The American University in Cairo

School of Humanities and Social Sciences

**Reading and Creating Comics in the Fully Online AFL Classroom: Students’ Perceptions**

A Thesis Submitted to

The Department of Applied Linguistics

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the degree of Masters’ of Arts in Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language

by

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Under the supervision of Dr. Dalal Aboelseoud

December 2018
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to examine the perceptions of multi-level Arabic as a foreign language (AFL) online learners of reading and creating digital comics in their online classroom. Data were collected from 23 multi-level online AFL students who participated in a 6 weeks fully online comic-based course where they read a comic each week with the teacher and create a digital comic using a web-based comic creation tool related to the topic they have read in class. Participants were asked to respond to a questionnaire and participate in group interviews at the end of the experiment. Results show that the majority of the students from different levels found reading comics to be enjoyable, motivating and useful to the development of their reading skills and vocabulary acquisition. However, students’ perceptions toward the impact of reading comics on students’ cultural awareness were more positive in the advanced class in comparison with the low-level classes. Moreover, findings revealed that creating comics was enjoyable to the majority of students and that it provided them with a sense of achievement and allowed them to be more creative with their language. Despite being viewed by the majority of the students as a time-consuming task, they stated that it was useful to their language proficiency. Thus, these results highlight the importance of integrating reading and creating comics in the AFL classrooms and opens the door for integrating more authenticity, innovation and technology in the AFL classrooms.
DEDICATION

إلى أمي الحبيبة، أهدي إليك يا غاليتي هذه الرسالة لأنها بفضل الله ثمرة دعمك ومواتك ومجهودك ودعواتك المستديمة.

إلى أبي الراحل رحمه الله وإخوتي الأعزاء.

إلى أخي الحبيب محمد أدامك الله خير سنّد لي.

إلى "غادتي" أدامك الله لي خير أخت وناحة وصديقة.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my very great appreciation to my supervisor Dr. Dalal Aboelseoud for her support, patience and valuable suggestions during the planning and development of this research work and for giving me her time and undivided attention whenever needed. I would also like to express my deep gratitude to Dr. Raghda El Essawi for her teachings, enthusiastic encouragement and constructive comments on this research work.

I would also like to extend my thanks to Dr. Zainab Taha for the knowledge, the kindness and the encouragement she gave me during my years of studying in the MA TAFL program and to Dr. Ashraf Abdou for the knowledge I gained from him and his classes and for his continuous support. I would also like to extend my thanks to Dr. Atta Gebril for his valuable support throughout my study.

I am profoundly grateful to my professors and for the TAFL program at the American University in Cairo that offered me the chance to take my first step in the world of Academia. I am very thankful for all the opportunities and the life-changing education that I have got at AUC.

Finally, I must express my very profound gratitude to my family particularly my mother for her love, hard work and never-ending support, to my father may Allah give him mercy, to my eldest sister Ghada for always being a true sister, a companion and a friend, to my brother Mohammad and all of my sisters for their support and prayers.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Theoretical Background

The outburst of digital communication tools in the twenty-first century has resulted in a transformation in learning and in students’ needs and demands. Students of the digital age are in need of active personalized learning that involves multimedia (McLoughlin & Lee, 2010). Therefore, incorporating technology and various modalities including text, image, audio and video in teaching can serve in creating an active learning environment suitable for digital natives. Comics and graphic novels are one of those multimodal mediums that can engage students in an active personalized cultural learning experience. In recent years, comics and graphic novels have been taking a prominent place in the classrooms and the scholarly work. Educators have been integrating comics in different disciplines including history, science, medicine, literature and finally language. Comics are defined by McCloud (1944) as “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer”. In other words, comics are multimodal texts that form “pictorial narratives”. Researchers have been interested in knowing more about the impact of comics and their uses in education. Comics as a cultural narrative source can motivate and engage learners, help them in developing visual and multimodal literacy, provide an overview of culture and finally encourage studies from different disciplinaries (Hall, 2011). Further, comics are literature texts that familiarize students about literacy (Botzakis, 2013) particularity multimodal literacy (Isaa, 2017). In addition, multimodal literacy through comics supports students in meaning making (Jacobs, 2007). Furthermore, Krashen and Ujiie (1996), stated that comics engage middle school students in reading, and increase their enjoyment to read more (Wilson, 2013). This in fact not only true for middle school...
students, but also for both young and adolescent foreign language learners. Comics encourage and motivate reluctant and struggling readers to read more (Brozo, Moorman, & Meyer, 2014 p.39). In fact, comics are not only motivating to reluctant readers but also non-reluctant ones. Comics motivate second language learners and reduce their level of anxiety (Tarabuzan & Popa, 2015). Further, comics have been invading the foreign language classrooms due to their innate power to enhance foreign language learners’ language proficiency. Comics enhance FLL’s reading skills and facilitates their reading comprehension (Dwi C, Santihastuti, & Wahjuningsih, 2018; Hassanirokh & Yeganehpour, 2016). Moreover, research has found that comics are powerful instructional materials to develop FLL’s acquisition of vocabulary and idiomatic expressions (Basal, Aytan, & Demir, 2016). Comics as a form of popular culture have the potential of supporting FLL’s intercultural communicative competence (Guadamillas Gómez, 2014; Norton & Vanderheyden, 2004). In addition to the profound uses of comics to enhance FLL’s reading skills, comics have the potential to improve FLL’s writing and speaking skills (Guadamillas Gómez, 2014). Interestingly, one study conducted by Engler, Hoskins, and Payne (2008) found that students in an English for Academic Purposes course had higher comprehension levels when their traditional texts were made into the form of comics by their teachers. Moreover, students in Engler’s et al. (2008) study enjoyed summarizing these difficult academic readings and transforming them into digital comics themselves. Academia focused mainly on comics in relation to literacy and reading skills, with very few researchers focusing on composing with comics. Among those are researchers like Deligianni-Georgaka and Pouroutidi (2016) who indicated that students perceived creating comics in the foreign language classroom to engage and motivate them to write and be more creative. Additionally, creating comics provides students with a sense of achievement that is motivating to them (Pitura & Chmielarz,
2017). Finally, creating comics was perceived by students to improve the FLL’s writing skills (Bal, 2018; Yunus, Salehi, & Embi, 2012).

1.2 Rationale of The Study and Statement of Problem

Research on uses of comics and comic-based activities in the foreign language classroom particularly the English as a second language (ESL) classroom is increasing. Researchers are no longer doubting the validity of comics in classes. Recent research’s interests are more toward investigating how and for what purpose comics can be used in the classroom (Syma & Weiner, 2013, p.1). However, in the field of Arabic as a foreign language (AFL) till this day, no research has been conducted on integration of comics and comic-based activities in the AFL classes, let alone the online AFL. Therefore, this research fills a gap in literature by trying to explore the validity of reading and creating comics in the online AFL classroom. Moreover, it opens the doors of creativity and 21st century skills to enter the AFL classroom. With the current and upcoming generations becoming digital natives, the AFL classroom can benefit greatly from including these multimodal texts and technical tools in the classroom to create an engaging and creative environment for students to learn in and to promote their language proficiency. Furthermore, despite the increasing research on comics and their effects on FLLs’ language proficiency particularly on their reading skills and vocabulary acquisition, minimal research was conducted on perceptions of FLLs toward the impact of comics on their language proficiency. Knowing how students perceive the integration of comics or any pedagogical intervention in the foreign language classroom is crucial because it can determine and explain students’ engagement during process of learning which in turn explains effectiveness of targeted teaching practice. Furthermore, proven and tested positive effects of using comics in the FLL classroom does not necessarily mean that students will perceive them positively. More importantly, examining students’
perceptions toward the process of learning have been gaining more importance in recent years due to the rise of learner-centered approaches (Barkhuizen, 1998). According to Nunan (1989a) “no curriculum can claim to be truly learner-centered unless the learner’s subjective needs and perceptions relating to the processes of learning are taken into account” (p. 177). Therefore, examining students’ perceptions toward the benefits and impacts of comics on FLLs’ language proficiency is required. Finally, very few researchers discussed FLLs’ perceptions toward comic creation tools and programs particularly Storyboard That™. Thus, it is particularly important to investigate because it highlights the affordances of comic creation tasks in the FL classrooms. Due to these gaps that exist in research related to comics in the foreign language classrooms and to the field of AFL learning and teaching, this research will investigate the perceptions of multi-level AFL students of reading and creating comics in the online AFL classroom.

1.3 Research Questions

The study sought to answer the following specific research questions:

1) What are the perceptions of online AFL multi-level students of reading comics in their online AFL classroom?

2) What are the perceptions of online AFL multi-level students of creating digital comics in their online AFL classroom?

1.4 Key Definitions

Comics: a “sequential art” (Eisner, 1985), a “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence” (McCloud, 1994).

Multimodal texts: Texts that consist of a series of panels, images, text and spoken words that forms a narrative (Bearne & Wolstencroft, 2007).
**Fully Online language learning**: refers to learning a language in an entirely online mode using online educational technologies, in which learners and teachers are distant from each other and do not exist in the same physical space (Wang & Chen, 2013).

**Synchronous e-learning**: in synchronous e-learning, both teachers and students exist together simultaneously using chat and video conferencing tools (Hrastinski, 2008).

**Asynchronous e-learning**: in Asynchronous e-learning teachers and students are not both online simultaneously, coursework is often conducted by posting on online forms such as discussion boards (Hrastinski, 2008).

1.5 **Operational Definitions**

**Silent Comics**: is a term used by the research to refer to comics that tell a story only through their illustrations and not though their written text.

**Fully Online Language learning**: The definition adapted in this study is Wang and Chen’s (2013) definition of online learning which refers to learning in a completely online mode.

**Comics and graphic novels**: The terms of Comics and graphic novels are used interchangeably in this research based on the assumption that graphic novels are an extended version of comics.

1.6 **Abbreviations**

**AFL**: Arabic as a foreign language

**ECA**: Egyptian colloquial Arabic

**MSA**: Modern standard Arabic

**L1**: First language
**FLL:** Foreign language learner

**EFL:** English as a foreign language

**ESL:** English as a second language.

**OLL:** Online Language Learning

**COL:** Collaborative online learning

**USE:** Usefulness, easiness, and satisfaction questionnaire

**FLCAS:** The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale

### 1.7 Delimitations

The present study will explore students’ perceptions toward the benefits and challenges of using comics and comic creation tasks in the online AFL classroom and will not explore the actual progress they made using comics. That is to say, the current research will not compare between participants who took part in the online Arabic comics course and those who did not or between participants before and after taking part in the online Arabic comics course. This was due to the variability of the participants’ levels. Also, there were not enough students in each level to separate them into control and experimental groups. Finally, the current research will not investigate AFL students’ perceptions toward comics and their impact on their speaking skills.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The present study aims at investigating the perceptions of online AFL students of both reading and creating comics in the online AFL classroom. The research is looking at how students view the potential use of comics in the AFL classroom and its impact on their AFL learning. The current review of the literature highlights uses of comics in the language classroom specifically the foreign language classroom and their impact on learners’ cognitive and linguistic skills. It specifically looks at comics, perceptions of benefits of comics, and impacts of comics on learners’ level of motivation and language proficiency, highlighting research conducted on the impact of comics on reading skills and cultural awareness in addition to research related to the potential of comic creation tasks and integrating both reading and creating comics in the language classroom. In addition, the chapter reviews literature related to online language learning and the major challenges facing online language learners namely, motivation, collaboration, and communication and culture knowledge. Investigating research related to the impact of comics on FLLs’ and challenges facing OLLs provides an opportunity to investigate whether students’ perceptions of using comics in an online classroom agrees with the mentioned research.

2.1 What are comics?

Comics and Graphic novels are multimodal texts that combine written texts and images in a number of panels. Comics are defined by Eisner (1985) as a “sequential art” and by McCloud (1994) as “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence”. Comics as multimodal texts consist of a series of panels, images, text and spoken words that form a narrative (Bearne & Wolstencroft, 2007). Several factors distinguish comics or graphic novels from children books. One is that most comics are presented in a series form, comic
strips in a specific volume followed by an extension to the comic stories in a following volume. Another factor is that the design and the components of comics and children books are different; comics consist of panels and they are filled with onomatopoeia (sound words) such as BOOM! and Pow! (see Figure 2.1). Finally, comic pictures and their order are an essential part of the story and a crucial part of comprehending the meaning (Meskin, 2007).

In terms of the type of language used in comics, Brown (1997) describes the linguistic codes involved in a comic strip including narrative and balloons stating that often the narrative code is written in the formal standard language and the balloons code often written in the spoken or the less formal language. Although Brown (1997) was mainly discussing French comics, his description of comic linguistic codes can be applied to Arabic. By examining a great number of Egyptian Comics, narrative boxes are often written in Modern Standard Arabic while thought and speech balloons are written in Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (see Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1 An Egyptian comic strip with both linguistic codes (formal and spoken). From Alsafti, K. (2005, May 30). *Sirr alfatāh alghāmidah* [The secret of the mysterious girl] #73 [Cartoon]. Cairo, EG: Modern Arab Association.
2.2 Comics, motivation and language proficiency

Comics are a remarkable authentic source to cater different aspects of language learning including reading, writing, literacy skills (Drolet, 2010), vocabulary acquisition (Basal et al., 2016; Miranda, Salazar, & Larenas, 2018) and characteristics of spoken language including pragmatics (Williams, 1995). In addition, comics have the potential to increase the language learner’s level of motivation and engagement (Cimermanová, 2015; Drolet, 2010; Ishikura, 2013; Whipple, 2007; Williams, 1995). Drolet (2010) proposes four different ways of using popular culture authentic texts mainly comics in the ESL classroom in order to promote the learners’ reading and writing skills. Activities include asking students to identify a certain grammatical point from a given comic strip such as reported speech. Other activities are running discussions and using adjectives in describing comic strip characters, comprehending a story in a comic and identifying its main components (mapping the story) and finally, comics are used to stimulate students to write about a certain topic. Drolet (2010) indicates that using comics as authentic texts in the ESL classroom can promote the learners’ reading and writing skills and increase their level of enjoyment, motivation, and creativity. Reading comics can encourage unwilling readers to read more, enjoy and engage in a narrative text. Similar positive results regarding motivation towards reading are obtained from Whipple (2007) study. Whipple (2007) conducted a study on 8 high school unwilling readers to examine the effect of reading comics in an environment outside the classroom (a book club) on their level of interest in reading and on their overall performance once they return to their regular classroom. Students’ performance did not change after joining the book club and returning to their classroom. However, students stated that they enjoyed the experiment and that it increased their interest in reading. Their behavior toward reading changed, they transformed from readers who are unwilling to read any type of text to readers who are willing and requesting to read more comics.
texts). Furthermore, comics have a positive effect on foreign language learners’ vocabulary acquisition and motivation. Ishikura (2013) conducted a study on Japanese foreign language learners addressing Japanese learners’ motive to learn Japanese and their perceptions of studying comics as part of their Japanese class. A high percentage of students were learning Japanese in order to understand manga “Japanese comics” and anime. When given a questionnaire, students responded positively to the experience of reading comics in their Japanese classroom. The majority of students stated that activities based on comics were motivating and that it increased their interest in learning the language (Ishikura, 2013). In addition, researchers like Miranda et al. (2018), who conducted a study on 17 ESL students from grade 11 and 12 to investigate the effect of using comics on participants’ learning of vocabulary, concluded that students performed significantly better in their post-tests after they have learned vocabulary through comics. Similar results were found by Basal et al. (2016), who found that graphic novels were effective in teaching idiomatic expressions and vocabulary to Turkish ESL university students. Moreover, comics are useful authentic texts that help foreign language learners to become more familiar with characteristics of spoken language specifically pragmatics. Comics are characterized by being permanent, in other words, they are based on the pace of the reader. They contain images, which make them visual. Moreover, comics consist of both written and spoken language. They contain interactional language, characters communicate in the comic panels, often the same characters in the same context using the same type of register. In addition, comics are filled with idiomatic expressions and fixed phrases that are often recycled in different comics (Williams, 1995). These interactional and communicative features make comics an outstanding source for students to explore features of spoken language including pragmatics. Williams (1995) suggests a framework to use comics as a material to help raise the students’ awareness of pragmatics and spoken language. He applied this method of using
comics in a low-intermediate intensive ESL class; students in this class had low speaking abilities. The suggested framework consisting of four major elements: observing, hypothesizing, experimenting and evaluating. Students are frequently exposed to the comic books and are guided to use this framework until they form a habit which leads them to be autonomous learners at the end by exploring, asking and trying to find answers by themselves. The teacher plays the role of a facilitator in this case presenting only the main concepts and guides the learners by proposing questions that directs them to explore certain linguistic and paradigmatic areas. Questions include asking the students the reason behind using a certain word in a specific context or asking about the way a certain word is said in the comic. Williams (1995) states that integrating comics in the foreign language classroom helps with ESL learners’ speaking and pragmatic awareness. Besides the previously mentioned uses and benefits of integrating comics in the language classroom on learners’ language proficiency, one particular area that drew the attention of researchers early on was the effect of comics on learners’ reading and literacy skills.

