The Use of Visuals in Teaching EFL Classes in Bangladesh

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Abstract: This paper explores the importance of using visual devices in teaching EFL classes and tends to identify its limitations at the tertiary level in Bangladesh. In order to bestow the students' with satisfactory exposure to English, we have to minimize the limitations and find out effective ways of using visuals in EFL classes. With reference to research evidence that has been studied on the basis of a questionnaire survey, both from the teachers' and students' point of view, this paper focuses on the effectiveness and limitations of using visual aids in EFL classes in fostering learners' progress in English language skills.

1. Introduction

The thesis of the paper at hand is to show the positive effects of using Visual materials in the EFL classes as well as to identify the reasons why the teachers are not getting the maximum benefit from it. That is why this paper will pay more emphasis on determining the limitations of using Visual materials in EFL classes and suggest recommendations to bring out the maximum efficiency from the students. But before that we need to define clearly what we mean by Visual materials. The definition what constitutes a visual is complex by nature. According to Canning (1998), a visual is any projected or non-projected image that can be classified into a great number of items namely illustrations, visuals, pictures, perceptions, mental images, figures, impressions, likeness, replicas, reproductions or anything that would help a learner see an immediate meaning. In short, a visual is the selection and sequence of messages in an audio-visual context.

Visuals can be used to:
• organize lecture or presentation
• provide interest and motivation for students
• increase retention of information and learning
• save instructional and preparation time because they can be reused several times
• serve communication
• explain the relationships of parts to the whole
• clarify something difficult, complicated or very large or stress very important points.

Students can become more actively involved through the use of visual materials. Good visuals used in the right way can help learners stay attentive and retain information. The teacher can stimulate students' creative expression through contrast, comparison, and continuity. But visuals have a universal appeal and are relevant to the learner. A learner's sensitivity to language and their ability to create relations amongst words can further be enhanced by the use of visuals. Graphic images can bring out more detailed, knowledgeable, responsive awareness to the object, situation or text. Moreover, the use of a picture may lead a learner to more abstract thought or ability to demonstrate greater accuracy. Overall, it brings out a more complex sensitivity in the learner (Canning, 1998).

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Pictures help individual learners predict, infer, deduce information, and analyze today's world so that it can be brought into today's classroom and expose the learner to new ideas. If a visual is used in teaching situation it can enhance clarity and give meaning to the text being communicated. Visuals can serve to create a solid link between the material learned and its practical application on a test (Canning, 1998).

A significant research conducted by Herron, Hanley and Cole (1995) indicates that the visual support in the form of descriptive pictures significantly improve comprehension in language. According to more current research, the more sensory modes in which mental representation is stored, the more likely will they be remembered (Borsook, T. & Higginbotham-Wheat, N. 1991). A recent large-scale survey by Canning-Wilson (2000) suggests that the students are fond of learning language through the use of videos. Video offers contextual support and helps learners to visualize words as well as meanings more effectively. In a research lecture on the use of visuals, Canning-Wilson (2000) claims that the use of illustrations, visuals, pictures, perceptions, mental images, figures, impressions, likenesses, cartoons, charts, graphs, colors, replicas, reproductions, or anything else help one see an immediate meaning in the language that benefit the learner by helping to clarify the message. "Video is a good means of bringing 'a slice of living language' into the classroom" (Allan, 1986 P.48). In a life-like video learner can see and listen to the communication between people which resembles actual communication processes in the real world. This daily language presented in videos benefit students in two ways. It re-affirms students that what they are learning in the classroom is actually used in the real world. Also, students may gain confidence in using English when dealing with real world situations as they have already been exposed to real English in the classroom.

