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VISUAL MATERIALS IN THE EFL CLASSROOM AT UNIVERSITY: A CASE STUDY

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to present and discuss the results of a small-scale study of student perceptions and opinions on the use of visual materials in the EFL classroom at university. Teaching new generations of students who grew up with smart phones in their hands and social media accounts implies the need for more integration of visual materials in university classes, and this need is particularly visible in foreign language classes. Visual literacy has become one of the objectives of education in general and must not be neglected at university.

The study was conducted after two EFL elective courses, which were largely based on visual assignments, were completed (two semesters) and the students who took the courses were asked to respond to a questionnaire. Their responses were then analyzed and positive and negative aspects of the visual assignments were identified and discussed in order to understand their potential in working with new student groups. The paper looks at both the students' responses and the EFL instructor's expectations and class observations, and provides suggestions for future work with university students.

Key words: EFL; image; university; video; visual literacy; visual materials

1. Introduction

In the past several years of teaching, I have turned to visual materials as much as textual ones. As a true believer in the power of words, I used to teach using different textual formats and there was nothing I thought was more powerful in the classroom than words and sentences. My preference for texts was based on my long experience in teaching but also on the fact that I, as a student, learned most successfully with the help of texts. I still believe this is the best way to learn – for

me. But different people learn in different ways, and teachers try various approaches in the classroom before they find the best one(s) for a particular group of students.

There are several reasons why I decided to reconsider my approach to teaching. The first one was the changing world around us and the speed at which new media come into our lives, for better or for worse. I found myself teaching new generations, much younger than me, who surely did not see the world the same way I did. As Kress (2003:p.9) points out, we live in a world with the dominance of the image and the dominance of the medium of the screen. I had to do something to adjust to that. The second reason was the multitude of various media and their accessibility. Even though I sometimes think the media consume quite a lot of our precious time, I also firmly believe there are so many ways and areas in which we can make them work to our advantage, education being one of them. And that is how I decided to turn to (moving) pictures for help in the EFL learning.

There is one more thing I should emphasize: I started realizing that teaching English at university, I could also make students think about so many important aspects of life, and not just grammar and vocabulary. I consider my classes an opportunity to make students ask questions about different issues and to help them see these issues from many different perspectives. I like to think that I help my students open their minds to broader views of the world and our place in it.

2. Outline of the courses

The courses described in this paper were elective English Language courses taken by a group of students who majored in German Language and Literature. The group of students consisted of 10 female students who I had been teaching the previous year too so we had already established a good relationship and knew each other very well. They had at least an intermediate or upper-intermediate level of English knowledge, which made it possible for me to set up the two-semester coursework the way I did. It would have been quite more difficult to meet the course requirements if the students' English had been at levels A1 or A2 (although not impossible). The courses (the official names were English 3 and English 4) consisted of only 2 classes per week (each 45 minutes or one and a half hour for a weekly session). This proved to be enough time for the described assignments although more preparation would have been helpful for some of them.

Over the course of an academic year, i.e. two semesters (the 3rd and 4th semesters of the 8-semester BA degree), I used four different assignments based on visual

materials. Together with other textual assignments, they constituted the basis for the students' progress assessment and final grades. The visual material assignments were:

- Presentation of a favorite social media site, and Essay based on a short video (3rd semester);
- Presentation of a significant photograph, and Essay based on an assigned image (4th semester).

The other assignments that the students were expected to do were Reading comprehension (texts handed out in class) and Story telling (continue a story, text handed out in class) in the 3rd semester, and Argumentative essay (topic assigned in class) and Reading comprehension/translation of an assigned text (take-home assignment) in the 4th semester. These assignments, however, will not be discussed in this paper as it focuses solely on visual materials.

3. Reasons to use visual materials in the classroom

When learning a new language, we first rely on coursebooks and the texts and exercises we read and complete to learn a new grammar item or vocabulary. But all coursebooks contain quite a lot of images and they are usually incorporated in the learning process in some way. However, these images are often seen as some kind of embellishment and are commonly used to introduce a new topic and have a two-minute conversation about it.

