


Incorporating Visual Arts into English Language Teaching

U. Thulasivanthana

Swami Vipulananda Institute of Aesthetic Studies (SVIAS), Eastern University, Kalladi, Sri Lanka

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8591-2356>

OPEN ACCESS

Manuscript ID:
ENG-2020-08043320

Volume: 8

Issue: 4

Month: September

Year: 2020

P-ISSN: 2320-2645

E-ISSN: 2582-3531

Received: 26.07.2020

Accepted: 29.08.2020

Published: 01.09.2020

Citation:
Thulasivanthana, U.
“Incorporating Visual Arts
into English Language
Teaching.” *Shanlax
International Journal of
English*, vol. 8, no. 4,
2020, pp. 52-56.

DOI:
[https://doi.org/10.34293/
english.v8i4.3320](https://doi.org/10.34293/english.v8i4.3320)



This work is licensed
under a Creative Commons
Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0
International License

Abstract

Most English language learners in SVIAS consider learning English as a complex, tiresome, and uninteresting endeavor. They face unprecedented trials and tribulations in learning English as an additional language. Therefore, finding ways to stimulate learner involvement and motivation has become important for English language teachers. Current teaching methods, materials, and resources seem inadequate to fulfill the students' attitudes, skills, interests, and needs. This experimental study examines whether integrating visual arts activities contributes to positive results for the students who would like to improve their English language skills. In addition to the experimental study, classroom observations were conducted. Arts can make learning exciting, unforgettable, and interesting. The advantages of incorporating arts in education have been extensively delineated in recent studies. Using arts in English language teaching helps to make learning exciting and unforgettable, decrease language learning anxiety, improve classroom atmosphere, increase memory and motivation, and build rapport with learners. This study aims to show the impacts of using contents visual arts in the English language classroom. The findings can assist English language teachers in promoting the use of contents related to visual arts in English class to cater to a range of preferences, strengths, and learning styles.

Keywords: English, Learning, Visual arts, Benefits, Learning styles and Incorporate

Introduction

Traditional methods of teaching the English language are not adequate to fulfill the requisites of the students who study visual and performing arts because they have a passion for artistic, dynamic, and meaningful education. According to Goldberg (2017), arts offer a congenial and essential channel to share feelings, knowledge, and experiences when studying a second language and trying to fit into a foreign culture. Chi (2017) elucidates that arts can act as a stimulus, refresher, facilitator, and guide, create an affinity between the students and lecturers and stimulate the students to learn creatively and think widely. Eubanks (1997) points out that arts can be beneficial in nurturing verbal development, and as the students become involved in activities related to arts, they are likely to become more interested in the subject matter itself. As a result, increasing attention has been focused on incorporating arts content in various subjects.

Research Questions

- Does incorporating contents related to visual arts in English language teaching motivate English language learners the students who study Visual & Technological Arts?
- Does including contents related to visual arts in English language teaching improve listening, reading, writing, and speaking skills of the students who study Visual & Technological Arts?

Research Hypothesis

Those who study Visual & Technological Arts in SVIAS are visual learners. Though they like written instructions, they learn effectively by reading information offered through visual mediums such as paintings, drawings, photos, texts with images, posters, graphs, maps, diagrams, videos, etc. They are most motivated when the subject matter is relevant to their interests. Therefore, this research hypothesizes, including contents related to visual arts in language learning, motivate the students who study Visual & Technological Arts and improve their listening, reading, writing, and speaking skills.

Literature Review

Ballesteros, P.A., et al. (2018) define visual arts as all of what can be seen and perceived in art forms such as drawing, painting, sculpture, printmaking, ceramics, design, crafts, photography and video. They explain that visual arts inspire students, stimulate critical thinking, and provide a range of effective tools for teachers. Thus, employing materials related to visual arts is effective in the classroom as an approach to teaching various subjects.

Several studies exemplify that visual arts improve academic achievement. Deasy (2002) indicates that engaging visual arts allow readers to visualize and interpret the text and engaged readers more fully in content. Visual images direct the students to enhance their comprehension of reading passages and adjust their reading skills accordingly. Usually, in English language classrooms, underachieving students are more reluctant to write because they regard themselves as unproductive writers. Visual arts for many students do not generate a similar situation. Donovan & Pascale (2013) note that whenever visual images are presented in writing sessions, the students write extensive details and rich ideas. A study conducted by Bayri (2010) concludes that students appreciate the use of visual arts in speaking classroom. Consequently, the proficiency level of the students increased.

