

From Text to Texture: Elevating English Teaching Through Visual Literacy Skills

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Abstract

In an era dominated by visual media, this study examines the effects of visual literacy training on the ability of English teachers at Kalam Kudus Elementary School in Bali to create effective teaching materials. Utilizing a one-group pretest-posttest design, 21 teachers underwent training in the CRAP (Contrast, Repetition, Alignment, Proximity) principles. Data collected from pre-and post-tests, alongside a supplementary questionnaire, indicated a notable enhancement in teachers' visual literacy, with an average Gain score of 74.15%. Although the training was deemed moderately effective, educators experienced a significant boost in their understanding and application of visual design principles, contributing to the creation of more engaging educational content. The study highlights the need for continued professional development in visual literacy to address ongoing challenges, emphasizing its importance in improving educational practices.

Keywords: *Visual Literacy, Visual Design Principles, Visual Literacy Training*

Introduction

The challenge English teachers face in creating effective teaching materials in an era dominated by visual media is profound. Despite the recognized importance of English as a global language, teachers often struggle to effectively engage students and enhance their language acquisition. This happens because teachers did not develop skills for effective visual communication when they were pre-service teachers (Aberšek, 2008). The rapid integration of visual elements in educational materials, necessitating skills beyond traditional text-based literacy, compounds this challenge. Teachers are required to not only convey linguistic content but also to integrate visual components that complement and reinforce language learning (Goldstein, 2016; Kulamikhina et al., 2021).

However, there is a notable gap in the proficiency of English teachers in employing visual literacy as the ability to interpret, create, and communicate through visual means in their teaching practices (Baylen & D'alba, 2015; Eilam, 2012). This gap signifies a disconnect between the potential of visual elements to enhance learning and the actual utilization of these tools in educational contexts, highlighting an urgent need for targeted training to equip teachers with the necessary visual literacy skills. Supporting this notion, Maldonado (2019) and Özsoy & Saribaş (2021) have both explored aspects of this challenge, emphasizing the necessity and impact of integrating visual literacy into English language teaching.

Recent studies underscore the pivotal role of visual literacy in educational settings, highlighting its significance in enhancing teaching effectiveness and teaching materials creation. Visual literacy, integrating the principles of contrast, repetition, alignment, and

proximity (CRAP), is increasingly recognized as a crucial skill set for educators, especially in the context of English language teaching (Huilcapi-Collantes et al., 2020; Yeh & Cheng, 2010). Research indicates that training in visual design principles can significantly improve teachers' abilities to create more engaging and pedagogically sound teaching materials.

The previous studies have underscored the significance of visual literacy in English language teaching, highlighting a gap between potential benefits and actual implementation in classrooms. Maldonado (2019) and (Haddad, 2019) emphasized how visual literacy can enhance understanding and engagement in language learning, especially for students facing language barriers. Britsch (2009) and Villamizar (2018) argue for a more integrated approach to visual literacy in teacher training, to better equip educators in leveraging visual elements for language instruction. These insights call for an educational shift towards integrating visual literacy to enrich English language teaching, suggesting a move beyond traditional methods to embrace a multimodal learning environment. This approach not only enhances student engagement but also aligns with the evolving landscape of communication in a digital age.

However, despite these advancements, challenges persist in the full integration and application of visual literacy in teaching methodologies (Duchak, 2014). Teachers often encounter difficulties in selecting appropriate visuals, applying color theory, and time constraints and the complexity of design. The gap between theoretical knowledge of visual literacy and its practical application remains a significant hurdle. Moreover, the need for ongoing professional development and support to fully harness the potential of visual literacy in education is evident (Kathleen Ellen O'Neil, 2011; Maldonado, 2019). Future research is warranted to explore the long-term impact of visual literacy training, its applicability across different educational contexts, and strategies to overcome the implementation challenges faced by educators. Addressing these limitations is essential for maximizing the benefits of visual literacy in enhancing teaching quality and student learning experiences.