But there is so much more that can be accomplished with images, be they still or moving. And the new world of the internet and social media outlets and many more visual arenas of entertainment, whose presence is difficult to ignore, might indicate that nowadays young people communicate more in visual than in verbal terms, and that we as educators must find ways to include the visual in our learning practices. Incorporating images in language instruction will appeal to digital native learners, those students who grew up in a world where using smartphones, laptops, and social media is part of everyday life (Prensky, 2001).

A concept which might provide a great framework for the approach to teaching EFL described here, as well as the analysis of the survey results is the concept of visual literacy. Ever since Debes (1969) formulated this term, it has become more prominent in education and has been one of its objectives. Debes explained that it is crucial to develop visual competencies through simultaneously looking and including other sensory experiences, which will enable a visually literate person to interpret the visible symbols, objects, and actions around him/herself, communicate with other people, and understand items of visual communication (Debes,

1969:p.26). Pettersson defines *visual literacy* as “*the learned ability to interpret visual messages accurately and to create such messages. Thus interpretation and creation in visual literacy can be said to parallel reading and writing in print literacy.*” (Pettersson, 1989:p.146). This comparison clearly highlights the importance of focusing on visual literacy in education. Avgerinou (2001:p.26) gives a straightforward, broad definition of *visual literacy*: “*In the context of human, intentional visual communication, visual literacy refers to a group of largely acquired abilities, i.e. the abilities to understand (read) and use (write) images, as well as to think and learn in terms of images.*” As one of the primary goals of education, literacy has always been defined in terms of linguistics, which Kress (2003) finds unacceptable. He suggests that language-based theories must be combined with semiotics and other visual theories in order to produce a true definition of literacy in the twenty-first century.

Visual literacy has been recognized as one of the primary focuses of education in some countries (Canada, Australia and Singapore), and in Canada, for example, two new skills have been added to the traditional skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking – viewing and representing (Begoray, 2001). Viewing is defined as observing and understanding visual media such as symbols, films, television, photographs, video etc.; representing is defined as students’ ability to communicate information and ideas using these and other media (Begoray, 2001). Film, for example, is one of the media which has been used in teaching different kinds of content, from foreign languages (Stojsavljević Divac, 2023) to philosophy (Škerbić, 2009). If these new skills are to become standard skills to be developed at all levels of education, then teachers must be trained how to work with their students and how to use various media. It seems that visual literacy has become crucial in the world of constant exposure to images, in which a great deal of communication is based almost exclusively on the visual. Karastathi (2016: para. 28) calls for students to be taught to “resist the passivity, apathy and numbness they might feel toward the visual” and proposes that teachers “help them analyze the rhetorical techniques and meaning making mechanisms in operation in visual texts – that is, to make them active viewers.”

Visual literacy is just one of many different forms of literacies considered nowadays as essential in life and education. The term multiliteracies pedagogy, proposed by the New London Group, refers to “a pedagogy of multiliteracies where students would learn to ‘read’ (analyse and interpret) and ‘write’ (create) multimodal texts.” (Donaghy & Xerri, 2017:p.5). Kress (2003) argues that we must combine theory based on language with semiotics and other visual theories, which will signify the new concept of literacy in the twenty-first century. As Jewitt (2008:p.56) points

out, it is “increasingly important for education to attend to the literacy practices of students and the diverse ways of making meaning, in particular the multilingual, visual and multimodal, and the digital”. Only by incorporating different modes of learning into education - modes that correspond to the contemporary context we live in - can we expect students to respond well to formal education and achieve the best results.

4. Description of assignments

4.1. Presentation of a favorite social media site

I have decided to include this assignment in the classes since most social media sites are based on and rely on visual content (sometimes exclusively so). I told the students to select any internet-based material they would like to share with their classmates, present its good and bad sides, focusing on the reasons that made them choose this particular site. The students had absolute freedom in terms of content, focus, presentation style, with a time frame of 10 minutes as the only restriction.

4.2. Essay based on a short video

This assignment was one of two writing assignments, which I felt could be practiced more in EFL classes. Even if our students are given writing assignments, they are usually based on one of two or three given topics and are rarely combined with video clips. I believe this type of assignment provides a good balance of rules and freedom, and students could benefit greatly from it. The first half an hour of the class consisted of watching a video and the remaining hour consisted of writing an essay based on everything the students could take from the video.