Language development is the ability to think about the world, and explore it with vision, hearing, smell, touch, etc. As a child begins to make sense of the world through exploration, language is attached to those experiences. "Videos can make the task, situation or language more authentic. More importantly, video can be used to help distinguish items on a listening comprehension test, aid in the role of recall, help to sequence events, as well as be adapted, edited or changed in order to meet the needs of the language learner" (Canning, 1998). Videos allow the learner to see body rhythm and speech rhythm in second language discourse through the use of authentic language and speed of speech in various situations. In addition, video can stimulate and motivate student interest towards language learning. The use of visuals can help learners to predict information, infer ideas and analyze the world that is brought into the classroom via the use of video instruction. Video can give students realistic models, increase awareness of other cultures, and can strengthen visual linguistic perceptions. It also widens the classroom repertoire and range of activities in association with the target language. But video used in a classroom should be interpretive and to the point. The visual should show reasonable judgment and enhance comprehension, heighten sensory acuteness, and illustrate the target language being used. Practitioners should avoid the use of distracters, over-crowded or violent stimuli, stereotypes, small and poor reproduction.

2. Research Design and Methodology

Subjects

This study was conducted with thirty five university teachers and three hundred and thirty tertiary level students randomly selected from two public universities —University of Dhaka and Jahangirnagar University, and eight private universities — Daffodil International University, Stamford University, State University, Northern University, Darul Ihsan University, Northern University, Eastern University and University of Development Alternative (UODA) in Dhaka. The teachers being Bangla speaking had at least a postgraduate degree in English language and/or literature. And all the students possessed the same mother tongue Bangla, and were learning English as a foreign language.

Instruments

To address and explore the research questions, a quantitative method including two questionnaires, one for the teachers (that follows next) and the other for the students (shown in the following part), was exploited. A practical questionnaire has been formulated on the basis of first-hand experience of using video aids for teaching EFL, especially EFL listening and speaking skills at the tertiary level in Bangladesh. And it is true that the present study has been concluded on the derivates of the cumulative impressions drawn from the responses to the questionnaire.

Each of the questionnaires consisted of eight items related to the research queries stated in the introduction. The first items in both the questionnaires were related to the question: 'Are visual aids used in the class?' The second and the fourth items in both the questionnaires were concerned with 'If yes, how much are they useful?' The fifth and the eighth items in both the questionnaires were linked to 'If no, why they are not used?' The third, sixth and seventh items in Teacher Questionnaire had relations to the question 'What does the teacher think of using visual aids?' And, the third, sixth and seventh items in Student Questionnaire were connected to 'What does the student think of using visual aids?' It is worth mentioning that the questionnaires contained almost identical items chosen with a view to comparing and contrasting the opinions of the two groups of respondents.

Data collection and analysis

The data for the study were collected from thirty five English teachers as well as from three hundred and thirty students learning English as a foreign language at the tertiary level. To tap the teachers' responses to the use of visual aids in the EFL class, the researcher personally contacted each of the teachers and requested them to respond to the items in the questionnaire. And to collect the students' responses to the use of visual aids in their EFL class, the researcher received cooperation of the teachers who administered the questionnaire after an explanation of the purposes of the study and some preliminary instructions. The data collected from the teachers and the students were then scored by hand.

3. Presentation and interpretation of findings

Teacher questionnaire

The teacher questionnaire contained eight items which were concerned with the teachers' opinions on different aspects of the use of visual aids in their EFL classes. The responses of the thirty five English teachers to the questionnaire are recorded and discussed item-wise in the follows manner:

The first question to the teachers was posed as 'Do you use visual aids in your English classes?'

Teacher Table: 1

Question	Choices	Scores	Percentage
Do you use visual materials in your English classes?	Yes	28	80%
	No	07	20%

N=35

The above Teacher Table: 1 indicates that 80% of the subjects used visual aids in their EFL classes and other 20% did not.

This finding indicates that the acquaintance of the teachers at the tertiary level in Bangladesh, with modern language teaching equipment and aids, make EFL teaching and learning relatively more scientific as well as more effective. It also shows that the teachers have expertise in using visual aids for teaching EFL, which the students find attractive and useful. Further, this phenomenon is consistent with the widely prevailing and popular communicative language teaching approach (Richards and Rodgers 2002).

The second question to the teachers was put as 'Do you think that visual aids are useful for teaching English?'