Recent studies, such as those by Huilcapi-Collantes et al., (2020) and Yeh & Cheng, (2010), have underscored the efficacy of visual literacy training in enhancing teachers' competencies in creating effective teaching materials. These investigations reveal that educators, post-training, exhibit improved abilities to integrate visual design principles—such as Contrast, Repetition, Alignment, and Proximity (CRAP)—into their instructional materials, which in turn, enhances student engagement and learning outcomes. However, these studies predominantly address visual literacy in a broad educational context without delving into the specificities and nuanced demands of English language teaching, especially in regions where English is not the primary language of instruction.

This research aims to fill this critical gap by focusing on the impact of visual literacy training on English teachers at Kalam Kudus Elementary School in Bali. It seeks to extend the existing literature by examining how visual literacy principles specifically influence the creation of English teaching materials in a non-native English-speaking environment. By situating the study within this unique context, the research will offer new insights into the practical application of visual literacy in English language education, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of its benefits and challenges in diverse linguistic and cultural settings. The novelty lies in its specific focus on English teachers in Bali, addressing a research gap by exploring the intersection of

visual literacy and English language teaching material development, contributing new insights into effective teacher professional development practices in this context.

Method

The study employed a meticulous and structured approach to investigate the impact of visual literacy training on English teachers' competence in creating effective teaching materials. Here's a detailed description of how the study was conducted, encompassing its design, sample population, data collection techniques, instrument development, and data analysis methods:

Research Design and Participants

The study employed quasi-experimental quantitative research with one-group pre-test and post-test design. The design was chosen to assess the changes in English teachers' knowledge and abilities before and after they underwent a specific visual literacy training program. The pretest-posttest framework allowed the researchers to measure the immediate effects of the training by comparing the participants' knowledge and skills at two points in time: before the training (pre-test) and after the training (post-test).

The research participants selected for this study consisted of 21 English teachers from SD Kalam Kudus in Bali. These participants were purposefully selected by considering the information rich (Bachtiar et al., 2024) and to provide insights into the specific context of English language teaching at that school. The selection aimed to understand how visual literacy training could influence teaching practices in a localized setting, offering a focused examination of the training's effectiveness within a particular educational environment.

Data Collection Procedure

There were two research instruments used in this study, namely pre-test and post-test, and the visual literacy questionnaire. The two research instruments utilized a combination of multiple-choice questions, close-ended questions, and open-ended questions. These instruments were administered during the pre-test and post-test phases, along with a questionnaire to gather additional insights. The questions were carefully crafted to capture a comprehensive view of the teachers' understanding and application of visual literacy principles.

Data Analysis Techniques

The analysis of data in this study was two-pronged. For quantitative data, derived from the multiple-choice and close-ended questions were analyzed statistically using SPSS. The paired-samples t-tests were employed to identify significant changes in the participants' knowledge of visual literacy principles post-training. The qualitative data, gathered from open-ended questions, underwent thematic analysis. This qualitative analysis aimed to uncover deeper insights into the participants' experiences, the practical application of their learning, and the challenges they faced in integrating visual literacy into their teaching materials.

Through this detailed and rigorous methodology, the study sought to provide a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of visual literacy training for English teachers, focusing on how such training can enhance their ability to create more engaging and effective teaching materials. The structured approach ensured a robust examination of the training's impacts, contributing valuable findings to the field of education and teacher development.

Results

The results of the current study are divided into quantitative and qualitative forms. The quantitative analysis involved pre-tests and post-tests alongside close-ended questionnaires to measure changes in the teachers' understanding and application of visual literacy principles. The normality test confirmed that the data followed a normal distribution, enabling the use of a Paired Sample T-Test. This test showed significant improvements in the teachers' visual literacy, as evidenced by an average Gain score of 74.15% (Table 1), indicating the training's moderate effectiveness.

