USING VISUALS IN TEACHING ENGLISH

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Abstract: Visual aids serve as powerful tools in foreign language education, offering teachers an effective means to convey complex information, introduce variety in class activities, and engage students more deeply. The advantages of incorporating visuals in language instruction are manifold, encompassing attention retention, motivation, and improved information retention. This paper delves into the theoretical underpinnings and practical applications of utilizing visual aids in the English language classroom, shedding light on their significant contribution to the learning process.

Keywords: Visual materials, paraphernalia, learning styles, direct approach, language acquisition, mental models, auditory and visual input

ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЕ ВИЗУАЛЬНЫХ СРЕДСТВ ПРИ ОБУЧЕНИИ АНГЛИЙСКОМУ ЯЗЫКУ

Аннотация: Наглядные пособия служат мощным инструментом в обучении иностранному языку, предлагая учителям эффективные средства передачи сложной информации, внесения разнообразия в классную деятельность и более глубокого вовлечения учащихся. Преимущества использования визуальных средств в обучении языку многочисленны, включая удержание внимания, мотивацию и улучшение удержания информации. В этой статье рассматриваются теоретические основы и практическое применение использования наглядных пособий на уроках английского языка, проливая свет на их значительный вклад в процесс обучения.

Ключевые слова: визуальные материалы, принадлежности, стили обучения, прямой подход, овладение языком, ментальные модели, слуховой и визуальный ввод

INTRODUCTION

Young learners tend to have short attention spans and a lot of physical energy. In addition, children are very much linked to their surroundings and are more interested in the physical and the tangible. As Scott and Yureberg (1990,2) describe. "Their own understanding comes through hands and eyes and ears. The physical world is dominant at all times".

One way to capture their attention and keep them engaged in activities is to supplement the activities with lots of brightly colored visuals, toys, puppets, or objects to match the ones used in the stories that you tell or songs that you sing. These can also help make the language comprehensible and can be used for follow - up activities, such as retelling stories of guessing games. Although it may take a lot of preparation time to make colorful pictures and puppets or to collect toys and objects, it is worth the effort if you can reuse them in future classes. Try to make the visuals on thick paper or laminate them whenever possible for future use. A great way to build your resources is to create a "Visuals and Realia Bank" with other teachers at your school by collecting toys, puppets, pictures, maps, calendars, and other paraphernalia and saving them for use in each other's classes. Included with the concept of visuals are gestures, which are very effective for students to gain understanding of language. In addition, tapping into children's physical energy is always recommendable, so any time movement around the classroom or even outside can be used with a song, story, game, or activity, do it! James Asher's (1977) method,

Total Physical Response (TPR), where children listen and physically respond to a series of instructions from the teacher, is a very popular method among teachers of young learners.

This popular method can be used as a technique with storytelling and with songs that teach language related to any kind of movement or physical action. Children have fun with movement, and the more fun for students, the better they will remember the language learned.

Theoretical background. Over the years, the benefits related to the use of visual aids in the language classroom have been a topic of lively debate. Nowadays, one thing that cannot be denied is 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.

A major aim of the teachers is to make the input comprehensible for the students, trying to use the target language as much as possible during the lesson, avoiding direct translations and extra explanations in the mother tongue. The visual materials support them in that matter, as they serve as metal scaffolds for the students (Carney and Levin, 2002) and help teachers to correlate and coordinate accurate concepts making the learning more concrete (Mannan 2005, p.108) . Pictures and videos can serve as a connection between the mother tongue and English, so direct translations are not needed (Feuntein 1995). This support also allows the teacher to skip excessive explanations and translations and help them to save time (Brinton,2001). It is important to mention that visual materials can create a harmony between the students and the instructional methodology and materials used, as Oxford (2001) points out. In our classrooms we will have to face a wide variety of learning styles, such as visual learners, who can benefit largely of the visual aids, as they feel confused when following oral instructions and conversations. But they are not the only kind of learners helped by visual aids, kinesthetic and tactile learners enjoy working with tangible objects, collages and flashcards too' (Oxford, 2001, p 105). If the students feel comfortable with the materials and the methodology, they are expected to perform well, feel confident and experience low anxiety. Videos, for example, help students in gaining confidence as they repeat and imitate real models using the target language. Therefore, students are expected to be more participative and feel more motivated.

Visuals have been an important component of the language classes over the years. To be exact, the use of visuals aids for presenting, training, and teaching languages has been around since the 1920s – 1930s, consisting mainly of film strips, pictures, slides and pass-around objects. They have been considered a useful tool for teachers in almost every trend of second language teaching. Such was an impact of visual materials that several universities have even created catalogues of visual aids that trace the history of using visual literacy and visual education.

