



Using Visual Materials in Teaching Vocabulary in English as a Foreign Language Classrooms with Young Learners

Dorela Kaçauni Konomi

“Fan S. Noli” University (Albania)

dorela_konomi@hotmail.com

Abstract

The aim of this research paper is to show how visual materials are used in the EFL classroom when vocabulary is being taught and what their effect on Young Learners is. The use of visual aids such as pictures, posters, postcards, word calendars, realia, charts, graphic organizers, picture books, television, videos from iTunes, and computers can help Young Learners easily understand and realize the main points that they have learned in the classroom. The targets of this research are the Young Learners in Primary School in Korca, Albania at Grade 3 and Grade 6 and they are seen how they response in vocabulary classes with visual materials. These data are compared to the responses in classes when the teachers do not use visual materials. Some other questions that this research will answer are:

- 1. If teachers use visual materials, how do they use them to teach new vocabulary?*
- 2. What are the main sources for visual materials?*
- 3. What are pupils' attitudes towards using visual materials in learning vocabulary?*
- 4. What are the teachers' attitudes towards using visual materials in teaching new vocabulary?*

For each visual aid, Young learners have different responses and expressions even because of their different educational and cultural background. Using visual aids can help learners understand the deep meaning of a topic and realize similarities and differences between each topic.

As teachers we should face the fact that our pupils expect their English lesson to be 'visual' because language they experience outside the classroom is strictly connected with images, colours, sounds. They possess all important features of effective teaching aid and it is the job of the teachers to facilitate the process of learning the vocabulary using visual materials. The reason may be that they allow Young learners to absorb the information through an additional sensory perception.

1. Introduction

Teaching vocabulary is one of the most discussed parts of teaching English as a foreign language. Vocabulary is, according to Hatch & Brown a list of words that speakers of a language use [1]. Many other scholars state the importance of vocabulary. For instance, McCarthy [2] underlines the importance of vocabulary by saying: “No matter how well the students learn grammar, no matter how successfully the sounds of L2 are mastered, without words to express a wide range of meanings, communication in an L2 just cannot happen in any meaningful way.”

A scholar like Harmer [3] also states the importance of vocabulary by saying, "If language structure makes up the skeleton of the language, then it is vocabulary that provides the vital organs and the flesh." Harmer further states that an ability to manipulate grammatical structure does not have any potential for expressing meaning unless words are used. Visual materials help YL to motivate them to speak, to create a context with which their speech will have meaning. Porter and Margaret assert that using visual



materials not only make what you have to say more comprehensive to YL, they can make it more interesting as well. [4] Most of what we learn we get through visual medium, so that is why the use of visual materials is very important in teaching English as they commit information to long-term memory.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research questions

The main question of this research is: To what extent do teachers use visual materials in English as foreign language classrooms with Young Learners in primary education in Korça, Albania in grades 3 and 6.

Other questions that this research will answer are:

1. How do teachers use visual materials to teach new vocabulary?
2. What are the main sources for visual materials?
3. What are pupils' attitudes towards using visual materials in learning vocabulary?
4. What are the teachers' attitudes towards using visual materials in teaching new vocabulary?

2.2 Context and participants

The objective of this study is to examine the use of visual materials in teaching English as a foreign language in the classrooms with YL at Grade 3 and Grade 6 in Korça, Albania. These two grades are chosen because it is at grade 3 that English starts and the primary education finishes at grade 6. The public schools that were chosen were 10. The English teachers of grade 3 were 12 and English teachers who taught in Grade 6 were 12. The teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire with some questions concerning the use of visual materials in the classrooms.

3. Instruments of the study

3.1 Questionnaires.

This method is used to collect data from the teachers. The teachers gave information about the extent they used visual materials in the classrooms, what their main sources of the visual materials were and what attitude they had towards them.

3.2 Interviews.

Teachers were interviewed to get additional information concerning the impact these visual materials have on children as they learn fast and in an enjoyable way.

Pupils were interviewed in a random way in the schools concerning the techniques they liked most when vocabulary is taught. They also were asked about the visual materials the book provided for them and if they were enough in the vocabulary section.