2.3 Comics and the Development of Reading skills

Literature discussing comics in the foreign language classroom focus significantly on the effect of comics on the development of reading skills including making inferences and guessing from context (Karap, 2017). In addition, comics were perceived by students to enhance their level of reading comprehension (Basol & Sarigul, 2013; Cimermanová, 2015). Karap (2017) investigated the effects of reading comics on novice, intermediate and pre-intermediate ESL Hungarian students. The study investigated the effects of comics on participants’ level of anxiety and ability to recall vocabulary and guess from context. Results did not show any difference in the students’ level of anxiety before and after being exposed to comics. However, students’ guessing and recalling abilities were higher after reading comics. In comparison with traditional texts, comics and graphic novels have the potential of
increasing the foreign language learner’s level of reading comprehension. A study by Basol and Sarigul (2013) conducted on EFL students in a university in Turkey reveals that students reading graphic novels performed slightly better in their reading comprehension than students reading the same stories in the form of traditional texts. In addition, students enjoyed using graphic novels in their classes. Basol and Sarigul (2013) conclude that with proper activities and careful guidance through the process of reading graphic novels students’ reading skills can be improved. In addition, ESL students perceive comics as a useful resource to develop their reading strategies such as guessing from context and making inferences. Cimermanová (2015) case study based on observation and interviews shows that all 4 ESL students involved in the study enjoyed reading comics in English. Despite their unfamiliarity with some words in the comics, they were willing to use strategies such as guessing and deducing the meaning to better comprehend the text. Last but not least, the interest in reading comics in the language classroom was accompanied by an interest in investigating the effect of reading comics on learners’ cultural knowledge and awareness. However, research on the effect of reading comics on language learners’ cultural knowledge and awareness is fairly sparse.

2.4 Comics and Cultural Awareness

Comics are a remarkable source for culture awareness. They can enhance the learners’ awareness of culture and cultural differences (Brown, 1977), intercultural communicative competence (Mortimore, 2009) and the degree to which learners respond and engage with texts both personally or culturally (Mortimore, 2009; Sakoi, 2015). Brown (1977) was one of the first researchers to recognize the potential of using comics to teach culture in the elementary and intermediate foreign language classroom arguing that a complete course of French culture can be taught using comics. He states that comics can be an initial step for studying culture, style variations and literature because comics with their multiple semiotics simulate authentic real-life situations and encompass many cultural connotations. According
to Brown (1977) both linguistic and visual codes take part in promoting foreign language learners’ awareness of French culture and cultural differences. However, he asserts the importance of training students to understand different elements presented in the comic and to identify cultural differences, otherwise students might overlook them. Researchers such as Sakoi (2015) and Mortimore (2009) discussed the way reader respond to a multimodal text such as comics and graphic novels. Sakoi (2015) in her study on 12 fifth grade American students discovered that when students are exposed to multimodal pictorial texts including manga (Japanese comics) they become more aware and accepting of the foreign (Japanese) culture, of culture differences and of their own culture. By observing the class and by analyzing the artifacts created by students in a 30-hour culture course, Sakoi (2015) found that participants responded to the multimodal texts utilized in the study in four ways namely analytical, personal, intertextual and cultural. Participants looked beyond the words, analyzed images in the text, created personal connection between their lives and the lives of the characters in the text, created a connection between the texts presented and similar texts they have seen before and they made use of their cultural knowledge and experience in responding to the multimodal texts. Furthermore, Mortimore (2009) discussed how high school and college students receive the idea of integrating comics in their English literature class and how they respond to comics as a multimodal text in meaning making. Participants observed by the researcher were able to connect more with comics both personally and culturally. Participants at the beginning of Mortimore’s (2009) study, viewed comics and graphic novels as a lower form of literature that is not appropriate for a classroom usage. Unlike many assumptions including Mortimore’s (2009) presumption that the primary reason for students’ interest in comics is due to their visual component, Mortimore (2009) suggests that the visual factor of comics is insufficient to engage students in comic reading. The visuality of the comics has to be accompanied by an engaging and captivating story. In addition, this
apparent lack of interest by students in comics can be attributed to poor pedagogical
treatment in the classroom resulting from the teacher’s assumption that students will be able
to decode and understand the semiotics embedded in the comic strip just by looking at it.
However, Mortimore (2009) stresses the importance of modeling “close comic reading” to
students and providing guidance to students on how to read a comic and understand its
semiotics. After Mortimore (2009) modeled “close comic reading to participants, she gave
them the chance to perform “close comic reading” on their own. The researcher discovered
that students’ interest and engagement level improved greatly. Participants were providing
responses and interpretation of the texts on a much deeper level both personally and
culturally. Moreover, Mortimore (2009) observed that participants were using multimodal
strategies in reading other forms of texts other than comics and graphic novels. The potential
of comics in the foreign language classroom developed another type of comic-based
activities, which is comic creation tasks.

2.5 Creating Comics in the Language Classroom

Creating comics, also referred to in literature by writing comics is a form multimodal
composition to promote students’ abilities both cognitively and linguistically. Creating
comics in the classroom have the potential to motivate and engage the learner (Morrison &
Bryan, 2002; Kılıçkaya & Krajka, 2012) and helps in improving his/her creativity
(Vassilikopoulou, Retalis, Nezi, & Boloudakis, 2011; Zimmerman, 2008), comprehension,
grammar and vocabulary usage (Kılıçkaya & Krajka, 2012; Sri Wilujeng & Yu-Ju., 2015),
research skills (Morrison & Bryan, 2002), and writing skills (Yunus, Salehi, & Embi, 2012).
Morrison and Bryan (2002) suggest that allowing middle and high school students to create
comics in their classrooms can increase their level of creativity, engagement, comprehension
and develop their research skills. Students learned to use the necessary skills to deliver
meaning through words and images. Consequently, students enjoyed the experience of
creating comics and expressed that this comic-based class is far more enjoyable than the traditional class. Notably, Morrison and Bryan’s (2002) study requires students to draw comics, in other words, to create comics in a paper form rather than a digital form. Zimmerman (2008) suggests that creating digital comics in the classroom is an engaging task that can help students with their reading, writing and vocabulary learning. He adds that creating digital comics can be helpful to visual learners, students with low drawing skills and students who have a low level in reading because it does not require them to write long sentences or paragraphs. Kılıçkaya and Krajka (2012) investigated the impact of creating digital comics on 25 Turkish pre-intermediate ESL teenage learners’ motivation and grammar usage. Almost all students (24 out of 25) responded positively to the tasks when given a questionnaire, stating that they enjoyed them and that the experience was useful in using grammar and in other aspects such as reading. Students were motivated and produced more language when they were creating digital comics. Vassilikopoulou et al. (2011) study yield similar results; it was also found that the task helped students with their linguistic ability and with their usage of imagination and cultural knowledge. Research on the difference between creating comics in a digital or a paper form is very minimal. Sri Wilujeng and Yu-Ju. (2015) study on elementary school students studying Chinese as a foreign language was carried out to examine the value of allowing CFL learners to create digital comics, independently and in groups, and to create paper comics in their CFL classroom. In addition, to examine the relation between comic creation tasks and students’ vocabulary usage. The study also focuses on students’ perceptions of creating comics and of the collaborative aspect of these tasks. Findings revealed the positive effect of creating digital comics collaboratively on the students’ language performance. Students who created online comics collaboratively showed more positive attitudes towards creating comics than the ones who created digital comics individually and the ones who created paper comics. Apparently creating digital comics is far
more enjoyable to foreign language learners than paper comics. A question that is left hanging, if reading comics and creating comics have these profound effects on language learners’ motivation and language proficiency why not to combine both tasks together and make use of each task’s distinctive advantages?

2.6 Reading and Creating Comics in the Classroom: A combined approach

Most of the previous literature reviewed looked at reading comics separate from creating comics. Very few researchers looked at the potential of integrating both comic reading and creating tasks in the language classroom. Brown (2013) examined the effect of reading comics and creating comics on 18-second grade students’ literary and language skills. The participants were both English and non-English native speakers. After reading comics 4 days a week for 5 weeks followed by 4 weeks of tasks in which students are supposed to create comics and transform it into a digital format, participants perceived the experience as fun and enjoyable. They were engaged in the process of reading and writing comics. The teacher observed that students’ level of comprehension increased when they were reading comics. It was perceived that the visualization factor along with the text helped increase students’ level of comprehension. They also mentioned that creating comics was fun and did not show any dissatisfaction toward writing or creating comics compared to their previous experience with writing. Creating multimodal comics was perceived as a motivating activity that helped reduce students’ anxiety levels. As has been noted reading and creating comics as motivating and powerful devices has the potential to empower demotivated foreign language learners in traditional classrooms. This leads to the question, does this motivating power of comic-based activates remain active in all language learning contexts particularly
the online ones? And more importantly, why are such motivating activities needed in the online classroom?

2.7 Online Language Learning

E-learning with its various forms can help in meeting students’ needs in learning actively in a personalized environment. Literature highlights different terms related to blended learning including web-enhanced in which online materials are used minimally, blended, in which around 45% or less of online materials are used along with face to face classes, hybrid, in which a higher percentage of online materials are used along with face to face classes around 45 - 80%, and finally fully online in which 80% or more of the learning is done online (Tomlinson, Whittaker, & British Council, 2013). It is worth mentioning that very few literatures are dedicated to fully online learning, let alone fully online language learning, in fact, most of the literature discussing online learning is focused on blended learning. According to Wang and Chen (2013) fully online language learning refers to learning a language in an entirely online mode using online educational technologies, in which learners and teachers are distant from each other and do not exist in the same physical space. Moreover, fully online learning is divided into synchronous and asynchronous online learning. Asynchronous e-learning describes a learning environment where teachers and students are not both online simultaneously, coursework is often conducted by posting on online forms such as discussion boards. On the other hand, in synchronous e-learning, both teachers and students exist together simultaneously using chat and video conferencing tools (Hrastinski, 2008). The current research focuses mainly on fully online language learning that involves both synchronous and asynchronous e-learning, in other words, participants in the current research do not meet face to face. More specifically, the present research is interested in discussing fully online language learners’ challenges and perceptions.
Despite the positive perceptions from online language learners presented in literature regarding their experience learning a language online, there are some challenges and difficulties that they face. Online language learners find collaborating online (Sun, 2014), communicating with others (Fujuan Tan, Nabb, Aagard, and Kioh Kim, 2010; Sun, 2014), staying self-motivated and engaged (Sun, 2014) and handling culture in their courses challenging (Fujuan Tan et al., 2010). Sun (2014), conducted a study on Chinese online foreign language learners, 46 students in New Zealand University took part in the study by participating in a fully online Chinese language group course and by responding to a survey given by the researcher at the end of the course period. Online language learners in Sun’s (2014) study faced difficulties in the aspects of collaboration, engagement, participation and motivation. Participants found it challenging to stay motivated, to remain engaged in the course and to fully interact with their classmates. In the context of ESL, Fujuan Tan et al. (2010) interviewed 7 ESL graduate students from different countries who took courses online. Results show that 6 out of 7 students benefited the most from the vocabulary, reading and writing components in their courses. However, a number of the students found challenges related to the aspects of culture, listening and speaking. Students reported that they felt “isolated” in the courses due to the lack of communication between them and their classmates. Fujuan Tan et al. (2010) found that students were not satisfied with the cultural component in their online courses. They stated that online courses do not support their cultural learning (competence, understanding) and that cultural differences are not considered in their online courses. As a result of the challenges faced in learning a language online, many researchers started thinking of a remedial pedagogical approach to overcome these challenges namely collaborative online learning also referred to as (COL). Collaborative online learning (COL) is the online version of classroom collaboration learning in which learners engage and collaborate online (Eklund & Eklund, 1997). According to Eklund and
Eklund (1997) COL helps students in enhancing their knowledge and improving a number of skills including problem-solving skills. Similarly, Bernard and Rubalcava (2000) state that COL can offer a solution to major problems in online learning. For instance, COL helps in reducing the feel of isolation online language learners often feel when learning online. In addition, COL helps in enhancing the students’ level of motivation and engagement (Bernard & Rubalcava, 2000). Nevertheless, taking part in a collaborative online learning environment does ensure that language or intercultural learning will happen (Lawrence, 2013). Lawrance (2013) found that learners at telecollaborative communication sometimes had faulty and culturally inaccurate assumptions about their international partner. For example, a student did not differentiate between Emirati and Saudi nationalities, referring to her partner as Saudi Arabian whereas in fact, he is Emirati. Lawrance (2013) asserts that such stereotypical images and inaccurate assumptions has to receive a special attention in class in order to avoid weakening students’ engagement and reinforcing stereotypes. Therefore, teaching and learning a foreign language online such as Arabic needs a pedagogical intervention and treatment that engages students in an active, personalized, fun, motivating and culturally competent learning environment. One multimodal treatment that is motivating, engaging, full of authentic cultural and linguistic knowledge is comics or graphic novels.