In continuation, we are providing a brief overview on the use of visual aids throughout the history of the language teaching. Probably, the Direct Approach was the first one to give importance to the use of visuals in the language classroom. This teaching method, which became popular at the 20s -30s of the last century, enhanced the use of the target language. Teachers used direct reference to objects or concepts in order to avoid the mother tongue. The use of tape recordings and picture slides gained special importance in the 1950s -1960s with the rise of the

Audio-lingual method in the USA. Based on Skinner´s behaviorist theory, it claimed to provide students´ with best models to imitate native speakers.

The Oral-Situational Approach, dominating in Britain in the middle of the last century, insisted on learning language situationally. Concrete objects, pictures, realia, charts and flashcards were widely used in the classroom to promote real life contexts.

The importance of visual material in the process of language acquisition was researched by scholars belonging to the Cognitive approach. Some of the theories that these scholars have developed are related to the importance of the input, dual-coding theory and image schema theory, which are deeply linked with the visual and experimental relationship of the human being with the world. Cognitivists allege that second language acquisition can be better understood by focusing on how the human brain processes and learns new information (Mitchell and Myles 2004). It is assumed that the meaning constructed through the language is not independent module of the mind, but it reflects all of the human beings' experiences (Geeraerts, 2006). Linguistic meaning is based on usage and experience, and therefore students should be place in an environment that trigger their experiences and let them use the language for real purposes as many times as possible. Visuals can support the input that the student receives. In the cognitive approach to second language learning, a lot of prominence is given to the access to the target language input. Fotos also states that the input the students receive in the classroom can be manipulated in order to make it easier to understand, fitting their needs and level. She defends her position by arguing that teachers have been doing it over the years, with different strategies such as simplifying the grammar activities or physically highlighting the important points of a particular topic (grammar structures or vocabulary) in the presentations or in the prints that they hand to them (Fotos, 2000).

Visuals in language acquisition. The incorporation of visuals in foreign language acquisition is a strategy that significantly enhances the learning process. Visual aids play a pivotal role in various aspects of language acquisition:

Vocabulary Acquisition: Visual aids, such as flashcards, pictures, or videos, help learners associate words with their corresponding images. This association reinforces vocabulary retention by creating mental connections between the visual representation and the word or concept, making it easier for learners to recall and understand new vocabulary.

Grammar and Sentence Structure: Visual aids can assist in explaining grammar rules and sentence structures. Diagrams, charts, and visual representations of sentence patterns help learners grasp the rules intuitively, making complex grammar concepts more accessible and comprehensible.

Cultural Context and Contextual Learning: Visuals offer a window into the cultural context associated with the language being learned. Images, videos, or cultural artifacts help learners understand the cultural nuances embedded within the language. This contextual understanding fosters a deeper connection to the language and encourages cultural appreciation.

Enhanced Comprehension: Complex ideas or abstract concepts in language learning can be simplified and made more understandable through visual representations. Visual aids aid in comprehension by providing a concrete and tangible representation of abstract linguistic elements, making it easier for learners to grasp and internalize the concepts.

Motivation and Engagement: Visual materials often captivate learners' attention and interest, making the learning process more engaging and enjoyable. Interactive visual tools, such as educational apps, language learning software with visual components, or multimedia resources, motivate learners to actively participate in language acquisition activities.

Multimodal Learning Experience: Integrating visuals into language learning creates a multimodal learning experience that caters to various learning styles. Learners with different preferences (visual, auditory, kinesthetic) can benefit from the incorporation of visuals, leading to a more inclusive learning environment.

Real-World Application: Visual aids often simulate real-life scenarios, enabling learners to practice language skills in context. For instance, videos depicting daily activities or authentic conversations provide learners with practical exposure to the language, enhancing their communicative abilities.

In essence, visual aids serve as a catalyst for effective foreign language acquisition by facilitating comprehension, retention, cultural understanding, and motivation. They offer a versatile and dynamic approach that accommodates diverse learning needs and fosters a holistic learning experience.

Visuals in language classroom. Most of the language teachers seem to agree that the use of visuals can enhance language teaching. As they help teachers to bring the real world into the classroom, they make learning more meaningful and more exciting (Brinton, 2000). According to Bamford (2003), it must be taken into account that visual literacy is the key to obtain information, construct knowledge and build successful educational outcomes. He asserts that this is due to the increase of the number of images in the world (as cited in Arif and Hashim, 2009). It is important to point that students bring to the classroom their own background, that nowadays is associated with images provided by mass media, videogames etc. Santas reflects on how teachers ask students to think without any of this help, what seems to require convincing them to give up what they have experienced in their lives.