Teacher Table: 2

Question	Choices	Scores	Percentage
Do you think that visual materials are useful for teaching English?	Yes	33	94%
	No	02	06%

N=35

The Teacher Table:2 indicates that 94% of the teachers thought that visual materials are useful for teaching English whereas other 06% did not think it useful for their English classes. So Teacher Table:2 clearly uncovers that a great majority of the teachers find it useful to use visual aids for teaching EFL at the tertiary level in Bangladesh as is seen in other settings, for example, Nigeria (Agun and Okunrotifa, 1977).

The third question to the teachers was framed as 'Are you satisfied with the use of visual aids in your English classes?

Teacher Table: 3

Question	Choices	Scores	Percentage
Are you satisfied with the use of visual materials in your English classes?	Strongly satisfied	18	51%
	Slightly satisfied	11	31%
	Dissatisfied	06	17%

N=35

It is noticeable from Teacher Table: 3 that 51% teachers are greatly satisfied with the use of visual aids in their English classes whereas only 06% are dissatisfied. This statistics conspicuously reveals that all the EFL teachers at the tertiary level in Bangladesh are more satisfied with the use of visual aids for their teaching.

The fourth question in the Teacher Questionnaire was 'Which English classes are more effective and interesting to the student?'

Teacher Table: 4

Question	Choices	Scores	Percentage
Which English classes are more effective and interesting to the student?	Classes with visual materials	26	74%
	Classes without visual materials	09	26%

N=35

The Teacher Table: 4 demonstrates that 74% teachers supported that English classes with visual aids were more effective and interesting to their students while only 26% opined that English classes without visual aids were more effective and interesting.

Lending support to Adeyanju (1988), this finding discloses that language classes with visual aids' are more effective and interesting to the learner than those without visual aids'.

The fifth question to the teacher was constructed as 'Are you satisfied with the visual facilities provided by the institution?'

Teacher Table: 5

Question	Choices	Scores	Percentage
Are you satisfied with the visual facilities provided by the institution?	Strongly satisfied	14	40%
	Slightly satisfied	13	37%
	Dissatisfied	08	23%

N=35

Teacher Table: 5 unfolds that at least 77% teachers are more or less satisfied with the visual facilities provided by the institution. This result sums up that maximum teachers have a good satisfaction level with the visual services provided by their respective institutions yet 23% showed their dissatisfaction in this regard.

The sixth question in the Teacher Questionnaire was 'How is the performance of the students in the classes without audio aids?'

Teacher Table: 6

Question	Choices	Scores	Percentage
How is the performance of the students in the classes without visual materials?	Strongly satisfied	07	20%
	Slightly satisfied	24	69%
	Dissatisfied	04	11%

N=35

According to the statistics in Teacher Table: 6 shows that 69% teachers were slightly satisfied with the performance of their students in the classes without visual aids while 11% were dissatisfied with the performance of their students in the class with same condition.

This finding can be attributed to the fact that the performance of the students fails to reach the teachers' expectation and the program target.

The seventh question to the teachers was designed as 'How is the performance of the students in the classes with visual aids?'

Teacher Table: 7

Question	Choices	Scores	Percentage
How is the performance of the students in the classes with visual materials?	Strongly satisfied	20	57%
	Slightly satisfied	15	43%
	Dissatisfied	00	00%

N=35

Teacher Table: 7 shows that 57% teachers were strongly satisfied with the performance of the students in the classes with visual materials and no one was found dissatisfied. This statistics reveals that the performance of the students reached the teachers' expectation and the program target because of the use of visual aids for teaching EFL.

The eighth question in the Teacher Questionnaire was 'What limitations do you face in using visual aids in your English classes?'