To summarize, this chapter reviews literature on potential uses of comics in the foreign language classroom and difficulties facing online language learners. Literature views comics as motivating, engaging and authentic sources to integrate in the classroom. Comics help in enhancing foreign language learners’ reading skills, grammar, cultural awareness and vocabulary knowledge and usage. Creating comics is also a motivating, engaging and a creative task that helps students in their linguistic and cognitive abilities. Despite the fact that research on integrating both types of tasks especially in an online setting is scarce, the few researches conducted in regular classroom indicate positive effects of the integration of both
comic reading and creating tasks. Moreover, previous research shows that online language learners find it challenging to stay motivated, to remain engaged and to work with others in their online classroom.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The present research is a mixed method, quasi experimental research. The research employs both quantitative and qualitative research methods to investigate the perceptions of online AFL students of reading and creating comics in the online AFL classroom. The quantitative side offers numerical results that help in forming conclusions about different students’ perceptions towards comic-based activities. The quantitative data are obtained from Likert scale and close-ended questionnaires. The Likert scale questionnaire is a convenient method for collecting data because it saves time in gathering the data. On the other hand, the qualitative side offers more verbal descriptions and non-numerical data allowing for further explanation and support to the quantitative results. Furthermore, the qualitative data are obtained from group interviews with the participants. Therefore, the qualitative data driven from the interviews can provide an explanation and a deeper insight to the reported students’ perceptions in the questionnaires. Moreover, the study is quasi-experimental. Participants are selected by the researcher and not randomly selected. In addition, it investigates the impact of a specific intervention (reading and creating comics) on the online AFL students.

3.2 Participants

Selecting participants in this study is based on convenience sampling methods. The researcher published an announcement and an application form over social media (Facebook™, Youtube™) and sent emails to an Arabic Linguistics mailing list announcing the start of a free course in May 2018 that involves reading and creating comics in Arabic (see announcement in Appendix A). Several teachers have forwarded the email to their students. The level required for taking part in this experiment was high elementary and
above. In other words, students must be able to speak or write about basic social interactions, for instance, introduce themselves, present their families to others or talk about a recent trip they had. In order to ensure that the participants selected are high-elementary or above and that they are able to read and write in a basic manner in order to make use of the course, applicants were required to fill in the application form, providing some personal information about themselves and their level in Arabic and respond to a speaking and a writing task. These tasks were included in the application form in order for the researcher to better estimate the participants’ language abilities in Arabic and to make sure they were capable of carrying out the requirements of the experiment. Moreover, the application form yielded 45 responses from students who applied to take part in the experiment, however, the researcher selected only the applicants that met the requirements which were 27 multi-level AFL students. The rest of the applicants were not selected because they were absolute beginners in Arabic or did not respond to the writing and the speaking task in the application form. Only 23 of the participants fully participated in the experiment by responding to the questionnaire and taking part in the interviews and those are the ones included in this research. The remaining four participants were excluded because they did not respond to the questionnaire or took part in the interviews. Subjects in this research were 9 females and 14 males in 20 to 49 age range. The majority of the participants (18) were English native speakers. The rest of the participants were Chinese, Persian and Russian native speakers. In addition, participants have studied Arabic before either in a university or online. Participants who previously studied in a university were 13, 10 of them studied Arabic from 1 to 2 years, 6 of them studied Arabic from 2 to 4 years and finally 4 of them studied Arabic for more than 4 years. Additionally, only 12 participants have previously studied Arabic online. The rest of the participants (11) did not study Arabic online before enrolling in this course. Tables 3.1 to 3.5 provides an illustration of participants’ demographics.
Table 3.1 Participants’ Gender.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>39.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>60.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2 Participants’ Age.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>39.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.3 *Participants’ L1.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Language</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>78.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farsi</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>23</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.4 *Number of Years Studying Arabic.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of years of studying Arabic</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-2 years</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>43.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-4 years</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more than 4 years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>under 1 year</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>23</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.5 *Previous Online AFL Study.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>True</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>52.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>False</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>47.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3 Instruments

Two main instruments are utilized in the current research. The first instrument is a questionnaire given to participants at the end of the experiment. The second instrument is semi-structured group interviews conducted by the researcher at the end of the experiment. These two instruments are both utilized to answer the two proposed research questions. In addition, the researcher used some of the participants’ generated comics in the data analysis (see Appendix F1 to F6). Although participants’ generated comics are not a main instrument and are not be analyzed in this research, they are used to provide examples, researcher’s observations and further support to some of the students’ perceptions.
3.3.1 Questionnaire

This research utilized one questionnaire given to students at the end of the experiment to investigate students’ perceptions toward reading and creating comics (refer to Appendix B). Further, the questionnaire included 30 items and a comment section. The questionnaire was created and distributed by the researcher using Google Forms™. The majority of the questions in the survey were Likert scale questions that require participants to evaluate their level of agreement or disagreement with several statements by selecting a number from 1 to 5 where is “Strongly disagree” and 5 is “Strongly agree”. Additionally, the questionnaire had 3 multiple choice questions, 3 open ended questions and a comment section. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. Themes highlighted in the questionnaire are summarized in Table 3.6. The first section contains questions about the student experience of reading comics and its impact on participants’ level of motivation to learn and to read in Arabic, their level of enjoyment, engagement, cultural awareness and finally its impact on their reading skills. The second section is focused on obtaining students’ perceptions towards creating digital comics in their online classroom and their impact on their level of motivation, production, creativity and writing skills. In addition, the second section contained questions investigating students’ perceptions toward Storyboard That™, the web-based comic creation tool that participants were required to use to create their comics. Investigating students’ perceptions toward Storyboard That™ which is a part of the comic-creation tasks enables the researcher to better determine and understand reasons behind students’ perceptions toward comic creation tasks as a whole. To elaborate, if students perceived creating comics as a challenging task, knowing students’ attitudes toward Storyboard That™ will aid in identifying if the challenges they faced were due to challenges in the task itself or it were due to technical difficulties they faced while using Storyboard That™. To investigate participants’ attitudes toward Storyboard That™, the second section contained some questions adapted from Lund’s (2001)
usability, satisfaction and easiness (USE) questionnaire. Lund (2001) developed the USE questionnaire as tool to measure various aspects of usability of software, hardware and services. Therefore, few items from the easiness and the satisfaction sections in Lund’s (2001) USE questionnaire were utilized in this research to investigate students’ perceptions toward Storyboard That™.

Table 3.6 The Topics of The Questionnaire.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Item number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading Comics</td>
<td>Comic Reading Usefulness</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading comics and motivation</td>
<td>3-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading comics and the development of reading skills</td>
<td>10-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading comics and cultural awareness</td>
<td>13-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading comics and vocabulary acquisition</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating Digital Comics</td>
<td>Creating comics usefulness</td>
<td>22, 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Creating digital comics and motivation and enjoyment</td>
<td>19, 20, 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Creating digital comics and language proficiency</td>
<td>21, 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Creating digital comics and creativity</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perceptions toward Storyboard That™ (Easiness, Satisfaction)</td>
<td>28-33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3.2 Group Interviews

The second instrument employed in this research were semi-structured group interviews. The interview was conducted by the researcher with participants after the completion of the comic-based course and after they filled in the questionnaire. The interview
is a way to obtain more qualitative data about students’ perceptions toward comic-based classes. The interviews were conducted to provide a deeper insight on reasons behind participants’ attitudes toward reading and creating comics in the online AFL classroom. Furthermore, the interview questions (see Appendix C) were mostly exploratory, aimed at identifying what students found beneficial in Arabic comic-based classes and reasons for finding it useful or challenging. They offered participants room to explain their reasons of enjoying or not enjoying the comic-based classes. Moreover, interviews were conducted online via Zoom®, recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Interviews were video interviews conducted with each group class that ranged between 40 to 75 minutes. However, some interviewees missed the interview for their class and therefore, they were grouped together and interviewed in 2 mixed classes interviews. Table 3.7 shows a list of the conducted interviews, duration and number of participants in each interview.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>No. Of Participants</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class 1 - Interview</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>75 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class 3 - Interview</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class 4 - Interview</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>75 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class 5 - Interview</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>75 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Classes Interview 1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Classes Interview 2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>70 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.4 Data Collection procedures

Participants in this research were required to participate in a 6-weeks fully online Arabic comics course in the summer of 2018. Further, the course involved reading and creating comics in Arabic. The researcher preferred using the term “creating comics” rather than
writing comics, since the process of creating comics involves more than just writing. Finally, participants were asked to respond to a questionnaire and participate in a group interview at the end of the course to examine their perceptions toward reading and creating comics as part of their online AFL class (see Figure 3.1). The following section provides more details on the Arabic comics online course conducted as part of this experiment.

![Data collection procedures](image)

**Figure 3.1** Data collection procedures

### 3.4.1 Course design

The course was a 6-weeks free online AFL course based on comics. The course was done in an entirely online mood. Participants were classified according to their level and background in Arabic and distributed to one of five classes. All five classes were taught by the researcher. Table 3.8 provides information about the classes.
Table 3.8: Information on online AFL comics classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Class Level (CEFR)</th>
<th>No. of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class 1</td>
<td>ECA</td>
<td>Elementary (A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class 2</td>
<td>MSA/ ECA</td>
<td>MSA (A2) / ECA (A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class 3</td>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>Intermediate (B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class 4</td>
<td>MSA/ ECA</td>
<td>MSA (B) / ECA (A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class 5</td>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>Advanced (C)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The course included pre-tasks, synchronous online classes and post asynchronous tasks (see Figure 3.2).

*Figure 3.2 Arabic comics course plan*

To clarify, each week participants are required to do some preparatory tasks such as studying a vocabulary list or reading the comic in preparation for the synchronous online class. This is followed by a 90 min synchronous online class on a virtual classroom named Zoom™ to discuss the comic. The synchronous class focused on comprehending the comics and
discussing linguistic and cultural aspects that emerged from the comics. Synchronous class discussions involved working collaboratively on reading comprehension and guessing meaning of words based on context. In order to facilitate collaborative work in an online classroom, the teacher sometimes used the “breakout room” feature in Zoom™ to divide students’ into pairs or small groups and put them in different rooms where they work collaboratively on answering specific comprehension questions on the comic. For example, students in class 4 (an intermediate MSA class) were required to work in pairs to summarize part of the comic story titled “border crossing” and write their summary on a shared Google document. After their pair work was over, all students returned to the main room, presented, and discussed their part with the teacher and the class. Once the teacher feels that students comprehended the comic, she starts working with them on guessing the meaning of some words based on the context and the visuals they saw in the comic. This was followed by a cultural discussion on the comic. It is worth mentioning that that cultural discussions were more frequent in the advanced ECA class. Due to their linguistic background, they were able to comprehend the comic in a shorter time in comparison with lower-level students. Therefore, more time was available for cultural discussions that were related to the comic discussed and that emerged from students while discussing the comic. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, there was less focus on culture in the lower-level classes and more focus on reading comprehension and linguistic aspects. Finally, the virtual meeting is followed by a post asynchronous task which is the comic creation task. In comic creation tasks, participants were asked to create digital comics individually using Storyboard That™. Each comic creation task was related to the comic read and the topic discussed in the same week (refer to Appendix D for a sample of weekly schedule from all classes). For example, the theme in week 2 for the elementary MSA class was “Things I enjoy doing”. After reading a comic about a woman who enjoys planting mint and drinking tea with mint in the balcony,
participants were given the following task (see Appendix E for a sample of task’s full instructions):

As a blogger who writes about his/her life, you want to add a comic story to your blog to make it more fun and to attract more audience. Create a comic story using Storyboard That™ to talk about things you enjoyed as a child and other things you’re enjoying as an adult. (Minimum of 2 stories per student).

Participants in this task were required to create a comic using Storyboard That™ talking about things they enjoyed doing as children and things they are enjoying as adults (refer to Appendix F-1 for comic created by a participant as a response to this task).

3.4.1.1 Comics Utilized In this Course

The researcher selected comics to use in the class based on particular criteria. First, all comics used in this class were mass consumption comics that are available for Arabic native speakers and were not ones that were specially designed for educational purposes or for foreign language learners. The reason behind this choice is firstly the lack of Arabic comic books or graphic novels that are designed for classroom usage and secondly the researcher’s desire to expose students to authentic language and culture that exists in mass consumption comics and might not be as accurate in specially designed comics for the classroom. That being said, comics used in this experiment had to be culturally rich and representative of Egyptian or Arab culture, not only in terms of the comic story itself and the language used to tell that story but also in terms of the images, illustrations, characters and backgrounds. Consequently, the teacher and the students can work together to make use of the available authentic elements presented in comics to help boost learners’ motivation, cultural awareness and proficiency in the Arabic language. Furthermore, all comics except “Border crossing” were originally written in Arabic and not translated. “Border crossing” was originally written in English and illustrated by international artists from Germany, Egypt, Finland, and
Switzerland. This was followed by an Arabic version that was published in 2016 titled “‘ma’bar ḥudūdī’” (see Appendix G). The above decisions were made by the researcher to ensure that students are provided with comics that are culturally and linguistically authentic. Additionally, superhero comics, and Disney created comics such as “Baṭoot” (the Arabic name for Donald Duck) and “Mickey” were avoided in this course for two main reasons. One, is to avoid demotivating students by providing them with children materials that might not be suitable for them as adults. Another reason is the researcher’s assumption that superhero comics might contain “unrealistic” language and topics and might be hard to relate to the life of students. Therefore, few comics in this course included such characters. Finally, comics had to be interesting and suitable to the level of the student. Appendix G shows a sample of the comics used in this course.

The majority of the comics used in this research have written texts in them. However, there were two comic stories used that had no written text in them. This is what the researcher calls a “silent comic. A “silent comic” is a comic with no written script that tells a story only through its illustrations. Figure 3.3 below provides a few panels from a “silent comic” story as an example of a “silent comic”. During the first week of the experiment students were introduced to “silent” and non-silent comics (i.e. Comics with a written text) in their first class. The main objective of the first class was to familiarize students with the way Arabic comics are read, for example, to start from the right, moving from one cell to another in order. Surprisingly, even students in the advanced level faced some difficulties in knowing where to start and how to read a comic. Another objective of the first class was to know more about the students’ speaking capabilities.

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1 The Arabic version of “Border crossing” titled: معبر حدودي.
With regards to comics with a written script that are used in the current courses, some of them had illegible handwritten script. The researcher assumed that students particularly in the elementary ECA class who are not used to reading in ECA would face difficulties in reading them therefore, the script of one of the comic stripes was transformed from a handwritten format to a typed one (see figure 3.4). However, this was done only for one comic story that was given to the elementary ECA class. The rest of the comics that contained handwritten script remained unchanged.
3.4.1.2 **Storyboard That™**

Participants were required to create a digital comic in Arabic using a comic creation tool. The current study used one specific web-based comic creation tool, which is **Storyboard That™** ([www.storyboardthat.com](http://www.storyboardthat.com)). Comic creation tools that currently exist in the market include: **Makebeliefscomix™**, **Bitstrips™**, **Pixton™**, **Comic life™** and **Toondoo™**. Several reasons resulted in choosing Storyboard That™ as the comic creation tool utilized in this research. One is that it is web based, which allows students to create comics while they are connected to the internet, so they do not have to install any software on their devices. Two, it supports Arabic with different Arabic fonts, unlike Pixton™ and the windows version of Comic life™. Moreover, Storyboard That™ offers participants a set of ready-made animated characters and backgrounds to choose from in order to create their comic strip, unlike Comic
life™ with which students have to upload their own pictures to the software. The characters tab on Storyboard That™ included a section for multi-cultural characters that included some middle eastern characters such as Hijabi and veiled women or a boy wearing galabeya². In addition, Storyboard That™ enables students to upload pictures to the platform in case they needed another picture that is not available on the site. Finally, the premium version of Storyboard That™ provides access to teachers to post assignments, group students in classes and to view and edit students’ created comics if needed. This feature was helpful to view students’ comics while they were working on them and provide support if needed. Consequently, the researcher considered that Storyboard That™ is an easier, more flexible, user-friendly tool for participants to create digital comics in comparison with other available web-based tools. At the beginning of the experiment, students were given a video tutorial recorded by the researcher and uploaded to YouTube™ on how to use Storyboard That™.

