RESEARCH PAPER

The Role of Images in the Teaching and Learning of English: Practices, Issues, and Possibilities

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ABSTRACT

Audio-visual aids have been one of the most influential sources, especially, in teaching and learning an unknown language. The use of images found in textbooks has great implications for teaching and learning the English language to non-natives. The current study aimed to explore the use of images in textbooks to teach the English language in primary schools in a Pakistani urban setting. The researchers, following the norms of qualitative research, used class observations and interviews as the tools for data collection. The findings of the study reiterated that the use of pictures in language teaching is quite helpful; however, the teachers under observation, often, did not make use of pictures found in the textbooks to teach the English language. The teachers can make their lectures and classroom activities more lively, interesting, and fruitful by employing the pictures found in the textbooks they use to teach the English language.

| **KEYWORDS** | Audio-visual Aids, ELT, English Language, Pictures, Textbooks, Young Learners |

Introduction

Languages have been taught and learned for centuries to communicate with people beyond one's linguistic community. The languages with social, political, educational, and economic importance get more audience than the ones that are unable to offer anything to their learners. In this scenario, the English language has been one of the most desired languages in the world (Kachru, 1992; Romaine, 2007). The teaching of the English language is associated with ELT. ELT stands for 'English Language Teaching'. ELT aims to teach the English language to learners, especially foreign learners (Cook, 2007; Vetriselvi, 2016). We, who fall into the Outer Circle of the "Three Concentric Circles Model" proposed by Kachru for World Englishes (Kachru, 1992), learn the English language in our own countries rather than in the countries that fall into the Inner Circle, i.e., where English is spoken as their mother tongue or L1. Thus, in our context, the learners have exposure to the target language only inside the classroom; therefore, these learners are called foreign or English as a second language learners (Krashen, 1985; Richards & Schmidt, 2010). ELT experts provide designed adapted teaching materials and techniques for teaching the English language (Nikoopour & Farsani, 2011). As English enjoys the honor to be the most important language of the day, therefore, learning the English language plays a vital role in improving chances to get a better job and it improves one's ability to communicate internationally and also in mastering modern education, i.e., most of the books are available in the English language (Khan & Butt, 2018; Rahman, 2004). Books related to science, for instance, biology, chemistry,

physics, etc. are (mostly) available in the English language. Overall, ELT deals with the ways and techniques to teach the English language to learners in a better way.

The word 'audio' is related to the listening modality and the word 'visual' is associated with the visual modality, meaning 'eyes'. Audial Aids help in giving exposure to the spoken form of the language and on the other hand Visual Aids help in giving an illustration of what is being taught and explained, these aids accelerate learning and help the learners to appreciate the language in an effective way (Ahmad, 2012; Ahmed, 2018; Rezaie & Barani, 2010). So, the equipment and materials which are used to help the learners to learn something in an easy way are called 'audio-visual aids'.

There are two kinds of aids that are used in language teaching; these are Visual Aids and Audial Aids (Asma, 2016; Padhi, 2021). Visual Aids are the materials or types of equipment that are used to show the object in the absence of it, for instance, a picture of an elephant substitutes the real elephant. So Visual Aids are numerous, some of them are television, video player, pictures, flash-cards, etc., these help the teacher to substitute real-life objects with the help of any of the above given visual aid.

Pictures are one of the most useful and cheapest visual aids. A picture can replace a whole explanation about a thing, place, or person. A picture represents the real object with its all essence and symbolizes the object, person, or place, that it is illustrating, in a vivid manner. Pictures are very handy visual aids to use to teach language components, especially to young learners (Harmer, 2013; Khafidhoh & Carolina, 2019; Macwan, 2015). Young learners are very fond of looking at pictures and this leads them to learn language items in an easy and effective way. The teacher can get pictures from a number of sources, like magazines, newspapers, the internet, etc., but the most helpful and relevant pictures one can get are from textbooks. These pictures can be effectively used in the classroom to teach the target language to young learners. But unfortunately, teachers make very less use of pictures for language teaching to young learners.

