# Chapter 28: How do Teachers in AGGS use Visual Language to Improve Students Learning across English & Art?

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**Abstract**: The purpose of this project was to examine how visual language was being incorporated in the New Zealand education curriculum, especially the teaching of the English language through Art to second language learners. To determine how visual language was used to improve language learning using Art, a mixed methods approach using semi-structured interviews with teachers and a survey with students was used in one New Zealand school. Qualitative data reveals that visual arts help children to read and recognize words in images, and those language skills can be **developed** at the same time as learning art skills. Quantitative data shows that most students feel that visual language helps them to learn English and the majority believed that visual language was important for learning. Moreover, art, design, and multimedia were the preferred visual materials to help them to learn English better. This paper concludes that English language skills in Saudi Arabia schools can be developed by incorporating visual language in the curriculum.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Saudi Vision 2030

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 has adopted a  Learning for Working  philosophy through which the government intends to invest in training and education so that the youth can get high-quality education to be prepared for future jobs (Government of Saudi Arabia [GSA], 2017). That means refining the educational curriculum and providing teachers with the necessary training. In essence, Vision 2030 calls for ensuring that a modern curriculum is put in place to emphasize high standards of literacy (GSA, 2017).

Within the country's Vision, 2030 are the General Objectives for Education. One of the prominent objectives is to develop curriculum, including methods of education and assessment (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2019). Another objective is to galvanize creativity and innovation. At the core of these objectives is the student who is expected to be creative and acquire the requisite knowledge and skills for their future career (MOE, 2019).

### Visual language

Visual Language Theory posits that the structure of drawn images has a narrative grammar through which sequences of images produce meaning. In addition, the cognitive principles used in visual language are similar to those in the language (Cohn, 2018). People, objects, patterns, lines, forms, colours, and shapes, are examples of materials used in visual language to communicate messages, meanings, feelings, ideas, and thoughts (Lloyd, Burgess, & Urry, 2015). Moreover, visual language is used by people unconsciously when they point at things in the environment as they make a point (Peeters, Snijders, Hagoort, & Ozyurek, 2017). Thus, visual language is pervasive and can be used to advantage in Saudi Arabia schools.

**Current State for Visual Language in Saudi Schools**

The use of visual language is not new in Saudi Arabia. For example, while unit 1 of the textbook 'Let's meet the team' makes many textual references to the Saudi social and cultural practices, such as a cartoon strip referencing the greeting Assalamu Alaikum, many images are also used (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014. Teachers of English feel that they lack the visual aids that are necessary classroom resources to ensure students' needs are adequately met (Asiri, 2017). The place for visual language, therefore, cannot be overemphasized. However, there no consistence approach common understanding about how to use visual language effectively to improve students learning and success.

**Purpose of the Project**

The purpose of this project is to determine how visual language can be used in education in Saudi Arabia, especially mixing Art with the English language to enhance literacy. There is an increasing number of

English L2 users. Visual language is used in Saudi education as a surface level. This study aimed at exploring how visual language could be used to prompt deep learning.  In addition, many interactions across the world are carried out in the English language since it is the main language through which non-native users use for communication (Al-Nasser, 2015). The English language is the preferred language for business, technology and science, and for diplomatic and political conversations. It has also become increasingly adopted by many people around the world for purposes of work and in education. Saudi Arabia is a clear example of this practice. However, the teaching of the English language is very challenging in the country because many learners face the difficulty of acquisition (Al-Nasser, 2015). This difficulty may be overcome if the visual language could be incorporated into the curriculum design, teaching and learning .across our schools

   This research taken place in Auckland Girls Grammar School for girls only about 1050 students and 50 teachers.

**Chapter 2 Literature Review**

Visual language has become increasingly important. Literacy in the 21$^{st}$ Century necessitates the capacity to critically scrutinize the voluminous amount of images available in contemporary society (Cappello, 2017). Communication outside of school is overshadowed by images, a fact that educators should capitalize on bearing in mind the propensity for visual material in current society. The communication inherent in visual materials can no longer be perceived to be subsidiary, but must be viewed as a critical mode of representation (Cappello, 2017). Nonlinguistic representations can serve as valuable tools for improving student outcomes. Moreover, visual integration in the classroom allows students to take risks, and is helpful for English learners (Cappello, 2017). Thus, literacy through visual language has become inevitable.

