

TEACHERS' PERCEPTION ON THE USE OF MULTIMEDIA VISUAL AIDS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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ABSTRACT

The study reports on lower secondary school teachers' perspectives regarding the use of multimedia visual aids in their English classrooms. Participants of the study were 12 EFL teachers at six lower secondary schools in a province in Vietnam. The study aims at investigating teachers' attitudes towards the effectiveness of multimedia teaching aids in their English lessons and the problems associated with their application. Data for the study were collected mainly by surveys for teachers and classroom observation. Findings from the data analysis revealed that teachers frequently used visual aids in their English classes and most of them had positive perspectives towards the use of multimedia visual aids to support English teaching. They claimed that multimedia visual aids were useful for motivating students, maintaining their interest and engagement, facilitating teaching and learning, increasing students' exposure to the target language, enhancing the quality of the lessons and improving the class atmosphere.

Key words: *Multimedia visual aids, digital visual aids, English teaching, teacher's perspectives, technology in English teaching*

INTRODUCTION

Visual aids are supposed to be effective tools to help teachers in the foreign language teaching (Pateşan & Balagiu & Alibec, 2018) due to a number of advantages (Meredith, 1947). According to Halwani (2017), visual aids are important for second language acquisition due to the fact that they help show the connection between words and meanings, which significantly facilitate the process of accumulating language input by students. The use of visualized aids has been proved to be more effective than those of texts (Clark and Lyons, 2004) because they bring the real life into the classroom and improved students' ability to memorize new vocabulary and structures. In addition, with visual aids, teachers' use of mother tongue to explain things in English classroom could be reduced (Feuntein, 1995), while increasing students' exposure to the target language. The application of digital visual aids also helps teachers to make the learning more concrete (Mannan 2005), therefore, the lessons become easier for students to acquire, better motivate students and help teachers satisfy different learning styles.

In recent years, thanks to the development of educational technology, better facilities for teaching have been provided in Vietnamese language classes. Together with people's awareness of the increasingly important role of English in this globalization trend, the English teaching and learning caught more attention. Visual aids, especially multimedia ones such as digital images, PowerPoint slide shows and videos have therefore been also more popularly used with teachers' expectation that they would significantly help enhance language teaching and learning quality.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Multimedia visual aids in English language teaching

Visual aids can be understood as any types of educational media or aids which carry information to encourage the effective teaching and learning process (Babalola, 2013). The use of visual aids was popular since the first half of the 20th century when such tools as film strips, pictures, slides and pass-around objects were used in teaching, training, studying English classrooms. Visual aids could be classified into different kinds such as posters, cartoons, TV, videos, Internet, chalk and board, and flashcards (Asokhia, 2009). In this study, the researchers only focus on the multimedia visual aids, which refer to all pictures, graphics and visual organizers in PowerPoint and other presentation tools as well as digital videos designed and made by teachers or downloaded from the Internet for English classroom use.

Previous studies

So far, a large number of studies investigating the application of visual aids in teaching English have been conducted. In most studies, the data collected showed that visual aid use was beneficial for language teaching and learning. Maria (2012) described a research into the use of teaching aids carried out by Herron, Hanley and Cole (1995) and reported that multimedia visual aids were useful as they helped to enhance students' learning and facilitate teachers in doing their jobs. The study also revealed that students kept positive opinions on the use of digital visual aids in language classroom as they found more motivation, confidence and effectiveness in learning.

Another research which was to investigate the effect of visual aids in teaching vocabulary was conducted by Bhatti, Mukhtar, Mazhar, & Touquir (2017). The researchers concluded that difficult words significantly affected students' learning speed and quality. Visual aids did help teachers deal with this problem by fostering students' memorization of the words learnt and made the explanation of the concepts easier for students to grasp.

Though researches into the use of visual aids were conducted in different contexts, with different subjects, researchers unanimously agreed that visual aids in general and multimedia visual aids in particular were useful for language teaching.

