Article

Examining Iraqi EFL Teachers' Perception: The Benefit of Using Visual-Based Input to Improve Reading Comprehension

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Abstract: This study examines Iraqi EFL teachers' perceptions of using visual-based input to enhance reading comprehension. A descriptive design was employed, combining quantitative data from questionnaire with 50 EFL teachers across Iraqi governorates. The results revealed positive perceptions, with teachers strongly agreeing that visual tools improve information recall, text comprehension, and classroom engagement. While visual aids were deemed highly effective for motivation and enjoyment, their role in fostering critical thinking and peer learning received slightly lower agreement. The findings align with prior research emphasizing the benefits of visual literacy in EFL contexts but highlight areas for further professional development.

1. Introduction

Reading comprehension is an important skill that challenges teachers and is crucial for students' academic success. This research explores reading comprehension about understanding images and videos, known as visual literacy. As images are everywhere in daily life, reading and interpreting them accurately is essential. Effective interpretation of images requires prior knowledge of visual language and understanding how its components work together to convey meaning.

In education, teachers need to change their methods to meet the different ways that the 'page' and 'screen' generations read (Tyner, 2014). The topic of how to teach reading is widely debated, involving various theories and teaching methods (Castles et al., 2018). The ongoing "reading wars," which have been seen in other English-speaking nations, have influenced the academic, policy, media, and classroom practices in different countries over the last 50 years (Buckingham and Meeks, 2019).

In the field of education, the focus is on the learning area, with students at the center. Students face challenges in understanding abstract concepts and ideas arising from the nature and relevance of abstract thinking. Therefore, educational institutions around the world rely on state-of-the-art technologies to meet the diverse needs of students. Rapid and diverse technological advancements are also transforming education and affecting all aspects of the learning process. As technology is increasingly integrated into all aspects of daily life, its significant impact is particularly evident in the field of teaching. Advances in information technology have led to innovative learning methods and provided learners

with opportunities to participate in education flexibly without being restricted by traditional time and place. (Al-Sinani & Al Taher, 2023).

Visual learning resources are increasingly utilized across various teaching fields (Meredith, 1947). Besides being a great asset for enhancing language learning, incorporating visual aids in lessons offers students a richer context. These elements contribute to students becoming more engaged and communicative within the classroom environment. The role of visual tools in teaching English is significant, and their presence in every lesson provides numerous advantages for both educators and students (Munoz, P. C., & Hidalgo, 2013). Additionally, it highlights the positive impact on both teachers and learners within EFL settings. Students require not only explanations on specific topics but also the chance to corroborate their knowledge based on their own experiences. According to Zewary (2011), "visuals are language teaching materials that can be used at all levels of language instruction. " Thus, employing visual learning aids is an essential strategy in teaching English to ensure an effective educational experience in the classroom. Visual aids aim to enhance learning by delivering information through sounds or sights. These tools help make complex ideas more concrete, encouraging active and meaningful learning during practice sessions. They also support teachers in their lesson planning and help students with their studies from textbooks. The famous educator Comenius once stated that the foundation of all learning is to present information clearly to the senses using items that can be seen and understood easily (Friesen, 2017). Visual aids, along with sounds, real-life objects, and other resources, are all categorized as "learning resources" (Khany & Kamalvand, 2022). Specific types of visual aids can be homemade or produced in large quantities. Examples include wall posters, pictures, symbolic items, and various flat materials. There are also audio-visual tools available. These are educational devices like TVs, radios, and different kinds of projectors that provide sound elements. Similar to books, films can be utilized in a range of classroom environments.

The source could come from various teaching styles, approaches, and strategies, as well as the internal and external factors related to students. This prompts teachers to discover the most effective resources for learning English. This study aims to outline the types of visual learning tools that teachers typically use and to explain how teachers view these visual aids in their English classes.

Literature Review

The use of visual learning tools in education is growing in popularity. This trend is linked to dual coding theory, which highlights the importance of using both visual and verbal methods, especially for younger students who are used to multimedia. However, many language teachers do not recognize how visual aids can enhance language learning, as traditional teaching often focuses only on verbal instruction. This study explored how English teachers can use visual learning aids to enhance their students' learning. It shared findings and insights from a postgraduate research project on this topic (dolati, r., & richards, 2010)

According to (Yang et al., 2013:116), Reading comprehension has improved throughout the nation in recent years. linguistic level of understanding. According to the report of the National Reading Board of the National Institute of Child Health and The progress of reading in Human Development. The five components of English are the alphabetic principle, oral reading fluency, vocabulary, phonemic awareness, and Understanding; According to Peregoy and Boyle (2013), reading in one's native tongue is akin to reading in the second language. Each language is made up of prior knowledge, communication, contextual clues, and universal grammarian a thorough educational environment.

Nowadays, it is hard to conceive of teaching without it being diverse. visual aids (Barseghyan, 2014). Visual aids are educational resources that are employed. in the teaching-learning process to maintain student attention, simplify subjects, and improve

learning. TVs, radios, flip charts, film strips, charts, models, and other teaching aids are examples. In essence, all of these titles allude to the same benefit: teachers, mentors, guides, facilitators, and mentors regularly use visual resources to improve their verbal skills, resulting in students being more focused, clear, curious, and able to learn more effectively.