In his study of teaching methodologies in Saudi Arabia, Al-Nasser (2015) concluded that visual language was critical in instruction because language, for example, is not inanimate but one where imitation and practice were paramount. In fact, the author argued that learners should see and hear language in reallife situations. Language cannot be effectively learned through textbooks alone.

Significantly, the bar for literacy in students continues to go higher. According to Seglem and Witte (2009), "students are facing increasing demands in the sphere of literacy because it is no

longer the trend to determine successful communication as having the ability to write and read in linear fashion". Rather, today's society is replete with visual symbols that need critical thinking skills compared to what was required by traditional literacy. Consequently, a curriculum that incorporates visual literacy is essential. However, Seglem and Witte posit the view that teachers fear incorporating visual arts in their classrooms because they argue it would digress from the important time needed for writing and reading skills. The traditional continues to act as a blockade for the contemporary.

Nevertheless, the fear of teachers is unfounded since some schools have started incorporating visual language in their curricula. As illustrated by visual language teaching in Auckland AGGS School in New Zealand, English language students learn literature and language through writing, orally, and visually . The school believes that students should develop attitudes, skills, and knowledge that proffer the ability to use visual language strategies for effective communication. They encourage individuality and an ability to be adaptable and innovative in the face of change. The learning goals in the school include learning and using links between oral, writing, reading, and visual language. In addition, students are expected to think critically and make meaning about visual language. One of the groups targeted in Auckland AGGS School is English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).

Some Australian schools are another case in point where visual language is given prominence. In theVictorian curriculum, visual literacy is addressed through what is termed "English through the mode of viewing" (Victoria State Government, 2018, par.1). It involves different text types such as advertisements, textbooks, non-fiction, web pages, film clips, animations, comic strips, graphic novels, posters, picture books, and art. Three levels of comprehension are used to read an image. These include the literal, inferential, and evaluative. At the literal level, students communicate what they see in the text while the inferential level interprets what is seen in the image based on prior knowledge. At the evaluative level, literal and inferential information is synthesized to propose meaning further than the text (Victoria State .(Government, 2018

## Chapter 3  : Description of Methodology

### Data Collection

This research project used a mixed methods approach, deploying both the qualitative methodology with semi-structured interviews and the quantitative approach with a survey questionnaire. Semi-structured interviews are useful because questions define issues to be explored, allowing certain flexibility to pursue an idea (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008). In relation to survey research, it is a useful method to. (Explore human behavior (Ponto, 2015

Thus, this project used semi-structured interviews to collect data from two teachers. Permission was first sought from the management of the institution where the teachers were employed as a way of seeking for willing participants. Having obtained the necessary permission, the researcher approached teachers and explained what the study entailed and assured them that their identities would be kept confidential and that they would receive copies of the research results as a way to promote transparency. Thereafter, purposive sampling was deployed by the researcher in order to determine the most suitable candidates. As Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim

(2016) point out, purposive sampling aims at identifying information rich cases to suit the objectives of a study.

The inclusion of the two teachers was important because they taught how to design and how to practice vocabulary and writing by using design and art. Each session lasted 45 minutes and responses were recorded with a digital voice recorder. The timing of the interviews was at the discretion of the two teachers. In addition, the researcher developed a questionnaire with nine questions for the quantitative survey of students. In survey research, primary data can be collected from a representative sample on respondents from a population of interest. In addition, this can be accomplished through questionnaires (Mathiyazhagan & Nandan, 2010). The population of interest in this regard was students in the same school as the two teachers.

### Data Analysis

To conduct the analysis, the recorded qualitative interview data was first transcribed using *Transcribe Audio Software*, and the resulting data collated into key themes. The survey data was analyzed using *Microsoft Excel*. This analysis was able to generate bar-charts and pie-charts that enabled better visual representation of the information collected from students.

### Chapter 4 – Results

### Qualitative Data

A number of key themes emerged from the qualitative interview data of Miss Kite and Miss Dina. These themes are summarized below in bulleted form.

- Theme #1 Visual arts help children to read and recognize words in images (Interview with Miss Kite)

Children are able to learn how to recognize words when they use visual arts such as picture books. These can be through comics or creating a photomontage. With photomontage, children create new images from old magazines and newspapers. While they learn to use materials such as crayon and paints, they also learn language through the symbolism represented in the images.

- Theme #2 Language skills can be developed when learning art skills

While some students may have some art skills at year 9 and 10, some have to be taught. However, they develop the art skills quickly. When asked to write down how they performed in an activity of art, the teacher is able to determine what help the student needs with language. Thus, the student improves in art while also developing language skills.