3.3 Observation.

A class of 26 pupils was observed during two English lessons in Grade 3. In the first lesson about the weather the English teacher used only the book (the pictures it provided), whereas the in the next lesson about the fruits, the teacher used visual materials such as flashcards, pictures from the book and drawings in the blackboards. At the end of the class a test was made to the pupils to see if they remember the new vocabulary they have learned. The pupils had to match the words with the pictures. The data from the two tests were compared and analyzed to see which lesson was more productive.



4. Data Analysis

This part deals with the discussion and interpretation of the data collected from three instruments used in the research concerning the use of visual materials in the classrooms with YL of grade 3 and grade 6.

The first part of the discussion starts with the analyses of the results gathered from the questionnaires. The total number of the teachers who taught in the grade 3 is 12 and the teachers in grade 6 are 12.

They were asked if they used visual materials in the classrooms and all of them answered that they used the visual materials but that varied from the topic of the lessons and from the grade as it is going to be seen later in the data tables.

In the next question of the questionnaire the teachers reveal the visual materials they use in the classroom such as: posters, pictures, flashcards, postcards, objects, charts, graphic organizers, picture books, television, computers and word calendars. The tables below show the results from the questionnaires.

Table 1. Teachers' responses about the extent they use the visual materials in Grade 3

Visual materials	GRADE 3									
	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Often		Always	
	Nr	%	Nr	%	Nr	%	Nr	%	Nr	%
<i>Pictures</i>			3	25%	1	8.3%	8	66.7%		
<i>Posters</i>			2	16.6%	5	41.7%	5	41.7%		
<i>Postcards</i>			3	25%	6	50%	3	25%		
<i>Flashcards</i>			1	8.3%	4	33.3%	7	58.4%		
<i>Word calendars</i>	5	41.7%	5	41.7%	2	16.6%				
<i>Objects</i>					2	16.6%	2	16.6%	8	66.8%
<i>Graphics</i>	7	58.4%	4	33.3%	1	8.3%				
<i>Tables</i>	8	66.8%	2	16.6%	2	16.6%				
<i>Picture books</i>	7	58.3%	5	41.7%						
<i>Board drawings</i>							4	33.3%	8	66.7%
<i>Gestures</i>					2	16.6%	3	25%	7	58.4%
<i>Television</i>	9	75%	3	25%						
<i>Videos</i>	10	83.4%	2	16.6%						
<i>Computer</i>	9	75%	1	8.4%	2	16.6%				



Table 2. The teachers' responses about the use of visual materials in Grade 6

Visual materials	GRADE 6									
	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Often		Always	
	Nr	%	Nr	%	Nr	%	Nr	%	Nr	%
<i>Pictures</i>			1	8.4%	2	16.6%	9	75%		
<i>Posters</i>	2	16.7%	2	16.7%	4	33.3%	4	33.3%		
<i>Postcards</i>	2	16.7%	4	33.3%	6	50%				
<i>Flashcards</i>	5	41.7%	2	16.6%	5	41.7%				
<i>Word calendars</i>	5	41.7%	7	58.3%						
<i>Objects</i>					5	41.7%	7	58.3%		
<i>Graphics</i>					3	25%	5	41.7%	4	33.3%
<i>Tables</i>							6	50%	6	50%
<i>Picture books</i>	7	58.3%	5	41.7%						
<i>Board drawings</i>					6	50%	4	36.4%	2	16.6%
<i>Gestures</i>							6	50%	6	50%
<i>Television</i>	5	41.7%	7	58.3%						
<i>Videos</i>	8	66.7%	4	33.3%						
<i>Computer</i>	9	76%	1	8.4%	2	16.6%				

It is clearly seen that pictures, posters and postcards are used in both grades, but as far as flashcards are concerned they are used more in grade 3, 58.4%, because they are part of the English books and the YL like them very much when they learn the new vocabulary. Word calendars are rarely used in both grades but two teachers replied that they use them since the beginning of the school and it is used as a Mini Dictionary for their learners in grade 3. Also picture books are not used in both grades as they need a lot of time to keep them and to be organized by the teachers. Objects are mainly used in grades 3, 66.8% of the teachers always use objects. Allen points out, "Real objects are better than pictures whenever we have them in the classroom. When there are real windows, doors, walls, floors, desks, etc. in the classroom, it is foolish not to use them in our teaching." [5]

Most of the teachers of grade 3 never use graphics, tables but 58.3% of the teachers of grade 6 often use them. This happens because young learners of grade 3 need more vocabulary to complete them.