Now, I move to talk about data analysis.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

Both quantitative and qualitative data obtained from the questionnaire and group interviews were used to provide an answer to both research questions regarding students’ perceptions towards reading and creating comics in the online AFL classroom. Data obtained from the Likert scale questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) which provides graphic representation of the results. Moreover, interviews are video-taped by Zoom™, then transcribed and analyzed by the researcher. Qualitative data resulting from the follow up interview helps in providing an explanation to the results from the questionnaire. Furthermore, the researcher used thematic analyses to

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² In Egyptian Arabic جلابية is a traditional Egyptian garment.
analyze the themes that appeared in the interview. Thematic analysis categorizes the different themes and subthemes resulting from the different students’ perceptions towards comic-based classes. Lastly, the researcher provides observations on the comics created by students with regard to their content and linguistic components.
Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

The current chapter presents results and discusses both quantitative and qualitative data collected from a questionnaire and semi structured group interviews conducted to answer two research questions investigating the perceptions of online multi-level AFL students of reading and creating digital comics in their online AFL classroom.

Research Questions:

1) What are the perceptions of online AFL multi-level students of reading comics in their online AFL classroom?

2) What are the perceptions of online AFL multi-level students of creating digital comics in their online AFL classroom?

It is worth mentioning that data was collected from 23 participants out of 27 who responded to all questions and statements in the questionnaire and attended the interview. The following sections presents, analyzes, and discusses students’ perceptions toward reading comics and motivation; reading comics and the development of reading skills; reading comics and vocabulary and grammar acquisition; reading comics and cultural awareness; creating comics and motivation; creating comics and creativity; creating comics and language proficiency; and finally perceptions toward Storyboard That™ (see Figure 4.1 for a visual illustration of the topics covered in this chapter). During the discussion a comparison is held between the current research findings’ and findings from previous literature related to these sections.
4.1 RQ1: What are the perceptions of online multi-level AFL students of reading comics in the online AFL classroom?

The following sections discuss students’ perceptions toward reading comics in relation to several aspects namely motivation to read in Arabic, reading skills, vocabulary and grammar acquisition and finally cultural awareness (see Figure 4.2)
4.1.1 Reading Comics and Motivation to Read More in Arabic

Statements 3 to 9 in the questionnaire targeted investigating participants’ perceptions toward the relation between reading Arabic comics and motivation specifically motivation to read more in Arabic. Question 4 of the questionnaire asked participants to evaluate their level of agreement with this statement “Reading comics raised my motivation to read more in Arabic”. Results to question 4 are shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Reading Comics and Motivation to Read More in Arabic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4) Reading comics raised my motivation to read more in Arabic</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>52.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results show that 52.2% and 30.4% of the participants strongly agree and agree respectively that comics raised their motivation to read more in Arabic. Whereas, only 13% disagree to this statement. Question 5 in the questionnaire addressed students’ anxiety in reading comics in comparison with other text forms. Table 4.2 summarizes the results to question 5.

Table 4.2 Anxiety When Reading Comics vs. Other Text Forms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>23</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results show that in comparison with other text forms, 47% of the participants did not agree that reading comics made them more anxious than reading other forms of texts, 21.7% chose neutral for this question and 30% agreed to this statement. These results indicate that the number of students who were not intimidated by comics and did not feel anxious when reading comics in comparison with other types of texts were higher. Therefore, answers to question 5 suggest that comics as a format did not cause anxiety or represent a threat to students. Question 9 addressed participants’ fear of reading in Arabic and if reading comics has a role in overcoming this type of fear. Table 4.3 demonstrate question 9 results.
As shown in Table 4.3 the majority of the participants strongly disagree (39%) and disagree (26%) which brings the total number of students who disagree with the fact that reading comics did not help them in overcoming their fear of reading Arabic to 65%. In contrast, very few students agree (4%) to this statement. Furthermore, 7 students (30%) took a neutral stance on this question. As can be seen from these results, reading comics helped students in overcoming their fear of reading in Arabic and therefore increased their level of motivation toward reading in Arabic.

Participants were asked in question 6 of the questionnaire if reading comics changed their attitude toward reading in Arabic in a positive manner. Table 4.4 shows a summary of responses to question 6 of the questionnaire.
Table 4.4 Reading Comics and Attitudes Toward Reading in Arabic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6) Reading comics changed my attitude toward reading in a positive way</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>34.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Over half of the students agreed (52%) to this statement. In addition, 8 students (34.8%) chose neutral for that question and only 3 students (13%) disagreed. As shown above, reading comics motivated and positively changed the majority of the students’ attitudes toward reading in Arabic. Question 7 aimed at investigating any changes in the subjects’ motivation to read in Arabic by trying to examine the relation between reading comics and the increase in the subjects’ interest in finding more Arabic comic books or graphic novels. Responses to this question are summarized in Table 4.5.
7) I am now interested in finding more Arabic comic books or graphic novels to read

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>43.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most of the respondents to this question (69%) agree that they are interested in finding more Arabic comic books and graphic novels after taking part in the experiment (comic-based course), whereas only 13% disagree. Question 8 highlights students’ motivation to read comics and other types of books in Arabic. Table 4.6 shows a summary of results.

Table 4.6 Motivation to Read Comics in Comparison to Other Types of Books in Arabic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>43.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>34.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results show that 43.5% of the participants agree that they are more interested in reading in Arabic after taking part in this experiment, 34.8% strongly agree and only 2% disagree with this statement. The main purpose of question 3 is to discover how students perceive the impact of reading comics on their level of motivation to learn Arabic. Results are illustrated in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7 Reading Comics and Motivation to Learn Arabic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>43.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results show that 43.5% of the students strongly agree that reading comics increased their motivation to learn Arabic, 26% agree and only 13% disagree. These results pinpoint the positive effect of reading comics on the students’ level of motivation to learn Arabic.

Data collected from the group interviews echo a lot of the questionnaire results with regards to comic reading and the students’ level of motivation and enjoyment. To clarify, when participants were asked if they found the experience of reading Arabic comics as part of their online AFL classroom motivating and enjoyable, a number of students reported that they enjoyed reading comics and that they found it motivating saying “it was really fun”, “The comics were amusing”, and “...what I really enjoyed was reading the comic itself”. One participant stated the following:
I thought it was enjoyable to learn through comics just because that’s not usually how language classes are taught so there’s a different type of learning that made it more exciting.

The quote above indicates that this student perceives learning through comics to be an “exciting” and a “different” way of learning Arabic. Similarly, the quotes below highlight that the appreciation of learning through comics as a new way of learning Arabic was a recurrent theme in students’ responses. In addition to this, participants indicated that reading comics encouraged them to find more Arabic comics and to try to discover new mediums to read in Arabic. To elaborate, two students reported the following:

It's definitely a useful medium, and I agree that it's something that I'm glad that I got to see as a thing. I would totally be down finding another comic and trying to learn by it because I feel this is helpful. I bought “a diary of a wimpy kid” in Arabic. It's common in America, I bought an Arabic version of it. It's got pictures and stuff in it so that's kind of vaguely similar.

The above quote also indicates that participant G3 was motivated to look for more Arabic comics to consume and that he actually bought “The Wimpy Kid” in Arabic. In addition, he is now more motivated to look at other mediums to help him in learning Arabic as addressed in the following quote:

I can see the width of the likelihood of how other mediums will be helpful and I kind of want to search out for more mediums in Arabic too, just to see what sorts of things out there. But I still appreciate though that it was a comic it was something that I hadn't experienced before in Arabic. I think that was a big positive.

Discovering a new medium to read in Arabic and a new part of the Arabic culture was “very interesting” to some students as reported by one informant below:
Before this class I actually didn't know they're this vibrant themes of Arabic comics, even though I live in an Arab country I don't really see Arabic comics going around, people reading them. So, it's very interesting. It's also a kind of newly discovered for me like a new part of Arab culture and it’s very interesting.

Comparatively, the current research findings match with the findings from Cimermanová (2015), Drolet (n.d), Ishikura (2013), Whipple (2007), and Williams (1995) studies that found that comics increased the language learners’ level of motivation and engagement. Furthermore, the results are in line with Karap’s (2017) study that did not find a major difference in learners’ level of anxiety before and after being exposed to comics which means that comics did not cause students to be anxious or represent a threat to them. That being said, Karap (2017) utilized “The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)” designed by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), to measure participants’ level of anxiety quantitatively before and after being exposed to comics, however, the current research findings are based on students’ perceptions gathered from both quantitative and qualitative self-reported data collected from students at the end of the experiment. Moreover, the current research found a strong correlation between comics and motivation. This correlation is further explained in the following section, that discusses students’ perceptions of comics and their impact on their reading skills. Finally, this finding is contrary to a previous study conducted by Sun (2014) which suggested that students found it difficult to be motivated and engaged in a fully online class. However, the present research’s findings indicate that participants, despite taking part in a fully online class, were motivated and engaged.
4.1.2 Reading Comics and the Development of Reading Skills

This section addresses students’ attitudes towards the impact of reading comics on their reading skills. Interestingly, other aspects such as characteristics of comics and motivation appear to be in line with reading comics and the development of reading skills. These intertwined relations between reading comics, characteristics of comics, motivation, and reading skills are more apparent in the interview results. Figure 4.3 provides an illustration of the factors discussed in this section.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 4.3 Reading comics and reading skills.**

Three items on the questionnaire measured the extent to which reading comics impact the development of reading skills. Item 10 looked at the perceptions of participants toward the effect of reading comics on reading skills. Table 4.8 shows an overview of participants’ responses to item 10.

- Visual
- Handwritten fonts
- Low Reading Load
- Authentic
- Interesting Story
- Diglossic Nature

- Reading Comprehension
- Making Inferences
Table 4.8 Reading Comics and the development of reading skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>10) Reading comics helped me to improve my reading skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 4.8, over 70% of the participants agree that reading comics has helped them in improving their reading skills. The rest of the participants chose neutral for this item. Interestingly, none of the respondents disagreed with this statement. Moving to question 11, which asked students to put a check if reading comics helped them with any or both of the reading skills listed, namely comprehension and guessing the meaning of words from context. Tables 4.9 and 4.10 present the summary statistics for this item.
11) Reading Comics helped me with developing the following reading skills:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading Skills</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percent of Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading comprehension</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>46.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>87.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guessing the meaning of words based on context</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>53.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>187.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.10 Reading Comics and Reading Skills (Gaining Familiarity with Handwritten Scripts).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gaining familiarity with different handwritten scripts</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>82.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen from tables 4.9 and 4.10, all participants (23) stated that reading comics helps them with guessing the meaning of words from context. In addition, the majority of the participants (87%) indicated that reading comics helped them with their reading comprehension as well. Question 11 offered participants an “other” option in which they can write other aspects related to reading skills that they felt comics helped them with. Markedly, four participants stated that reading comics helped them in gaining familiarity with different handwritten scripts. Additionally, other answers included that reading comics enhanced the participant’s ability to paraphrase, to read better without vocalization and to get familiar with alternative spellings of words in ECA. The next question examined what features in comics are beneficial to students when comprehending a comic. Participants were asked to put a check next to any feature that helps them with comprehending comics. Options included visualization (ie, visual elements in comics such as pictures), a preview of content or what was referred to by NCTE (n.d) as “front load” which means students have a chance to see the
whole story at once before actually starting to read it and finally recycled vocabulary which means students see the same word or phrase repeated in different sentences within the same comic story. The results obtained from this question are summarized in Tables 4.11 to 4.14.

Table 4.11 Features in Comics in Relation to Reading Comprehension.

12) The following feature/s helped me the most in comprehending the comic I was reading:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features helping in comprehending comics</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Percent of Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visualization (The pictures, images)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>44.7%</td>
<td>91.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preview of content</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>47.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recycled vocabulary &amp; phrases</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
<td>65.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>204.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.12 *Features in Comics in Relation to Reading Comprehension (Visualization).*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>91.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>23</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.13 *Features in Comics in Relation to Reading Comprehension (Preview of Content).*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>52.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>47.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>23</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As presented in Tables 4.11 to 4.14, visual elements in comics (ie, pictures and illustrations) were found to be the most beneficial when comprehending a comic by the majority of the participants (91%). Followed by recycled vocabulary and phrases, this was found to be the second most important characteristic of comics by 65% of the participants. Finally, 47% of the participants chose “preview of content” as an important element that helps them when comprehending comics. In summary, the above results indicate that visual features of comics are the most helpful to students when trying to read and comprehend a comic. In addition, recycled vocabulary followed by a preview of content were also found to be helpful to students.

The same positive correlation between comics and reading skills was found in the data gathered from interviews as well. Moreover, as summarized in Figure 4.3, participants indicate that due to certain features in comics that differentiate them from traditional texts, their level of reading comprehension increases which result in increasing their level of
motivation. These comic features include visualization, low reading load, interesting plot, authenticity and mixing between MSA and Colloquial Arabic. In addition, participants addressed the handwritten fonts used in Arabic comics. To illustrate, the majority of the students when asked if they find comics useful for the development of their reading skills indicated that comics are more motivating and “less intimidating” than traditional texts because they include pictures that ease the process of comprehension for them. One participant commented:

Personally, I definitely found it motivating because it has pictures and pictures made it easier for me to understand and connect the dots. The pictures make it a lot easier instead of just seeing a full text of Arabic, that's terrifying for people who learn Arabic.

Another interviewee commented on how comics in comparison with traditional texts helped him with reading comprehension and making inferences:

I feel like with a comic it helps you pick up different context things into what's happening. Whereas with a book it might be a bit more difficult to pick up exactly what's going on. I liked that with the comic pictures, it gives you a bit of an idea what's going on. So even if you are lost on something, you can still get the story and then use an extra bit of context clues as to what something might mean.

Other participants discussed how comics are more interesting than traditional texts because they include an interesting plot that encourages them to work on comprehending the comic. For example, one informant reported:

It was really fun! Usually, in Arabic class, it’s just like a big block of text and that’s way more intimidating than looking at a comic and it is more motivating to try and piece together a comic because you know it’s going to be like an exciting story. Some of the other texts you read not as interesting, they might be helpful or relevant to the
vocab you’re learning but the comics they are going to be a good fun story to read which I enjoyed.

