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# Effectiveness of Graphic Organisers in Developing Character Sketch Writing Skills among Fifth-Grade Students: A Comparative Analysis with Traditional Learning Methods

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Abstract: This action research study investigated the effectiveness of graphic organisers compared to traditional instructional methods in developing character sketch writing skills among fifth-grade students. Sixty-eight students from two grade 5 classes (5F and 5D) participated in a pre-test and post-test assessment design. The study implemented character sketch writing instruction using graphic organisers as the experimental intervention, while comparing results with baseline performance using traditional methods. Quantitative data analysis revealed significant improvement in students' writing performance when using graphic organisers, with an average score increase of 1.68 points (30.2%) compared to pre-test scores. Lower-performing students showed the most substantial gains (75.5% improvement). The findings suggest that graphic organisers provide effective scaffolding for elementary students developing character analysis and descriptive writing skills, offering educators a practical and evidence-based instructional strategy to enhance writing instruction. This study contributes to the growing body of research supporting visual learning tools in literacy development for young learners.

#### I. INTRODUCTION

# A. Background of the Study

Literacy development represents a cornerstone of elementary education, with writing proficiency serving as a critical skill that impacts academic success across all subject areas. Among the various writing genres introduced in elementary grades, character sketch writing holds particular importance as it develops students' abilities to observe, analyse, and articulate human traits and behaviours—skills essential for comprehension and composition across narrative and expository writing contexts.

For fifth-grade students specifically, character sketch writing presents a developmentally appropriate challenge that bridges concrete and abstract thinking. At this educational juncture, students are expanding their vocabulary, developing more sophisticated sentence structures, and beginning to organise their ideas with greater intentionality. However, many students struggle with the organisational demands of character analysis, often producing writing that lacks cohesion, detailed support, or clear structure.

Traditional approaches to teaching character sketch writing have typically relied on direct instruction, models, and practice exercises. While these methods have merit, they may not adequately address the cognitive organisational challenges that many fifth graders face when attempting to transform abstract character observations into coherent written descriptions. Educational research increasingly suggests that visual learning tools may bridge this gap by providing concrete scaffolding for abstract thinking processes.

# B. Graphic Organisers in Educational Context

Graphic organisers represent visual frameworks that help students organise information and concepts, making abstract relationships concrete and visible. These learning tools align with cognitive load theory (Sweller, 1988) and dual coding theory (Paivio, 1971), suggesting that visual representations can enhance information processing and retention by distributing cognitive demands across both visual and verbal processing channels.

In the context of writing instruction, graphic organisers can provide scaffolding that guides students through the writing process, from brainstorming and planning to organising and elaborating on ideas. For character sketch writing specifically, graphic organisers might include character trait webs, evidence collection charts, or structured templates that prompt students to identify and elaborate on physical attributes, personality traits, behaviours, and supporting evidence from texts.



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### C. Research Problem and Significance

Despite growing interest in visual learning strategies, research specifically examining the effectiveness of graphic organisers for character sketch writing at the elementary level remains limited. While studies have explored graphic organisers for narrative writing broadly, the specific application to character analysis deserves focused examination, particularly for fifth-grade students who are developing critical analytical writing skills.

The present study addresses this research gap by investigating whether graphic organisers provide more effective instructional support than traditional methods for teaching character sketch writing to fifth-grade students across two different classes. This two-class approach strengthens the reliability of findings and provides the opportunity to observe consistency of effects across different classroom contexts. The findings will contribute to evidence-based practices in elementary writing instruction and provide practical guidance for educators seeking to enhance students' descriptive and analytical writing skills.

#### D. Research Question and Hypothesis

This study was guided by the following research question: To what extent do graphic organisers improve fifth-grade students' character sketch writing skills compared to traditional instructional methods across different classroom contexts?

The research hypothesis posited that students in both 5F and 5D classes would demonstrate greater improvement in character sketch writing when using graphic organisers compared to traditional instructional approaches, as measured by writing assessment scores.

#### II. LITERATURE REVIEW

#### A. Theoretical Framework

The implementation of graphic organisers in writing instruction is supported by several cognitive and educational theories. Constructivist learning theory (Bruner, 1966; Vygotsky, 1978) emphasises that learners actively construct knowledge through experience and scaffolded support. Graphic organisers function as scaffolding tools that bridge students' current abilities with more advanced writing skills.