4.3. Presentation of a significant photograph

I had given this assignment to my students in the previous years and their delivery was always excellent. The students are asked to choose a photograph of them, or taken by them, and show it to their classmates, explaining why they selected it and why it is significant to them. Even though these presentations are rather short (up to 7 minutes), students always communicate their messages well and let their classmates get to know them a little better. This might be a very good way for a group of students to learn some new information about each other and understand their classmates’ opinions and feelings better.

4.4. Essay based on an assigned image

The students are asked to write an essay based on an assigned image. Chosen images are all rather abstract and allow of a range of various interpretations (as images normally do). This provides quite a lot of freedom for students to write whatever they want and choose an essay type they think appropriate. The only limitation is time, as they are expected to look at the image, think about what they might want to write and produce a 250-word essay in one hour. This much freedom, in terms of the content and form, is meant to make it possible for students to formulate a topic they feel the most passionate about (within the very broad limits of the assigned image) and select the type of essay they feel the most confident writing.

5. Explanations and observations

5.1. Presentation of a favorite social media site

It would be almost impossible to imagine a 20-year old student who does not use the internet and social media extensively in this day and age and this was my first thought when I decided to ask my students to present a favorite social media site (or profile) to their classmates. This assignment was rather simple and consisted of doing some research at home and making a PowerPoint presentation which would introduce the chosen internet site to the classmates and explain the reasons for selecting that site. The latter was actually what I focused on because I thought this was an excellent way for my students to express themselves and for their classmates and myself to learn a little more about their preferences. Other than having a 10-minute time frame for their presentations, the students had no other limitations in terms of what site to select or how to design and present their work.

I was very curious about what the students would prepare because I wanted to learn more about my students as people. I already had a good relationship with this group of students and felt we always had a great atmosphere in the classroom so I thought getting to know them better could make this atmosphere even more stimulating. I was not wrong. These presentations did help me learn more information about my students, who revealed their interests I had not previously been aware of.

In terms of the content, all the presentations belonged to one of two categories – lifestyle and education. Namely, seven of the ten presentations showed Youtube channels (4) or Instagram accounts (3) of people cooking, living their everyday lives, sorting out clutter or talking about make-up, and also of a famous band and a popular teen magazine. Three presentations introduced Youtube channels (2) and

a Facebook account helping people learn German or find motivation to study or to live a happier life. Some of the presented content was expected as it is obvious that nowadays twenty-year-olds use Instagram all the time and follow many bloggers, vloggers and influencers who often talk about beauty, clothes and fashion, and post about various situations from their lives. What I did appreciate more was some of the students' decision to talk about educational content which could undoubtedly help their fellow students either in their studies or in their everyday lives.

I marked this assignment based on the following criteria: organization, content, grammar, and delivery. The most successful presentations were those which had great content, were well-prepared, and were presented with quite a lot of enthusiasm. Those which were awarded the least points lacked interesting content and acceptable English.

5.2. Essay based on a short video

The idea behind this assignment was to provide students with more input before a writing assignment than would normally be the case. Regardless of the type of essays students are asked to write, they are usually given two or three topics to choose from and are then left on their own to come up with a story, description, discussion, or whatever the format requires. And there is nothing wrong with this type of assignment – students should be able to formulate a structured piece of writing based on a more or less abstract topic. However, I wanted to try something else as I believed my students would feel more inspired if they were given more material (i.e. visual as well as verbal ideas) before the actual writing. Research shows that using video as a teaching tool increases efficiency of learning (Ljubojevic, Vaskovic, Stankovic & Vaskovic, 2014). The video was used here as a resource, and the students were encouraged to interpret what they view, so the focus was on their critical responses (Goldstein, 2017:p.28).

After watching an 8-minute video titled *What is freedom – People from around the world*², the students were asked to write a 250-word essay answering the following question: What does freedom mean to you? The video shows people from all over the globe saying what freedom is for them, and I believed their different answers might provide my students with a range of ideas, making it easier for them to come up with their own perspective. As Clare (2017) argues, video can be a transformational medium for learning and can be used to connect with other people and their stories and generate empathy. I asked my students to refer to some lines and ideas they heard in the video because I wanted to make sure they would listen to it attentively and

those perspectives might give them some pointers and make them think of more ideas of their own. I also thought such a broad topic could inspire my students to write about many various aspects of this topic, as any abstract notion might.

