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Effectiveness of Using Visuals in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

Abstract

This study explores the impact of visual aids on teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), highlighting how various visual tools enhance students' motivation, participation, comprehension, and language acquisition. Conducted with 7th-grade students, the research compares the performance of an experimental group—taught with visual aids—and a control group—taught with traditional methods. The results clearly show that visual aids significantly improve vocabulary retention and grammar comprehension. The study categorizes visual aids into non-projected 2D and 3D materials, projected media, and verbal visuals. Findings support that visuals help learners contextualize language, engage actively, and better internalize abstract concepts. Consequently, integrating visual resources creates a more dynamic, inclusive, and effective language learning environment. This study advocates for the increased use of visual teaching materials to address the needs of diverse learners and support communicative competence in EFL classrooms.

Keywords: *EFL classroom, visual aids, Non – Projected 2D, Non – Projected 3D, Projected 3D, Verbal visuals*

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Xarici dil kimi ingilis dilinin tədrisində vizual vasitələrin effektivliyi

Xülasə

Bu tədqiqat xarici dil kimi ingilis dilinin (EFL) tədrisində vizual vasitələrin təsirini araşdırır və müxtəlif vizual alətlərin tələbələrin motivasiyasını, iştirakını, mətnin mənimsənilməsini və dil öyrənməsini necə artırdığını vurğulayır. Tədqiqat 7-ci sinif şagirdləri ilə aparılmış və vizual vasitələrlə tədris olunan eksperimental qrupun nəticələri ənənəvi üsullarla tədris olunan nəzarət qrupu ilə müqayisə edilmişdir. Nəticələr göstərir ki, vizual vasitələr lüğət yaddaşını və qrammatika anlama səviyyəsini əhəmiyyətli dərəcədə yaxşılaşdırır. Tədqiqatda vizual vasitələr qeyri-proyeksiyalı 2D və 3D materiallara, proyeksiyalı media vasitələrinə və verbal (mətni əsaslı) vizual alətlərə bölünür. Tapıntılar vizual vasitələrin öyrənənlərə dili kontekstdə qavramağa, fəal şəkildə iştirak etməyə və abstrakt anlayışları daha yaxşı mənimsəməyə kömək etdiyini sübut edir. Nəticədə, vizual resursların tədrisə inteqrasiyası daha dinamik, inklüziv və effektiv dil öyrənmə mühiti yaradır. Bu tədqiqat müxtəlif öyrənənlərin ehtiyaclarını ödəmək və EFL dərslərində kommunikativ bacarıqları dəstəkləmək üçün vizual tədris vasitələrinin istifadəsinin artırılmasını tövsiyə edir.

Açar sözlər: *EFL sinfi, vizual vasitələr, Qeyri-proyeksiyalı 2D, Qeyri-proyeksiyalı 3D, Proyeksiyalı 3D, Verbal vizuallar*

Introduction

Over the years, the benefits related to the use of visual aids in the language lessons have been a topic of lively debate. Nowadays, one thing that cannot be denied that our students live in a media world, in which most of the information is provided by visual input, through different technological

devices. As scholars have always argued, in order to make the acquisition of the language more meaningful for the students, teachers must bring the real world into the classroom. Visual materials work as a powerful tool in this aspect, as far as they give teachers the opportunity to show the culture of the target language, the habits and the body language that lie behind the language transactions. All this makes students understand that the use of the target language has a purpose: the real purpose of real communication.

Visual aids have been used since the beginning of learning and teaching. Most early reviews were concerned with the meaning of visual aids. According to Gilbert Weaber and Elroy Bollinger's definition visual aids are "any specifically prepared drawing, illustration, model, motion picture, film strip, or other device that will expedite learning through the sense of vision" (Jesa, 2008).

Not exempt of defining visual aids, as M, Jesa claims that they "refer to graphs, maps, pictures etc. used as aids in learning" and these can be separable into four categories:

- NON-Projected 2D: wall board, roll-up board, picture, poster, chart, cartoon, cue sheet, flannel board, flash card;
- NON-Projected 3D: cut-out, model, mock-up, puppet, marionette, diorama, vocabulary wheel, keyboard, teaching machine;
- Projected 3D: slide, transparency sheet, film strip, microfilm, videocassette, CD;
- Verbal: text book, supplementary reader, workbook, magazine, document, duplicated materials, reference book, newspapers, and clippings (Bamford, 2003).

