read	80.00%
C) Studying things like symbols, characters, storylines, talking, and viewpoint in books	80.00%
D) Looking at the main ideas in stories	74.55%
E) Getting better at using different types of media, like reading and writing in different ways	85.46%

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research into the pedagogical applications of comic books and graphic novels, particularly for autistic learners, suggests they offer several unique benefits. The blend of text and images in comics can facilitate understanding of complex concepts, boost vocabulary, and improve reading comprehension (Cohen, 2010). Studies indicate that comics make learning more engaging and enjoyable for students, potentially leading to improved academic outcomes and fostering a lifelong love for reading (Wright and Sherman, 2016) as well as improving social skills and self-esteem (Sainsbury and Hayhoe, 2016). The majority of existing research focuses on the use of comics in classroom settings, with limited exploration of their potential role at home. This represents a significant research gap, considering that learning extends beyond the four walls of a classroom.

METHODOLOGY

A survey was carried out in May 2023 amongst families with students aged 8 and above at the school, yielding a total of 55 responses. The survey gathered information on family demographics, the child's reading habits, and comic book ownership at home. It also queried their perspectives on using comics in school teaching and potential advantages for their child's reading comprehension and enjoyment. Data analysis comprised basic statistical analysis and thematic analysis of open-text responses.

FINDINGS

Survey results indicate that a majority of respondents find comic books effective for enhancing literacy skills, particularly multimedia literacy. Although families favour regular use of comics in school and as optional reading, their role in homework assignments receives less endorsement.



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study's key findings and recommendations can be summarised as follows:

- Comic books, as viewed by families, can significantly aid learning for autistic students by promoting literacy skills and managing autism-related learning complexities.
- Schools should consider:
 - Integrating comic books into the curriculum as classroom teaching aids.
 - Recommending them as optional reading at home.
 - Being mindful of their use as homework due to mixed family feedback.
- Future research should investigate effective comic book implementation strategies, barrier mitigation, and individual learning differences within the ASD community.
- The broader educational community is urged to explore unconventional teaching mediums like comic books, which can enhance accessibility, enjoyment, and educational equity.

REFERENCES

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