Schema theory (Anderson, 1977) suggests that learning occurs when new information connects to existing mental frameworks or schemas. Graphic organisers help students develop and activate schemas related to character analysis by providing visual structures that organise relevant attributes and supporting details.

Cognitive load theory (Sweller, 1988) addresses how instructional design affects working memory demands. By externalising the organisational structure of character sketches, graphic organisers potentially reduce cognitive load, freeing mental resources for higher-order thinking about character development and descriptive language.

#### B. Graphic Organisers and Writing Development

Research on graphic organisers in writing instruction has generally shown positive effects across grade levels. A meta-analysis by Hebert et al. (2013) found that writing interventions incorporating graphic organisers demonstrated moderate to large effects on writing quality for elementary and secondary students.

Similarly, Graham and Perin's (2007) influential meta-analysis identified prewriting activities, including graphic organisers, as effective strategies for improving student writing.

Several studies have examined graphic organisers specifically for narrative writing components. Culham (2003) found that visual tools helped young writers identify and develop key traits in effective writing. Hawkins (2016) observed that character development graphic organisers enhanced fourth graders' abilities to create multidimensional characters in narrative writing. However, these studies typically addressed character development within narrative composition rather than focusing on character sketch writing.

#### C. Writing Instruction for Elementary Students

Research on elementary writing instruction emphasises the importance of explicit teaching, modelling, guided practice, and process-oriented approaches (Graham et al., 2012). Traditional writing instruction typically involves teacher demonstrations, sample texts, and gradual release of responsibility as students develop independence.

Studies by Troia and Graham (2003) and Harris et al. (2015) demonstrated the effectiveness of structured writing approaches that incorporate explicit strategy instruction. These approaches often include organisational supports, though the specific impact of graphic organisers versus other instructional elements is not always isolated in such research.

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#### D. Character Analysis in Elementary Writing

Character analysis represents an important element of literary response and narrative composition at the elementary level. Research by McKeown and Beck (2006) identified character analysis as a key component of reading comprehension that transfers to writing competency. Emig and King (1979) noted that students' abilities to analyse character traits and motivations correlate with their overall writing proficiency.

Limited research has specifically examined instructional approaches for teaching character sketch writing at the elementary level. Studies by Parsons and Colabucci (2008) and Roser et al. (2007) explored how elementary students develop character understanding through reading and discussion, but fewer studies have examined the writing instruction that translates this understanding into well-crafted character sketches.

#### E. Research Gap and Study Rationale

The literature review reveals several gaps that the present study addresses. First, while research supports graphic organisers for writing generally, fewer studies have isolated their effectiveness for specific writing genres or tasks. Second, character sketch writing, though an important elementary skill, has received limited attention in instructional research compared to other writing formats. Finally, classroom-based action research that examines practical implementation and outcomes provides valuable evidence for practitioners seeking effective, implementable strategies.

This study, therefore, contributes to educational research by examining the specific application of graphic organisers to character sketch writing, providing empirical evidence from an authentic classroom context, and measuring concrete learning outcomes through pre- and post-intervention assessments.

#### III. METHODOLOGY

#### A. Research Design

This study employed an action research design with pre-test and post-test measures to evaluate the effectiveness of graphic organisers on students' character sketch writing skills. This design was selected for its practical applicability in classroom settings and its alignment with teacher-led inquiry aimed at improving instructional practices.

The independent variable was the instructional approach (traditional methods versus graphic organiser intervention), while the dependent variable was students' character sketch writing performance as measured by assessment scores on a 10-point scale.

#### B. Participants

The study included 68 fifth-grade students from two separate classes designated as 5F and 5D during the 2024-2025 academic year.

Class 5F: 34 students (17 boys and 17 girls)

Class 5D: 34 students (18 boys and 16 girls)

Both classes represented typical age ranges for fifth grade (10-11 years old) and included students with varied writing abilities as demonstrated by pre-test scores ranging from 2.0 to 9.5 points on the assessment scale.

The study utilized convenience sampling as all students from the intact classrooms participated in both the pre-test and post-test assessments. Parental consent and student assent were obtained in accordance with institutional ethical guidelines for classroom-based research.

#### C. Instructional Intervention

The research study implemented identical instructional interventions in both 5F and 5D classes to ensure consistency of treatment and comparability of results.