The textbook is one of the best sources of relevant pictures for language teaching inside the classroom (Ashaver & Igyuve, 2013; Birdsell, 2017; Byrne, 1984; Mushtaq et al., 2022). The textbooks are prepared with great care, by keeping in view the need of young learners. Therefore, they are decorated with a large number of pictures and illustrations of objects. As the textbooks are designed with great care, therefore, the pictures found in the textbooks cover (to some extent) all the pedagogical aspects and objectives of the lesson. The selection of pictures in a textbook is related to the lessons which the learners are going to study; hence the teacher does not need to go in search of other pictures which can give relevant concepts and illustrations for certain things or objects. Thus, pictures play a very important role in the process of teaching and learning a foreign language.

The researchers have observed that most language teachers do not use pictures from textbooks for the teaching of different language components due to this their performance is sometimes unsatisfactory. For this study, the First Author visited two schools in an urban setting of Pakistan to explore how the language teachers were using pictures given in the textbooks for language teaching.

After completing the research and analyzing the data the researchers have recommended some ways to improve language teaching, and methodology, with the help of pictures found in textbooks. These recommendations are based on class observations, and informal interviews, which have been conducted by the researcher during the research. Thus, the study aimed to explore how the language teachers used

pictures, given in the textbooks, for language teaching at the primary level in Pakistan, and how it helped to maintain learners' motivation in learning.

Literature Review

A textbook, having pictures, is considered a vital component in language teaching and learning, as it provides a roadmap for the teacher and the learners. It is very essential for all learners, but particularly for young learners, who are unable to learn anything without observing or having exposure to the very thing that they are to learn (Byrne, 1984; Mushtaq et al., 2022; Nnamdi-Eruchalu, 2012).

One cannot deny the importance of pictures in a textbook in the teaching and learning of a language. It is very essential for language teaching at the primary level because textbooks are a kind of visual aid for young learners. Literature shows that "in early stage of language learning the textbook should be regarded as a form of visual aid whose primary function is to reinforce what has been learnt orally" (Byrne, 1984, p. 128). Therefore, the textbooks offer advice to the students whether they are at home or at school, in the classroom, with or without the teacher, as they can recollect what they have learned in the classroom by glancing at the pictures or the text. The use of a textbook is crucial in the classroom as well, when students have their textbooks with them, they rely on them to follow the teacher's instructions and connect the information s/he has shared orally with them. "It has to be accepted that many learners…learn less effectively if they are deprived of the written form of the language" (Byrne, 1984, p. 128). So the textbook helps in enhancing the chances of success in learning a language.

The textbook used to teach young learners contains a number of pictorial illustrations which demonstrate a number of objects. If a word has a pictorial illustration in the textbook, the teacher can use it without wastage of time for effective language teaching. And the effective use of pictures makes the class lively and interesting, which motivates and arouses interest in the young learners. According to Mueen, "they [pictures] make learning easy and more enjoyable" (Mueen, 1992, p. 88). Pictures make learning easy for both the teacher and students, in addition, the retention of information is quite long-lasting (Aljuhani & Maroof, 2019). If a teacher keeps explaining things in words it would be monotonous and tedious for the students and effective learning may not take place. Instead of words if the teacher exploits the pictures given in the textbook for teaching certain grammatical structures or vocabulary items, it can make the task easy as well as interesting(Al Jawad, 2021; Jatmiko & Jauhari, 2018).

The textbook, which is designed for young learners, is devised with great care and planning. They mostly have plenty of visual aids, i.e., pictures, drawings, sketches, etc., to teach vocabulary and grammatical structures to young learners (Muliati & Aprizani, 2020). So the textbook which is designed for young learners contains a number of visual illustrations in the shape of pictures and images. If a word has a pictorial illustration of it in the textbook, then the teacher can use it without wasting of time for effective language teaching (Baker, 2015). Therefore, the effective use of pictures makes the class lively and interesting, and make learning easy for both teachers and students (Kanwal, 2021; Ratnaningsih, 2019).

If a teacher keeps explaining the content of the course in words it might make the class monotonous and effective learning may not take place. Because "their understanding comes not just from explanation, but also from what they see" (Harmer, 2013, p. 82). Hence if the teacher instead of providing wordy explanations, if he exploits the pictures, found in their textbook, s/he can easily achieve the objectives of the lesson.