Another student mentioned:

I think for me the comics were more interesting material there're pictures and there's a plot and that's more exciting as opposed to my textbook. In my textbook, I have readings about this one woman walking around Egypt and doing things which wasn't very exciting, but this is a lot more fun than that.

In addition to the feature of interesting stories in comics, when participants were asked about their favorite comic that they have read and reasons for favoring this particular comic, they addressed the importance of reading not just interesting but also “realistic” and “relevant” comics. The majority of the students in the intermediate MSA classes indicated that “Border crossing”\(^3\) was their favorite comic because it was “relevant”, “meaningful”, talking about “contemporary events”, represented “a different perspective”. Furthermore, participants commented on their preference of comics that are “intended for an older audience” and that “touch the real world” and not superheroes or children comics.

Another feature in comics that emerged from the data gathered from interviews was their low reading load. Majority of students in the elementary ECA class indicated that due to the fact that comics are “short” and does not contain a lot of written texts it is easier for them to “absorb”, comprehend and infer. Talking about this feature, an interviewee from the A2 ECA class said:

I like the type of comics, the amount of dialogue in the comics was not overwhelming, a little humorous which always helps when learning. The fact that it was a comic and there were pictures and some bite-sized chunks of dialogue I think that did kind of encourage reading a little bit.

\(^3\) معبر حدودي
Interestingly, another student from the Advanced ECA class shared the same opinion toward the low reading load of comics adding that it was particularly interesting and useful for her to see ECA in a written form and to try to guess the meaning of the words written. She elaborated saying:

what was interesting for me was reading ECA in a written text. It was fun to read and to try to guess what was written like because we're used to hear Egyptian Arabic so I felt it was a sort of challenge because I had to reactivate my Egyptian Arabic vocabulary but at the same time the text was not too long so I could manage. Recently I had to read a long narrative piece in Egyptian Arabic and that was really hard for me because it went on for ten pages and at the end I felt exhausted, while with the comic even if it's written in Egyptian Arabic I could manage because it was sort of the right shot of linguistic information that I could bear.

Another student in the Advanced ECA class appreciated as a visual learner being introduced to written texts and “visual reading resources” in ECA that can help him in learning and “picking things up from context”. On that note, one informant reported that it was enriching for him to see comics as one of the mediums that contain both linguistic codes (ie. MSA and ECA). On the other hand, one participant in the elementary ECA class indicated that the low reading load of comics was “counterproductive” for him because he did not have enough amount of text to be able to comprehend the comic and consequently, his mind was not engaged in comprehending the text.

Making inferences and guessing words meanings based on context was another reading skill that students felt they improved by reading comics. Furthermore, participants discussed how working on guessing meanings of words was much more enjoyable when they were reading comics. A student in the intermediate MSA group said:
I think reading comics helped me try to read stuff without looking up dictionary so often. If I'm reading a piece of news, I'll be like there are so many words I don't know, and I'll be looking up things constantly but now I have pictures and I can feel what's going on and I'm trying to ask myself not to open the dictionary. It improved my reading skills.

The previous quote indicates that comics, with their visual components, allowed the participant to practice the skill of guessing meanings of words based on context rather than running to dictionaries for help. Another informant reported:

I think the satisfaction came when you read words that you don't know, and you can look at the picture and you can just derive the word much easier as compared to maybe reading a text from Al-kitaab. You really have to read a lot and you see so many words you don't know, it's kind of demoralizing but in this case, you see many words you don't know but you can guess quite a lot so it's fine, it's really helpful.

The same view was held by a participant in the advanced ECA class that was motivated to guess meanings of words with the help of pictures:

actually, I really enjoyed trying to figure out words based on the context. I think it is more fun to read words with pictures and try to figure out what the words mean so I think that part definitely helps with my motivation and interest in learning the language a bit more.

Another characteristic of comics that emerged from the participants’ answers highlighted comics as authentic materials. One participant in the Advanced ECA class mentioned:

I think for me using comics was great because they are authentic materials and throughout most of my experience studying Arabic a lot of the materials have been produced for learners and so they don’t really ring as true, they're kind of inauthentic.
Another participant in the elementary ECA class addressed the authenticity of comics in comparison with other asynchronous online Arabic courses he studies from saying:

I think for the online courses I follow like “Rocket language” for example, they really break it down into individual words and how the words are structured and they show you how to pronounce it like very slowly word by word which is fine but it's obviously not natural so where we do the comics you don't get that and you get it more natural which I thought was good.

The quote above shows how students are sensitive to natural versus fabricated language texts and language learning practices. This indicates that students do not always perceive simplified language to be helpful.

Another feature came up while discussing features of comics and their relation to the development of reading skills. Participants addressed the handwritten fonts used in comics. Moreover, the majority of the students found handwritten fonts to be a challenging aspect of reading comics. Nevertheless, opinions differed as to whether gaining familiarity with handwritten fonts used in comics were useful or not to their learning. As one interviewee from the elementary ECA class put it:

I think for me, I probably struggled with the first comic with the font that was used and the books I read it's very uniform. I think that was on the first one, once I got used to it then I think that the second one was more understandable for me, but again that's probably because is just something new so you may be used to looking at one letter in a certain way and just because it's written slightly different because it's still a foreign letter to me I'm thinking what is that, that is something I don't know when you realize it's just the same one it's just with a different font.

The same view was echoed by another participant from the intermediate MSA class saying:
sometimes they write comics in a way that is a bit less conventional, it's like a
different style, it's a bit harder to read because it looks different, but I think after a
while, it gets easier.

Surprisingly, other participants view the challenge of reading handwritten fonts in comics as
a blessing in disguise. The quotes below signifies positive attitudes toward the handwritten
fonts used in comics.

I liked that reading comics was exposing us to more unique handwritings because I
think even like in classes I've had, that's something that we've lacked. In my personal
experience, it’s something that we aren't exposed to as much. Some Arabic
handwriting is just so hard to read. So, I liked that we were exposed to different fonts
with the comics.

Another participant echoed the opinion in the above quote about lack of exposure to
handwritten scripts in Arabic classes, he also addressed the difficulties he faced when he had
to read handwritten Arabic while working in Egypt:

I think the script is difficult at times, but I also think it's a great opportunity to learn
how to read different forms of handwriting. One of the hardest things for me to do,
while I was living in Egypt and working, was to read people’s handwriting there was
no Arabic class that taught me how to read handwritten Arabic and at least with
comics you're beginning to get closer to that and I don’t see a better way to make that
easier.

A participant from the elementary ECA class indicated that the not so legible script
represents an intriguing challenge for her. She comments on that saying:

I liked the challenge of reading and learning how to read more handwriting, more
cursive script rather than the typed fonts. It's almost a separate challenge for me. It's
like, okay, can I figure out what’s written here? And then in the second go can I figure out what it means.

Notably, the majority of the students indicated that they often faced this problem at the beginning when they were first introduced to comics and that it got easier once they became more familiar with the Arabic handwritten fonts used in comics. Furthermore, students had several suggestions to deal with challenges of reading comics which will be discussed in more details in the study pedagogical suggestions.

As can be seen from the data presented above, the majority of the participants in all classes in the current research stated that comics help them in improving their reading skills namely reading comprehension and making inferences which makes them more motivated and engaged when reading comics in comparison with other text forms. Furthermore, participants elaborated on characteristics of comics that make them both motivating and helpful to AFL students’ reading skills. Characteristics of comics included visualization, interesting story, low reading load, authenticity, mixing between MSA and colloquial Arabic and finally handwritten fonts. Similarly, these findings match Brown’s (2013) findings that indicated that students viewed the visualization of comics to increase their level of reading comprehension. In addition, these results are in line with Mortimore’s (2009) findings that indicated that both a compelling story and images in comics are the main reasons for engaging learners in comic reading. On that note, Mortimore (2009) also found that pictures in comics without a compelling story is not enough for learners to engage in comic reading, however, the current data is not enough to reach conclusive results about whether or not both factors must go hand in hand in engaging learners in comic reading and if one cannot go without the other. Notably, as presented in the interviews’ quotes, students who discussed pictures in comics and their role in engaging them in the text mentioned the concept of interesting stories within the same quote, that might be an indicator that participants think of
these two factors as one package. Additionally, the current research findings match findings from Karap (2017) and Cimermanová (2015) studies that found that students’ perceived comics as helpful to their reading comprehension and reading skills such as making inferences and guessing from context. Finally, the current research results conform with Basol and Sarigul’s (2013) research results in that participants comprehend better when they are reading comics in comparison with traditional texts. It has to be mentioned here however that unlike Basol and Sarigul’s (2013) research that compared between students’ comprehension level when reading comics and when reading traditional texts, the current research did not conduct any comparisons between the two and was mainly based on students’ perceptions on that matter.

4.1.3 Reading Comics and Acquisition of Vocabulary

We now turn to students’ perceptions toward comics and their impact on vocabulary and grammar acquisition. Item 16 was the only item in the questionnaire dedicated to measuring students’ perceptions toward reading comics and its impact on vocabulary acquisition. Item 16 asked participants if reading Arabic comics helped them acquire more vocabulary in Arabic. The results for this question are set out in Table 4.15.

Table 4.15 Reading Comics and Acquisition of Vocabulary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>43.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>47.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is apparent from the table above that the overall response to this question was very positive. Over 90% of the participants agree that comics help them with acquiring more vocabulary in Arabic. A minority of 8% represented in only 2 students disagree with this statement. Data gathered from interviews hold the same positive view toward the positive relation between comics and vocabulary acquisition. Moreover, participants shed light on the fact that comics are helpful for learning grammar and gaining familiarity with sentence structure. Although there were no questions in the questionnaire that aimed at investigating students’ perceptions toward the impact of reading comics on their learning of grammar, but this impact emerged from the interview quotes discussed below. When asked if they found reading comics useful, one interviewee from the elementary ECA class commented:

I think I found it was good to help with grammar as well and it wasn't kind of a grammar lesson, it wasn't like let's learn grammar, it was like read the comic and then you pick up on the grammar and possibly verb conjugations and stuff like that. Also, if you look up a word in the dictionary, you see the word you don't see how it's used especially with Arabic it's not just the word there’s also prefixes and suffixes. While with comics it's almost like you have a dictionary and that dictionary becomes alive, you see how everything's used.

The student in the above quote discussed how comics can be a useful tool for incidental learning of grammar. In addition, he sees comics as a “live dictionary” where he can see vocabulary and grammar in real contexts. Additionally, he finds that comics, since they are permanent unlike movies, offers a chance of vocabulary learning in a way that is “drip fed”. This shows how students appreciate grammar and vocabulary learning from an input provided through comics in manageable shots. A participant from the same class mentioned that comics are a great way to “expand one’s vocabulary” and “extend one’s familiarity with idioms and grammar”, to him comics were “a nice detour to see how words are spelled in
ECA and to see the different word patterns”. A student from the elementary MSA class when asked about her favorite comic to read, said:

I feel like comics are really good for the elementary level because with traditional text there're so many words. You'll be very lost unless they're adopted for your level but with comics you know they're only the words that you need on this subject they're like very to the point and there are not as many varieties of them. You know if you're reading about environment there not going to be that many other words about food or books, so you can really learn a lot of words on this specific subject.

Interestingly, the participant in the above excerpt considers comics to be suitable for the elementary level mainly because comics discuss a certain topic and uses vocabulary about that specific content. That makes it easier for students to be more focused on understanding a certain topic and learning its vocabulary without getting distracted by other non-relevant words. As discussed previously, students’ quotes in the previous section and in the current one, highlight the importance of offering students with a manageable amount of input.

In light of the quote above, the same participant indicated that she found the diglossic nature of comics to be “useful in gaining more vocabulary” and in “learning some Egyptian Arabic words” which was particularly useful for her since she lives in an Arab country and does not have much knowledge in dialects. When asking the participants in the advanced ECA class about their favorite comic, one participant indicated:

I liked the photo session comic, the one about marriage because it combined a good amount of new automatic expressions and new vocabulary with a topic that we could debate so I thought it’s a topic that was culturally rich and basically in that class we also used some sort of methodology that we had learned the previous class, the class with the first comic with no scripts so basically we had to learn how to comment on
the general meaning and then every scene every frame it's clear so we applied the
same methodology. So, I enjoyed the second comic.

As can be seen from the quote above, the student liked “the photo session” comic because she learned new vocabulary and expressions from it within the context of a cultural topic which is marriage. On a side note, she signifies her preference to start learning how to read a comic before actually starting to read them. Therefore, the student in the above quote indicated that it was useful for her to work on a “silent comic” first with which she learned how to handle a comic and then move to comics with both written texts and illustrations to apply this methodology of reading comics that she learned with the silent comic.

Finally, a subject in the intermediate MSA class reported that it was “positive” for him to see “media Arabic words” that he learned previously in his media Arabic classes in “the form of comics”. It was useful for him to recycle and activate this vocabulary that he learned in his previous classes.

Overall, these results suggest that comics are powerful in facilitating the acquisition of grammar and vocabulary. Participants from different levels stated that comics help them in acquiring vocabulary, gaining familiarity with grammar and sentence structure.

Comparatively, these results corroborate the ideas of Basal et al. (2016) and Miranda et al (2018), who found that comics were helpful to ESL students in acquiring vocabulary. This indicates that in addition to the proved positive impact of comics on learning of vocabulary as found in Basal et al. (2016) and Miranda’s et al (2018) studies, this impact was also perceived positively by participants in this research despite the absence of any clear measure of progress to prove it. In addition, the current research findings suggest that reading comics can also be helpful in learning grammar particularly with the incidental learning of grammar. However, the researcher did not come across any research that was conducted on the relation between reading comics and students’ acquisition of grammar.
4.1.4 Reading Comics and Cultural Awareness

Having focused on the impact of comics on AFL students’ level of motivation, enjoyment, reading skills and vocabulary and grammar acquisition, I will now move on to discuss students’ perceptions toward the impact of comics on their cultural awareness. Three items in the questionnaire aimed at investigating students’ perceptions toward comics and their impact on their cultural knowledge. Item 13 asked if students think that reading comics raised their awareness of Arabic or Egyptian Culture. A summary of responses to this question is highlighted in Table 4.16.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>13) Reading comics raised my awareness of the Arabic/Egyptian culture</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>43.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Over half of the participants (56%) agree that comics improved their awareness of Egyptian culture. Other participants responded with disagreeing (13%) and neutral (30%). Statement 14 aimed at investigating students’ perceptions toward comics as a source of cultural knowledge. Table 4.17 presents summary statistics for item 14.
Table 4.17 *Comics as A Source of Cultural Knowledge.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>60.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>23</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be shown in Table 4.17, the overall response to this item is very positive. Majority of the participants (78%) disagreed with the statement “I do not consider comics as a source of cultural knowledge” and only 4% agreed. In other words, the majority of the participants consider comics to be a source of cultural knowledge. Item 15 was an open-ended question that required students to state one or more examples of cultural points they learned from the Arabic comics course they attended. Responses to this question varied according to the course the respondent enrolled in and to what he/she considers to be culture. In addition, as indicated in the research procedures, there was more focus on culture in the advanced ECA class in comparison with lower-level classes. Therefore, respondents answered this question according to their own definition of culture. Answers included address terms, baby language expressed in ECA, differences between MSA and ECA, social relations, gender relations and work experience, stereotypes on athletes, environmental issues, marriage customs in Egypt, Egyptians taking a long time off for Eid, a new perspective on being a refugee, popular
culture in Egypt, art styles, handwriting, Egyptian humor, cultural phrases and finally ingrained stigma against adult Egyptian women living by themselves. On the contrary, six students stated that they did not learn any cultural points from the course. To illustrate, 2 out of the 6 students stated that they learned vocabulary, but not cultural points and another student stated that since she is well versed with Egyptian culture having lived in Egypt for 4 years and being married to an Egyptian, she did not learn new cultural points. Despite the positive correlation between comics and cultural knowledge seen from the results of the latest 3 questions above, it is worth mentioning that participants perceive comics to be more useful for the development of their reading skills and vocabulary acquisition than it is for their cultural awareness. Item 17 of the questionnaire was dedicated to knowing whether comics are most useful in reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition or cultural knowledge. Table 4.18 shows a summary of the results.
Table 4.18 Most Useful Aspect of Reading Comics.