It is obviously seen that board drawings are used more in grade 3 as teachers draw pictures to illustrate the meaning of the new words. It focuses on bringing the experience into real life. 50% of the teachers of grade 6 always use gestures to explain the meaning of the new vocabulary. This technique strengthens imagination and helps YL to memorize words. Even 7 teachers of grade 3 always use gestures in their teaching as it an entertaining way for the learners.

When it comes to television, videos, computers, they are rarely used for teaching new vocabulary by the teachers of both grades. The teachers replied that they have few hours in disposition to use the means of teaching in their English curricula.

The second part of the data analyses deals with the results of the interviews with the teachers of both grades concerning the resources of visual materials. The main resources are the teachers as they create the visual materials themselves such as the charts, the graphic organizers, board drawings and gestures; other visual materials are included in the resource pack of the English textbooks such as the posters,



flashcards; the schools are another resources as they provide the teachers with televisions, videos and computers; the pupils are resources as well, with their word calendars, and picture books guided by the English teachers. Pictures are taken from magazines and newspapers and objects are also taken by the pupils in the classrooms. Another useful resource is the internet from which the teachers take the pictures.

Teachers provide information about the impact visual materials have on YL. Visual materials bring the teaching to mind in the future, they enhance the children's credibility, they also make teaching clear. YL have more interests in learning new words when they are involved. A benefit of visual aids is their function as educational tools for learning more effectively. English books usually have their visual aids, such as pictures but teachers should use other visual aids. This benefits the children and helps them retain more information.

In addition Young learners enjoy getting involved in learning English and find visual materials very interesting and funny especially objects that teachers bring in the classroom or blackboard drawings. 42% of the interviewed pupils think that these are their favorite techniques when language is taught. 39% of Young learners like flashcards especially those of grade 3 and 19% like posters.

During the first class observation with 26 pupils of grade 3 about the weather, the teacher used only the book. In the next lesson about the fruits the teacher used flashcards and blackboard drawings to draw and write the fruit words: banana, pear, apple, orange, grape and cherry.

At the end of both lesson pupils had to complete a test by matching the words with pictures. The results were that 85% of the pupils were correct from the first test whereas 97% of them were correct in the second test. This means that visual aids such as flashcards and blackboard drawings helped YL identify the correct pictures. The words cherry, grape and pear were mostly confused because they did not know them previously.

5. Conclusions

The purpose of the study was to examine the extent teachers use visual materials when they teach English vocabulary in grade 3 and 6. The data collected from the three instruments of the research: questionnaires, interviews and observation were very helpful in arriving a conclusion that teacher use visual materials in their vocabulary teaching at different extent. Young learners also appreciate the role that visual materials such as pictures, posters, postcards, word calendars, realia, charts, graphic organizers, picture books, television, videos from iTunes, and computers, can play in helping them to learn English. Further research of this kind can look into these issues in more detail, particularly examine the classroom practices of all grades, discussing with more teachers about the role of each visual in teaching English vocabulary.

References

- [1] Hatch, E. & Brown, C. 1995. Vocabulary, Semantics and Language Education. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [2] McCarthy, M. 1990. Vocabulary. Oxford: OUP. viii
- [3] Harmer, J. 1991. The Practice of Language Teaching. London: Longman Group UK Ltd.
- [4] Porter, P. and G. Margaret, 1992. Communicating Effectively in English: Oral Communication for Non-native Speakers. 2nd ed. Boston: Heinle Publishers.
- [5] Allen, V. F. 1983. Techniques in Teaching Vocabulary. Oxford: OUP.