Humans are visual animals. Although we can process kinesthetic and auditory information, we take more information visually than through any other senses because the visual mechanisms of the memory are strong. Visual aids are not only powerful

retention tools of the curriculum but also facilitate to surge understanding (Wolfe, 2011). Several studies confirm how well the mind processes and recollects visual information.

Gardner (1999) outlines eight kinds of intelligence comprising linguistic intelligence, musical intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, spatial intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, and intrapersonal intelligence. By the time children start school, they have possibly recognized ways of learning which align more along the lines of certain intelligence than the other. Gardner's spatial intelligence signifies the skill to perceive the visual-spatial universe precisely. This intelligence includes responsiveness to the line, figure, design, space, color and the connections that exist between these aspects. Learners with spatial intelligence prefer designing, drawing, visualizing, and doodling (Armstrong, 2009).

Every student learns differently. The VARK model, developed by Neil Fleming and Charles Bonwell, specifies four different learning styles: visual, aural, read/write, and kinesthetic. So, teachers should reflect on a variety of learning styles when selecting and preparing teaching and learning resources. Incongruities between teaching methods and leaning styles cause boredom and inattentiveness among students (Varela, et al. 2010). Therefore, a particular set of obstructive strategies is not efficacious with all learners. Teachers should admit learner differences and utilize stratagems that cater to the learners who study Visual Arts. This will enable the learners to employ their dominant or mostly developed intelligence.

Methodology

Sample

This study was conducted with the students in the department of Visual & Technological Arts. Twenty-two participants were selected using random sampling. All of them were informed about the research intended to be carried out during their studies. The participants were randomly assigned to control and experimental groups, each consisting of eleven students.

Details of the Research Tools and Procedure

The research tools were pretest and post-test. Pretest and post-test included tests of listening, reading, writing, and speaking. The total test duration is one hour. Listening, reading, and writing components were completed with no breaks between them, and the speaking test was conducted on another day. Both groups were pre-tested for assessing their abilities in listening, reading, writing, and speaking skills using traditional testing methods. The participants listened to a ten minutes conversation between two people set in an everyday social context and answered the questions as they listened. Reading section took about twenty minutes to answer a passage taken from a pre-intermediate English exercise book. In twenty-five minutes long writing task, the participants were required to write an essay using at least two hundred words. The speaking test was five minutes long. The participants were asked general a range of familiar topics. Then, the participants of the experimental group were taught by using contents related to visual arts. Teaching materials were extracted from Create to Communicate: Art Activities for the EFL Classroom, Dimensions in Learning English, Study Skills in English for a Changing World, and Integrating Visual Arts Across the Curriculum. The participants of the control group received traditional methods of instruction. This process lasted for four weeks without losing sight of the aims, objectives, and intended learning outcomes of the lessons.

Finally, the students from both the groups post-tested for comparing their competence in listening, reading, writing and speaking skills. The posttest completed by the control group was similar to the pretest in format, duration, testing methods, and evaluation criteria. The posttest done by the experimental group was similar in format, duration, and evaluation criteria but different in contents and testing methods.

Data Analysis

The results obtained from the tests held in the beginning and the results taken from the tests conducted at the end were analyzed using Microsoft Excel spreadsheets. Furthermore, an informal interview was conducted with the students in the

experimental group to get their opinions about incorporating visual arts-related activities in English language teaching.

Findings

Table 1: Average results of pretest and post-test

Groups	Skills	Average Pre test	Average Post test
Control group	Listening	48	52
	Reading	52	50
	Writing	65	69
	Speaking	54	50
Experimental Group	Listening	47	55
	Reading	50	59
	Writing	62	80
	Speaking	53	75

The students in the experimental group not only outperformed the control group but also exhibited a great level of participation, excitement, and engagement in learning English, and they were in favor of the practice of incorporating visual arts into English language learning. The students said that they are more likely to recall the lessons they learned through visual arts. Also, classroom observations supported the incorporation of visual arts into English language teaching.

Conclusion

Many teachers are reluctant to include contents related to visual arts into their classrooms due to the unfamiliarity of visual arts, curriculum constraints, and lack of time and resources. Integrating visual arts can function as a bridge between the usual learning process in the subject areas and encompassing chances for the students to make use of their artistic skills in a variety of capacities. The findings and insights gained from this research assert that the use of visual arts in the English language classrooms attracts learners' interests, offers a meaningful context for the learners, and stimulates the students to become more enthusiastically involved in the language learning process.

