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The Role of Visual Teaching Materials in Teaching English Vocabulary in the Context of Basic Education in Myanmar

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Abstract

This research has been carried out to investigate the role of visual teaching materials in teaching English vocabulary at the context of basic education in Myanmar. Questionnaire (A) and Questionnaire (B) were distributed to the teachers who are working in 15 Basic Education High Schools in Chan Aye Tharzan Township and Aung Myay Tharzan Township, Mandalay. Questionnaire (A) and Questionnaire (B) were prepared following the concept of Porter and Margaret (1992) that using visual materials not only makes what teachers have to say more comprehensive to their students, they can make it more interesting as well. In this research, sixty primary school teachers, sixty five lower secondary school teachers and fifty one upper secondary school teachers of English participated. The findings of this research reveal that teachers use all kinds of visual teaching materials. Therefore, visual teaching materials are useful as an a means for providing an effective language input.

Introduction

Human-beings express their ideas, opinions, feelings, likes and dislikes by using language when they communicate with each other. Effective communication can be performed based on the communicative competence of the learners through the use of appropriate words for intelligible interaction. Many language teachers and linguists believe that using appropriate visual materials in teaching vocabulary can be a stimulus for language acquisition.

In this research, the data were collected by asking questionnaires with the concept of Porter and Margaret (1992) that using visual materials not only makes what teachers have to say more comprehensive to their students, they can make it more interesting to sixty six primary, sixty eight lower secondary and fifty two upper secondary school teachers of English at 15 Basic Education High Schools in Chan Aye Tharzan Township and Aung Myay Tharzan Township, Myanmar. There are 30 question items in Questionnaire (A) and 10 question items in Questionnaire (B). The respondents were given both English version and Myanmar version in Questionnaire (A) and Questionnaire (B). In Questionnaire (A), 24 question items are related to the visual teaching materials used in teaching vocabulary that make students more comprehensive and other 6 question

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items are related to the visual teaching materials that make more interesting for the students in learning English vocabulary. In Questionnaire (B), item numbers (1-7) are related to the use of visual teaching materials. Question number (8) is related to the popular strategy for Myanmar teachers. And item number (9) is related to the helpful method in teaching vocabulary. The last question item (10) is related to students' attitudes towards using pictures in teaching vocabulary. Their responses to questionnaires were analyzed with the idea of Porter and Margaret (1992) that using visual materials not only makes what teachers have to say more comprehensive to their students, they can make it more interesting as well.

1.   Aim and Objectives

The aim of this research is to examine the role of visual teaching materials in teaching English vocabulary at the context of basic education in Myanmar. So, the objectives of this research are:

(i)   to find out whether the visual teaching materials used in teaching English vocabulary at the context of basic education in Myanmar make learning more comprehensible and interesting for students

(ii)   to explore teachers' opinions towards using visual teaching materials in teaching English vocabulary.

2.   Literature Review

In this section, the visual aids and techniques in vocabulary learning and teaching and the theoretical frameworks which are related to the process of data collection, analysis and interpretation of the research data on the use of visual teaching materials are presented.

3.1   The Visual Aids on Vocabulary Learning

The use of visual aids in the classroom helps students to become more interested in the subject. There are visual aids for all ages of students that are appropriate for classroom use. They are tools to help teaching a subject. They are also learning tools for students. They can be interactive and can help to customize the learning process. Teachers can hold students' attention by using visual aids. They can make students to keep their attention focused on the subjects that they are learning. These aids can help students to break down information and manage it on their own. Using visual aids in the classroom is a good way to make a lesson more memorable to the students involved. They

are learning tools that teachers use to convey an idea more effectively and they can also make students' idea become more concrete for them.

The use of different visual aids will help improve students' motivation and interaction in class as well as learning of particular language skills and knowledge. Gairns and Redman (1986) claimed that the most general visual aids that were displayed in the language classrooms included flashcards, photographs, blackboard drawings, wall charts, and realia and those other forms of visual aids such as mimes and gestures which were often used to supplement other ways of conveying meanings. Goodman (1987) proposed that for the most part, learners of all ages easily understood by looking at visuals in that a picture seemed worth a thousand words and avoided lengthy and difficult word definitions. Mayer and Sims (1994) also claimed that when learners made connections between verbal and visual representations of words by using visual aids, learners' knowledge were enhanced and they could memorize many new words.

