



USING VISUAL AIDS AS AUTHENTIC MATERIAL IN ESL CLASSROOMS

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ABSTRACT

The increasingly growing importance and use of English language has opened up doors of the continents and widened the horizons for ample of opportunities. Learning the language has become obvious for aspiring minds. The advent and advancement of technology has made it possible to transform English language lab into a mini theatre where visual clips or films can be shown. The soothing impact of visual aids is now recognized all over the world. The idea of using visual aids in ESL classroom is a kind of challenge to educate learners as it demands attention and interest. It is a new concept and is highly required keeping in mind the learners. Using visual aids can get unflinching attention and interest of the learners. Professional programs like Engineering, BBA, B.Sc etc. do offer some practical aspects in English language learning where students get a chance of entering into Language labs. This article is an effort that language learning becomes fun and an activity to look forward to if visual aids like clips, episodes, documentaries, films are part of the language learning process. Visual aids demand complete attention. It may also enhance imagination of the students and that may lead to skills like critical thinking, debates and Group Discussions. Language learning requires listening to the language attentively. If one watches a film his speaking, writing and listening skills are cultivated. The potential of visual aids to educate must be recognized in teaching-learning English.

Key words: Visual aids, ESL Classroom, authentic material, English lab, language activities.

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INTRODUCTION

English has been a global language. Wikipedia mentions that there were fifty eight sovereign states and twenty one non-sovereign ones where English was an official language in 2014. Many country subdivisions have declared English an official language at the local or regional level. Today's younger generation of learners are more familiar

with the visual interface of multimedia and internet technologies. The importance and usefulness of using visual learning aids in the classrooms is becoming general understood and commonplace in education. Nowadays, trend is more toward communicative language teaching than traditional grammar teaching. Previously, language learning was meant learning to learn the grammar and read

the literature of the language. No emphasis was given to either listening to the language or using the visual aids. Now the necessity of learning a new language has become a communicative need. People learn another language after their mother tongue for maintaining communication with the people of other community speaking a different language. Same way, majority lot in the world have been found interested in learning English as English has become the global language. As a result, English language is learnt as a means of communication, not as a subject. That is why with the changed necessity of learning the language, the teaching methods and approaches have also been adapted. Language teachers are trying to bring new innovations in their teaching to make their language teaching effective. There is no age limit if one wishes to learn something. Although, teaching the language is not an easy task and it needs to be interesting enough to remove the anxiety of the learners. Therefore, language teachers tend to adapt various techniques to teach language more effectively and more interestingly. With the rapid growth and availability of technology, language teachers have been integrating different supplementary aids along with the text books to teach the language. Different electronic boards, overhead transparency, multimedia projector, computer, audio and video equipment have been in great demand and have lessened the burden of the language teachers. Teaching has been transformed into easier and dynamic one.

Scope and Definition

As the great philosopher Aristotle long ago apprehended that thinking is impossible without image. Visual aids are a great tool for seeing and understanding. Visual aids allow learners the time they need to process what they are being asked to do. They do not disappear into thin air to be forgotten as spoken words or hand gestures do. Visual aids can also be sequenced to breakdown and learn a skill bit by bit. The traditional instructional methodology of learning English was learning through grammar. Chalk and talk or white board were used to explain rules of word stress and rhythm, projector to put up rules of intonation, and students would take the rules down. Learners

would copy down exercises of grammar and work on them at leisure. This methodology could not allow to inculcate communication skills. It has been then realized that in order to cater for the ever increasing need to enhance and sharpen the communication skills and soft skills of learners, theory alone was not enough. Learners need to practice to be able to use English in a variety of situations and that a language lab has turn out to be the need of the hour.

Teachers invariably use audio-visual aids in teaching listening, speaking, reading and writing skills of a language to make it interesting and enjoyable and so is becoming popular nowadays among the language teachers. It attracts the learners' attention immediately. It motivates them to pay more attention in the class and they can relate their learning with their real life (Çakir, 2006, pp.67). The use of audio-visual aids seems to be benefited for both the teachers and the learners. The use of Audio-visual aids facilitate language skills best and classroom becomes dynamic.

Audio materials mean the texts that can be heard and that is recorded in tape, CD or DVD player. Any recorded dialogue, speech, song, music can be audio materials for language classroom. Visual aids can be seen like pictures, poster, graphics, videos, charts, flash cards The use of visual aids such as pictures, posters, postcards, word calendars, charts, graphic organizers, picture books, television, videos, clips, short films, documentaries and computers can help Learners easily understand and realize the main points that they have learned in the classroom.