Their essays proved me somewhat wrong. Although the students wrote about many aspects of freedom, they all focused on people's personal freedom to choose who they want to be and create their own life paths. What was clearly lacking in these essays were political freedoms, and relating the personal choices they mentioned to a wider social context. Apart from the obvious examples of the role of law in the society and everybody being equal in the eyes of the law, the essays contained no questions about the relationship between the state/society and the individual. When I later thought about possible reasons for this, I realized that their focus on their own personal place in the world in their essays could be interpreted in terms of their young age (around twenty) and their not being exposed to texts discussing more political topics.

The essays were marked for the content, grammar and vocabulary, as well as following the word count and the 5-paragraph structure. Since the essays were very similar in content, their different marks were the result of their good or bad use of English.

5.3. Presentation of a significant photograph

This is one of my favorite assignments because I always have an opportunity to learn a little bit more about my students and see them in a new (always favorable) light. Hopefully, all the students appreciate this opportunity to get to know their classmates better and understand their background, opinions and behaviors. Teachers are glad if their students "develop a sense of agency" because the learning process will become "meaningful for them". (Clare, 2017:p.39). If students pick a selfie for the presentation, it will give them "a sense of ownership in their learning, as they are not only interpreting photographs, but also creating them" (Baker, 2015:p.10). The same also applies to any photograph students take themselves.

Most of the students chose a photograph taken by them and the photographs featured a friend or family member (5 photographs), their dog (3), their hometown, and a scene from a school excursion. This fact shows that, given a chance to talk about something they care about the most, the students will gladly take it. It is my conclusion that students like to share private information about themselves because this increases their sense of community, which, I believe, is extremely important and stimulating in a learning situation.

This assignment was marked based on the content, grammar and vocabulary, and delivery of the presentations within the time frame. The most successful presentations were those which were delivered by the students with the best command of English.

5.4. Essay based on an assigned image

This assignment, too, was designed to offer as much freedom as possible to students to think of their own interpretations of abstract images, which could mean different things to different people. The reason I decided to assign an image to my students was that I wanted to provide some guidance, so they would at least have a starting point for their essays. Besides receiving an image to write about, the students were also instructed to write up to 250 words and to finish their essays in one hour. Everything else depended on their own creativity. As Baker (2015:pp.3–4) argues: “Justifying why they understand images in particular ways requires students to analyze pieces of the image before producing a response based on evidence from the image. Stating that one ‘likes’ or ‘does not like’ an image is not sufficient for visual literacy; instead, students are challenged to link vocabulary from the visual representations with abstract ideas or past experiences.”

This much freedom is both a positive and a negative thing. Not giving students any restrictions in terms of content and not setting an essay format, I thought I was creating ideal conditions for producing essays which would be a result of the students’ creativity, interests and imagination. In reality, though, this meant that the students felt somewhat lost and did not know what to do with that much freedom. It also meant they focused on the most obvious parts of the images and did not feel the need to expand their meaning and go beyond the actual objects and scenes shown in them. One of the reasons for the students’ lack of confidence in producing more meaningful essays might be related to their youth and their not being accustomed to having much freedom in doing highschool assignments. The latter should be discussed in more detail in class before they start working on any assignment without many restrictions.

These essays were marked based on the students’ use of English and vocabulary, the essay structure and its relationship with the assigned image. The students’ final grades mostly depended on the use of English and vocabulary as the other two elements were of similar quality.

6. Survey results

In order to learn about the students’ opinions and comments about these assignments, I decided to create an online questionnaire and ask my students to answer the questions as frankly as they could after the end of the fourth semester. The questionnaire was made on the Google Docs platform and consisted of state-

ments with answers based on the five-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 and 2 as positive responses (“I strongly agree” and “I somewhat agree”) to 4 and 5 as negative responses (“I somewhat disagree” and “I strongly disagree”). The mid-point 3 represented the “undecided” response (“I do not know”). There was only one open-ended question, to which only some of the students responded as it was not obligatory.