3.1.1   Theoretical Background

Vocabulary functions as a cornerstone. Without vocabulary, any language could not exist. Speaking would be meaningless and it may be impossible with only structure without vocabulary. The word "vocabulary" generally represents a summary of words or their combinations in a particular language. However, according to Ur (2000), one item of vocabulary can consist of more than one word. E.g. 'post-office' consists of two words and still expresses one idea. Vocabulary teaching is one of the most important components of any language class.

3.1.2 Techniques in Vocabulary Teaching

Learners acquire vocabulary in various ways. Students are exposed to a lot of new vocabularies during lessons: by the teachers, by texts or other materials they work with. A lot of this vocabulary is automatically absorbed. (Harmer, 1993)

Porter and Margaret (1992) assert that using visual materials not only makes what teachers have to say more comprehensive to their students, they can make it more interesting as well. The use of various types of visual materials helps the learners in order to negotiate meaning, interact with one another actively and exchange views while their attention is on meaning. According to Thornbury (2004), real objects (called realia) or pictures or mime are used to express the word meaning".

Pictures comprise text pictures and class pictures. Text pictures are found in the texts designed primarily for the beginners. Class pictures may be sub-divided into picture cards and wall pictures. Wall pictures include maps, posters, photographs, etc. They are excellent in practice for oral composition and question and answer drill. Pictures assist learners to negotiate word meanings during task performance. Wright (1976) summarizes the role of picture in teaching vocabulary by saying, "A picture can often show an action more easily than even a talented actor can demonstrate." Besides, Dobson (1974) explains, "If teachers have a set of flashcards that show a figure or figures performing different activities such as sleeping, getting up, eating a meal, reading the newspaper, driving, working in an office and so on, they can make a student put the flashcards into a logical sequence and then tell a story based on the sequence." Flashcards and postcards develop the learners' self-study and create fun as they are easily shuffled.

Picture and words flashcards are also very useful tools in presenting and drilling forms of new words. They draw students' attention and make boring activities more enjoyable. As Cable (1977) mentions blackboard is the most conveniently available instructional device to display lettering and diagrams, drawn on the spot in front of the class.

2.2   Related Researches

There are many researches related to the visual teaching materials in teaching English vocabulary. In this research, four researches related to the present research in one way or another are presented. In those four researches, the researchers had been done through questionnaires survey both from teachers' and students' point of view. Two of them were divided into two sections. The first section deals with various techniques of vocabulary teaching in general. The second section is comprised of several activities and lesson plans offered practical examples of pictures utilization in the class. And also advantages and disadvantages   of using pictures were discussed.

In the other two related researches, many students and English language teachers participated and questionnaires and interviews were used as research tools. The researchers discovered that using visual materials enhances vocabulary learning. The present research also deals with on using visual materials.

4.   Research Methodology

This research is an attempt to assess the role of visual teaching materials in teaching English vocabulary. In order to achieve this objective, 6 Basic Education High

Schools in Chan Aye Tharzan Township and 9 Basic Education High Schools in Aung Myay Tharzan Township in Mandalay were chosen and 60 primary teachers of English, 65 lower secondary teachers of English and 51 upper secondary teachers of English were requested to answer Questionnaire (A) and Questionnaire (B). In questionnaire (A), the the teachers or respondents only had to choose 'Yes' or 'No' depending on the concepts whether visual materials used in the classrooms makes learning more comprehensible and interesting. They had to choose the appropriate answer with their opinions towards using visual teaching materials in teaching English vocabulary in Questionnaire (B).The questionnaires in this research are based on the idea of Porter and Margaret (1992) that using visual materials not only makes what teachers have to say more comprehensive to their students, they can make it more interesting as well.