Audio-visual aids in ESL Classrooms:

The approach in learning ESL-English as a second language has been now that of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). It is one of the popular language teaching approaches in the recent time. It was introduced in the early 1980s. The approach aimed at the practical use of language in everyday communication. In this approach, the use of authentic materials is highly emphasized. Teachers are encouraged to use different audio-visual aids such as pictures and videos in a classroom to make the class interesting and authentic. The use of authentic materials allowed the class activities that are related to real communication. As a result, the learners are shown different visual aids like map for

giving direction, picture for describing any place or person and so on. Kleinman and Dwyer (1999) examined the effects of specific visual skills in facilitating learning. Their findings indicate that the use of color graphics in instructional modules as opposed to black and white graphics promotes better achievement in the learning of concepts.

Visual medium is the most powerful medium to propagate ideas and influence minds. Visual aids like movies in particular exercise an appeal on the collective imagination of youth across countries and cultures. Visual aids remain the same and allow for equal rehearsal and consistent memory pathways to be created. It won't be an exaggeration to claim that Indian movies bind the people of India and Pakistan at an emotional level better than bilateral ties. With the rehearsal and memory of sequenced activities, learning and understanding become easier. It also increases confidence and self-esteem. Visual aids should be used in conjunction with other forms of communication such as speech, signing and concrete experiences. Learning is positively affected by presenting visual and verbal aids together. It is well said and remembered that a picture is worth a thousand words. An understanding of visual – verbal language enables better structures and efficiencies of communication.

Types of visual aids

Mathew & Alidmat (2013) conducted a study on the usefulness of audio-visual aids in ELT (English Language Teaching). According to the authors, "Teaching and learning becomes monotonous when the language teachers are compelled to rely on the text books as the only source of language input" (p.88). In their study, they explored how the use of audio visual aids helps the language teacher in EFL classroom at undergraduate level. They found that the result of their study indicates that using audio-visual aids in language teaching is helpful for both the teachers and the students. Both the parties claimed that it makes the class interesting and effective (pp.89, 90).

There are a range of types of visual learning aids used in language learning which use different media. Pictures are the simplest and commonly used. Pictures are very effective. Pictures provide associations for the learning of new words. But we

cannot use pictures for every unknown or abstract words as they cannot be illustrated easily. The more concrete a word is, the easier it is to find and uses a picture for its illustration (Anderson & Shifrin, 1980). Research has been done in use of pictures in area of second language learning. Underwood (1989), as cited in Chun and Plass (1996), has concluded that —an ordinary principle and opinions for human learning is visual memory'. Koren (1999) points out that learning foreign words with associated of words alone can be easier than words without these associations. Photo dictionaries are widely used to increase the vocabulary and speaking skills of learners. Charts, maps and diagrams are other common visual tools used for learning purposes. Myatt and Carter (as cited in Heinich et al., 1999) in their study suggests that most learners prefer color visuals to black and white visuals, but that no significant difference in the amount of learning occurs except when color is related to the content to be learned.

Film is another common form of visual aids in education which can be useful also in language learning. It helps the learner to focus and pay attention to the pictures and words on it. Different slides, motion pictures, clips from You-tube short films, motion stories with captions play an important role in understanding words, word groups and gradually the sentence structure. The learner may be able to grasp some words in the initial stage. But the practice may lead on to grasp word groups and then lead to sentence structure. Film strips can show not only those condition which the teacher can present in the class but also many of these which he cannot. Not only that it can be shown repeatedly which will lead to long term memory of words, phrases and so on. In a different types of study involving subtitling in films, Danan (1992) investigated that a grouping of video input and bilingual verbal input (subtitles in the second language only with audio in the learners' first language) aided vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension. The use of verbal as well as visual presentation give benefits as the visual traces are remembered better than verbal components and also have an additional effect when items are encoded dually.

Movies with sub titles also play crucial role in acquiring a new language. Danan (1992) investigated that a grouping of video input and bilingual verbal input (subtitles in the second language only with audio in the learners 'first language) aided vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension. The generation today is attracted more towards English movies. The trend has been vibrant with the series of Harry Porter. The student community in particular derive relief from movies. They visit the cinema before and after the exam, celebrate an event with a trip to the theatre; exhibit happiness at being chosen for a job or at a university abroad for higher studies by taking friends to the cinema. Movies have the same significance for the IT and Facebook generation that temples had for the generation that inherited a free India. Movies attract the human psyche as they thrill, motivate, shock, entertain and render the masses powerless to resist the temptation of the silver screen. Movies present visual content in which the dialogues take place and action accompanies speech. According to Gebhardt (2009) through movies gestures, facial expression and other body language appropriate to the dialogue can be well observed which lead to language acquisition.

Movies, video clips, short films, episodes are best used in Note taking-Note making practices where the learners get the opportunity to watch, listen, think ,analyze and write the language. The use of movie extracts or other kinds of animation provide either a background to or specific examples which might provide a focus for learning activities. They help in learning listening and speaking skills. This activity can also provide a focus for a range of communication activities lead by the teacher. The use of authentic role plays where students interact performatively using non-verbal actions and gestures to supplement the verbal aspects of communication and interaction. It is evident that "because of considerable student interest in movies, learners always seem to benefit from watching the trailers that appeal to them and discussing their thoughts of them afterward" (Heffernan, 2005). The casual side of course is that films have the power to educate, inform and influence an individual's mind for the better. Films are popular as authentic

material since "... they have high potential for teaching grammar, social language and pronunciation, and also for practicing notional areas to do with daily life and human behavior" (Sherman , 2003 ,pp.4647).