#### 1) Traditional Method (Pre-Intervention)

Prior to implementing graphic organisers, students in both classes received character sketch writing instruction through traditional methods, which included:

- Teacher explanation and modelling of character sketch writing
- Reading and analysing sample character sketches from literature
- Whole-class discussion of character traits and descriptive language
- Independent practice with general writing prompts
- Teacher feedback on drafts

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#### 2) Graphic Organiser Intervention

The intervention consisted of a four-week instructional unit incorporating specially designed graphic organisers for character sketch writing in both classes. The graphic organisers included:

- Character Trait Web: A central circle for the character name surrounded by connected circles for identifying primary personality traits
- Evidence Collection Chart: A two-column organiser for listing traits and corresponding textual evidence or observed behaviours
- Physical/Personality/Actions Organiser: A three-section template prompting students to identify and describe physical attributes, personality traits, and significant actions
- Paragraph Planner: A sequential organiser guiding students from introduction to supporting details to conclusion

#### 3) The Intervention Followed this Sequence

- Week 1: Introduction to graphic organisers and modelling their use with familiar characters
- Week 2: Guided practice using graphic organisers with literary characters
- Week 3: Collaborative completion of graphic organisers in small groups
- Week 4: Independent application of graphic organisers to develop character sketches

#### D. Data Collection Instruments

### 1) Writing Assessment Rubric

A 10-point assessment rubric evaluated students' character sketch writing across five domains:

- Character trait identification (0-2 points)
- Supporting details and evidence (0-2 points)
- Organisation and structure (0-2 points)
- Descriptive language and vocabulary (0-2 points)
- Writing mechanics and grammar (0-2 points)

The same rubric was applied to both pre-test and post-test assessments across both classes to ensure measurement consistency.

#### 2) Assessment Tasks

- Pre-test: Students in both 5F and 5D classes wrote a character sketch based on a provided prompt without using graphic organisers, following traditional instruction.
- Post-test: Students in both classes wrote a character sketch of comparable complexity using the graphic organisers introduced during the intervention period.

To control for potential differences in task difficulty, both assessments involved writing about a fictional character with similar complexity and familiarity levels.

#### E. Data Analysis Procedures

The study employed quantitative analysis methods to examine changes in student performance across both classes, including:

- Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, ranges) for each class and combined data
- Paired t-test to determine statistical significance of score changes
- Effect size calculation to quantify the magnitude of the intervention effect
- Subgroup analysis to identify patterns based on initial performance levels
- Comparative analysis between the two classes to identify consistency in results

Pre-test scores established baseline performance following traditional instruction methods, while post-test scores measured performance after implementing the graphic organiser intervention. The statistical analysis focused on comparing these scores to determine whether significant improvement occurred in both classes.

#### IV. RESULTS

#### A. Overall Performance Change

Analysis of pre-test and post-test scores revealed notable improvement in students' character sketch writing performance following the graphic organiser intervention. Table 1 presents the individual student data collected during the study.



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## 1) Pre-test and Post-test Scores for Grade 5F Students (N=34)

Descriptive analysis of the data revealed the following statistics for the 5F class:

- Mean pre-test score: 6.01 (SD = 2.09)
- Mean post-test score: 7.60 (SD = 2.02)
- Mean change: +1.59 points (+26.5%)
- Range of improvement: -1.0 to +5.0 points

## 2) Pre-test and Post-test Scores for Grade 5D Students (N=34)

Descriptive analysis of the data revealed the following statistics for the 5D class:

- Mean pre-test score: 5.10 (SD = 1.47)
- Mean post-test score: 6.87 (SD = 1.80)
- Mean change: +1.77 points (+34.7%)
- Range of improvement: -0.5 to +5.0 points

#### B. Combined Analysis of Both Classes

When analysing the combined data from both classes (N=68), the following results emerged:

- Mean pre-test score: 5.56 (SD = 1.85)
- Mean post-test score: 7.23 (SD = 1.93)
- Mean change: +1.68 points (+30.2%)
- Range of improvement: -1.0 to +5.0 points

A paired t-test conducted on the combined data revealed a statistically significant improvement from pre-test to post-test scores (t(67) = 14.32, p < 0.001), with a large effect size (Cohen's d = 0.87).

#### C. Analysis by Initial Performance Level

To understand whether the graphic organiser intervention had differential effects based on students' initial writing abilities, participants were categorised into three performance groups based on pre-test scores:

- Low performers (scores 2.0-4.5): 17 students
- Medium performers (scores 5.0-6.5): 30 students
- High performers (scores 7.0-9.5): 21 students

Table 3: Mean Score Improvement by Initial Performance Level

Performance Level	N	Mean Pre-test	Mean Post-test	Mean Change	Percent Improvement
Low (2.0-4.5)	17	3.47	6.09	+2.62	+75.5%
Medium (5.0-6.5)	30	5.65	7.23	+1.58	+28.0%
High (7.0-9.5)	21	7.98	8.48	+0.50	+6.3%

Analysis revealed that students with lower initial scores demonstrated the greatest magnitude of improvement, although all performance groups showed positive gains on average. This finding suggests that the graphic organiser intervention may be particularly beneficial for struggling writers.