The questionnaires have two parts. The first consists of 30 question items which are related to visual teaching materials that make students more comprehensive and more interested in learning vocabulary. Among 30 questions, 24 question items which are related to the visual teaching materials used in teaching vocabulary make students more comprehensive. And other 6 question items which are related to the visual teaching materials that make more interesting for the students in learning vocabulary. The second part has 10 question items, which deal with the teachers' opinions towards using visual materials in teaching English vocabulary. Question items (1-7) are concerned with teachers' attitudes that are related to the use of visual teaching materials. Question number (8) is related to find out the popular strategy for Myanmar teachers. And item number (9) is related to investigate the helpful method in teaching vocabulary. The last question item (10) is related to seek the students' attitudes towards using pictures in teaching vocabulary. During the administration of questionnaires, respondents or teachers were told the purpose and how they had to complete in the questionnaires. They were also informed to fill in Questionnaire (B) based on what actually happened in the classroom about the use of visual teaching materials in teaching vocabulary.

4.1   Data Collection

The data were collected in 6 Basic Education High Schools in Chan Aye Tharzan Township and 9 Basic Education High Schools in Aung Myay Tharzan Township, Mandalay in Myanmar. After the data were collected, the responses were coded. All responses were analyzed by the concept of Porter and Margaret (1992) that using visual

materials not only makes what teachers have to say more comprehensive to their students, they can make it more interesting as well.

4.2   Data Analysis

This section deals with the responses of all participants to question items (1-30) which are related to visual teaching materials that make students more comprehensive and interested in Questionnaire (A) and question items (1-10) which are related to the use of visual materials, the popular strategy, the helpful method and students' attitudes towards using pictures in teaching vocabulary in Questionnaire (B). The following tables show the detail of the percentage of teachers' responses in Questionnaire (A).

Table (1): Responses of all participants to items (1-30) of Questionnaire (A)

Information	Yes	No
Visual materials make students more comprehensive in learning English vocabulary.	91%	9%
Visual materials make more interesting for students in learning English vocabulary.	97%	3%

91% of all levels of teachers of English responded that using visual materials makes students more comprehensive in their learning vocabulary and 97% of all levels of teachers of English responded that using visual materials makes more interesting for students in their learning vocabulary. So, almost all three levels of teachers of English believe that visual materials make learning more comprehensible and more interesting in teaching vocabulary.

The following tables show the detail of the percentage of teachers' responses on question items which are related to the use of visual materials, the popular strategy, the helpful method and students' attitudes towards using pictures in teaching English vocabulary in Questionnaire (B).

Table (2): Responses of all participants to items (1-7) of Questionnaire (B)

Participants	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
Primary teachers	18%	14%	27%	27%	14%
Lower secondary teachers	4%	15%	43%	28%	10%
Upper secondary teachers	9%	13%	46%	25%	7%

Almost all three levels of teachers of English sometimes use visual materials in teaching English vocabulary.

Table (3): Responses of all participants to item (8) of Questionnaire (B)

Participants	Pictures	Real objects	Drawings on the blackboard	Reading repeatedly	None of these
Primary teachers	37%	18%	32%	13%	0%
Lower secondary teachers	17%	9%	8%	66%	0%
Upper secondary teachers	20%	4%	16%	54%	6%

Primary teachers of English mostly use "pictures", lower secondary teachers and upper secondary teachers of English use "Reading repeatedly" strategy in teaching English vocabulary.

Table (4): Responses of all participants to item (9) of Questionnaire (B)

Participants	Pictures	Real objects	Drawings on the blackboard	Reading repeatedly	None of these
Primary teachers	41%	35%	7%	17%	0%
Lower secondary teachers	35%	18%	2%	45%	0%
Upper secondary teachers	16%	47%	8%	29%	0%

The helpful method for primary teachers of English is "Pictures". "Reading repeatedly" method is popular for lower secondary teachers. However, using "Real objects" is popular for upper secondary teachers in teaching English vocabulary.

Table (5): Responses of all participants to items (10) of Questionnaire (B)

Participants	Nothing	Normal	Satisfied	Happy	Very happy
Primary teachers	0%	0%	7%	42%	51%
Lower secondary teachers	0%	0%	26%	40%	34%
Upper secondary teachers	0%	4%	33%	47%	16%

All three levels of teachers of English responded that all students are happy when they learn English vocabulary by using pictures.