References

- Armstrong, Thomas. *Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom*, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2009.
- “Art in the classroom.” *Teaching English*, <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/art-classroom>.
- Ballesteros, P.A., et al. *The Use of Visual Arts as a Strategy to Teach Vocabulary in Second Grade at the Public School La Julita, Sede providencia*, Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira, 2018.
- Bayri, Gaye. “The Student Perception of Visual Arts in the Speaking Classroom.” *International Journal of Arts and Sciences*, vol. 3, no. 11, 2010, pp. 166-180.
- Becker, Patricia A. “Teaching Language and Literacy through the Visual Arts: An Interdisciplinary, Literature-Based Approach.” *Teaching Exceptional Children*, vol. 52, no. 3, 2020, pp. 166-179.
- Chi, Chenkai. *Integrating the Arts into English Learning: A Case Study of EFL Learners in a Canadian University*, University of Windsor, 2017.
- Deasy, Richard. *Critical Links: Learning in the Arts and Student Academic and Social Development*, Arts Education Partnership, 2001.
- DellAngelo, Tabitha, et al. *Using Photography and Other Arts-Based Methods with English Language Learners: Guidance, Resources, and Activities for P-12 Educators*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2017.
- Diaz, Gene, and Martha Barry McKenna. *Preparing Educators for Arts Integration: Placing Creativity at the Center of Learning*, Teachers College Press, 2017.
- Donovan, Lisa, and Louise Pascale. *Integrating the Arts Across the Content Areas*. Huntington Beach, Shell Educational Publishing, 2012.
- Ehrenworth, Mary. *Looking to Write: Students Writing through the Visual Arts*, Pearson, 2003.
- Emma, P. “Visual Arts Activities in the English Language Classroom.” *ELT Campus*, 2020, <https://eltcampus.com/blog/visual-arts-activities-in-the-english-language-classroom/>
- Eubanks, Paula K. “Art is a Visual Language.” *Visual Arts Research*, vol. 23, no. 1, 1997, pp. 31-35.
- Farokhi, Masoumeh, and Masoud Hashemi. The Impact/s of Using Art in English Language Learning Classes.” *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 31, 2012, pp. 923-926.
- Flood, James, et al. *Handbook of Research on Teaching Literacy through the Communicative and Visual Arts*, Routledge, 2015.
- Gardner, Howard E. *Intelligence Reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the 21st Century*, Basic Books, 1999.
- Goldberg, Merryl. *Arts Integration: Teaching Subject Matter Through the Arts in Multicultural Settings*, Routledge, 2017.
- “Integrating Visual Arts with Language Arts.” *Visual Arts4 Learning*, <https://sites.google.com/site/visualarts4learning/integrating-visual-arts-with-language-arts>
- Jordan, Robert M., and Michael DiCicco. “Seeing the Value: Why the Visual Arts have a Place in the English Language Arts Classroom.” *Language Arts Journal of Michigan*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2012, pp. 27-33.
- Klein, Jennifer and Elizabeth Stuart. *Using Art to Teach Reading Comprehension Strategies: Lesson Plans for Teachers*, Rowzman & Littlefield Education, 2013.
- Luongo, Nicole. *The New English Language Arts classroom: Teaching in a Digital World*, Cognella Academic Publishing, 2017.
- Macintyre, Margaret Latta and Elaine Chan. *Teaching the Arts to Engage English Language Learners*, Routledge, 2011.
- “RELO Webinar: Teaching Language Through Visual Arts” Youtube, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DxzdyRHycYA>
- Tolvanen, Nina. *Teaching English through Visual Arts to 9th Graders in Finnish Comprehensive School: A Material Package*, University of Jyväskylä, 2018.

- Varela, Mario., et al. *Current Issues in English Language Teaching and Learning: An International Perspective*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010.
- Wolfe, Patricia. *Brain Matters: Translating Research into Classroom Practice*, ASCD Express, 2010.

Author Details

U. Thulasivanthana, Swami Vipulananda Institute of Aesthetic Studies (SVIAS), Eastern University, Kalladi, Sri Lanka,
Email ID: vanthana22@gmail.com