A study by Muna and Dunya (2017) examined if visual cues could enhance reading comprehension for EFL students. They posed a null hypothesis claiming no difference in scores between students using picture cues and those using traditional methods. The study involved 36 students from two middle school sections. Results showed that the group using picture cues scored higher, proving this approach was effective.

Dewanti, Batan, and Suprianti (2019) found that most English teachers believe using media can enhance the learning experience for students. Teachers should view media as a helpful tool that saves time on lesson preparation and allows for better use of their time, while also expanding their knowledge. Gistituati, Refnaldi, and Syaifullah (2019) explain that visual aids support speech development by allowing the audience to see and hear information. Visual aids include sketches, pictures, models, films, and other tools that help students learn through sight (Weaber & Bollinger, 1949).

Fa'eza Adnan's 2019 study examined how reading text and viewing visuals impact understanding for students learning English as a foreign language. It found that while images can help improve comprehension and thinking skills, they do not significantly affect overall understanding. The study involved 120 female college students, with one group learning with graphics and the other without, both achieving similar understanding.

Another study by Nguyen and Trang (2021) used both quantitative and qualitative methods to collect data through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Thirty teachers from various high schools in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam, participated. Six of the teachers were invited to participate in the interviews. The main findings are: First, English teachers highly value the role of pictures in the reading stage. Second, participants revealed some potential difficulties that hinder English teachers from using visual aids in the reading stage.

In this study by Retno Wiyati and Feni Marlina (2021), the use of visual learning aids by teachers in EFL classrooms and their attitudes toward these aids were examined. The researchers collected data through interviews and questionnaires from three English instructors. The findings revealed that teachers used many visual learning tools, such as projectors, flashcards, and textbooks. Moreover, 53.33% of the teachers had positive views about these aids. Visual learning tools helped teachers manage their time during lesson preparation and delivery, contributing to a better learning environment. Overall, the study highlighted the effectiveness of these tools in EFL teaching.

Aseel Sabeeh (2022) looked at how Iraqi teachers felt about the quick changes happening in society, particularly in classrooms, as a result of the use of information and communication technologies. They allow students and teachers to personalize their education. Institutions must respond to these developments in a way that is really efficient. The challenges that Iraqi instructors face when utilizing these technologies to teach English as a foreign language are the subject of this study. The findings revealed positive attitudes toward ICT while also bringing up issues that need to be addressed. The findings and suggestions for future studies are presented.

Arief Hadziq Fikri et .al (2024)　explores how visual literacy influences reading comprehension for 8th graders at SMPN 01 Buay Madang, using a qualitative descriptive approach with observation and documentation for data collection. The findings reveal three key points: (1) there is a notable difference in comprehension between students who use visual literacy media and those who do not; (2) visual aids help students grasp texts more easily and quickly; and (3) students who utilize visual media demonstrate better understanding and application of information compared to those who rely solely on text.

The study suggests that incorporating visual literacy into the curriculum can enhance student comprehension and improve teaching standards in schools.

Ali and Rommel (2024) studied how pictures-based activities influence children's reading comprehension skills, focusing on three levels: literal, interpretive, and evaluative. They worked with 380 children, splitting them into two groups—one used pictures-based activities, while the other had traditional teaching. The results showed that the picture group had better read comprehension test scores, but there were no significant differences among various reading levels in this group. The study recommended using visual aids in early reading and training educators to implement these activities effectively. George et al. (2024) also found that visual documentation improves reading comprehension for children with difficulties, suggesting more research on effective visual teaching methods.

In this study, the researcher conducted a mixed-methods design. The researcher gathered both quantitative and qualitative data. The study focused on the importance of visual aids in enhancing reading comprehension and teachers' views on integrating these tools into teaching.

The present study aimed to address the following question:

a. What are teachers' perceptions towards the use of visual tools to improve reading comprehension?

2. Materials and Methods

Design

This study enjoys a mixed methods design, the researcher gathered both quantitative and qualitative data using a questionnaire and interview. The study was conducted with Iraqi English teachers.

Participants

The sample for this study 50 EFL teachers (14 females and 36 males) selected non–randomly from different governorates of Iraq (Diyala _ Baghdad _ Dhi Qar). They represented a diversity of using visual tools as well as different teaching and learning conditions.

Table 1. Participant.