17) Reading comics in Arabic was most useful in improving my (You can choose more than one item):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percent of Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading Comprehension</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary Acquisition</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>40.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As presented in Table 4.18 above, participants consider comics to be most useful in enhancing their reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. Moreover, cultural knowledge was viewed to be the least useful aspect of reading comics. This perception also emerged in the interviews’ transcriptions.

When participants were asked if reading Arabic comics was helpful to their cultural knowledge, participants varied in their responses according to the class they were enrolled in. All of the advanced ECA class view comics as a remarkable source of cultural knowledge and state that comics were useful for their cultural awareness. This may be due to the fact that more time was given to culture in the advanced ECA class in comparison with other classes. As explained earlier, elementary and intermediate classes needed more time and support than the advanced class in order to comprehend the comics due to their level in Arabic which resulted in more focus on linguistic aspects and less focus on cultural aspects. For example, an interviewee from the advanced ECA class reported that:

It's interesting because we talked about a lot of culture points about like how marriage works in Egypt, so I especially found that part really fascinating. Especially in Egyptian comics when there’s something you find odd you actually want to ask
questions about it, like why people would react to this in a certain way and that would naturally serve the conversation between us and they just make me want to learn more about the culture. I feel like that’s very useful because it’s the students asking for it. The student would initiate the conversation or asks why it’s like this and what happens in my culture and I remember you specifically asked us about “what is the marriage traditions in your respective countries” I found that conversation very enlightening and not only learned about the Egyptian culture but also learned about other students in the class. Again, students take on the initiative to learn things and also the conversations going on within the class. So, I find that quite useful for me to learn.

Another student from the same class agreed to this statement saying:

The process of the cultural analysis or the comparative analysis was fun. Learning from other students was interesting as well and I found that by looking at the comics I wanted to know more about the authors the people who wrote the text and the illustrators and particularly the context in which they created those comics, when were they drawn or written what was going on in that period of time I kind of wanted to situate them more within their context or when they were created to kind of understand from that.

The above quotes indicate that participants enjoyed and benefited from the cultural discussions and the cultural comparisons that were held in class, not only between their self and target cultures but between their self, target, and their classmates’ cultures as well. Interestingly, the students also thought that comics provided a chance for them to be autonomous learners by initiating cultural discussions about the parts they found intriguing or different. For instance, in the first class in which students were presented with a silent comic talking about justice and crime, a student from the advanced ECA class who has never been
to Egypt asked about something drawn in the comic, his inquiry was “why there are so many cats in the streets?”. That led to an enriching cultural discussion about features of the streets in Cairo. Additionally, his question was not answered by the teacher but by the students themselves who have been in Egypt before. Furthermore, it was suggested by the participant in the quote above that knowing more about the source, authors and illustrators of the comics would have helped him in knowing more cultural information such as the context and the time the comic was situated in. Another student from the same class commented on the choice of comics saying:

I also enjoyed our conversation about cultural issues that started from the comics, so it was a good mix to have the first part of the class focus on the text and then the second part of the class in which we could just speak more easily. I enjoyed the debate I enjoyed listening to other opinions and other cultural traditions and I think you have chosen some topics that are related to everyday life, so you allowed us to see different aspects of society so from marriage to working routine or social relations, so it was quite enjoyable. I also that the characters are like normal ordinary people and not superheroes.

The participant in this quote highlighted the importance of choosing comics that are “real” and that talks about ordinary people and not superheroes. Other students from the same class considered the “style of comics” and the “illustrations” to be a source of cultural knowledge for them. As one participant in the ECA advanced class explained it:

The style of comics in Egypt is distinctive it’s different from the style of comics that I’ve read in the US just in terms of illustrations and the style. They seemed kind of more underground comics as opposed to kind of the mainstream big-name DC or Marvel or things like that, so they definitely had kind of a different feel which was cool.
In contrast, responses were not very positive in other classes. Majority of the students in the elementary ECA and in the elementary and intermediate MSA classes were not decisive about the correlation between comics and culture. The majority of the participants in the elementary ECA group stated that they did not learn a lot of culture from comics. This might be due to the increased focus on reading comprehension and language aspects in this class in comparison with cultural aspects. As one student in the ECA elementary class put it:

I think that there were maybe Egyptian Arabic or Arab expressions sprinkled throughout the comics, but I don't know as far as the specific cultural points that I really picked up, maybe those are more expressions rather than cultural points.

Another student from the elementary MSA class confirmed saying:

I personally wish you have a little bit more text about the culture because I personally didn't feel like I learned a lot about traditions or Arab history. It was more about the vocabulary which is also good, but I wish we had more cultural texts as well.

Participants had different ways of interpreting the term “culture”. Some perceived “Egyptian Arabic expressions” to be purely linguistics that does not relate to culture. Others thought of teaching of culture to mean the teaching of texts that are only focused on Arab and Egyptian history and traditions. Other subjects reported positively that comics are a source of cultural knowledge that is mostly “subtle” or “indirect”. Additionally, students reported getting to see and read something that is written by Arabs is in itself culture. One student reported that:

I think it was interesting with all of the comics because I feel comics in other languages and cultures are still some sense of culture.

Another respondent stated:

I feel just because they're written by people who live in Arab countries so already the way that they portray cities and people is already different from the way that it is in
the US, just from looking at the backgrounds and the way people are interacting you sort of get a sense of how people interact there.

A more positive response was given by a student in the ECA elementary class included:

Although comics are relatively simple, there's still quite a lot of cultural information, cultural backgrounds that we can learn from. You sent us this paper of different kinds of terms of address, things like that I find really culturally very useful and when learning Arabic, Egyptian Arabic, these terms of address, you find them everywhere, you hear them everywhere and just to have a bit more background on that it comes from the comics because these things come up and I think that's kind of interesting and it seems to me that comics can give that kind of cultural background in a simple way.

Students in the ECA elementary class stated that one of the few cultural points they have learned was “address terms in ECA” and it was a result of seeing different address terms that were used in the comics used. Another student in the intermediate MSA class discussed that she did not feel there was a lot of focus on culture in the course. Additionally, she discussed how the amount of cultural knowledge she got from comics differed from one comic story to another saying:

I feel we did not discuss a lot about the cultural aspect of each story as much. I mean for the “law kunta malikan” it constantly would remind me of Queen Elizabeth but for our last reading "ma’bar ḥudūdī” I felt like when families were sitting together talking discussing before they take off to travel or become refugees that the pictures particularly showed some culture, but I don't feel like we spoke a lot about cultural aspects.

٨ لو كنت ملِكاً
٩ معبر حدودي
In summary, although participants perceive comics as a source of cultural knowledge, they consider comics to be more useful in developing their reading skills and vocabulary acquisition than it is for their cultural awareness. These results reflect those of Fujuan Tan et al. (2010) who also indicated that students perceived online learning to be useful to the development of vocabulary and reading but challenging to the development of their cultural knowledge. Furthermore, further analysis of the data gathered from interviews reveals that some participants stated that although they see comics can be a source of culture, they did not learn much about Egyptian or Arab culture from the current experiment. That is to say, responses varied according to the students’ levels and to the comic they have read. For example, Egyptian marriage traditions topic was highly perceived by students in the advanced ECA class as a cultural topic in comparison with the topic about environmental issues in the elementary MSA class. Moreover, participants in the advanced ECA had positive views toward comics and culture, they viewed comics as a cultural source that brings many cultural discussions. On the other hand, some participants from the other four classes stated that they did not learn a lot about culture in these classes. Others from the same classes stated that most of the culture they have learned from the comic-based classes were subtle and indirect. A possible explanation for these variable perceptions might be the fact that students were not trained to be cultural observers of the comics they read as was suggested by Brown (1977). In other words, the teacher did not spend an adequate time training students in the lower-level classes to be cultural observers of comics due to the increased focus and time that were given in these classes to linguistic aspects at the expense of cultural ones. Therefore, students might have overlooked the comics’ cultural component. These results might be an indicator of the validity of Brown’s (1977) comment regarding the importance of training students to observe and notice culture in comics or otherwise it will go unnoticed.
Additionally, as indicated previously, there was less focus on cultural aspects in comparison with language aspects in lower-level classes while there was more focus on culture in the advanced ECA class because their level allowed them to comprehend the comic in a shorter time, which gave more class time for cultural discussions. In light of the above, the current research is indecisive about the degree of correlation between comics, cultural awareness, and students’ levels. Thus, while Sakoi (2015) found that American students provided cultural responses to comics about Japanese culture, further research that considers the above factors is required to provide a definitive answer on student perceptions of the effect of comics after having received the necessary training on enhancing students’ cultural awareness. It is worth mentioning that the course that Sakoi (2015) taught as part of her study was a 30 hours culture focused course taught in English and not a foreign language course. Finally, participants in Sakoi’s (2015) study were children and not adults as in the current research. Having answered the first research question, now I move to the second research question about students’ perceptions toward creating digital comics in their online AFL class.

4.2 RQ2: What are the perceptions of online multi-level AFL students of creating digital comics in the online AFL classroom?

In an attempt to answer the second research question, data were collected from the questionnaire and the interviews to investigate students’ perceptions toward creating digital comics. The following sections demonstrate how students perceive creating comics in relation to aspects such as enjoyment and achievement, creativity, language proficiency, and finally perceptions toward Storyboard That™ the web-based tool participants used to create their comics (see figure 4.6).
4.2.1 Creating Comics and Students’ Sense of Enjoyment and Achievement

Items 19, 20 and 24 of the survey were dedicated to measuring students’ perceptions toward creating comics and its impact on their level of enjoyment and motivation. Question 19 asked participants if “creating digital comics was enjoyable”. Table 4.19 provides a summary of statistics for this item.

Table 4.19 Creating Comics and Students’ Enjoyment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>19) Creating digital comics was enjoyable</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Disagree</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Strongly Agree</td>
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<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.4 Perceptions of creating digital comics in Arabic sub-themes.
The results as shown in Table 4.19 indicate that 65% of the participants found creating comics to be enjoyable. On the other hand, creating comics was not enjoyable to 26% of the participants. Responses to item 24 confirm that creating comics was an enjoyable and fun way to practice Arabic. Summary of results is presented in Table 4.20.

Table 4.20 Creating Comics as a Fun Way to Practice Arabic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
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<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
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<td>34.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen from table 4.20 above, 60% of the participants agreed that creating digital comics is a fun way to practice Arabic while 13% of the participants disagreed and 26% took a neutral stance on that statement. Item 20 investigated participants views toward creating comics as a motivating activity. The results of the analysis are set out in Table 4.21.
Table 4.21 Creating Comics and Motivation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Disagree</td>
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<td>Agree</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the data in Table 4.21, we can see that 47% agreed that creating comics was a motivating activity. On the other hand, 30% did not find creating comics to be motivating and 21% were neutral toward the relation between comic creation and motivation. Despite the fact that the percentage of agreement was more than the percentage of disagreement, percentages were rather close.

Data collected from interviews provides an insight into why creating comics was enjoyable for some students and not for others. The majority of the participants who enjoyed creating comics digitally stated that the reason behind their enjoyment is that they get a sense of pride when they finish creating a comic, in other words, a sense of pride in their achievements. An informant in the advanced ECA class reported:

I was not great in creating the comics on Storyboard That™ but at the end I did it, so I'm proud of myself. I mean to overcome this lack of creativity, I don't like doing artistic work, I don't like doing creative work and so it was sort of hard but in the end, when I finished my second task, I was happy.
The participant in the excerpt above indicated that despite the difficulty of the task and her lack of creativity, she enjoyed the task and was “proud” of herself when she finished it. Another student from the elementary MSA class commented:

Creating comics is more exciting than writing an essay because you get to put all the pictures in and you get to choose the background and it's like a game but also it takes a lot of time but when you're done you can have the comic to look at and you’re like yeah, I finished it.

Despite taking a long time to create a comic, the participant in the above quote denoted the same sense of pride in creating comics. In addition, she indicated that creating comics using Storyboard That™ is more enjoyable than writing essays because it felt like “a game”.

Another participant from the intermediate class stated that he would like to see comic creation tasks among his assignments and if he was “given the choice between writing a comic and writing an essay” he “would probably choose to create a comic”. A student from the elementary MSA class stated:

To create the comic, it took me time because I wanted to put the faces and the right text, but I really enjoy creating comics, I think it's the first time I create something at all really.

On the other hand, when asked about their perceptions toward creating comics as part of their online AFL class one individual commented:

I didn't really enjoy the comic creation task because I think the time that I use to come up with a compelling comic story with pictures and everything may have been better used writing more Arabic maybe in that way learning more as well. Maybe if I want to make my story more compelling or more interesting that is something that I'll consider but in terms of learning Arabic, I would say for me I would prefer to just write an essay.
The quote indicates that creating comics can be time-consuming because students do not only spend time focusing on the written text but in addition, they spend time creating the semiotic forms of comics. A student in the advanced ECA group indicated that creating comics was “an enjoyable experience” for him because he felt pride in his accomplishment saying, “I can feel like I am a director of something”. On the contrary, five participants indicated they did not enjoy creating comics mainly because it was a time-consuming task that takes away from their learning of Arabic. Interestingly, most of the students who did not enjoy the task were from the intermediate MSA classes and only one was from the advanced ECA class and another from the elementary ECA class. Some participants stated that they could have been spending more time on learning and writing more Arabic if they were just writing an essay. Another student agreed to this opinion saying:

I guess if it had been more focused on just writing than trying to position the characters in the comic then I would have just been able to focus more on writing.

Another participant echoed the same opinion saying:

For me, I didn't find the task as useful. I just feel like I would learn more per hour spent working on a story than a comic.

Participants suggested that giving students the choice to either create a comic or write a story would be more convenient for all types of students, those who enjoy creating comics and those who do not. Additionally, they suggested creating comics collaboratively. Other suggestions to reduce the intensity of the task are listed in the pedagogical suggestions section below.

