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The Importance of Audio-Visual Materials in Teaching ESL Vocabulary at Primary School Level

Ramona Chiriac
Vasile Alecsandri University of Bacău, Romania
Science Faculty
157 Calea Mărășești, Bacău 600115
https://orcid.org/0009-0002-3541-5153

Abstract: This article explores the role of audio-visual materials in teaching vocabulary to primary school students, emphasizing their benefits in enhancing language acquisition and communication skills. The significance of audiovisual materials in English-as-a-second-language (ESL) classrooms is increasingly recognized as technology and foreign language education evolve. Understanding the nature and development of these materials is crucial since they enhance the learning experience. The interplay of language, structured as a macro-system, involves various micro-systems, where grammar is just one component. Modern theories of language acquisition highlight individual learner traits, allowing teaching through audiovisual content to connect with personal experiences. Teachers play a pivotal role, tasked with organizing these experiences and providing suitable materials. Authentic teaching resources, drawn from real-life contexts, have become invaluable, facilitated by audiovisual techniques that require diligent preparation and enthusiasm from educators and institutions.
Today's ESL teaching emphasizes comprehension and oral skills from an early age, moving away from traditional methods in search of innovative approaches. Quality must take precedence over quantity in teaching materials to effectively engage students. Ultimately, the success of various foreign language teaching methods largely hinges on the teacher's attitude, who must cultivate a positive and dynamic classroom atmosphere to encourage successful language learning.

Keywords: audio-visual aids; vocabulary teaching; primary education; ESL; language acquisition; teaching materials.

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1. Introduction

Throughout my teaching career, I've had the chance to work in various rural educational institutions where resources for teaching English were limited, often consisting of just a few textbooks and illustrations. However, technological advancements have transformed the educational landscape, enabling schools to utilize laptops, video projectors, and the Internet. These tools enhance teaching activities and can sometimes surpass traditional materials. For instance, during a vocabulary lesson on "Pets," a teacher can now use projected images instead of physical picture cards, improving visibility for the entire class. Nonetheless, traditional picture cards still serve a purpose in certain educational games to reinforce vocabulary knowledge.

This paper examines the significance of audiovisual materials in teaching vocabulary at the primary school level. Introducing English language study in early education may seem ambitious, but it is an opportune time to shape students' mental operational structures. A solid grasp of vocabulary is crucial for language acquisition, with various strategies available influenced by factors like word types, student age, and education level.

In primary education, children are eager to participate in playful activities, so English instruction should incorporate games to engage their interest. Audiovisual materials make vocabulary learning more engaging and are perceived as playful. Moreover, young learners retain information best when it is concrete, highlighting the importance of illustrations and drawings in the teaching process. Ultimately, vocabulary development is fundamental to learning English, as all language skills rely heavily on it.

2. The contribution of audio-visual materials to teaching vocabulary

Audio-visual materials have a long history in education, dating back to the seventeenth century when John Amos Comenius introduced illustrated teaching aids in his book *Orbis Sensualium Pictus*. Influential educators like Jean Rousseau and J. H. Pestalozzi also advocated for the use of visual and play materials in teaching. Audio-visual aids are defined as materials and equipment that support both learners and teachers in language education, with various definitions available from different scholarly sources and websites. Defined broadly, these aids encompass any materials that enhance the teaching and learning process, including auditory and visual components.

With advancements in technology, audio-visual resources have gained prominence in classrooms, transforming traditional teaching methods by making lessons more engaging and interactive. Such materials not only capture students' attention but also foster intrinsic motivation, making learning more impactful.

Teachers can utilize a variety of audio aids, such as cassette recorders, CDs, radios, and language laboratories. Visual aids can be categorized into projected aids (like overhead projectors, slides, and film strips) and non-projected aids (like realia—authentic objects, pictures, and graphics).

A. AUDIO AIDS:

✦ cassette recorder and cassettes – they might be no longer used these days because of the development of the technology, but they were successfully used many years ago;

✦ CDs – they have successfully replaced cassettes;

✦ radio;

✦ language laboratory

Ⓟ headphones;

Ⓟ microphones;

Ⓟ tapes recorders;

Ⓟ computers.

B. VISUAL AIDS:

1. projected visual aids

✦ the OHP /overhead projector (that helps the teacher to present pictures or written material to students in a more visible way; the information presented is written on overhead transparencies);

✦ slides and transparencies;

✦ film strips;

2. non projected visual aids

✦ realia (real things; concrete objects brought into the classroom) are used especially with beginners and particularly children, 'real' or lifelike items are useful for teaching the meanings of words; words like *ball, apple, pen, book* etc. can obviously be presented in this way; the teacher holds up the object (or points to it), says the word and then gets students to repeat it. Teachers sometimes appear in the classroom with plastic fruit to help simulate market conversations, or two telephones to help simulate phone conversations. Anyway, there are some disadvantages when it comes to realia. Thus, the objects that we bring to the class are limited in size and quantity.