All of the students completed the questionnaire and their responses will be discussed here in order to learn about the students’ satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the four assignments. The results of this small-scale survey show me which of the assignments should be repeated with some other groups of students, adjusted or avoided altogether.

The analysis of the students’ responses has shown that the students provided a positive feedback on the use of visual materials in our EFL classroom. All the students said they liked using visual materials (images, video clips, films, internet sites, etc.) in class, with a majority (60%) saying they *strongly agree* with this statement, and 40% saying they *somewhat agree* with it. However, they could not decide if they preferred visual to textual materials as 30% of the students responded with *don’t know* when asked about this preference. Half of the students said they liked using visual materials more than textual materials in class (1 chose *strongly agree* and 4 *somewhat agree*), while 2 favored textual to visual materials (one each chose *somewhat disagree* and *strongly disagree*).

When asked to list the four different assignments according to preference, the students said they liked the two presentations much more than the two writing assignments. Their favorite assignment was *Presentation of a significant photograph*, which was chosen as their most favorite or second most favorite assignment by all the students (not a single student chose it as their least favorite assignment). The second best assignment was *Presentation of a favorite social media site*, which 50% students said was their favorite assignment, 30% said it was their second best assignment, while one student each chose it as her second least favorite and the least favorite assignment.

The least favorite assignment was *Essay based on an assigned image*, which was selected as such by 6 students, while only 1 student picked it as her favorite assignment. The assignment *Essay based on a short video* was selected as a second least favorite assignment, with half of the students putting it in the third place. One student chose it as her least favorite assignment but the remaining four students considered it their most or second most favorite assignment.

I wanted to have more detailed information about what exactly the students thought about each particular assignment, so I asked the students to respond to a questionnaire about what they did or did not like about the assignments. The students were asked to agree or disagree (strongly or somewhat) with nine statements, or remain undecided if they were not sure what they thought about each statement. The questionnaire items for each of the assignments were as follows:

- This assignment is demanding.
- This assignment takes a lot of time to finish.
- This assignment is boring.
- This assignment is amusing.
- This assignment has made me think.
- I would repeat this assignment.
- If I were a teacher, I would assign this assignment in my class.
- I have learnt something doing this assignment.
- I enjoyed preparing and/or doing this assignment.

The most demanding assignment³ is *Essay based on an assigned image*, for which only one student chose *strongly disagree* as her answer. Five students picked *strongly agree*, one selected *somewhat agree*, and three picked *do not know*. The second most demanding assignment seems to be *Essay based on a short video*. Six students chose *strongly agree* (3) and *somewhat agree* (3), and two chose *do not know*, which means only two students think it is not demanding (1 picked *somewhat disagree* and 1 *strongly disagree*). The least demanding assignment was *Presentation of a favorite social media site*, for which one student chose *strongly agree*, one *somewhat agree*, and two *do not know*; three students selected *somewhat disagree* and three *strongly disagree*. The students had similar answers for the assignment *Presentation of a significant photograph*, with only slightly different numbers for each option – two students picked *strongly agree*, one chose *somewhat agree*, and one *do not know*; three students selected *somewhat disagree*, and three *strongly disagree*. It would, however, be good to know whether the ‘demands’ referred to their thinking of what they would present or write about, how much time went into researching, the actual delivery in class, or something entirely different.

In terms of how much time they consumed, the assignments *Presentation of a favorite social media site* and *Presentation of a significant photograph* are seen as the least time-consuming, with most students choosing the *somewhat disagree* and *strongly disagree* options (80% and 60%, respectively). With the other two assignments, the

³The following analysis will present responses to most but not all of the questionnaire items due to the word limit of the paper.

answers are different – the students did not know how to answer this question for *Essay based on a short video* (60%), with the other answers equally distributed (one student each chose all the other options); with *Essay based on an assigned image*, the students felt it did take quite a lot of their time (half of the students selected *strongly agree* (1) and *somewhat agree* (4)) and 30% opted for *do not know*.