METHODOLOGY

Research aims and questions

The study aimed at investigating teachers' opinions regarding the benefits of visualized teaching tools for the teaching and learning process, and the problems associated with their use in order to help raised other practitioners' awareness of the advantages and disadvantages of this teaching assistive tools. Based on the aims, two research questions for the study were proposed which included:

- (1) What are teachers' opinions about the benefits of multimedia visual aids in the English classrooms?
- (2) What are the problems that teachers might have when using multimedia visual aids in teaching?

Sample choosing

Participants of the study were 12 EFL teachers of six lower secondary schools in a province in northern Vietnam where English was a compulsory subject that students had to follow when studying at schools. Teachers participating in the survey were chosen randomly among those who were willing to participate in this study. Among the twelve teachers, two were novice teachers whose experience in teaching was within one year while all others had been teaching for more than five years.

Data collection instruments

The data for the study were collected by two major techniques including a set of questionnaires for the teachers and twelve class observation sessions. The questionnaire was designed to investigate teachers' frequent use of multimedia visual aids and their attitudes on their benefits of such visual aid use in their English lessons, the potential problems with visual aid employment and their suggestions on the ways to overcome the difficulties to make more advantages of using visual aids.

Classroom observation was relied on in the hope that it would provide some evidence to confirm benefits of visual aids in application. It was also expected that more information regarding teachers' use of visual aids, students' behavior and classroom atmosphere would be reported. Six teachers' class sessions were observed, each teacher was observed twice. An observation sheet was designed for more convenient notes about the class sessions, which focused on the types of multimedia visual aids used and when they were used, how the students' behaviours were in classes where teaching aids were employed and what problems teachers had during these class sessions. The data collected from observation sheets was then summarized and compared with the information from the questionnaires to see whether what teachers' believed was the same as what really happened in their classes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings from the questionnaires

Teachers' general evaluation on the usefulness of multimedia visual aids

Figure 1 below presents the teachers' general evaluation on the usefulness of multimedia visual aids. Generally, teachers had positive attitudes towards the usefulness of this type of teaching tools in their classrooms.

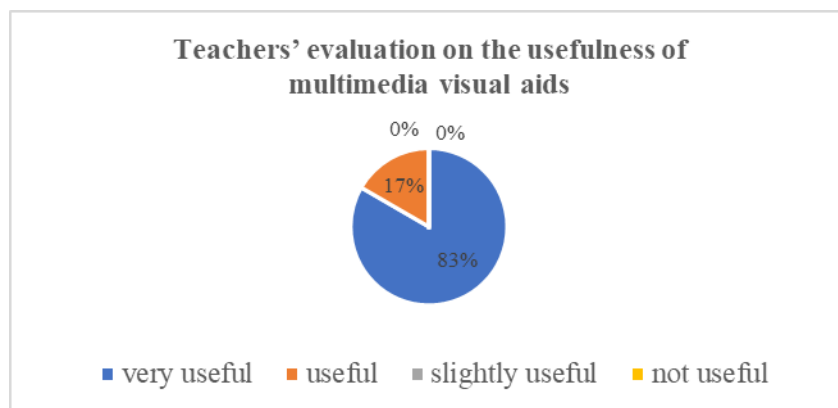


Figure 1: Teachers' evaluation on the usefulness of multimedia visual aids

The data in the figure showed that in general, teachers found multimedia visual aids useful for the teaching and learning of English. All teachers who responded to the questionnaire perceived visual aids as very useful or useful. On the contrary, none of them were in doubt of the advantages of digital aids. This explains why almost all of the teachers participating in this study enjoyed using visual aids for their teaching and therefore frequently relied on them.

Teacher's opinions on the benefits of multimedia visual aids in English teaching

Table 1 below presents teachers' opinions on the benefits of digital aids for English teaching.

Table 1: Teachers' opinions on the benefits of multimedia visual aids

Benefits of multimedia visual aids in teaching English	Percentage (%)
increase students' motivation in learning	100
improve students' attention to the class activities	100
make the lessons more interesting and enjoyable	100
encourage students' participation in the lessons	83
improve students' vocabulary retention	100
develop better understanding of grammar	75
enhance students' interest in speaking lessons	92
make the target language input clearer	100
help reduce the level of explanation in mother tongue	75

As presented in the table, all teachers surveyed agreed that multimedia visual aids were beneficial for English teaching in different ways. Multimedia visual aids were supposed to make the lessons more interesting and enjoyable, improve students' vocabulary retention and make the target language input clearer. Therefore, the use of multimedia visual aids helped increase students' motivation in learning and improve students' attention to the class activities. Other advantages that visual aids brought to the English classrooms were that they encouraged students' participation in the lessons, develop better understanding of grammar, enhance students' interest in speaking lessons and help reduce the level of explanation in mother tongue, which, on the other hand, increases students' exposure to the target language. These findings were similar to what were found in the study by Maria (2012).