Teacher Table: 8

Question	Choices	Scores	Percentage
What limitations do you face in using visual materials in your English classes?	Lack of visual materials	16	46%
	Interruption of Electricity	17	49%
	Lack of commitment	02	6%
	Lack of administrative support	01	3%
	Lack of teachers' training	01	3%

N=35

The above Teacher Table: 8 shows that 46% teachers marked for 'Lack of visual materials', 49% for 'Interruption of Electricity', 6% for 'Lack of commitment', 3% for 'Lack of administrative support' and 3% for 'Lack of teachers' training' as their limitations in visual based EFL classes. This finding discloses that interruption of

electricity and the lack of visual aids tremendously hampered the visual facilities in the EFL class at the tertiary level in Bangladesh. Besides, the lack of commitment, the lack of administrative support and teachers training were to some extent responsible for the insufficient use of visual aids in the class.

Student questionnaire

The student questionnaire consisted of eight items that were related to the students' views on the varied aspects of the use of visual aids in their English classes. The responses of the 330 students to the questionnaire are put forward item wise as follows:

The first question to the students was formulated as 'Does your English teacher use visual aids in your classes?'

Student Table: 1

Question	Options	Scores	Percentage
Does your English teacher use visual materials in your classes?	Yes	276	83%
	No	54	17%

N=330

Students' Table: 1 shows that a great number of 83% teachers used visual materials in EFL classes whereas only 17% teachers did not. So it is clear that visual aids were used in most of the EFL classes at the tertiary level in Bangladesh, which is in harmony with the communicative language teaching approach (Richards and Rodgers 2002).

The next question in the student questionnaire was framed as 'Do you think that visual aids are useful for learning English?'

Student Table: 2

Question	Options	Scores	Percentage
Do you think that visual materials are useful for learning English?	Yes	279	85%
	No	51	15%

N=330

The finding of Student Table: 2 is closely correlated to that of teachers, that is a great majority of the students (85%) and the teachers (94%) felt that visual aids were useful for teaching and learning EFL. It also suggests that if the teachers get all kind of visual supports and training they will use it more to bring out the maximum efficiency from the learners.

The third question to the students was posed as 'Are you satisfied with the use of visual aids in the English classes?'

Student Table: 3

Question	Options	Scores	Percentage
Are you satisfied with the use of visual materials in the English classes?	Strongly satisfied	51	15%
	Slightly satisfied	234	71%
	Dissatisfied	45	14%

N=330

The statistics in Student Table: 3 disclose that a good number of students (86%) were more or less satisfied with the use of visual aids in their English classes yet only 14% were dissatisfied. The finding can be attributed to the interruption of electricity, inadequacy of visual facilities, limitation of administrative support and lack of teacher training.

The fourth question to the students was put as 'Which English classes are more effective and interesting to you?'

Student Table: 4

Question	Options	Scores	Percentage
Which English classes are more effective and interesting to you?	Classes with visual materials	243	74%
	Classes without visual materials	87	26%

N=330

Student Table: 4 shows that more students (74%) thought the English classes with visual aids were more effective and interesting then English classes without visual aids. Only 26% disagreed with this hypothesis.

This result lends complete support to the teachers' views, and demands sufficient use of visual aids in the EFL class at the tertiary level in Bangladesh.

The fifth question in the student questionnaire was designed as 'Are you satisfied with the visual facilities provided by the institution?'

Student Table: 5

Question	Options	Scores	Percentage
Are you satisfied with the use visual facilities provided by the institution?	Strongly satisfied	57	17%
	Slightly satisfied	183	56%
	Dissatisfied	90	27%

N=330

As per the statistics in Student Table: 5, a good number of students (73%) were more or less satisfied with the visual facilities that the institutions provided still 27% thought that the present visual facilities were inadequate.

The sixth question in the student questionnaire was designed as 'How is your performance in the English classes without visual aids?'

Student Table: 6

Question	Options	Scores	Percentage
How is your performance in the English classes without visual materials?	Strongly satisfied	39	12%
	Slightly satisfied	213	64%
	Dissatisfied	78	24%

N=330

As exhibited in Student Table: 6, only 12% students were strongly satisfied with their performance in the classes without visual aids while 24% were dissatisfied and 64% were slightly satisfied with their performance in the class with same condition. It indicates that visual aids are more or less needed to upgrade the performance level of the students.