You-tube videos, clips are very helpful in learning listening and speaking skills. For example, a motivational video about a man who does not have any legs and hands can be used in a class. The man can jump, walk, play football and golf, play drums and can also swim. This video can help in speaking activity as learners will share their feelings and the inspirations they got from the video. It will lead to discussions which will provide the learners with the opportunity to speak to develop their speaking skill. A number of such clips, stories, documentaries support in developing speaking skill.

Another essential aid is the use of PowerPoint slides. PowerPoint slides have become popular as presentation has become more dynamic with attractive slides and audio-visualized equipment. Ozaslan&Maden (2013) found in their study that students learn better if materials are presented through some visual tools. Teachers also believe that PowerPoint makes the content more appealing which draw the attention of the students easily (p.42). Using PowerPoint slides, the presenter can keep the main points in bullet point with a lot of variation and visualization. It gives the presenter confidence and can recover his nervousness. It helps the presenters to organize the speech in better ways and make the presentation lively by using different colorful visuals and examples. The visual effect in the presentation attracts the attention of the audience too.

Different visual aids like pictures, videos and projectors helps the learners to understand the abstract ideas of the text and help in learning reading the language. Use of visual aids in reading can be benefited in many ways. According to Yunus, Salehi& John (2013), use of visual aids creates interest among the learners in reading. Visual aids create an authentic communication between the readers and the text. It makes the reading process faster and active. Readers feel more engaged with the text through visual aids (pp. 114-15). Human nature is such that pictorial description always

attracts first. Pictures with description helps in making reading speedier.

Visual aids in language learning

Visual aids help the learners to learn language in diversified ways. Learners come with different ideas. Audio clip helps them to learn the correct pronunciation because the speakers of the conversations are mostly the native speakers. Audio clips help them to know variety of accent of English language. Also, they can know different styles of speaking and the supporting non-verbal expressions watching the videos of English speakers leading to post session activities like group discussion, role play, presentation, debate, quiz, conversations etc. By listening to the conversations of the native speakers, they can improve their listening skills, which is not always possible by listening only to the class lectures. They also think that these types of audios and videos provide them extensive language exposure which is very important for learning the language. The use of PowerPoint slides makes easier for the learners to grasp as they have the visuals in front of them. Visual aids facilitate in language learning.

Use of visual aids in the Direct Method

The Direct Method uses completely English with the use of visual aids. The instruction and other activities are given using English language. Even though any student cannot understand anything, the teacher will not use any other language or mother tongue. As necessity is the mother of invention, the compulsion may lead the learner to grasp language anyhow. Through demonstration of visual aids learners understand the concepts. Various pictures, posters, videos and others such aids prove to be the best options. A learner with the help of maps and pictures may learn how to give directions.

Use of different audio-visual materials makes the class interesting and enjoyable. A lengthy class becomes really tough if it is not interesting. The learners lose their attention soon from the lesson. Only the lecture-based class becomes monotonous for the learners. However, different types of interesting videos can take away the monotony of the students as they make learning more attractive and attentive. It brings variation in class. Visual aids

refresh the mental state and invite concentration. Learning becomes fun with the use of aids.

CONCLUSION

According to Allen, Kate & Marquez (2011), "Visual aids impact and add interest to a presentation. They can create excitement. Visual aids enable students to use more than one sense at the same time. One picture can elicit unlimited words" (p.5). Different visuals bring variation in the classroom as they help to draw the attention of the learners toward the topics. Use of different pictures related to the lesson of the class lead the classes to be lively as well as learners get some outlines of the topic. It is always better to have something visuals in front of the learners so that they can understand the point well. As suggested by Gardner's (1983) multiple intelligence, all the learners do not learn in the same way. Some learn better by watching, some learn better by listening and so on. The use of the visual aids provides the learners opportunity to have background knowledge of any topic which is necessary for the learners. It gives the learners extended language exposure to the learners giving them better idea of the language culture. Mathew and Alidmat (2013) found that audio-visual materials can make lessons easy to understand. Images that a learner views on the screen can be easily comprehended and remembered than descriptive reading materials. Learner feel that he can remember the information for longer duration due to the use of audio-visual aids. Therefore, having something visuals on the lesson are always helpful for the learners. Harmer (2001) also stated that use of pictures in the class makes the lessons appealing. He mentioned the recent textbooks and the design of the newspapers which are intentionally designed in ways for grabbing readers' interest. Also, it enhances the text giving readers a view of the outside world (p.135).

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