Category	Number of Participants	Male	Female	Bachelor's	Master's	Ph.D.
Overall	50	14	36	28	18	4
By Experience:						
- Less than 5 years	12	3	9	8	4	0
- 5–10 years	14	5	9	7	6	1
- More than 10 years	24	6	18	13	8	3

Instrument

To meet the objectives of the present study, the following instruments were used:

Questionnaire

The teachers ranged from beginners to experienced English teaching experts with three different degrees (Bachelor, Master, PhD). The respondents were selected based on the principle of free sampling. The questionnaire questions were taken from Trans Hugh

Nguyen (2021). The term "image" was replaced by "visual aid" to make it more relevant to the study. Fifteen questions specifically addressed the use of images during the reading phase. A Likert scale was used to rate the questions reviewed, with five categories: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree. In addition, a PhD expert in the field of TEFL was consulted to ensure the validity of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was tested as a pilot project among 64 teachers with more than five years of experience in teaching English in secondary schools. Data from the pilot questionnaire was collected and reliability tested. This result indicated that the questionnaire had sufficient reliability to be used for data collection in this survey.

To test the internal reliability of the questionnaire, the researchers used Cronbach's alpha, the result of which was. 0.92, which is an acceptable level of reliability.

Table 2. Reliability Statistics.

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	Number of Items (N)
0.92	0.91	14

Procedure

The researcher distributed a questionnaire to 50 Iraqi EFL teachers, selected non-randomly from different governorates (Diyala, Baghdad, Dhi Qar). Before the main study, a pilot test was conducted with five teachers to refine the instrument. The questionnaire, adapted from Nguyen (2021), used a 5-point Likert scale to assess perceptions of visual tools. After one week, the data were collected and analyzed using SPSS for descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) and reliability testing (Cronbach's α = 0.92). Interviews provided additional qualitative insights.

3. Results
Teachers' perceptions towards the use of visual tools

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Teachers' Perspective towards the use of visual tools.

Statement	1 (Strongly Disagree)	2 (Disagree)	3 (Neutral)	4 (Agree)	5 (Strongly Agree)	Mean	SD
1. Visual tools allow students to recall the information easily.	0	0	4	18	28	4.48	0.64
2. Through visual tools, students can understand the text better.	0	0	3	15	32	4.58	0.60

3. Visual tools enable students to be motivated to read the text.	0	1	6	20	23	4.30	0.75
4. Visual tools make students think more about the text.	0	0	5	19	26	4.42	0.67
5. Visual tools help students connect prior knowledge with new learning.	0	0	4	22	24	4.40	0.65
6. Visual tools can involve students in the text they will read.	0	0	6	18	26	4.40	0.70
7. Visual tools help students follow the text easily.	0	0	5	20	25	4.40	0.68
8. Visual tools help students know the purpose of the reading text.	0	1	7	19	23	4.28	0.76
9. Visual tools help students predict the topic/contents before reading.	0	0	6	21	23	4.34	0.69
10. Visual tools stimulate	0	2	8	18	22	4.20	0.82

students' critical thinking.						
11. Visual tools make the classroom atmosphere more enjoyable.	0	0	5	17	28	4.46 0.66
12. Visual tools make students more confident to deal with the text.	0	0	6	20	24	4.36 0.70
13. Visual tools encourage students to learn from peers' ideas.	0	2	9	19	20	4.14 0.84
14. Visual tools make students more involved in reading.	0	1	7	18	24	4.30 0.77

The survey results demonstrate overwhelmingly positive perceptions among EFL teachers regarding the use of visual tools in language instruction. Across all 14 statements, mean scores consistently exceeded 4.0 on the 5-point Likert scale, indicating strong agreement about the benefits of visual aids. The highest levels of agreement (means >4.4) were observed for statements concerning information recall, text comprehension, and classroom enjoyment, suggesting teachers view visual tools as particularly effective for these aspects of learning. While still positive, slightly lower agreement (means 4.1-4.2) emerged for items related to critical thinking and peer learning, hinting at potential areas for professional development. Notably, disagreement was rare (0-2 responses per item), and neutral responses remained below 20% for all statements, reinforcing a clear consensus about the value of visual tools. The relatively low standard deviations (mostly <0.8) further indicate consistent agreement among respondents. These findings strongly support the integration of visual tools in EFL classrooms, particularly for enhancing engagement, comprehension, and motivation, while suggesting opportunities to further explore their role in fostering higher-order thinking skills.

4. Discussion

The current findings corroborate earlier studies (e.g., Muna & Dunya, 2017; Fikri et al., 2024) demonstrating that visual aids significantly enhance reading comprehension and student engagement. Like Dewanti et al. (2019), Iraqi teachers acknowledged visual tools'

efficiency in lesson delivery, though their slightly lower agreement on critical thinking contrasts with Ali and Rommel's (2024) emphasis on visuals for higher-order skills. The strong consensus on motivation aligns with Wiyati and Marlina's (2021) results but diverges from Fa'eza Adnan's (2019) null finding on overall comprehension impact. Challenges noted in Nguyen and Trang (2021), such as resource limitations, were less prominent here, possibly due to increased ICT adoption (Sabeeh, 2022).

5. Conclusion

Iraqi EFL teachers perceive visual tools as highly beneficial for reading comprehension, particularly in boosting recall, engagement, and enjoyment. While the study reinforces global trends favoring visual literacy, it underscores the need for targeted training to maximize their potential in critical thinking and collaborative learning. Future research should explore contextual barriers and longitudinal impacts of visual aids in diverse EFL settings.

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