✦ pictures/graphics – they have always been used by the teachers – whether drawn, taken from books, newspapers and magazines, or photographs – to facilitate learning; the teacher uses them in order to teach different lexical sets of words, for example: vegetable, family members, means of transport, food, clothes etc.; they can also be used to explain the meaning of vocabulary items; they can illustrate concepts

such as above and opposite just as easily as sand, block of flats, car, smile etc. Pictures can be in the form of:

Ⓟ cutouts (something cut out or intended to be cut out from something else, from a magazine, a newspaper, a book etc.) – very useful and handy in teaching vocabulary; with their help the teacher may ask students to make a poster on different topics; they can be also successfully used in vocabulary games.

Ⓟ flashcards (smaller cards that may be held up for pupils to see, on which the teacher writes words, sentences, or numbers; cards with images or illustrations on one or both sides; they are used in the classroom to introduce new words, practice drills, or review vocabulary). As well as with the cut-outs, flashcards are very useful in vocabulary games. Thus, the teacher may show students a series of flashcards illustrating different objects, and ask them to raise the flashcard they have got only if it represents the name of the object that he/she holds up. Some other times, cards can be successfully used for matching activities, where students have to find another student in the class with a similar card or one that has the answer to the question on his or her card. They can be asked to place cards in the correct column for sounds, or with the correct lexical group on a board or on a poster. Students can each be given word cards to hold in front of them and then be asked to move around until they form a line where all the cards together form a question or a sentence.

Ⓟ large wall pictures (big enough for everyone to see details);

Ⓟ cue cards (small cards which students use in pair or group work);

Ⓟ photographs;

Ⓟ illustrations (typically in a textbook);

Ⓟ handouts (sheets of paper containing information);

Ⓟ mock-ups (objects made up of cardboard or wood that focus on functionality not on the design; they are designed for usability testing; such objects can be, for example, dummy telephones used to simulate telephone conversations, or clocks which help the students learn and express the time etc.);

Ⓟ cuisenaire rods (small blocks of wood of different lengths; each length is a different colour; the rods are featureless, and are only differentiated by their size and colour; with a little imagination they may stand for a lot of objects and be used in conversational games; they can also be used to teach prepositions);

✦ the flannel board (on which pictures/cutouts of various items can be stuck or pinned);

✦ flip charts.

C. AUDIO-VISUAL AIDS:

✦ computer, laptop, tablet, mobile phone;

✦ internet;

- videos;
- film clips.

Vocabulary is better learnt within the context of interesting activities that promote students' active involvement and provide varied opportunities for them to practice and apply knowledge of new words.

The goal of audio-visual materials is to increase teacher's ability to present the lesson in a simple, effective and easy way to be understood by the students, which means that these teaching aids facilitate learning and make the teaching-learning process more pleasant, more enjoyable.

With their help the process of learning becomes more permanent since students use more than one sense, and abstract ideas become more concrete to the learners. An important role is played by the teacher, whose job is to make sure that he/ she chooses and uses the appropriate teaching aid to the topic and objectives of the lesson, to the age of the students and to their level of knowledge.

By using audio-visual materials in the English class, the teacher makes sure he/ she provides good occasions for different types of learners to acquire vocabulary, facilitating their language learning. Thus, visual learners are stimulated and learn better with the help of visual means (by reading and by looking at pictures, posters, maps, flashcards, wall displays, graphic organizers, realia, timelines, charts, grids, diagrams, by using coloured chalk/pencils or by watching films/videos) as they remember information/instructions best if they visualize the source.

On the other hand, auditory learners learn well by listening to materials (through lectures, verbal instructions, explanations, discussions or through listening to passages on audio-cassettes); they also learn through songs, poems, rhymes. Even tactile learners' acquisition of vocabulary is greatly enriched by practice, as they learn best when they practise, when they are physically involved/ actively participate in the activities; they like to work with cards, slips of paper, magnet board/flannel board, hand-outs. Moreover, kinaesthetic learners, who are very dynamic students and enjoy moving around and doing rhythmic routines in order to learn, increase their vocabulary on the bases of educational games developed with the help of visual materials.

While audio materials offer students a pattern for pronunciation, through video materials (flashcards, handouts) the teacher provides the form/spelling of words and audiovisual materials help students understand the meaning of words in specific contexts, the way they are used in different situations.

By means of videos, it is the animated, mobile image that has made its intrusion into the language class: this new teaching aid, in addition to the attraction it exerts and the possibility it allows to introducing a varied language, current and in situation, provides a reservoir of linguistic know-how and communication practices.

