THE ROLE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF VISUAL MATERIALS IN TEACHING ENGLISH IN EFL SETTINGS

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Abstract. The use of visual materials in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms has become increasingly prominent as educators seek more effective, engaging and inclusive teaching methods. This paper will examine the meanings of different terms related to the use of visual materials and reviews effective visual materials in EFL contexts, focusing on their contribution to vocabulary development, comprehension, motivation, and cultural understanding. It also outlines literature review and a suggested methodology for future empirical research on the impact of visual aids on English language acquisition. The review highlights the potential of visuals to enrich language instruction and improve learning outcomes when integrated strategically.

Key words: visual aids, EFL (English as a Foreign language), pictures, dynamic visuals, digital and multimedia visuals, language acquisition, visual literacy.

Annotatsiya. Ingliz tili o‘qituvchilarining yanada samarali, qiziqarli va inklyuziv o‘qitish usullarini izlashlari hamda bugungi yosh avlodning o‘ta qiziquvchan va talabchan ekanligi ingliz tili chet tili sifatida o‘qitiladigan sinflarda vizual materiallardan foydalanishni tobora dolzarb masalaga aylanishiga sabab bo‘lmoqda. Ushbu maqolada vizual materiallardan foydalanishga oid turli atamalar mazmuni tahlil qilinadi hamda EFL kontekstiga doir samarali vizual materiallar ko‘rib chiqiladi. Xususan, ularning so‘z boyligini rivojlantirish, tushunishni yaxshilash, motivatsiyani oshirish va madaniy tushunchani shakllantirishdagi hissasiga e’tibor qaratiladi. Shuningdek, ingliz tilini o‘rganishda visual vositalarning ta’sirini o‘rganishga qaratilgan kelgusidagi empirik tadqiqotlar uchun tavsiya etilgan metodologiya bayon etiladi. Ko‘rib chiqilgan adabiyotlar vizual vositalarni strategik tarzda qo‘llash orqali til o‘qitishni boyitish va o‘quv natijalarini yaxshilash imkoniyatini ta’kidlaydi.

Kalit so‘zlar: vizual materiallar, EFL (ingliz tili chet tili sifatida), rasmlar, dinamik (harakatdagi) vizual materiallar, raqamli va multimediali vizual materiallar, til o‘zlashtirish, vizual savodxonlik.

Аннотация. Использование визуальных материалов на уроках английского языка как иностранного (EFL) становится всё более актуальным, поскольку преподаватели стремятся к более эффективным, увлекательным и инклюзивным методам обучения. В данной работе рассматриваются значения различных терминов, связанных с использованием визуальных

ISSN 3030-3907

материалов, а также проводится обзор эффективных в контексте EFL, с акцентом на их вклад в развитие словарного запаса, понимания, мотивации и культурного восприятия. Кроме того, предлагается методология для будущих эмпирических исследований влияния визуальных средств на овладение английским языком. Обзор подчеркивает потенциал визуальных материалов обогащать языковое обучение и повышать его эффективность при их стратегической интеграции.

Ключевые слова: наглядные пособия, EFL (английский как иностранный язык), изображения, динамические визуальные материалы, цифровые и мультимедийные визуальные материалы, усвоение языка, **визуальная грамотность.**

Introduction

In recent decades, visual literacy has gained recognition as a component of language learning. As Mayer [1] argues, “People can learn more deeply from words and pictures than from words alone”. This principle, rooted in the cognitive theory of multimedia learning, emphasizes the importance of integrating visual elements with textual or verbal information to enhance comprehension and retention. In EFL (English as a Foreign language) settings, where learners often have limited exposure to authentic English input, visual materials provide valuable scaffolding that supports both understanding and communication. They offer contextual clues, illustrate abstract concepts, and bridge linguistic gaps by making content more relatable and accessible. Moreover, visual resources such as images, diagrams, infographics, and videos can stimulate learners’ interest and engagement, promoting active participation and critical thinking. As a result, incorporating visual literacy into language instruction not only aids in comprehension but also foster more inclusive and multimodal learning environment that accommodates diverse learning styles and proficiencies.