Visual aids can be a helpful tool in the language classroom as Mannan (2005) 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' (p.108). Visual material or anything use to help the student see an immediate meaning in the language may benefit the student and the teacher by clarifying the message, if the visuals enhance or supplement the language point, as Canning-Wilson (2000) indicates in her work. These advantages suggest that visuals can help make a task or situation more authentic (Canning-Wilson, 1998).

Researchers as Kemp and Dayton (1985) claim that visuals aid in motivation and maintaining attention by adding variety and making the lesson more interesting (as cited in Bradshaw, 2003). Watkins and Brobaker have collected in their paper several studies from different researches that conclude that visuals clarify and enhance students learning, and that this information is recognized and remembered for longer durations than verbal information alone.

Early researchers such as Adam and Chambers (1962) or Harber and Myers (1982) seem to agree with the idea that the memory for picture-word combination is superior to memory for words alone or pictures alone (Petterson, 2004). Branch and Boom explains that memory for pictures is superior to memory for words and this effect has been called the Pictorical Superiority Effect (as cited in Petterson, 2004). More recent researches on visuals and words have shown that memory for visual tends to be better than memory for words (Clark and Lyons, 2004).

Some other researches as Barry (1998) has claimed that persuasion tend to be accomplished in both children and adolescents almost exclusively through imagery, and that those images and visuals speak directly to us in the same way experience does: holistically and emotionally. Taking this into account Piaget and Inhelder (2000) states that young students have little knowledge of the

living world and developing conceptions. Therefore, they need more visual information to represent their thoughts (as cited in Arif and Hashim, 2009). Moriarty (1994) also claims that human beings develop their visual language skills before the verbal language development and severs as the foundation for the last one. This is a possible explanation for the need of pictorial information rather than textual among young students (Arif and Hashing 2009). Paivio (2009) had already explained this with his theory based on the idea that cognitive growth is stimulated by the balance between verbal and visual experiences in the early stages of learning. Arif and Hashim (2006) own research proves that pictures gained better attention than words, and among young learners, pictures became the main clue in interpreting the meaning of the words. Research on effectiveness of the visuals used in the learning environment shows that they can improve learning (Anglin, Vaez and Cunningham, 2004). Visuals can help arising the readers interest, curiosity and motivation (Mayer and Moreno, 1998). Fang agrees with these benefits and adds others such as promoting creativity, serving as mental scaffolding and fostering aesthetic appreciation (as cited in Carney and Levin,2002).

Studies carried out by Mukherjee and Roy (2003) have found that the use of visual aids to contextualized spoken speech it's a great help for students, given that they can understand 30% more than without the visual support. Following this path, Canning Wilson (2000) researches suggest that visuals can be used to enhance the meaning of the message conveyed by the speakers thanks to the paralinguistic cues. Another important thing to note is that visuals may help in order to build mental models, and communicate relationships among content objects in a more efficient way than can words alone (Clark and Lyons, 2004). According to Canning-Wilson (1997) the importance of the visual aids is highlighted when focusing on the way language is processed. Clark and Lyons (2004) explain that in the process of learning two different types of memories are involved: working memory and long-term memory. The new information is stored in the working memory which is claimed to be the center of active mental work, including the learning. When the visual and phonetic information is received then it is organized to form a cohesive idea. Finally, this idea must be integrated with active prior knowledge from long term memory. As it is seen, the two memories work together in complementary ways, to form what is called an updated mental model that will be stored in long-term memory, where it lasts indefinitely (Clark and Lyons, 2004). The virtual capacity of the working memory is affected by how much related the knowledge of the long-term memory is with the domain studied. The more it is related, the more is the virtual capacity.

Taking into account that in a learning environment this related knowledge may not be too much, cognitive overload can take place if the working memory cannot process all the new information during learning. In order to avoid this cognitive overload, the two subcomponent of the working memory should be used in their best way. One of these subcomponents is specialized in visual input and the other one in auditory input. For example, if a graphic is explained by words presented in audio, learning the new information is better than if the words are presented in text (Clark and Lyons, 2004, p. chapter 6). The mental models that have been mentioned before are the schemas stored in the long-term memory and are the basis of thinking, and visuals are claimed to help building them.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the incorporation of visual aids as an integral part of the teaching-learning process yields significant benefits for both educators and students. When carefully chosen and thoughtfully designed, visual aids serve as catalysts for student engagement, motivation, and

focused participation in classroom activities. The integration of technology further amplifies the effectiveness of visual aids, enabling teachers to present concepts in a manner closely aligned with real-life scenarios. This not only captures students' attention but also fosters a deeper understanding of the subject matter. As a result, the acquisition and learning of students improve, and classes become more attractive and interactive, creating an environment conducive to effective education.

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