Table 1. Results of the Gain Score Test Calculation.

| Item | Pre-Test | | Post-Test | | Gain Score | |
|-------------|----------|------|-----------|------|------------|-------|
| | Means | SD | Means | SD | Means | SD |
| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) |
| 21 teachers | 38.10 | 9.57 | 84.05 | 7.96 | 74.15 | 12.04 |

To systematically gauge the participants' experiences and perceptions, responses to the close-ended questions were collected via a Likert scale, offering a detailed spectrum of agreement levels ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree". In the detailed analysis of the close-ended questions, it's evident that the majority of English teachers recognize the significant impact of visual literacy on enhancing student comprehension, with all participants (21 out of 21) affirming its importance. Specifically, 15 teachers strongly agreed, and 6 somewhat agreed that visual literacy markedly improves students' understanding and engagement in English teaching, showcasing a unanimous endorsement of visual literacy's role in the classroom.

When dissecting the understanding of the CRAP principles, a substantial number of respondents showed a strong grasp, especially regarding the principle of contrast, with 8 strongly agreeing and 12 somewhat agreeing, totaling 20 out of 21 teachers. This strong endorsement indicates the training's success in conveying the relevance of contrast in crafting visually compelling teaching materials. Similarly, the principle of repetition was well received, with 15 teachers strongly agreeing and 5 somewhat agreeing (20 out of 21) on its value in bolstering key concepts in English lessons, demonstrating a comprehensive understanding of its role in learning retention.

The application of alignment and proximity also garnered significant recognition, though specific numbers were not provided, the majority indicated familiarity and confidence in utilizing these principles effectively. The integration of visual design principles into teaching practices was reported by the majority, suggesting a shift towards more visually focused educational methods post-training.

However, confidence levels in applying the CRAP principles varied among teachers, pointing to the necessity for continuous learning and practice. The survey showed that while teachers are incorporating these principles into their teaching materials, there is a spectrum of confidence, indicating areas where further reinforcement is needed. The acknowledgment of visual literacy's role in language acquisition by a large majority reinforces its perceived value in the educational process and underscores the

importance of ongoing professional development in this area to fully leverage visual literacy's benefits in teaching.

Furthermore, the qualitative insights gleaned from the open-ended questions in the study provide a comprehensive view of how English teachers perceive and integrate visual literacy into their pedagogy, particularly through the application of the CRAP (Contrast, Repetition, Alignment, Proximity) design principles. The teachers' responses reflect a deepened understanding of visual literacy's pivotal role in enhancing various facets of student learning, including comprehension, retention, and engagement. This aligns with the Dual-Coding Theory, which posits that the integration of visual and verbal information can significantly enrich learning experiences, suggesting that visual literacy is not just an add-on but a fundamental component of effective teaching. Teachers detailed their journey of incorporating visual literacy into their teaching materials, marking a significant evolution in their instructional design approach. Previously centered on content, their focus shifted towards a more balanced incorporation of visual elements, emphasizing the strategic use of contrast to draw student attention, repetition to reinforce key concepts, alignment to guide information processing, and proximity to organize content logically. This transformation indicates a move from traditional to more dynamic and interactive teaching, enhancing both the appeal and effectiveness of educational materials.

However, the transition to a visually literate teaching approach presented challenges. Educators highlighted difficulties in mastering the art of visual selection, particularly in choosing colors and images that not only attract attention but also support the learning process. This struggle points to a potential gap in their training, emphasizing the need for a deeper dive into the principles of visual design beyond the basics. Furthermore, teachers expressed the need for continued practice and exploration to fully integrate these principles into their everyday teaching practices. For some, visual literacy represented a new and initially unfamiliar set of skills, underscoring the importance of ongoing professional development and support systems to foster comfort and proficiency in this area. Time constraints emerged as a significant barrier, with teachers noting the extensive effort required to create or revise materials that embody these design principles. Balancing the demand for high-quality visuals with other teaching responsibilities remains a concern, highlighting the need for efficient strategies and tools that can streamline the material creation process.