Key concepts of EFL:

- context: EFL learners typically study English in their home countries (a student in Uzbekistan studying English at school);
- **goal**: the focus is often on academic, professional, or travel-related purposes rather than day-to-day communication;
- **environment**: learners have limited exposure to English outside the classroom;
- **teaching methods**: emphasis is often placed on grammar, vocabulary, reading, and writing, with less natural exposure to speaking and listening.

As schools, institutes, universities, language centers and online platforms are considered as common EFL settings, EFL pedagogy evolves to meet the needs of diverse learners. That’s why the integration of visual materials has become a widely

ISSN 3030-3907

recommended practice. This paper offers an overview of effective visual materials in EFL teaching and proposes a research methodology for further investigation into their effectiveness.

Literature review. Numerous scholars studied visual literacy and emphasized the importance of visual aids in second language acquisition. "An early and helpful guide for teachers attempting visual literacy activities is Catherine M. Williams's "Learning from pictures" [2]. Her book is valuable because there are given number of practical ways to make the classroom environment more engaging and lively. Visuals can bridge the gap between unfamiliar English words and learners existing knowledge by providing context and concrete references. According to Vale and Feunteun, "Visual aids are significant for those students who want to learn English as a second language or another language" [3]. According to these authors, a teacher can use visual aids to:

- support understanding when the children are listening;
- put across the meaning of vocabulary;
- prompt and support reading;
- provide a topic or focus to prompt speaking or writing;
- provide a visual link between L1 and English or another language;
- provide support and motivation for early reading and writing in English;
- provide ways to have better communication.

Hyerle, in his book, states about his studies on visual tools: "During my later research on Thinking maps, I became intrigued by different types of visual materials, finally writing two comprehensive books on the theory, practice and degree of effectiveness of these tools. I discovered through research, my own teaching and experiences that each of these types of visual tools offered useful ways of visually accessing knowledge" [4]. According to Hyerle "visuals are not only powerful retention aids but also serve to increase understanding. The students can benefit from using visual materials to transform thoughts into images; this is often viewed as a "test of true understanding" [5].

While studying visual tools we can see the term "Visual literacy". The term is usually credited to John Debes, co-founder of the International Visual Literacy Association. In 1969, Debes offered a tentative definition of the concept: "Visual literacy refers to a group of vision competencies a human being develop by seeing and the same time having and integrating other sensory experiences. Development of these competencies is fundamental to normal human learning" [6]. According to Fransecky and Debes: "Students in visual literacy projects suddenly sense a new power, a new language facility that they have not felt with words" [7]. As M. Avgerinou and J. Ericson cited in "A review of the concept of Visual Literacy":

ISSN 3030-3907

Sless argues: “If Visual Literacy is to be rescued as a term (and I think it may still have some life in it), we need to interpret it more generously … Visual literacy is any sustained activity that treats visual material and its uses as worthy of intelligent consideration. This is the heart of the matter and the reason for retaining the metaphor” [8].

Visual aid, according to Cambridge dictionary, something that you are shown, such as a picture, film, or map, in order to help you understand or remember information. Visual aids “may stimulate the imagination and encourage fuller student participation” [9]. “Other visual aids are the “picture file” which can be used to give interesting meaningful practice in the sounds, structures and vocabulary of the foreign language. The file should contain three kinds of pictures, first there are pictures of individual people and of individual objects; second, there are pictures of situations in which people are doing something and third a series pictures (six to ten) on one chart” [10].

As it is necessary to be kept integrating visual aids into teaching we should distinguish the different types of visual aids. Visual materials are diverse in form and function. They can be categorized based on how they are used and the medium they utilize. Below we will discuss main types of visual materials.

1. Static visuals (still images) - non-moving images used to support vocabulary learning, grammar explanations, or to prompt discussion and writing:

•pictures and photographs are used for vocabulary presentation, cultural context, describing different topics.

- Flashcards are used in drills, memory games, vocabulary practice.



1-picture. Flashcards.

ISSN 3030-3907

- drawings and illustrations are used for storytelling, grammar explanation, creative writing prompts.

•charts and diagrams are used for explaining grammar rules, organizing ideas, comparing tenses or sentence structures.