As the human mind is more inclined towards the visual modality to perceive things perfectly, in the same way, the visual aids which are given in the textbook for young learners play a very vital role to fulfill the requirement of learning something holistically. Since the pictures help in learning the concept or idea in question perfectly, in the same way, they also help in motivating and arousing interest in young learners to learn the new language items (Al Jawad, 2021; Baker, 2015; Kanwal, 2021; Octaberlina & Anggarini, 2020). Some of the factors, of using pictures for language teaching, are given below with explanations.

We, as human beings, learn things better by experiencing them. We perceive things and objects around us through our five senses, for instance by looking, touching, tasting, or hearing. If the phenomenon or object in question fulfills the requirements of any one of these senses, human beings learn it easily and in a better way, hence pictures fulfill the requirement of one's visual modality thus, one learns such things very easily (Petrovici, 2013). They, pictures, are extensively used for conveying meaning and are particularly useful for teaching concrete items of vocabulary such as food or furniture, and certain areas of vocabulary such as places, professions, and descriptions of people, actions, and activities (Gairns & Redman, 1995; Muliati & Aprizani, 2020). The textbook for young learners is designed carefully keeping in view their age, interest, and their intellectual level. As children are mostly attracted by visual aids so designers use as many pictures as possible to make the textbook interesting and easy to retain their attention (Al'Omairi & Al Balushi, 2015). Those pictures are used to convey meanings and teach concrete vocabulary items. This pictorial representation of the thing or object in question makes the meaning obvious and clear to the young learners and makes the job of the teacher easy, moreover, the learners can retain the information for a longer period of time (Aljuhani & Maroof, 2019).

Language teachers understand the importance of pictures given in the textbook, but when they come in class, they sometimes forget to utilize the pictures, thus, they should "stop thinking about …[their] teaching for a few moments and think about the picture and what …[they] feel about it" (Wright, 1989, p. 150). The teacher should not always go for the description of the grammatical structures or other language components, especially with young learners, rather s/he should think about what s/he feels about the pictures and how s/he can engage the learners with the pictures. The researchers have experienced that, when they were in school their teachers gave very less importance to the pictures found in textbooks and did not relate those pictures with the real-world context. Their teachers took very less benefit from this helpful visual aid.

The researchers believe that if a teacher(s) uses pictures given in a textbook to exploit the language items, s/he can bring a drastic change in language teaching and language learning, as the pictures given in the textbook help the teacher(s) to bring creativity among the learners, and they encourage and engage the learners to pay full attention to the given task(s). The use of pictures from the textbook also eliminates monotony in the class and makes the classroom activities lively.

Material and Methods

The researchers used a qualitative approach for this research (Merriam, 1998). The qualitative approach of research focuses on the analysis of subjective data and on the other hand the focus of the quantitative approach is on the analysis of objective data (Berg, 2001; Cohen et al., 2007; Creswell, 2012). The study was conducted in two public sector schools in an urban setting in Pakistan. This study was mainly based on classroom observations and informal interviews. The researchers used semi-structured interviews,

and classroom observations to collect the data. The researchers paid five visits to each of the schools in connection with the interviews and observations. A total of six interviews (three with each of the teachers) and ten observations (five in each classroom) were carried out.

Data analysis was a continuous process during the data collection (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The researchers used thematic analysis (Creswell, 2012) to generate the research report. All the interview data were transcribed initially and then coded under various sections and sub-sections (Berg, 2001; Creswell, 2012). The qualitative nature of the study enabled the researchers to get an insider's views and generate rich and in-depth data for the analysis. Data from two different sources (interviews and observations) helped the researchers to triangulate the findings and to maintain the rigor and trustworthiness of the findings (Berg, 2001; Creswell, 2012; Scott & Morrison, 2006; Tavakoli, 2013).

The researchers followed the ethical guidelines and considerations of social science research (Khan, Hussain & Alam, 2021). The teachers' participation was voluntary. Anonymity and confidentiality of the data, individual teachers, and their schools were maintained in all respects during the data collection, analysis, and reporting.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study. The findings include teachers' perceptions of the use of pictures in teaching, the benefits of the use of pictures, and issues related to them.