4.3   Data Interpretation

In this section, the analyzed data are interpreted. According to the responses of all participants to items which are related to visual teaching materials that make students

more comprehensive and interesting in Questionnaire (A), 91% of participants responded that visual materials can make students more comprehensive and 97% of participants responded that visual materials can also make learning more comprehensible and more interesting in teaching English vocabulary.
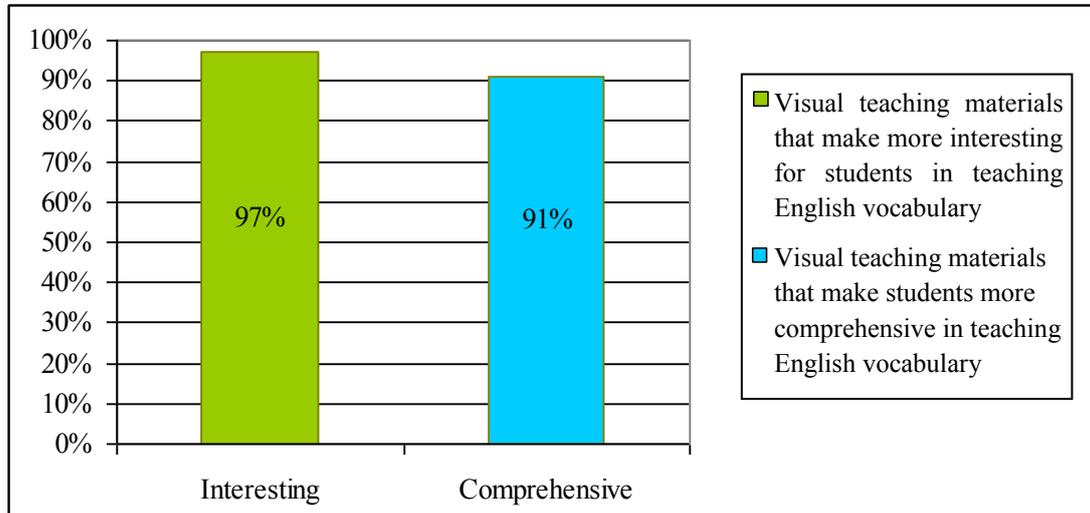

Figure (1): Responses of all participants to items (1-30) of Questionnaire (A)

These results indicate that visual materials can make students more comprehensive and they can also make more interesting for students in teaching and learning English vocabulary. Thus, it can be concluded that these results are in line with the findings of Porter and Margaret (1992). Their findings reveal that using visual materials not only makes what teachers have to say more comprehensive to their students, it can also make learning more interesting as well.
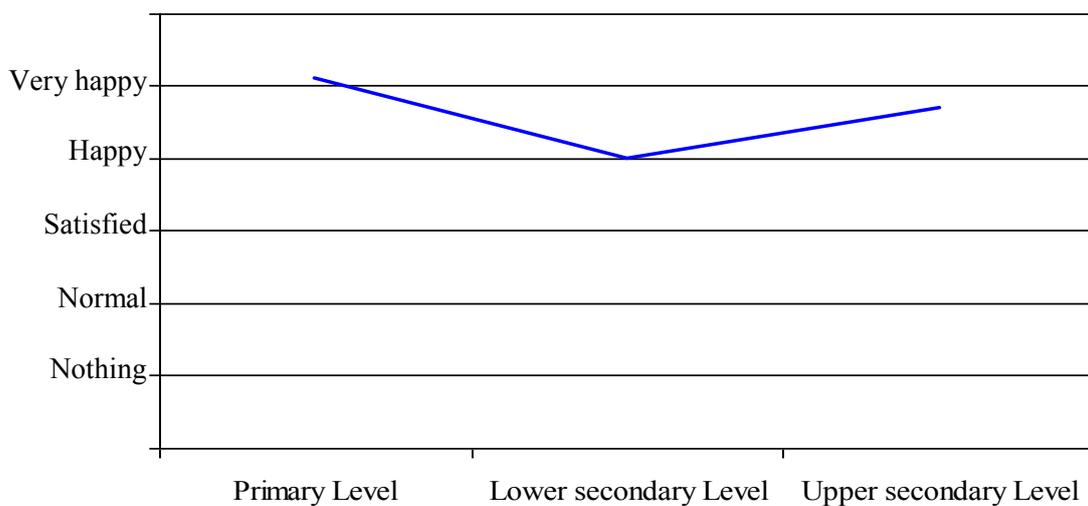

Figure (2): Responses of all participants to item (10) of Questionnaire (B)

In figure (2), primary students are very happy, lower and upper secondary students are happy in learning English vocabulary by using pictures. Primary students like "pictures" more than other two levels.