•posters and wall charts are used in classroom decoration and reference tools.



2-picture. Charts.

2. Dynamic visuals - this type of visuals include motion and are particularly useful for showing language in context. Furthermore, they foster student engagement and attention:

- videos and films are used in listening practice, cultural exposure, pronunciation modeling, and discussion.
- animations are used for teaching grammar rules or vocabulary in a more engaging, accessible way.
- whiteboards and slideshows are used in presentations, guided exercises.

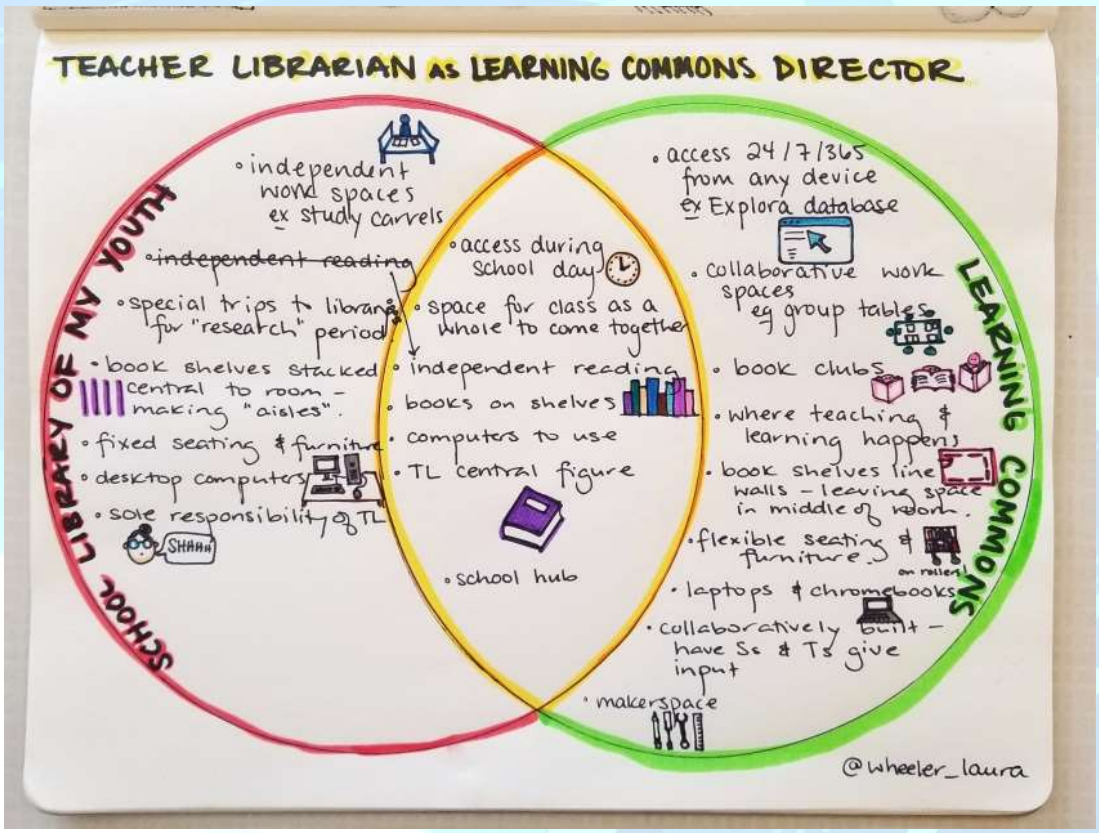
3. Digital and multimedia visuals - with the integration of technology, digital tools offer rich visual experiences:

- infographics are used for summarizing complex information like grammar rules or comparing topics.
- educational apps and games are used for engaging learners in interactive vocabulary or grammar practice.

4. Graphic organizers - they are structured visuals that help organize thoughts, language and speech:

- mind maps are used for brainstorming ideas, vocabulary expansion.
- Venn diagrams are used for comparing and contrasting topics organizing opinions.
- timelines are used in teaching narrative tenses, historical events or life stories.