Teachers know how important it is to create or find assignments and tasks which will simultaneously educate and entertain students, and how challenging this is as these two qualities are not necessarily present in a task at the same time. I had assumed the two presentation-based assignments would be considered more entertaining than the two writing assignments, and I was right. *Presentation of a favorite social media site* was considered amusing by 70% of the students, while *Presentation of a significant photograph* received a positive response by 80% of the students. I had hoped there would be no negative responses to these assignments but they each received a single negative response. The writing assignments were not very popular, as it turns out - *Essay based on a short video* received 50% of *do not know* responses, 20% thought it rather boring (*somewhat agree*) and 30% considered it amusing; the answers were more negative for *Essay based on an assigned image*, with 40% saying it was boring (2 *strongly agree* and 2 *somewhat agree*), 40% picking *do not know*, but 20 % thinking it was not a complete waste of time (*somewhat disagree*).

I also wanted to find out how much thought my students had put into preparing their presentations and essays, so I asked them to (dis)agree with the following statement: “This assignment has made me think”. The most ambiguous response was given for the assignment *Essay based on an assigned image*, as the students’ chosen answers were equally distributed across all five options. The three other tasks had similar responses, ranging from 5 *strongly agree* and *somewhat agree* and 5 *somewhat disagree* and *strongly disagree* answers for *Essay based on a short video* to 4 *agree* and 5 *disagree* answers (plus 1 *do not know*) for both *Presentation of a favorite social media site* and *Presentation of a significant photograph*.

The second similar statement given to my students (“I have learnt something doing this assignment.”) has given me a little more insight into what my students think they have gained doing these assignments. According to their answers, the assignment that seems to have taught them the least is *Presentation of a favorite social media site*, for which 7 students chose the *disagree* answers (3 *somewhat* and 4 *strongly disagree*). Only one student each chose the *strongly agree* and *somewhat agree* options, and one did not know how to answer. With the assignment *Presentation of a significant photograph*, half of the students felt they had made some progress in learning (3 *strongly agree* and 2 *somewhat agree*) but there were still

the other 5 students who felt they had learnt nothing (*5 strongly disagree*). Their responses improved a little for the writing assignments: 1 chose *strongly agree* and 2 *somewhat agree*, as opposed to 2 *somewhat disagree* and 3 *strongly disagree* for *Essay based on a short video*, with 2 students who were not sure how to respond to this statement; similarly, there were 2 *strongly agree* and 1 *somewhat agree*, and 3 *somewhat disagree* and 1 *strongly disagree* responses for *Essay based on an assigned image*, with 3 students who chose the *do not know* option.

In order to find out whether the students thought these assignments were useful as some of their future classroom activities (when they start their teaching careers), I asked them to respond to the following statement: “If I were a teacher, I would assign this assignment in my class.” The best responses were given for *Presentation of a significant photograph*, as 3 students chose *strongly agree* and 1 *somewhat agree* options. However, 3 students picked *somewhat disagree* and another 3 *strongly disagree*, which means that more than half of the students did not consider the assignment good enough for their prospective students. The most negative responses were given for *Presentation of a favorite social media site*, where 4 students each chose the *somewhat disagree* and *strongly disagree* options, and only 1 student each selected the *strongly agree* and *somewhat agree* options. Half of the class chose the disagree options (2 *somewhat disagree* and 3 *strongly disagree*) for *Essay based on a short video*, with 3 students responding favorably to this assignment (1 *strongly agree* and 2 *somewhat agree*), and 2 students who were unsure how to respond. Finally, the students seemed to be most confused about the assignment *Essay based on an assigned image*, with half of the students selecting the *do not know* option. The other 5 students distributed their responses almost equally across all the other options: 2 picked *strongly agree*, 1 *somewhat agree*, 1 *somewhat disagree* and 1 *strongly disagree*. The reasons for negative responses might be found in my students’ lack of experience, different approaches to teaching different age groups, English knowledge level of their prospective students as well as my students’ personal preferences.

The students were also asked whether they liked in-class assignments or doing individual research at home and preparing their presentations before actually sharing them with their classmates and the teacher. I learn from their answers that almost one third of them *do not know* how to respond to that question (30%), which I interpret as their willingness to being assigned tasks to prepare at home, as well as to being given tasks in class and completing them there. Another third of all the students said they did like in-class assignments, with two students picking the *strongly agree* and one opting for *somewhat agree* options. The remaining four students chose the *somewhat disagree* answer, meaning they preferred take-home

assignments. The conclusion which could be drawn from these responses is that more than two thirds of the students either liked or did not mind doing take-home assignments, so they are definitely a good idea, at least occasionally.