Problems of multimedia visual aids

Besides the advantages, teachers also shared their opinions regarding the disadvantages of using multimedia aids, which can be seen in table 2 below.

Table 2: Teachers' opinions on the disadvantages of multimedia visual aids

Disadvantages of multimedia visual aids	Percentage (%)
take time to prepare	100
require more class time	83
increase teachers' workload	100
increase class' noise	100
distract students from the main contents of the lessons	75

Common problems faced by teachers were that it took them a lot of time to prepare for the lessons. This can be explicable due to the fact that teachers need to look for or to design aids suitable with the contents of the lessons they teach. They also have to prepare the activities associated with those aids they choose. As a direct result, teachers' workload is levelled up. Teachers also agreed that the use of digital visual aids increased the class' noise and require more class time to apply. Some teachers even found that the use of multimedia visual aids distracted their students from the main contents of the lessons.

Findings from class observation

Types of multimedia visual aids used and when they were used

The findings from the observation sessions showed that pictures, PowerPoint presentations and videos were the most favorable aids. During their class sessions, teachers more often employed pictures, videos and PowerPoint presentations than other types of digital visual aids such as graphics and other visual organizers. Teachers of all lessons observed used multimedia visual aids to different extents and for different purposes. Interestingly, the researcher found that teachers used digital visual aids more for vocabulary lessons than for other lesson types. Pictures were most frequently employed to explain the meanings of new lexical items as well as to recall the words they learnt previously. Sometimes they were also used to elicit students' background knowledge of the target topic. Similarly, videos were employed mostly to introduce the topics of the lessons or to provide some background knowledge, while in some speaking lessons, teachers used videos to present a current issue and asked students to discuss to find the solutions. PowerPoint presentations were also frequently used in all class stages and for all kinds of class activities, ranging from warming up, displaying the lesson contents, to presenting the keys for the exercises and summarizing up the lessons.

Students' behaviors and class atmosphere

From the classroom observation, the researcher could see that students showed a lot of interest when digital visual aids were used. In general, they became more attentive and engaged with the lessons. Their positive reactions included listening to teachers' instructions more attentively and they make a lot of guesses when their teachers raised a question. Also, they were more willing to take part in discussion activities designed by teachers. For vocabulary lessons, the use of pictures helped reduce the need for the explanation of word meanings. Whenever teachers used pictures to show meanings, very few questions were raised by students as they could easily understand what the words meant. This confirms that teachers' beliefs on the usefulness of multimedia visual aids in the survey results was reasonable.

Problems associated with multimedia visual aid use

On the other hand, there were some problems associated with the use of multimedia visual aids in the classrooms observed. First, the class often became much noisier before and after teachers showed videos or pictures and asked students to discuss. Sometimes some students lose their control of discussion as they made comments on the things the teachers showed rather than focusing on the questions that their teachers raised for discussion. Also, sometimes, students seemed to be over-interested that keep sharing their opinions with their classmates that it took a while to get them stop talking to return to learning. Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to think in advance about the classroom management techniques to employ for better settling down the class.

CONCLUSION

From the data collected and analyzed, it can be concluded that teachers had positive opinions on the use of multimedia visual aids in English language teaching. Multimedia visual aids, according to the teachers, were useful as it helped improve the quality of the lessons, facilitate teaching and learning of both knowledge and skills, make students more attentive and engaged, thus positively motivate students and changed the classroom atmosphere. Although there were some problems with the use of this type of visual aids such as the significant amount of time teachers might have to spend on preparation for the materials, the activities and the suitable class management techniques to be used, due to a number of benefits, it is advisable that multimedia visual aids should be used for English language teaching.

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