Visual learning aids have exceptional qualities that should be considered by the subject teachers while preparing them for specific topic. Visual learning aids such as pictures and real objects should be attractive and portable so that to encourage learners to participate fully during the learning process. Effective visual learning aids are capable of attracting attention, simplicity and sometimes familiarity especially for visual aids. This is due to the fact that, the presence of such physical qualities of visual learning aids provides knowledge acquisition and skills adaptation, hence the achievement of quality education to the students (Mannan, 2005).

Research

Instruction process takes place so that to fulfill certain specific goals and objectives. This could be attained by using different teaching methods, techniques together with several visual learning aids. Different types of teaching and learning processes demand different types of visual learning aids. Some are useful in teaching skills, presenting facts, showing relationship or changing behavior or attitudes, while others are more effective in giving back ground information summarizing a unit of work. Therefore, subject teachers select visual learning aids that would be the best aid in achievement the target goals. Only visual learning aids that would serve instruction purposes should be used. According to Arguel and Mtana's ideas on the essence of teaching and learning visual resources on quality education as they observed that, the quality of education was enhanced by the availability of relevant teaching visual learning aids (Jonson, 2007).

Visual learning aids are vital in ensuring that quality is addressed. Jonson conducted studies and observed that, effective learning is facilitated by the availability of teaching resources such as visual learning aids.

According to Herron, Hanley and Cole's research, it is indicated that listening comprehension is significantly facilitated by visual support in the form of descriptive pictures and visual organizers thanks to the richness of the context provided. Graphic images also help students to create relations amongst the words. According to Canning-Wilson "bringing out more detailed, knowledgeable, responsive, awareness to the object, situation or text being communicated". It is also pointed that the picture can help the student to work with more abstract thoughts and organizing skills through the use of logical structure. It is stated that in order to help the working memory process the information, the graphical representations are effective because their processing require fewer cognitive transformations (Canning-Wilson, 2001).

According to Bamford, it must be taken in to account that visual literacy is the key to obtain information, construct knowledge and build successful educational outcomes (Arguel, Mtana, 2012). As he asserts that this is due to the increase of the number of images in the world. Visual aids can be

a helpful tool in the language classroom as Mannan points out they “help the teacher to clarify, establish, correlate and coordinate accurate concepts, interpretations and appreciations, and enable him to make learning more concrete, effective, interesting, inspirational, meaningful and vivid” (Bala, 2015).

This study sought to find out the following questions:

- ❖ Do visuals take a role to facilitate foreign language learning?
- ❖ Do visual aids augment students’ motivation and performance in class activities?

Articipants

Preliminarily, in this study the participants were 13 pupils of the 7th “A” and 13 pupils of 7th “B” class, 2 EFL teachers: D. A. Abdurazzakova, N. D. Alimova, in total, the research encompasses 28 participants.

Design of the study

As the comparison is an essential point in experimental research two groups were taken in order to observe. There have been experimental lessons for 2 weeks and the same unit was taught to both groups. The classes 7th “A” and 7th “B” have been observed in order to analyze the efficiency of using visuals. In the class 7th “A”, the teacher was Naima Alimova and for the 7th “B” class Dilnoza Abdurazzakova. The 7th “A” class was selected as the “control group” and the 7th “B” as the “experimental group”. Classroom observation was carried out by using criteria and field notes regarding pupils’ behavior and attitude towards the activities (Scrivener, 2010).

Table 1. Observation tool for the research.

CRITERIA FOR OBSERVATION	
Class _____	Number of pupils _____
Date _____	Teacher _____
Theme: _____	Time: _____
Type of visual aids	
a) Non – Projected 2D (picture, poster, chart, wall board)	
b) Non - Projected 3D (model, mock-up, puppet, marionette)	
c) Projected 3D (slide, film strip, microfilm, videocassette)	
d) Verbal (workbook, magazine, document, newspapers)	
e) Mixed	
How do the used visuals impact on:	
❖ Pupils’ level of attention	
❖ The increase of participation	
❖ The comprehension of a new theme	
❖ Immediate answers to the new input (written and oral activities)	
❖ Other comments:	

After the observation period, tests and grammar exercises were given to both groups in order to compare their outcome of knowledge.

Data collection

The observation lasted two weeks. During this period, the Unit 2 “Your health” was taught with 7 lessons in which mainly parts of body and illnesses were given. For grammar The Present Perfect Tense was given. In the control group, the teacher used pupils’ textbooks to explain the themes. Teacher did not use other visual teaching aids. During the lessons the teacher taught new words orally,

she said the words and pupils repeated them in chorus. In all lessons that were observed in this class, the activities were given for either individual or pair work. Pupils rarely worked as a group. In these lessons, overall, pupils learned 60 words in this unit. Besides, the teacher taught grammar with the structures given in the book. Pupils had difficulties to understand The Present Perfect Tense, as this tense does not exist in the grammar of the Uzbek language. The teacher tried to explain this tense by writing some sentences on the blackboard. However, it was difficult for most pupils to write sentences while doing activities (Herron, Hanley, Cole, 1995).