In summary, the majority of participants enjoyed creating comics in Arabic and found it motivating in spite of being difficult and time-consuming. These results are consistent with data obtained from Kılıçkaya and Krajka’s (2012) study that Turkish ESL students found creating digital comics to be enjoyable and motivating.
4.2.2 Creating Comics and Creativity

Only one item in the questionnaire measured students’ perceptions toward creating digital comics and their level of creativity. Table 4.22 below provides an illustration of responses to item 23.

Table 4.22 Creating Digital Comics and Creativity in Language Production.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
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<td>26.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
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<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>39.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>23</strong></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Over half of those surveyed (65%) reported that creating digital comics helps them to be more creative in their language production. Only 8% of the participants disagreed to this statement and 26% took a neutral stance. Furthermore, additional analysis of data obtained from interviews indicates that some participants found creating comics to be a creative task that helped in making them more innovative and to unleash their imagination. As one interviewee from the advanced ECA class said:

I really liked creating my own comic, you actually have to think to use your imagination and first you have to really have a tight grasp of what the phrases we learned mean and how to use them in appropriate contexts and then you can create whatever crazy contexts you can think of and make major characters do certain things you want them to do and use the phrases you learned in them.
Creating comics allowed the participant in this quote to use his imagination in a creative context. Another participant from the elementary MSA class confirmed saying that he likes creating comics because “it helped with creativity”. Another student stated:

I think that I put myself more in the camp of someone who likes to do the creative stuff I really enjoyed working with the storyboard application and I did enjoy the creative aspects it was fun.

On the other hand, one participant in the advanced ECA class indicated that one of the reasons he did not enjoy creating comics was he does not find himself creative enough to accomplish this task. He elaborated saying:

As for designing your own comic, I'm not creative I really struggle to come up with a coherent story. I spent time stressing or worrying about I need to come up with a coherent plot rather than just practicing words and so for me the goal seems to be to provide an opportunity to use those words and use them correctly in contexts if that’s the goal I think it can be done in another way of just using them in sentences or just writing something without sort of the visual artistic component.

As can be seen from the quote above, since this participant did not identify himself as a creative person it was difficult for him to accomplish the task, he would rather write sentences or essays than create a comic with an artistic component.

To sum up, the majority of the participants found creating digital comics to be a creative task that helps them to use their imagination and be more innovative in their language production. Similarly, these findings corroborate the ideas of Zimmerman (2008) and Maliszewski (2013) and match findings from Vassilikopoulou’s et al. (2011) study in that creating comics allow students to use their imagination and to be more creative in the language. Having talked about perceptions toward creating comics in relation to cognitive
aspects such as motivation, achievement, and creativity, we now move to discuss perceptions toward creating comics in relation to linguistic aspects.

4.2.3 Creating Comics and The Development of Language Proficiency

Respondents were asked in items 21, 22 and 25 of the survey about their perceptions toward comic creation and its impact on their language proficiency. Participants in question 22 were asked if they perceive creating digital comics using Storyboard That™ as a useful activity. The results obtained from the preliminary analysis of item 22 are set out in Table 4.23.

Table 4.23 Usefulness of Creating Digital Comics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
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<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>30.4</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results as shown in Table 4.23 indicate that over 65% of the participants believe that creating digital comics in Arabic is a useful activity. On the other side, few of the participants (17%) do not believe that creating comics is a useful activity. Item 21 of the questionnaire aimed at investigating the relation between comic creation tasks and their production in Arabic. Table 4.24 summarizes the results.
Table 4.24 Creating Digital Comics and Language Production.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Frequency</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The percentage of participants that agree with this statement (47%) is higher than the percentage of disagreement toward this statement (26%). In addition, 26% of the participants responded to this statement with neutral. Therefore, it can be concluded that more participants view creating comics as a helpful activity. Item 25 examines students’ perceptions toward creating comics and the development of writing skills. Table 4.25 below provides a summary of results.

Table 4.25 Creating Comics and The Development of Writing Skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The majority of the participants represented in 78% agree that creating comics was helpful in enhancing their writing skills. A minority of 4% does not perceive comics to be a helpful activity for their writing skills. Analysis of the data collected from interviews provides a support and an explanation of these findings. Participants perceive comic creation tasks to be helpful in the development of their vocabulary acquisition and writing skills, particularly circumlocution. One participant in the advanced ECA class reported:

Although it is difficult to create a coherent story and to have a concise dialogue that uses these terms that we've learned I thought that it was really fun to create a little world in the comic and I think that helps me remember the text that I did include because I have a visual representation, I have a story in my mind and when I memorized vocabulary I tried to attach a word to something visual like a picture or a situation and I liked having the oral dialogue component you know kind of reading out loud what I've written and kind of listening to how the story goes, imagining a real conversation.

The student in the quote above indicates that despite the difficulty of creating comics he enjoyed it because it was a way for him to memorize vocabulary and apply what he learned in class. It appears from the student’s explanation that he is a visual learner which makes this form of learning more meaningful to him. Additionally, it gave him a chance to produce something more communicative. Another visual learner in the elementary MSA class commented that creating comics was her favorite part of the course because she found it was beneficial in retaining vocabulary and making it more “solid” in her head. She added:

It was useful in terms of memorizing words because sometimes I'll be thinking this word, I don't remember its meaning, but I remember the spot it was taking place in my comic or in the comic that we read and I feel like associating those words with places on the paper was more useful in order to memorize those words.
Another participant from the intermediate MSA class stated that creating comics was useful because it helps her to “practice formulating text and conversations that are given to someone else instead of generic ones”. In other words, the participant was able to represent a different perspective and direct her talk to a specific character or characters in the comic itself rather than speaking generally to the reader as it is the case with essays that she has written in her classes before. As another student put it:

I basically created comics that were part of our world, of our class I tried to use references that only us could guess I mixed the stories I put "Madam Narges " in another comic just to remember what we did together just to make sense of our own class world that made sense for me and so basically I didn't care about a sort of external reader I tried to focus more on an internal reader in our group.

The participant provided an example of using “Madam Narges” in personalizing her comic. “Madam Narges” is a character in a comic that students in the Advanced ECA class have read in one of their classes. In the comic “Madam Narges” created a so-called self-defense course to help people be more devious and get what they want and avoid problems in the workplace. (see Figure 4.7 for a sample of the comic created by this student and refer to Appendix F- 6 for the whole comic).

Figure 4.5 A sample of created comic in which a student used a reference “Madam Narges” from other classes.
One student from the elementary MSA and another from the elementary ECA classes indicated that creating comics required them to apply “circumlocution” while they were working on their comics. A student from the elementary MSA class elaborates saying that sometimes she did not have “the grammar to say things” in the way she wanted to say it, so she had to “rephrase” it in her head or look at the vocabulary she learned from class to say it “in a different way”. This was also confirmed by another student in the elementary ECA class. Finally, by observing the comics created by students, it can be noted that majority of the students tended to personalize their comics and involve themselves in the stories they create.

To elaborate, the researcher observed that most of the students tended to include comic characters that resemble themselves and their culture not only in tasks that require them to create factual stories about their lives and actual things that happened to them but also in tasks that require them to create imaginary stories. For example, participants created comics in response to a comic creation task that required them to create a comic about what they will do if they were kings. Figures 4.8 and 4.9 presents an example of this type of personalization. Notably, the participant in the first strip was a Chinese female while in the second one the participant was an American male (refer to Appendices F-1 to F-8 for the complete student-generated comics)

Figure 4.6 Panels from a comic created by a Chinese student.
The most interesting observation to emerge from the created comic in Figure 4.9 was the usage of both Standard and Colloquial Arabic. To clarify, two participants used Standard Arabic in the narration boxes and activated their previous knowledge of Levantine colloquial Arabic by using it as the spoken form as shown in the speech balloons created in the comic. Therefore, it can be argued that comic creation tasks are one of the few tasks where using both Arabic standard and colloquial varieties in a written form is actually authentic and valid. One final observation is that some participants tended to use rhetorical language, idioms and expressions in their comics. Usage of idioms and expressions was very obvious in the created comics by the Advanced ECA class since part of the comic creation tasks required them to use idioms and expressions, they have learned from the comics they read. Nevertheless, it was also shown in students’ artifices from other classes. A couple of examples can be seen in Figures 4.10 and 4.11 underlined in blue. Figure 4.10 is a panel created by a participant in the elementary MSA class talking about walking on the beach with his girlfriend as something...

Figure 4.7 Panels from a comic created by an American student.
that he enjoys doing. The student in this comic used a rhetorical sentence to express his love to his girlfriend saying, “the ocean is big as the love between us”.

Figure 4.11 shows another example of usage of rhetorical language. The participant in these panels used a rhetorical question to indicate her confusion and disbelief in the loyalty of the vice president saying, “Who will he choose, me, the nation or himself?” In addition, the queen sadly says “I left my Kingdom that left me” to indicate that she abandoned that Kingdom that gave up on her and left her lonely.
In summary, participants believe that comic creation tasks are useful in developing their language production, vocabulary acquisition, and writing skills, specifically circumlocution. These results are consistent with the data obtained from Sri Wilujeng and Yu-Ju’s (2015) study that found that Chinese as a foreign language learners’ acquisition of vocabulary was enhanced by creating comics digitally. Following is the final section that investigates students’ perceptions toward Storyboard That™.

4.2.4 Perceptions Toward Using Storyboard That™

Items 28 to 33 were adapted from Lund’s (2001) usefulness, easiness, and satisfaction (USE) questionnaire. The main purpose of these questions was to examine students’ perceptions toward the web-based tool they used to create comics namely Storyboard That™. Items 28, 29 and 30 were focused on investigating perceptions toward the ease of using Storyboard That™. Tables 4.26 to 4.28 show a summary of results.
Table 4.26 Ease of using Storyboard That™.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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Table 4.27 Ease of using Storyboard That™.

<table>
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<th>Frequency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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Table 4.28 *Ease of using Storyboard That™.*

<table>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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</table>

As can be seen from the tables above, 65% of the participants believed that Storyboard That™ was easy to use. Furthermore, 60% agreed that Storyboard That™ requires the fewest steps possible to accomplish what the student wants to do with it. Finally, 69% of the students agreed that they can use Storyboard That™ successfully every time. Item 31 examines the easiness of learning Storyboard That™. Table 4.29 presents a summary of the results.
Table 4.29 *Ease of learning Storyboard That™.*

<table>
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<td>Total</td>
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</table>

As presented in the table above, 78% of the students’ reported that they learned using Storyboard That™ quickly. In terms of satisfaction, it was measured by items 32 and 33. An illustration of results is shown in Tables 4.30 and 4.31.

Table 4.30 *Satisfaction of using Storyboard That™.*

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.31 *Satisfaction of using Storyboard That™.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>33) It is fun to use</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>43.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>23</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results show that 60% of the participants were satisfied with Storyboard That™ and 73% thought it is fun to use. Data from the interviews is consistent with the results from the questionnaire in that Storyboard That™ was satisfying and easy to use and learn. The majority of the students stated that it was very easy to use. One participant in the advanced ECA class stated that the “Software was easy to use” and that it took him “five to ten minutes to get the hang of it”. Other participants from the elementary ECA group stated that Storyboard That™ is “amazingly easy” and it is “very user-friendly”. Students indicated that the video tutorial that was created by the researcher for Storyboard That™ at the beginning of the experiment was “helpful” and using Storyboard That™ “became easy” once they created their first comic. In addition, participants mentioned that they were happy to create the comic online instead of drawing it due to their lack of artistic skills. One participant in the intermediate class indicated that she is “not good at drawing” and that Storyboard That™ helped her in making creating the story “easier”. The same opinion was stated by another
participant in the elementary ECA class. She described herself as “not artistic in any way whatsoever” therefore, Storyboard That™ was a good tool with which she can “slap the background, search for pictures” and create a story. Interestingly, one participant stated that although “it takes time to type in Arabic” and that he “didn’t type much before this class” that aspect of creating comics using Storyboard That™ was helpful in familiarizing himself with the Arabic keyboard. He added, “the times that I've been typing up the comics I've found that it's becoming much easier for me to write out in Arabic”. Moreover, participants discussed useful features of Storyboard That™. Participants stated that Storyboard That™ is an “intuitive interface” that is “full of resources” and that has “so many templates” and “so many characters” that students can choose from. Nevertheless, if the students did not find a suitable picture in Storyboard That™ they can “find and upload extra pictures from outside sources” as can be seen in Figure 4.10. As one participant said:

I really liked how many options there were for changing the color of what one was wearing, adding accessories things like that. I was actually quite surprised how many choices there were in terms of backgrounds and things and how easy it was to experiment within that space.

Figure 4.10 Panels created by an intermediate student containing pictures uploaded to Storyboard That.
On the other hand, two participants stated that they did not find a suitable picture on Storyboard That™ to suit what they were trying to create so they had to change the story because of that. Two other students reported a few technical issues with Storyboard That™, including punctuation marks that do not place in the right direction when writing in Arabic and that sometimes the site becomes “slow” when the student uploads a lot of pictures to it. In a word, participants found Storyboard That™ easy to use and learn, satisfying to use and full of different resources and features. This indicates that any challenges some of the participants faced while creating comics were mostly due to the difficulty of the task itself particularly the time it took them to create comics and not due to any technical difficulties they faced while using Storyboard That™. The researcher did not come across any other research discussing foreign language learners’ perceptions toward Storyboard That™. Therefore, the findings of this study could be of a benefit to the AFL teachers or researchers dealing with comics as a genre.
Chapter 5: Conclusion and Final Remarks

5.1 Conclusion

The current research examined the perceptions of multi-level online AFL students of reading and creating digital comics as part of their online AFL classroom. An analysis of data collected from a questionnaire and semi-structured group interviews as presented in the results and discussion chapter was able to answer the two research questions. With regards to the first research question, it was clear that participants from all classes perceive comics as a powerful authentic source that motivates them to read more in Arabic and that helps in promoting their vocabulary and grammar acquisition and reading skills, especially comprehension and making inferences. In addition, participants perceived comics to be a useful source to their vocabulary acquisition and reading skills because they contained pictures, have a low reading load and an interesting plot, are authentic, and mixes between standard and colloquial Arabic. Additionally, participants discussed an interesting feature in Egyptian comics which is their usage of handwritten fonts. Although this was challenging for the majority of the participants, some participants viewed this feature to be helpful in familiarizing them with the Arabic handwritten fonts. The final aspect discussed in perceptions toward reading comics was its relation to cultural awareness. Results show that participants view comics as a source of cultural knowledge; however, some participants stated that they did not learn new cultural aspects from this experience. Notably, participants in the advanced ECA class were the most to perceive comics as beneficial for their cultural awareness. With respect to the second research question, it was found that students perceived creating digital comics as an enjoyable and a motivating yet a time-consuming and a challenging task for the majority of the students. Students also had a sense of pride and accomplishment when they created a comic. Moreover, participants stated that creating
digital comics allowed them to be more creative and use their imagination and was helpful to their language proficiency specifically to their acquisition of vocabulary and writing skills, namely circumlocution. Finally, Storyboard That™ was viewed as a resourceful and intuitive web-based tool to create comics.