The Theory Practice Gap

The teachers in the study perceived the fact that the pictures found in the textbook for young learners are very helpful for language teaching, but during classroom observations, the researchers observed that they had not been actually using those pictures often in the classrooms. A teacher explained:

Pictures are good resources for explaining the concepts to students. Most of the textbooks at the primary level have pictures in them. They help us in explaining concepts. Pictures also enhance children's motivation and interest. It depends upon the teachers to use the pictures.

Another teacher mentioned:

I have seen that when we use pictures in the classrooms, children get motivated and take part in discussions. Not only the pictures in the textbook but also the charts help in teaching. I try to engage students in discussions through pictures.

The teacher further explained:

For instance, if I teach the word 'zoo' and there is no picture either in hand or in the textbook, the students may not get the concept of a zoo. As most of the students never have been to a zoo. Thus, whenever I use a picture of a zoo, I make them understand the concept clearly.

It is to mention that the researchers collected data regarding the use of pictures found in the textbook used for teaching the English language to young learners.

However, after analyzing the observation data it was found that the teachers in the study did not often use pictures found in the textbook for the teaching of the English language to young learners at the primary level.

Use of Pictures Increased Learners' Motivation

The researchers observed that children were really very interested in the pictures found in the textbook and they took part very enthusiastically in every activity in which the teachers used the pictures found in the textbook. After the observations, the researcher asked some questions from the children about the pictures found in their textbooks. They told him that they liked the pictures found in their textbook and they enjoyed taking part in the activities in which the teachers used any picture in the classroom. The researchers observed that the teachers sometimes made use of pictures for language teaching, but they did not exploit them in an effective way.

A student mentions:

I like pictures very much! Sometimes, I draw pictures. I draw pictures of my home, my school, and the trees. whenever I see pictures in the books, I get excited. Our classroom has some charts of birds etc. I like them.

Another student expressed!

I wish all of our books could have pictures in them. one day our teacher showed us pictures, and asked many questions about them. We enjoyed answering the questions. I like the colors in the pictures. I like flowers and I like the pictures of flowers in books.

The young learners also mentioned to the researcher that when teachers show something like, pictures or realia they enjoy those class activities more as compared to those activities where pictures are not used. Thus, it was found that students get more interest in teaching and reading when the textbooks have pictures in them. They enjoy discussing the pictures and also drawing pictures according to their interests.

Effective use of Pictures in the Classrooms

The researchers reached the conclusion that pictures can bring the real world inside the classrooms. The teachers perceived that when the pictures are related to the text the classroom environment becomes lively, and effective learning takes place. They expressed that the pictures gave great exposure to such things which are not possible to be brought inside the classroom, for instance, *the sea* or *beach,* etc. In this way, pictures can give exposure to a large number of objects, things, places, or people which are not possible to be brought into the classroom. They further mentioned that when the teacher did not use pictures and spent a lot of time explaining things verbally, which became tiresome and boring for both the teacher and students.

On the other hand, when the teacher used pictures for such activities, the job of the teacher became easier and the purpose of the lesson was easily and effectively achieved. The researcher's classroom observations also reinforced the idea. For instance, one of the teachers was to teach the word 'train' so she showed the picture found in the textbook that did not take much time for the students to understand the meaning of the word. The researchers believe that the language teacher at the primary level can exploit pictures from textbooks to teach the English language properly. Another teacher used the picture of a village setting from the textbook. Through the picture, the teacher explained village life. However, it could have been more interesting if the teacher could

have asked questions from the students about what they could see in the picture. The teacher could have developed a few questions to ask so as to elicit responses from the students.

Thus, it is to conclude that teachers need guidance and professional training to use pictures effectively and efficiently in the classrooms.

To conclude, the researchers found that the teachers were not properly trained, and they did not know how to use them (pictures) in an effective way. Both of the teachers made use of pictures for a very short time to relate them to the real world, but they could not use the pictures effectively for the teaching of language items. Whenever they used the pictures the students took part in the activities very enthusiastically, but when the teachers relied only on verbal explanations the young learners lost interest. The pictures (found in the textbook) could be used as effective tools for transforming knowledge. The use of pictures eliminates monotony in the class by bringing an active and lively atmosphere to the classroom.