It facilitates comprehension, because it allows a good contextualization by presenting the communication environment and a vision of the non-verbal (mimicry, gesture, proxemics): the one which brings in itself a wealth of information which helps creation, sense. It also offers many advantages to the teaching of civilization: television and video material directly testify to social and cultural reality.

These tools help illustrate concepts and facilitate vocabulary teaching by connecting abstract words to concrete items.

Audio-visual aids can also be divided into three primary categories: audio aids, visual aids, and audio-visual aids. Audio aids encompass devices that allow students to practice their listening skills and improve pronunciation. Visual aids like images, flashcards, or wall charts enhance vocabulary retention by providing visual context. Meanwhile, audio-visual aids such as videos and internet resources combine sound and imagery, creating a richer learning experience.

Effective vocabulary acquisition occurs best through engaging activities that require student participation. The varied nature of audio-visual aids targets different learning styles, accommodating visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners. For instance, visual aids help visual learners remember information through imagery, while auditory learners benefit from listening exercises. Kinesthetic learners, who thrive on physical engagement, gain vocabulary skills through interactive activities.

Video-based materials, particularly, provide an immersive learning experience, allowing students to observe language in use and contextualize vocabulary in real-life situations. Such resources contribute to language comprehension and cultural awareness, as they provide insight into non-verbal communication and social customs.

Ultimately, language teachers are tasked with promoting an environment conducive to vocabulary development. Thoughtful selection and use of audio-visual materials facilitate this process, making it easier for learners to grasp new words and appreciate the cultural nuances of the language being taught. With a shift towards communication-focused language education, audio-visual resources represent a powerful means of enhancing language acquisition and fostering effective communication skills.

3. Vocabulary knowledge – the essential element towards effective communication

Vocabulary knowledge is a crucial element in acquiring and mastering a language, significantly influencing effective communication. For students learning English, developing a robust vocabulary is essential; inadequate vocabulary limits their ability to understand and express themselves. Good vocabulary knowledge enhances comprehension of texts, leading to broader reading experiences and further vocabulary development.

Harmer (1993:68) emphasizes that knowing a word encompasses understanding its form and meaning, which includes its usage, connotation, word formation, and grammatical application. Vocabulary can be categorized into two types: incidental vocabulary that arises from discussions and intentional vocabulary that is pre-selected by educators. Mastery of a word requires repeated exposure, as learners typically grasp only a word's most common meaning initially.

Pikulski and Templeton (cited in Bonta, 2013:99) identify various vocabularies, such as oral (listening and speaking), written (reading and writing), receptive (understanding through listening and reading), and expressive (active use in speaking and writing). Wallace (1982:6) and McCarty (1990:5) assert that vocabulary learning is fundamental to foreign language acquisition, emphasizing that contextual learning and understanding grammar are more effective than rote memorization.

Vocabulary knowledge is crucial for language comprehension, as understanding a language relies on known words. Harmer (1991) differentiates between active vocabulary, which students use regularly, and passive vocabulary, which students recognize but do not often employ in their speech or writing. Understanding a language's vocabulary directly impacts language comprehension—students must know a significant portion of the vocabulary to grasp the content of texts. According to Nation (2001), readers should understand at least 97% of the vocabulary in a text for adequate comprehension; thus, knowledge of key vocabulary is imperative for understanding written material.

Vocabulary dramatically influences all aspects of language skills: reading, listening, speaking, and writing. In reading, students with a rich vocabulary can decode messages effectively, while those with limited vocabulary struggle. Students need to have sufficient word knowledge to understand what they read. They can decipher a writer’s message only if they know the meaning of most of the words used in a text. Successful communication hinges on a student's vocabulary; more words enable clearer and more precise expression of thoughts and ideas. In order to fully understand the message of a text, students need to know the meaning of the key vocabulary in the respective piece of writing, that is, word knowledge is crucial to reading comprehension and determines how well students will be able to comprehend the texts they read.

Similarly, for listening skills, good vocabulary aids in understanding spoken content and responding appropriately. Writing competence is also tied to vocabulary; students must know how to spell words correctly and use them in suitable contexts to convey their intended messages. Overall, a strong vocabulary foundation is integral for students to communicate effectively and competently across all language skills.

4. Conclusion

Vocabulary development is crucial for learning English, as all language skills—speaking, listening, writing, and reading comprehension—hinge on the size and knowledge of vocabulary. Recent studies emphasize that teaching English focuses on effective communication. Image-sound interaction has emerged as the best approach for acquiring a foreign language effectively. The teacher uses audio-visual materials in English class to support various types of learners in acquiring vocabulary and enhancing their language learning.

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