## D. Analysis by Assessment Components

Further analysis of assessment components revealed the areas where students showed greatest improvement. Table 4 presents the mean pre-test and post-test scores for each assessed component of character sketch writing across both classes.

Table 4: Mean Scores by Assessment Component (Scale 0-2 points per component)

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Component	Mean Pre-test	Mean Post-test	Mean Change			
Character trait identification	1.25	1.68	+0.43			
Supporting details/evidence	0.95	1.51	+0.56			
Organisation and structure	1.04	1.49	+0.45			
Descriptive language/vocabulary	1.14	1.35	+0.21			
Writing mechanics/grammar	1.18	1.20	+0.02			



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The largest improvements occurred in students' abilities to provide supporting details/evidence for character traits (+0.56) and in the organisation/structure of their character sketches (+0.45). These components directly align with the scaffolding provided by the graphic organisers, which emphasised evidence collection and structured organisation of ideas.

#### V. DISCUSSION

#### A. Interpretation of Findings

The results of this action research study provide compelling evidence for the effectiveness of graphic organisers in developing fifth-grade students' character sketch writing skills. The statistically significant improvement in writing performance following the graphic organiser intervention supports the research hypothesis that these visual tools enhance writing outcomes compared to traditional instructional methods.

#### 1) Several key findings merit Discussion

The substantial overall improvement across both classes (mean increase of 1.68 points, representing a 30.2% gain) demonstrates that graphic organisers provided meaningful instructional support for most students. This finding is particularly compelling given the consistency of results across two different classes (5F and 5D), suggesting that the effectiveness of graphic organisers is not limited to specific classroom dynamics or student groups. This aligns with previous research by Hebert et al. (2013) and Graham and Perin (2007), who found positive effects of prewriting organisational strategies on writing quality.

The differential impact across initial performance levels reveals that graphic organisers may be particularly beneficial for struggling writers. Students with lower pre-test scores showed dramatically higher percentage improvements (75.5%) compared to high-performing students (6.3%). This pattern suggests that visual scaffolding helps bridge developmental gaps by making abstract writing processes more concrete and accessible for students who find writing challenging. This finding corresponds with Vygotsky's (1978) concept of scaffolding within the zone of proximal development, where instructional supports enable students to accomplish tasks they could not complete independently. The component analysis reveals that graphic organisers had the strongest impact on the organisational aspects of writing, specifically, students' abilities to provide supporting evidence for character traits and to structure their writing coherently. This aligns with cognitive load theory (Sweller, 1988), suggesting that graphic organisers reduce the mental effort required for text organisation, allowing students to focus more attention on higher-order aspects of character analysis.

The consistent pattern of improvement across two different classes strengthens the validity of the findings, indicating that the positive effects were not isolated to a single classroom context or teaching style.

#### B. Connections to Previous Research

The findings align with and extend previous research on graphic organisers in writing instruction. The significant improvements in organisation and evidence provision support Culham's (2003) work on using visual tools to develop key writing traits. Similarly, the differential impact across performance levels corresponds with research by Harris et al. (2015), which found that struggling writers particularly benefit from explicit organisational strategies.

The study also extends research by Hawkins (2016) on character development tools by demonstrating their effectiveness specifically for character sketch writing, rather than character development within broader narrative composition. This contribution helps address the research gap identified regarding instructional approaches for specific writing genres at the elementary level.

#### C. Implications for Teaching Practice

Several practical implications for elementary writing instruction emerge from this study:

- 1) Integration of Graphic Organisers: Teachers should consider incorporating character analysis graphic organisers as regular components of writing instruction, particularly when teaching descriptive and analytical writing forms.
- 2) Differentiated Application: While all students benefited from graphic organisers, teachers might prioritise their use with struggling writers, who demonstrated the most substantial gains. Higher-performing students may require less scaffolding or more complex organisers that challenge them appropriately.
- 3) Focus on Evidence and Organisation: Since these components showed the greatest improvement, teachers should emphasise how graphic organisers help students gather evidence and organise ideas coherently—explicit instruction on transferring information from organisers to connected prose may enhance effectiveness.
- 4) Gradual Release of Support: The intervention's four-week progression from modelling to independent application aligns with best practices in scaffolded instruction. Teachers should implement similar gradual release approaches when introducing graphic organisers.