ISSN 3030-3907



3-picture. Venn diagrams

Suggested methodology for future research. While the benefits of visual materials are well documented in theory, further empirical research is needed to assess their practical impact in specific educational contexts. A mixed-methods approach could be used to evaluate the effectiveness of visual materials in EFL instruction.

Research design. A quasi-experimental design involving two groups (control and experimental) could be implemented:

- control group receives traditional text based instruction;
- experimental group receives instruction enhanced with visual materials (images, infographics, videos).

Participants. The study could involve EFL learners at the secondary or tertiary level, or students of pedagogical institutions, ideally in a setting where English is taught as a foreign language and exposure outside the classroom is limited.

Instruments:

- pre-tests and post-tests on vocabulary, reading comprehension and grammar;
- classroom tracks to evaluate student engagement;
- surveys or interviews with students and teachers to collect qualitative feedback.

Discussion. Citing pedagogical, cognitive, and motivational advantages, the literature strongly supports the integration of visual aids in EFL classrooms.

ISSN 3030-3907

Visuals can simplify abstract concepts, enhance memory retention, and provide learners with contextual clues that support meaning-making and comprehension. From a cognitive perspective, visual stimuli help activate prior knowledge and encourage dual coding—processing information both linguistically and visually—which enhances learning efficiency. Motivationally, engaging visuals often stimulate curiosity, sustain attention, and foster a more interactive and enjoyable classroom experience.

However, despite this strong theoretical foundation, actual implementation of visual materials in classrooms reveals a complex and varied picture. Factors such as curriculum rigidity, teacher training, institutional support, and access to resources significantly influence how and to what extent visual aids are used. In many contexts, teachers may lack the training to effectively select, adapt, or integrate visuals into pedagogical routines, or they may be constrained by limited access to appropriate technological tools and materials.

The methodology proposed in this study lays the groundwork for empirical investigations into how different types of visuals affect learning outcomes across diverse educational settings. Such research is essential for understanding not only the general benefits of visual aids, but also the nuanced ways in which learners interact with them based on age, language proficiency, and cultural context. For instance, images that are engaging and relevant to older learners may not be suitable for young children, and visuals that are culturally specific may require adaptation to avoid misinterpretation or alienation.

Furthermore, the role of the teacher in mediating visual materials is crucial. Visuals should not function as passive decorations or mere comprehension tools; rather, they must be integrated into tasks that promote interaction, inquiry, and language use. To achieve this, educators must strike a balance between providing visual input and encouraging active language production through speaking, writing, and collaborative learning. Visuals should be used not just to present information, but to prompt dialogue, critical thinking, and real-world application of language skills.

Ultimately, while visual aids present promising opportunities for enriching EFL instruction, their effectiveness hinges on thoughtful integration, pedagogical planning, and sensitivity to learners' needs. Continued research and reflective practice are necessary to refine how visual materials can best be utilized to support communicative, learner-centered language education.

Conclusion. In EFL environments, visual aids and materials have significant potential to enhance the efficacy of English language instruction. As the literature demonstrates, they support a range of pedagogical goals, including improved

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comprehension, greater learner engagement, and the promotion of inclusive and differentiated instruction. Visuals—such as images, diagrams, videos, and infographics—can help bridge linguistic gaps, stimulate learner interest, and facilitate multimodal learning that appeals to diverse cognitive styles and language proficiencies.

Moreover, visual materials serve as powerful tools for contextualizing meaning, supporting vocabulary acquisition, and fostering critical thinking. Their integration into language instruction aligns with contemporary shifts toward learner-centered and communicative approaches in EFL teaching. However, while the theoretical basis for using visual aids is well established, there remains a noticeable gap in empirical research that investigates their practical impact in real-world classroom contexts, particularly across varying educational levels, cultural settings, and learner needs.

The suggested methodology in this study offers a robust framework for addressing this gap by outlining practical strategies for data collection, classroom observation, and learner assessment. By conducting further research based on this approach, educators and scholars can gain deeper insights into the effectiveness of visual materials, identify best practices, and adapt instructional strategies to maximize learning outcomes. Ultimately, such research has the potential to inform curriculum development, enhance teacher training programs, and contribute to the creation of more dynamic and accessible EFL learning environments.

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ISSN 3030-3907