5.2 Pedagogical Implications and Recommendations

The results of this study are considered to be groundbreaking for AFL teachers and material developers, being the first research that investigates students’ perceptions toward integrating Arabic comics and comic creation tasks in the field of AFL. The current study opens the door and paves the way for AFL teachers and material developers to integrate an engaging, motivating, authentic, multimodal and interactive recourse in their AFL curricula. In addition, it opens the door for teachers to understand the benefits of reading and creating comics in the AFL classroom and the challenges of including them in AFL classes. Furthermore, the present research introduces teachers to new technology tools that can flourish in their classrooms.

That being said, there are few suggestions and issues to note when integrating comics and comic creation tasks in the foreign language classroom particularly the AFL classroom. First, when teachers are choosing comics to integrate in their classes, they need to integrate ones that are engaging to learners. A suggestion would be asking students what kind of comics they read or what type of comics they will be interested in. Building on what was learned from participants in this study, it is advisable to use comics that have ‘real’ characters, ordinary people and not superheroes. An important factor that AFL teachers should pay a close attention to when utilizing comics in the AFL classroom is handwritten fonts used in comics. Despite the fact that all languages have handwritten fonts, the
researcher did not come across any research that addresses this feature in comics and how beneficial or challenging it is when reading comics in the foreign language classroom. However, the current research findings indicate that students found that reading comics with Arabic handwritten script to be challenging yet beneficial. This indicates a lack of exposure to handwritten fonts in AFL classes and suggests another use of comics in the AFL classes to help students gain more familiarity with handwritten Arabic only if treated carefully and with preparation. In addition, several participants suggested a number of practices to overcome the difficulty of reading comics with handwritten scripts. Suggestions included, providing students with “a short introduction to Arabic handwriting” at the beginning of the course, overwriting the handwritten fonts with another typed one, and finally having “a clearer companion text” that clarifies the text bubbles that are difficult to read.

As has been noted from the results of this research, comics as a form of popular culture has the potential of raising AFL learners’ cultural awareness. Nevertheless, culture was a weak part in the current courses due to reasons explained previously. Therefore, it is advisable that teachers train students to be cultural observers of the comic they read, not only observers of the linguistic codes in the comic but also observers of the visual codes represented in comic illustrations, backgrounds and characters.

Some activities suggested by students were dramatic readings of comics or acting out the comics. In addition, providing students with some information about the source and the illustrator of the comic story is highly advisable. Students in the current courses suggested that knowing more about the source, authors and illustrators of the comics will help them in knowing more cultural information such as the context and the time the comic was situated in. Other suggestions included creating comics content-based courses. For example, dedicating a whole course based on comics to social issues such as “sexual harassment”, using different comics illustrated by 2 or 3 male and female artists to see “how it develops the
same issue in a different way” or creating a literature course that is entirely based on comics. Additionally, one student suggested doing a comparative cross-study of comics throughout the Arab world as a way of exposure to different dialects. In spite of having low-reading load, comics are full of cultural and linguistic information that needs a sufficient time to decipher. Consequently, participants in this course suggested (even needed) spending more time with the comics to better comprehend the comics and activate the vocabulary they have learned from them. To elaborate, participants found that meeting synchronously once a week for 90 minutes is insufficient to fully comprehend the comics and practice the vocabulary they have learned from the comics. Therefore, they have suggested spending more time per comic by increasing the number of classes during the week and by adding more supplementary activities that can help them digest the comic they have read and activate the vocabulary they have learned.

In terms of creating comics, the researcher suggests creating the first comic with the students in class. In the current research, the researcher provided students with a video tutorial and all of the comic creation tasks were done asynchronously, however it was apparent from questions received from students during their first task that they needed more support in their first task. Therefore, it would have been better to create the first comic in class or to have a live training session after watching the video tutorial. More suggestions were given by students to reduce the intensity and the time consumption of comic creation tasks included giving students the choice to either create a comic or write a story. Thus, those who enjoy creating comics and those who do not would benefit equally from the production activity. Other suggestions included providing students with a ready-made comic containing just illustrations and empty bubbles to write in. In other words, the teacher creates the comic or erase the text written on a particular comic and give it to students to fill in those speech bubbles and narration boxes. Last but not least, one participant suggested creating the comics
collaboratively with classmates where one student creates one panel and passes it on to following classmate to add another panel and so on. Finally, the current research is yet another witness to the amazing capabilities of our students which never cease to amaze us.
5.3 Study Limitations

There were some limitations in the current research. First, participants in this study were only 23 participants which make it difficult to generalize the results of this study to all learners of AFL. Second, the study examined the perceptions of reading and creating comics in an AFL online classroom and not a traditional classroom, therefore results are more representative of online AFL classroom and cannot be generalized to the general population of AFL. Finally, as has been previously stated in the results and analysis chapter, the current research was unable to confirm if reading comics was beneficial to intermediate and elementary AFL students’ level of cultural awareness due to the lack of focus on culture in these courses, due to students’ uncertainty and variability of what falls under the category of culture and finally due to the fact that comics given to students were different from one class to another and variable in the amount of cultural information they withhold.

5.4 Recommendations for future research

Further studies need to be carried out in order to validate students’ perceptions toward reading and creating comics in an AFL non-online, traditional setting. Additionally, further research can investigate the impact of reading comics on FLLs’ acquisition of grammar. In addition, further studies can examine AFL teachers’ perceptions toward integrating comics and comic creation tasks in their classrooms. Further research could usefully explore the effectiveness of allowing AFL students to create comics collaboratively. Finally, a further study of a comparative nature on students’ perceptions of creating digital verses paper comics would be very interesting.
References


https://doi.org/10.17165/TP.2017.1-2.14


Pitura, J., & Chmielarz, D. (2017). “Creating a comic strip is very creative and thanks to it we learn and remember” - Student perceptions of a Biology challenge in a gamified extracurricular CLIL project. Teaching English with Technology, 17(3), 77–95.


References of comics


http://kotobna.net/Book/Details?bookID=968

Shinnawi (2015). *ḥadatha bilfi’il* [Actually happened] [Cartoon]. Retrieved From: http://kotobna.net/
Appendices

Appendix A: COURSE ADVERTISEMENT AND APPLICATION FORM

Course announcement video: https://youtu.be/3cBvTpl4KMI

Free Arabic Online Course: Apply now (LIMITED OPENINGS)
Take part in this 100% Free Arabic online course with me. The course involves reading and creating comics. That helps promote your reading, writing, speaking skills and cultural awareness in either Modern Standard Arabic or Egyptian Colloquial Arabic or both. Apply now (LIMITED OPENINGS).

Make sure to watch the video before you apply and do the following:

1) share the video with your friends

2) Subscribe to my YouTube channel like my Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/arabicglobal/

Sign up to my website: arabicglobal.com

3) Submit your application. https://goo.gl/forms/hTLYr8tpyQJA7xO33
Appendix B: QUESTIONNAIRE

By clicking next, you agree that you have read and understood the information included in this form and agree to participate in this study.

Please answer all questions as honestly as possible. Participating in this questionnaire means you’ve given your consent to participate in this research.

**Personal Information**

1) Gender  
   a) Male    b) Female
2) Age:  
3) First language:  
   a) English  
   b) German  
   c) French  
   d) Spanish  
   e) Italian  
   f) Other _________
4) How long have you studied Arabic?  
   a) under 1 year  
   b) 1-2 years  
   c) 2-4 years  
   d) more than 4 years
5) Did you study Arabic Online before attending this course?  
   a) Yes  
   b) No

For each of the questions below circle the response that best characterizes how you feel about the statement, where 1= Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3= Neutral 4= Agree 5= Strongly Agree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading Comics:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  Reading comics raised my motivation to learn Arabic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Reading comics raised my motivation to read more in Arabic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I was more anxious reading comics in comparison with other text forms</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Reading comics changed my attitude toward reading in a positive way</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I am now interested in finding more Arabic comic books or graphic novels to read</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>After this experiment, I am more motivated to read comics and other types of books in Arabic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Reading comics did not help me overcome my fear of reading in Arabic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Reading comics helped me to improve my reading skills</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Reading Comics helped me with the following reading skills (You can choose more than one answer):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading comprehension</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guessing the meaning of words based on context</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other (please Specify)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>The following feature/s helped me the most in comprehending the comic I was reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visualization (The pictures, images)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preview of content</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(You can choose more than one option)</td>
<td>Recycled vocabulary/ phrases</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Reading comics raised my awareness toward the Arabic/Egyptian culture</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>I do not consider comics as a source of cultural knowledge</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Can you mention an example/s of new cultural points learnt in this comic-based course</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Reading Arabic comics helped me in acquiring more vocabulary in Arabic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Reading comics in Arabic was mostly useful in improving my (You can choose more than one answer):</td>
<td>Vocabulary Acquisition Reading comprehension Cultural knowledge Other (Please Specify)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Creating Digital Comics:**

<p>| | | | | | |</p>
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<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Creating digital comics was enjoyable</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Creating digital comics activities were motivating</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>Question</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>Creating digital comics helped me to be more productive in Arabic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>Creating digital comics activities using Storyboard That™ were useful</td>
<td></td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>Creating digital comics allows me to be more creative in my language production</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Creating digital comics is a fun way to practice Arabic</td>
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<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Creating digital comics helps in promoting my writing skills</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>What did you find useful in creating digital comics in Arabic?</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following questions, is directed toward your experience with the tool used to create comics: Storyboard That™
*Based on and adapted from: Lund, A.M. (2001) Measuring Usability with the USE Questionnaire. STC Usability SIG Newsletter, 8:2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Storyboard That™ is easy to use</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Storyboard That™ requires the fewest steps possible to accomplish what I want to do with it</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>I can use it successfully every time.</td>
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<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>I learned to use it quickly.</td>
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<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>I am satisfied with it.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>It is fun to use.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>What are your suggestions to improve this comic-based online course?</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments
Appendix C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1) What did you feel about this online Arabic class? Was it useful? Challenging? Not? Why?


3) Did you find reading comics helpful for your culture awareness? If yes, in what way?

4) Did you enjoy creating comics in this online course? Was it useful? Challenging? Motivating? Or not?

5) What was your favorite activity? Why?

6) What was your favorite comic? Why?

7) What was the three most positive aspects of this experience?

8) What was the three most negative and challenging aspects in this experience?

9) Any suggestions to enhance this comic-based course? Anything to edit? Anything to add?
Appendix D: SAMPLE OF WEEKLY SCHEDULE FROM ALL CLASSES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Comic Used</th>
<th>Comic Creation Task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>Class 5</td>
<td>Discussing and describing a silent comic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>Class 3&amp;4</td>
<td>Being a king</td>
<td>لو كنت ملكا</td>
<td>What would you do if you were a king.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Class 2</td>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>غابة الأشجار</td>
<td>Create an environmental campaign</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Week 3| Class 1   | Younger siblings                | جونيور خارج المنزل | • Change the ending of the comic  
                              |                      | • Extend the comic (min 3 panels)           |
| Week 4| Class 3&4 | Refugees                        | مَعبر حدودي        | Asylum Seeker                                 |
| Week 5| Class 5   | Contradiction                   | شيزوفرنيا         | Complete the comic / Create a part 2         |
| Week 6|           | Feedback on Created Comics      |                  | Act The comic/ Provide feedback on partner’s comic. |
Appendix E: INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMIC CREATION TASK “ASYLUM SEEKER”

Week 4
Assignment’s Instructions
Comic Creation Task 2- Time to Flee! Asylum Seeker

- Study the comic studied in week 4 class and its vocabulary list.
- As a comic artist. Create a comic story using “Storyboard That™” to tell the following story:
  - You’re a member of a Syrian family that are forced to leave their home because of the war. Discuss the reasons of your fleeing. You and your family are forced to decide who to take and who to leave, the method of transportation and the ten most important items to take with you as a family. Where you’re heading? What documents and things you need to take with you? How do you and your family feel? What you’ll miss in your home? What you like and dislike about the new place you fled to? What are your hopes for the future?
  *Adapted from: https://goo.gl/nDkaod

- As intermediate students, you should write a long story and longer sentences so please don’t make short stories that just consist of two short sentences for instance!
- Use new words and expressions learned in class.

- In your comic you can do the following (not only limited to this):
  - Find a suitable title for your comic.
  - Provide narrations and conversations.
  - Any other ideas you have are more than welcome.

- Create a plan for the comic before designing it, you can think of the following:
  - Plot
  - Characters
  - When is the situation happened?
  - How did it happen?

- Remember that: Arabic is written from right to left, so the first panel should be on the right.
- Remember to be creative and to consider not only words but also characters, backgrounds, facial expressions when you’re designing the comic.
- Try to employ new expressions and vocabulary learned.
You can text me about any problems you’re having or share a question with me over google classroom comments or email.

**How to access storyboard that?**

**Tutorial on how to use Storyboard that:**
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x18hQAdD7Xw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x18hQAdD7Xw)

Remember to use Arabic fonts when you’re writing on the comic (They are some available fonts on Storyboard That™)

I forgot to mention this in my tutorial so here’s it “The comic section” in textables:

Follow instructions:

**Register for Storyboard That**

**Sign Up Steps**

2. Fill in the area marked "Register"
3. Username: Choose a unique login name
4. Password: Choose a private password
5. Display Name: Please enter your real name
6. School/Teacher Name: ######
7. Access Key: ######
8. Recommended: Record your user name and password
Appendix F-1: STUDENT-GENERATED COMICS (CLASS 2, THINGS I ENJOY TASK)
Appendix F-2: STUDENT-GENERATED COMICS (CLASS 4, IF I WERE A KING)
لا يوجد نص يمكن قراءته بشكل طبيعي من الصورة المقدمة.
Appendix F-3: STUDENT-GENERATED COMICS (CLASS 4, IF I WERE A KING)
Appendix F-4: STUDENT-GENERATED COMICS (CLASS 3, TIME TO FLEE)
Appendix F-5: STUDENT-GENERATED COMICS (CLASS 2, THINGS I LOST)
Appendix F-6: STUDENT-GENERATED COMICS (CLASS 5, CREATE ANOTHER EPISODE OF THE COMIC)

Create your own at Storyboard That
Appendix F-7: STUDENT-GENERATED COMICS (CLASS 1, BEING SICK)
Appendix F-8: STUDENT-GENERATED COMICS (CLASS 1, CHANGE THE ENDING OF THE COMIC)
Appendix G: SAMPLE OF COMICS USED IN THE CLASS (BORDER CROSSING)


واجهت في البداية بعض المشاكل في التكيف مع كوني في مخيم لاجئين. لقد وصلت من "برلين" بالطائرة أمس فقط، حيث قضيت ليالي في فندق خمس نجوم، وبالأسف النهوض أطلتًا من الطعام المزاب ضعيف فأعتى في "الأريج".

الأطفال هم دائمًا نقطة البداية المناسبة. قمت برسم فناء ذات قبعة مملحة، فانتبهت لذلك، وفى النهاية رسمت:

على الأقل حصلت على الصورة التي رسمها لملهمة بكلمة

تم استنادًا واختفت بين الخيام دون أن

هذه الصورة التي رسمها لا تلمح

أخلي، إلا أنًا رسمها إني كان أفضل