In the next group the lessons were held as experimental lessons and the teacher used different types of visuals while teaching. In the experimental group, during the lessons students were sat forming a semi – circle and the teacher stood in the middle of it, walking through the classroom in order to write on the blackboard and check students’ performance of the activities. For teaching new vocabulary, on the first day, the teacher showed a short video on the projector in which the parts of body were described. The environment of the classroom changed when the video was introduced. There was a significant increase in the number of pupils participating in the discussion of the video. During viewing and post – viewing activities pupils showed to be more interested and participative. On the other days, the teacher distributed printed pictures to pupils. When it was time to consolidate, the teacher showed pictures on the projector and asked pupils what they were. These tools helped pupils to learn and memorize the words. While teaching grammar, the teacher used slides on which some situations for explaining Present Perfect Tense were given with pictures. It was easy for learners to understand that theme with the help of those slides.

In summary, it can be said that pupils’ level of attention and their participation increased gradually when these methods were used. Most of them became active participants while doing oral and written activities. The most important improvement that can be noticed was that shy and less – participative pupils felt really supported by the visuals.

Results and Discussion

The exam results for each group are demonstrated in the tables below.

As it is mentioned above, the test was given to pupils in order to check their comprehension of the theme. The results of both groups were given in the following table:

Table 2. Comparison of the results of the test.

№	Experimental group		Control group	
	Words (overall 60)	Percentage	Words (overall 60)	Percentage
1	55	91%	54	90%
2	45	75%	41	68%
3	50	83%	31	51%
4	58	96%	48	80%
5	48	80%	50	83%
6	54	90%	45	75%
7	57	95%	41	68%
8	50	83%	43	71%
9	49	81%	38	63%
10	40	66%	36	60%
11	52	86%	40	66%
12	37	61%	47	78%
13	49	81%	45	75%
Average	49	81%	43	71%

It is evident from the tables that in terms of vocabulary, the results of the “experimental group” is higher (with 81% on average) than the results of the “control group” (with 71% on average). In the

experimental group the lowest result was 61% with 37 words, while in the control group this was 51% with 31 words.

When it comes to the analysis of grammatical task, while completing the sentences, most of the learners of the experimental group did not have any difficulties, but in the control group difficulties were observed. The results are given in the following table:

Table 3. Results of testing grammar of both groups.

Sentences	Completed by: (number of pupils)	
	Experimental group	Control group
1	8	8
2	9	8
3	7	5
4	8	6
5	9	7
6	5	5
7	7	6
8	9	8
9	7	6
10	6	5
Average	8	6

It is obviously figured out from the tables that the experimental group showed better results in grammar task, too. The average number of sentences completed was 8 in experimental and 6 in the control group.

All the given data proved that when visual aids are used in teaching English as a foreign language, the lessons will be more efficient compared with the lessons in which visuals are not used. In addition to this, it was easier for teachers to teach pupils if they use more visuals, rather than explain with words or simple structures (Weaver, Bollinger, 1949).

Conclusion

In this globalization era, traditional teaching aids such as course books, dictionaries have no longer great effect on learners. They cannot satisfy the students' needs and excite them because of lacking variety of teaching. As the day goes on, educators attempt to discover various teaching approaches so as to find out the ways to engage the students to their courses. In consequence of these endeavors, some of them came to a mutual agreement that utilizing more visual teaching aids facilitate the acquisition of a foreign language and give the learners opportunity to experience real life situations in classroom atmosphere.

The results of the experiment carried out with the pupils of 7th "A" and 7th "B" clearly show the positive effects of including different visuals in the language classroom. With the change of the classroom dynamics, the students' behavior was changed as well. The data collected through observation during the lessons shows a clear increase of students' participation. Less participative students seemed to be more engaged and relax and it was reflected in their attitude, as they seemed more confident when speaking and interacting. The comparison of the results of the "experimental group" and the "control group" clearly showed that while teaching grammar or giving new vocabulary, utilizing visual teaching aids leads to better results. Visuals helped learners to memorize the words quickly and to remember when they are asked. Besides, there was a great role of visual aids when explaining grammar, they made easy to understand the theme.

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