The only open-ended question asked the students to suggest visual materials which they would like to use in class while at university, regardless of the type of course (language or any other course). Not everyone gave answers to this question, but those who did (6) said they would like to have a quiz after covering a certain subject matter, and use videos, PowerPoint presentations and images. One of the respondents pointed out that it is quite right to use the Internet when researching something or learning about new matters, specifying that this includes watching videos, discussing photographs, reading newspaper articles, etc. This student's suggestion ends with the following sentence: "Learning should be fun for both young learners and university students." One of them said that they should do book and film presentations, while another one suggested doing exercises based on newspaper articles, listening exercises for better understanding of different dialects, watching YouTube videos and similar activities. Another one briefly said that materials they use in classes at the moment are quite alright.

7. Observed positive and negative aspects

7.1. Positive aspects

Many researchers give compelling reasons for the frequent inclusion of visual materials in the classroom but I have observed some of my own, which I will briefly discuss in the next few paragraphs.

a) Relaxed and stimulating atmosphere in the classroom

This would be a good enough reason to include any new approaches and materials in teaching because every teacher knows how important it is to create a positive, non-threatening and motivating atmosphere in the classroom. Simply put, in a stimulating teaching environment any new topic and language issue will be discussed more successfully, which does not refer only to students but to teachers as well.

b) Increased sense of community

This refers to the two tasks that are done via presentations, especially because the presentations are based on the personal information which students are willing to share with their classmates. It is sometimes surprising, and also wonderful, to see how freely and openly students talk about their innermost feelings and most important

people in their lives, and share some significant moments and little dilemmas from their lives. A classroom filled with laughter, where comments are heard and thoughts exchanged, can only contribute to a faster and more productive learning process.

c) Individual work at home

Teachers know that sometimes, no matter how hard they try, it is difficult to make students do any little task they are given in the classroom. The take-home assignments described here are one of the ways to ensure that students have already done some work before they come to school, and will also repeat what they have prepared during their delivery, so the work will definitely be done.

In addition to this, students are asked to do some research when composing their presentation and I believe that individual research is priceless when it comes to an effective learning process.

d) Thinking about new concepts

New concepts might not necessarily be completely novel to students but students might not have had the opportunity or the need to think about them. Besides, even if students start looking at a concept they are very familiar with, it will lead them to a whole range of new ideas and associations while they are doing their research. This only means that at least some learning is guaranteed and that is a great reason for these assignments to be done with new groups of students.

7.2. Negative aspects

Although I do not think there are any real negative aspects of using visual materials in teaching a foreign language (and many other subjects), I would like to address some that I have observed in order to eliminate any drawbacks of this approach to teaching and learning.

a) No limitations – both positive and negative aspect

The fact that students are given quite a lot of freedom in preparing their assignments seems like a positive thing, both for students and teachers, until students actually start working on their ideas. Suddenly, a whole world of possibilities opens up and it sometimes seems too big and rather daunting. What happens then, in most cases, is that students get lost in too much information they come across in their research and are unable to find a way out of it and tell crucial information from that which is not essential and could be omitted.

This negative aspect might be a result of the students' lack of experience in doing independent research and will hopefully disappear in the students' third and fourth year of studying. This is not to say that a student in his/her first or second year at university should not be able to do some research and to know what information to include in their paper or presentation but the truth is, they are not in many cases. This unfavorable fact can be related to students' highschool demands and lack of insistence on writing assignments there, which means that students need to focus more on this type of individual work at university.

b) Abstract ideas

This aspect of the assignments is directly related to the previous one as (almost complete) freedom is part of the interpretation of abstract notions. Struggling with abstraction was particularly obvious in the two writing assignments as they were both based on a very broadly formulated topic and an image allowing of plenty of interpretations.