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5) Cross-Curricular Application: The success of graphic organisers for character sketch writing suggests potential benefits for other analytical writing tasks across the curriculum, including content-area writing that requires evidence-based description and analysis.

#### D. Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting this study's findings:

- 1) Absence of Control Group: The pre-test/post-test design does not provide a true experimental comparison with students who continued receiving only traditional instruction during the intervention period. Natural maturation and practice effects may account for some observed improvement.
- 2) Teacher Variables: While having the same intervention implemented across two classes strengthens the findings, there may be variations in implementation quality or teacher-specific factors that influenced results.
- 3) Assessment Context: The post-test occurred immediately following the intervention, without measuring long-term retention or transfer of skills to independent writing without graphic organisers.
- 4) Limited Assessment Scale: The 10-point assessment scale, while practical for classroom use, provides relatively coarse measurement that may not capture nuanced changes in writing quality.
- 5) Focus on Product vs. Process: The study evaluated final writing products rather than examining changes in students' writing processes or attitudes toward writing, which represent important additional dimensions of writing development.

#### VI. CONCLUSION

#### A. Summary of Key Findings

This action research study investigated the effectiveness of graphic organisers for developing character sketch writing skills among fifth-grade students. Through quantitative analysis of pre-test and post-test assessments across two classes (N=68), the study found that:

- 1) Students demonstrated statistically significant improvement in character sketch writing following the graphic organiser intervention, with an average score increase of 1.68 points (30.2%).
- 2) Lower-performing students showed the greatest relative gains (75.5% improvement), suggesting that graphic organisers provide particularly valuable scaffolding for struggling writers.
- 3) The greatest improvements occurred in students' abilities to provide supporting details/evidence for character traits and to organise their writing effectively—components directly supported by the structure of the graphic organisers.
- 4) The consistency of positive results across two different classes strengthens confidence in the effectiveness of the intervention. These findings support the research hypothesis that graphic organisers improve fifth-grade students' character sketch writing compared to traditional instructional methods.

#### B. Educational Significance

This study contributes to educational practice by providing empirical evidence for an instructional strategy that can enhance elementary students' analytical and descriptive writing skills. The findings suggest that visual organisational tools effectively bridge the gap between abstract character analysis and coherent written expression—a developmental challenge for many fifth-grade students. The differential impact across performance levels holds particular significance for inclusive classroom practice, as the intervention appears to provide the greatest benefit to students who struggle most with writing tasks. This suggests that graphic organisers may serve as an effective differentiation tool within heterogeneous classrooms.

#### C. Recommendations for Future Research

Several directions for future research would further develop the understanding of graphic organisers' effectiveness in elementary writing instruction:

- 1) Experimental Design: A controlled experimental study comparing students receiving graphic organiser instruction with those continuing traditional instruction would strengthen causal conclusions about effectiveness.
- 2) Long-term Effects: Longitudinal research examining whether improvements persist over time and transfer to independent writing without organisers would address questions about lasting impact.
- 3) Qualitative Components: Mixed-methods research incorporating student interviews, process observations, and attitude measures would provide deeper insight into how graphic organisers affect writing development beyond quantitative outcomes.



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- 4) Comparison of Organiser Types: Research comparing different graphic organiser designs for character analysis would help identify the most effective visual structures for supporting specific writing skills.
- 5) Cross-genre Application: Studies examining whether students transfer organisational strategies learned through graphic organisers to other writing genres would address questions about broader writing development.

#### D. Final Reflections

This action research study demonstrates the power of intentional instructional tools to enhance students' writing development. The significant improvements observed suggest that graphic organisers provide valuable cognitive scaffolding that helps fifth-grade students bridge concrete and abstract thinking processes in character analysis.

For classroom teachers, the findings offer practical evidence supporting the implementation of graphic organisers as regular components of writing instruction. For educational researchers, the study contributes to the growing body of evidence on effective writing instruction at the elementary level, while suggesting promising directions for future investigation.

The study ultimately reinforces the importance of providing appropriate structural support for developing writers, enabling them to organise their thinking visually before translating ideas into connected prose—a process that appears to significantly enhance the quality of their written expression.

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