The seventh question in the student questionnaire was set as 'How is your performance in the English classes with visual aids?'

Student Table: 7

Question	Options	Scores	Percentage
How is your performance in the English classes with visual materials?	Strongly satisfied	129	39%
	Slightly satisfied	174	53%
	Dissatisfied	27	08%

N=330

Student Table: 7 demonstrates that 39% students were strongly satisfied with their performance in the classes with visual aids, and 53% students were slightly satisfied with their performance in the same condition; and only 08% students were dissatisfied with their performance in the classes with visual aids. It is a clear indication that when teachers used visual aids in EFL classes nearly all the students performed satisfactorily.

The eighth question to the students was posed as 'What limitations do you find in the use of visual aids in your English classes?'

Student Table: 8

Question	Options	Scores	Percentage
What limitations do you find in the use of visual materials in your English classes?	Lack of visual materials	153	46%
	Interruption of Electricity	48	15%
	Lack of commitment	36	11%
	Lack of administrative support	39	12%
	Lack of teacher training	15	5%
	Lack of fund	09	2%
	Others	30	9%

N=330

Resembling the finding concerned with the teachers, Student Table: 8 discovers that the lack of visual aids (46%), interruption of electricity(15%), administrative support(12%), lack of teacher training(5%) and lack of fund(2%) along with some other factors (9%) reduce the visual facilities in the EFL class at the tertiary level in Bangladesh. So these limitations should be minimized for better effective EFL classes.

4. Inferences

The presentation and interpretation of the findings of the study above lead to the inferences that visual aids are more or less used in most of the EFL classes at the tertiary level in Bangladesh, which is in consonance with the contemporary communicative language teaching mode (Richards and Rodgers 2002). The research also shows that visual aids in the EFL class at the tertiary level in Bangladesh are substantially useful since the use of such aids makes teaching attractive and effective, and reinforces learning by stimulating and motivating the learner and arresting his/her attention during the instructional process. The lack of visual materials, interruption of electricity, lack of teacher training and administrative support is responsible for the insufficient use of visual aids though the use of visual aids considerably adds to EFL learning at the tertiary level in Bangladesh. Hence, it could briefly be concluded that the use of visual aids in the EFL class at the tertiary level in Bangladesh is a plus, not a minus, but it is seriously hampered due to insufficiency of visual equipment and material, the lack of teacher training, and the indifference of the administration.

5. Suggestions

Based on the aforementioned findings and inferences, a number of suggestions can be put forward.

Firstly, it is already found that visual aids are used in the EFL class at the tertiary level in Bangladesh. But, it should be ensured that every teacher would maximize the use of visual aids including visual equipment and materials in each and every class to develop the learner's communication skills.

Secondly, though the use of visual aids prove to be substantially useful for both teaching and learning EFL, the limitations of this means, such as the inadequacy of visual aids and the interruption of electricity should be reduced. That is, the availability of appropriate visual equipment and material, the timely supply of electricity and proper teacher training, and necessary administrative support and monitoring can ensure the optimal use of visual aids in the EFL class, and thus guarantee the learner's maximum benefit.

Thirdly, the teacher should have expertise as well as interest in using visual aids in his/her EFL class so as to make his/her teaching effective and facilitate learning to a considerable extent.

Last but not least, there should a well equipped language lab having sufficient and suitable visual facilities which the learner can use any time to practice EFL skills and improve his/her linguistic as well as communicative ability.

6. Conclusion

Through the study it is established that the use of Visual Aids in the EFL class is a positive step and it ensures a greater degree of learning, especially in the context of the contemporary socio-cultural atmosphere. But the lack of visual materials, interruption of electricity, lack of teacher training and administrative support seriously hampers it.

Hence, this study recommends for adequate Visual equipment and materials, uninterrupted electricity supply, proper teacher training, necessary administrative support, and a well equipped language lab to ensure the optimal use of visual aids, and thus guarantee the learner's maximum benefit.

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