Findings show that learning with pictures increases learners' motivations towards learning and retaining knowledge for a longer period of time (Aljuhani & Maroof, 2019; Baker, 2015). As pictures give a holistic understanding of real objects or the real world in a short span of time by making the very concept or object clear to young learners. The use of pictures requires lesser efforts on the part of the teacher as well as on the part of the learners (Ahmed, 2018; Baker, 2015; Khafidhoh & Carolina, 2019; Rezaie & Barani, 2010). However, when teachers do not have pictures (either magazine or flash card pictures, etc,) they have to rely solely on wordy explanations which either makes the classes monotonous or creates boredom, and makes the learners confused about the object or idea under discussion. Hence, if the teachers only rely on wordy explanations, they may not make a lively and vibrant classroom setting. On the other hand, if they use pictures they can explain things effectively (Harmer, 2013; Macwan, 2015; Padhi, 2021). Thus, the use of pictures has a great influence on the teaching and learning of a language (Ahmad, 2012; Asma, 2016; Khafidhoh & Carolina, 2019; Vetriselvi, 2016).

The young learners cannot stick to an activity for long as they often get distracted, they demand novelty and something striking which can be sensed by them, and then they get ready to learn the tasks in question (Al'Omairi & Al Balushi, 2015). If the teacher gives something to see the young learners they really enjoy doing the tasks and they respond very quickly and eagerly (Byrne, 1984; Mueen, 1992; Mushtaq et al., 2022; Ratnaningsih, 2019). The use of pictures from their textbook arouses interest in them and they are motivated to learn whatever the teacher is going to teach. The pictures attract the attention of young learners (Al'Omairi & Al Balushi, 2015) and in this way, they learn the language components in an effective way which makes them capable of retaining the knowledge in their minds for a longer period of time (Aljuhani & Maroof, 2019).

The use of pictures is a bit technical. The teacher should know when, where, and how to use pictures for teaching a particular language component. If s/he is capable enough to exploit the pictures effectively then teaching and learning become fun. As pictures need fewer explanations and less effort on the part of the teacher to explain and as well as on the part of the students to understand (Kanwal, 2021; Ratnaningsih, 2019). Mostly in teaching both the teacher and the students have to undergo lots of effort to learn something, here 'much effort good result' is the slogan but on the other hand, the use of pictures reverses this slogan into 'less effort better result' and that is true. The teacher just shows the picture and asks the students to interpret (in most cases) and if

they cannot interpret the real message or meaning of the picture then the teacher gives hints or sometimes a brief explanation which usually suffices, and students do not need to ask for more explanation of the picture in question (Khafidhoh & Carolina, 2019; Rezaie & Barani, 2010).

A concept retains in one's mind when one sees the thing oneself with one's own eyes or if one experiences it. Therefore, the knowledge or information retains or stays in one's memory of what one has experienced (Aljuhani & Maroof, 2019). A learner cannot experience or see real objects all the time, but one can get illustrations or pictures of them which fulfill the need to know about them. Pictures do this job very efficiently and their use helps the learners to learn and memorize concepts, objects, or things in a very proficient way. Pictures not only help to retain knowledge but also help in transferring the meaning or knowledge to others quite easily and effectively (Ahmed, 2018). We can call the pictures to be a sort of knowledge transfer tool which is very useful and important in language teaching, especially to young learners (Kanwal, 2021).

Conclusion

Pictures in the textbooks are great resources for language teachers. It is not possible for teachers to bring each and everything in the class for demonstration. They can bring some of the things as realia. However, some of the things are impossible to be brought into the classrooms, for example, a marketplace, an elephant, a museum, a bus, etc. All such things can be shown to young learners with the help of visual aids, especially with the help of pictures. The textbook for young learners contains pictures of all these things and places which makes the task easy for the teacher to give examples of the real world. As every child has his/her textbook with him/her so they can see certain pictures which the teacher asks them to look at. It also helps the teacher to maintain discipline in the class and the students to get exposure to the real world.

This study, thus, found that the use of pictures in the primary classroom in language teaching increases learners' motivation and the classrooms become active and vibrant. However, it was found that teachers' own capacity and understanding of how to use pictures as language teaching resources is vital. In this study, the teachers generally lacked the pedagogical knowledge (Al Jawad, 2021) of using the picture in the classrooms. Therefore, it is imperative to train teachers in the use of resources. Also, teacher education programs in the country need to focus on training prospective teachers and resource development, utilization, and preservation.

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