Discussion

The research focused on the impact of visual literacy training on English teachers' abilities to create effective teaching materials, specifically employing the CRAP (contrast, repetition, alignment, and proximity) design principles. This study, building upon previous research, aimed to ascertain if such training enhances teachers' visual literacy knowledge and their material creation skills.

The findings demonstrated a marked improvement in teachers' visual literacy, with an average Gain score of 74.15%, indicating moderately effective training outcomes. This aligns with prior researches (Huilocapi-Collantes et al., 2020; Yeh & Cheng, 2010) which also showed significant gains in visual literacy through professional development programs, though not specifically targeting English teachers. Huilocapi-Collantes et al., (2020) observed notable enhancements in in-service teachers' visual literacy following a 20-hour blended learning course. Similarly, Yeh and Cheng (2010) investigation into pre-service teachers highlighted improved abilities to perceive, analyze, and utilize

visual materials post-training. These studies underscore the potential of visual literacy training to elevate pedagogical practices across different teaching stages.

The current research further explores the effect of visual literacy training on English teachers' material creation capabilities. Post-training feedback indicated a strong appreciation for visual literacy's role in enhancing student comprehension and engagement. This acknowledgment mirrors the principles of Dual-Coding Theory, which suggests that integrating verbal and visual information can significantly boost learning efficacy. As one participant noted,

The profound impact of embracing the CRAP design principles in creating teaching materials has been transformative from my perspective. By integrating these foundational design concepts, I've significantly enhanced the visual appeal and pedagogical effectiveness of my learning resources. This captivates students' attention more effectively but also fosters a deeper understanding of the content. Consequently, students are more engaged, which translates into improved retention and application of the material.

Teachers recognized the CRAP principles' critical role in creating compelling educational content. Contrast and repetition were highlighted for their effectiveness in drawing attention and reinforcing concepts, while alignment and proximity were valued for organizing content clearly. This reflects a deeper understanding and application of visual literacy in teaching, moving beyond mere aesthetics to enhance pedagogical value.

However, the research also unveiled challenges in applying these principles. Some teachers struggled with aspects like color contrast and lacked confidence in their artistic skills. They expressed a need for ongoing training to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. The time-intensive nature of creating visually appealing materials also emerged as a significant barrier, emphasizing the need for more efficient strategies and tools in this domain. These findings point to a broader requirement for comprehensive professional development programs that not only teach visual literacy but also provide practical tools and strategies for effective implementation (Bachtar, 2021). Maldonado (2019) highlighted that there is a critical need for explicit visual literacy instruction for English language teachers, a sentiment echoed in the current study's outcomes.

In conclusion, the research confirms that visual literacy training substantially enhances English teachers' capabilities in creating effective teaching materials. It underscores the importance of integrating visual literacy into teacher education, reflecting its significant benefits for educational practices. This study contributes to the field by offering empirical evidence of the positive impact of visual literacy training, advocating for its broader adoption to improve teaching and learning experiences.

Conclusion

The results of the current study highlight a substantial improvement in teachers' understanding and application of visual literacy. This improvement signifies the training's role in boosting student comprehension, engagement, and retention.

Furthermore, the participating teachers transitioned from a content-centric approach to a visually strategic one, demonstrating a deeper appreciation of visual literacy's role in enhancing teaching effectiveness. However, the study also notes challenges, such as difficulties in color selection and a need for further skill development, indicating a gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. The findings of the study advocate for integrating visual literacy training into teacher education programs, emphasizing its significance in creating visually engaging and educationally effective materials. It also calls for additional support to help teachers overcome the identified challenges and fully integrate visual literacy into their practices. Recommendations for future research include exploring the impact of extended visual literacy training and support mechanisms like coaching.

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