Once again, the students' problem to overcome this obstacle derives from their lack of experience to write about ideas and notions which are not concrete or do not come from lived experiences. Besides, even if students could discuss such concepts in a group discussion, it becomes more challenging to put those ideas into a well-structured and meaningful piece of writing, especially when they are asked to write their essays with no input from their classmates.

c) Limited progress in learning

Some of the students felt they did not learn much preparing and presenting some of the assignments. If learning something is equated with acquiring new information about a new topic, then they are probably right to some extent. However, thinking about a familiar concept in a new way or hearing about something familiar from another person's perspective also constitutes learning, so I believe the students' opinion was based on this wrong premise. In order to make the whole process clearer to students, it might help to give them more detailed feedback after each assignment and point out what exactly they might have learnt in the process.

8. Conclusion

It would be impossible to imagine teaching a foreign language (or, even, any other subject matter) without using visual materials nowadays. Most of our students grow up and live their everyday lives seeing and making hundreds of photographs

and videos so we, as teachers, have to think of the best ways to use this exposure to visual materials. And this is what I tried to do during the described academic year and will continue to do, taking into consideration the feedback I received from the students and altering and adjusting the assignments described in this paper based on their feedback.

The students' responses were equally positive and negative, which clearly indicates which of the features should be implemented in my future assignments and which should be avoided or changed significantly. The overall students' attitude to visual materials in the classroom is very positive and this is a great starting point for any teacher. Although they said they did not necessarily prefer visual to textual assignments, there was not a single negative response that would indicate the students did not enjoy using visual materials in classes and it is a teacher's responsibility to identify the best assignments and tasks for each new group of students. The best points about the assignments were the following: they are amusing, they are not too demanding and time-consuming, and they make students think. These points alone are good reasons to include these and many other visual assignments in the classroom at any level of education.

One of the points that should be analyzed in more detail and adjusted in future assignments is the students' feeling they have not learnt much doing presentations and writing essays. As already pointed out, the feeling that they have not achieved much progress in learning might be due to the fact that there was not much new information while the students were preparing their assignments as they selected to present and discuss something they were already familiar with. However, the research that they were asked to do, structuring of their ideas into essays and presentations as well as the choice of language items they had to make does not really mean there was little or no progress in learning. What teachers might need to do in order to deal with this objection is to provide better feedback on how their students delivered their assignments, focusing on everything the students might take from the whole process of preparing and presenting them.

Based on the expectations and observations in the classroom and on the responses of the students, it is right to say that visual materials should be integrated in the EFL teaching and learning at university as much as textual ones since they make a natural resource for learning activities for new generations of students, they can be used in many different forms and manners, and they are essential in developing visual literacy, one of the crucial skills to have in the digital age.

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ВИЗУЕЛНИ МАТЕРИЈАЛИ У УЧИОНИЦИ ЕНГЛЕСКОГ КАО СТРАНОГ ЈЕЗИКА НА УНИВЕРЗИТЕТУ: СТУДИЈА СЛУЧАЈА

Резиме

Циљ овог рада јесте да се представе и анализирају резултати студије случаја о ставовима студената о употреби визуелних материјала на часовима енглеског као страног језика на универзитету. Подучавање нових генерација студената који су одрасли са паметним телефонима у рукама и друштвеним мрежама указује на потребу да се на часове на универзитету још више укључе визуелни материјали, а ова потреба нарочито је уочљива на часовима страних језика. Визуелна писменост постала је један од циљева образовања и не смије се занемарити ни на универзитетском нивоу.

Студија случаја бави се часовима два изборна предмета енглеског као страног језика, који су се у великој мјери заснивали на задацима са визуелним материјалима (презентација значајне слике, презентација омиљене странице на интернету или профила на друштвеним мрежама, те писање састава на основу слике и фотографије). Након што су задатке завршили током два семестра, студенти су замољени да одговоре на питања из упитника, а потом сути одговори обрађени. Идентификоване су и анализиране позитивне и негативне стране визуелних задатака (нпр. нове теме, атмосфера у учионици, осјећај заједништва, слобода у раду, напредак у учењу) како би се уочио њихов потенцијал за примјену са новим групама студената. У раду су представљени одговори студената, очекивања и запажања наставнице енглеског као страног језика, као и приједлози за даљи рад на часовима на универзитету.

► **Кључне ријечи:** енглески као страни језик, слике, видео, универзитет, визуелна писменост, визуелни материјали.

Preuzeto: 23. 6. 2025.
Korekcije: 15. 7. 2025.
Prihvaćeno: 10. 8. 2025.