## 5.	Findings and Discussion

Visual materials have been used in teaching English not only for the children but also for the adults. Using visual materials is an effective language input. This research investigates the effectiveness of using visual materials in teaching English in the context of basic education in Myanmar. It is found that using visual materials in teaching English vocabulary helps students well in their learning with an effective way according to the data collected from Questionnaire (A) and Questionnaire (B).

The results reveal that visual materials used in teaching English vocabulary can make students more comprehensive and more interesting for the students in learning vocabulary as well. All levels of teachers of English sometimes use visual materials. Using "Pictures" in teaching English vocabulary is popular and helpful for the primary teachers. "Reading repeatedly" strategy is popular for the lower and upper secondary teachers and it is helpful for the lower secondary teachers. But for the upper secondary teachers, "Real objects" method is helpful. All of the students are happy when they learn English vocabulary with pictures. The findings indicate that most of the teachers agreed that visual materials help all the teachers in teaching vocabulary as in mastering vocabulary. Moreover, the visual materials could increase the students' motivation in learning vocabulary. The findings are in line with the idea presented by Porter and Margaret (1992). They stated that using visual materials not only makes what teachers have to say more comprehensive to their students, they can make it more interesting as well.

Teachers use visual materials like pictures, real objects, postcards, flashcards, flip charts and blackboard drawings. Those visual materials assist the teaching of vocabulary to a great extent. The respondents answered that visual materials enhance students' vocabulary learning. Moreover, the respondents responded that learning vocabulary through visual materials helps the students to communicate effectively. They said that the use of visual materials gives the students opportunity to express their ideas and feelings by using the language they have in their exposure.

The use of various types of visual materials assists the students in order to interact actively using the language for meaningful communication. Teachers use pictures not only to teach the words but also to show people, places and things from areas far outside their own experiences. Visual materials like real objects and pictures for suitable vocabulary are very effective methods as they are direct and interesting. Dobson (1974) explains, "if teachers have a set of flashcards that show a figure or figures performing different activities such as sleeping, getting up, eating a meal, reading the newspaper, driving, working in an office and so on, they can make a student put the flashcards into a logical sequence and then tell a story based on the sequence." Flashcards and postcards develop the learners' self-study and create fun because they can be easily shuffled. The research shows that visual materials are significant in helping students to understand the meanings of words. The presence of the visual materials in the students' textbooks also encourages the students to use the book and to do their own independent learning. The findings also confirm that visual materials are useful tools for teaching and learning vocabulary.

6.   Conclusion

Acquisition of vocabulary is one of the important factors in language teaching and learning societies. Edward (1992) said that the students must continually learn new words as they learn structure and as they practise sound system, but most of them are not interested and motivated in learning vocabulary. At that time, teachers should use visual materials to make students interested and motivated in learning vocabulary. The main goal of this research is to examine the role of visual teaching materials in teaching English vocabulary.

Based on the responses of the questionnaires, it can be concluded that students are very interested in the visual materials given by teachers. The findings are in accordance with the idea presented by Porter and Margaret (1992). They assert that using visual materials not only makes what teachers have to say more comprehensive to their students, they can make it more interesting as well. Visual materials used at the context of basic education in Myanmar can make students more comprehensive and more interesting for them as well. The research indicates that the use of visual materials facilitates students' effort to understand the meaning of words.

This research has shown that teaching English vocabulary with the help of using visual materials has a great effect on teaching-learning process. Moreover, visual

materials can create an enjoyable atmosphere for learning English. Students can memorize new language items easily. In conclusion, this research highlights the effectiveness of using visual materials in teaching English vocabulary. So, there will be a great advantage for the students. The use of visual materials is of great use and help for the teachers in teaching English vocabulary.

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