- Theme #3 Definition of visual language (Interview with Miss Dina)Visual language can be defined as the ability of an artist or designer to use visual tools to communicate. Thus, language can be represented visually. Symbolism is one method through which a viewer can have a different perspective of a familiar piece of text.

Theme #4 Text has to be critically examined to be visually represented students must be able to critically examine meaning in text, and its different interpretations when they are learning to visually represent the text. In essence, they learn to analyse text, learn language, and learn visual language; all at the same time.

**: In this part of the report, I will summarize 5 key themes from student's survey**

**Survey for Students about Visual Language:**

There were 19 responses for each question

**Year Level**

**Numbers**

| | |
|---|---|
| 11 | 7 |
| 12 | |
| | 9 |
| 13 | 3 |

**Question #1-Do you think Visual language helps you to improve your learning in English?**

Yes (52.6%) Maybe (47.4%) No (0%)

Yes   10

No    0

Maybe 9

The above chart shows that the majority of students (52.6%) felt that visual language helped them to improve their English. The rest (47.4%) were unsure and said that "maybe" visual language helped to improve their English.

**Question #2- I learn better when I use visual language rather than text.**

| Value | Numbers |
|---|---|
| | Strongly disagree 1 (5.3%) |
| Disagree | 0 (0%) |
| Neutral | 8 (42%) |
| Agree | 6 (31.6%) |
| Strongly Agree | 4 (21.1%) |

The above chart shows that 4 out of 19 students (21.1%) strongly agreed that they learn better using visual language instead of text, while 6 out of the 19 students agreed with the statement. Eight out of the 19 students were unsure (42%) and 1 student was emphatic that he/she did not learn better using visual language instead of text.

| Type's | numbers |
|---|---|
| Photomontage | 0 |
| Multimedia | 0 |
| Design & Multimedia | 6 |
| Art | 13 |

Eg. Please write other types of

0 visual …

**Question #3-The type of visual language I prefer to use in English includes:**

Photomontage, Multimedia, Design, Art

A majority of students prefer to use Art at 68.4% while some students prefer to use design and multimedia at 31.6 %.

**Question #4-Do visual images help you to build your Vocabularies?**

Yes   7

No    2

Maybe 10

 Seven students (36.9%) felt that visual images helped to build their vocabularies while 10 students (52.6%) responded by saying "maybe". Only 2 students were categorical that visual images did not help to build their vocabularies.

**Question #5-Do you think visual images are very important in your learning?**

Strongly disagree 0

Disagree       0

Neutral        6

Agree          7

Strongly Agree6

Six out of 19 students (31.6%) were neutral when asked if visual images are important for their learning while 7 (36.8%) were definite about the importance of visual images in their learning. Another 6 (31.6%) strongly agreed that visual images were important for their learning.

**Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings**

There were many areas where the results of this project corroborated what was in the literature review. Cappello (2017) posited the view that non-linguistic representations are valuable tools to enhance student outcomes, and integrating visual language can assist English learners. These views are supported by qualitative interview data from Miss Kite positing that visual arts assist children to read and recognize words in images. Moreover, 52% of students who were surveyed stated that visual language helped then to learn English. In fact, Al-Nasser (2015) study of teaching methodologies in Saudi Arabia concluded that visual language was an important asset for instruction because it was not inanimate. Rather, learners should experience language in real-life situations through hearing and seeing.

Significantly, Al-Nasser (2015) also argued that text was not enough to teach language. In contrast, the survey of students showed that 31.6 % and 21.1 % agreed and strongly agreed respectively when asked if they learned better through visual language instead of text. This is

not surprising since, in the interview with Miss Dina, she defined visual language as a tool for communication, but also one through which language can be represented visually.

However, there was an area where data from the project differed from the literature review. According to Seglem and Witte (2009), "many teachers fear to use visual tools in their classroom because such an approach would take up time better spent for writing and reading skills". But as the interview data showed, children are able to develop art skills quickly, and teachers are able to assist those under their charge when they ask them to state how they performed. Nowhere in the interviews is there evidence that teachers fear using visual language in their classrooms. Instead, the teachers are of the view that children learn both art and language skills at the same time.

Moreover, visual language has been successfully incorporated in Auckland AGGS School in New Zealand. In this school, students of English language are taught literature and language, not only orally and through writing, but also visually (Tua Marina School, 2018). Visual literacy is also given prominence in the Victorian curriculum through what is dubbed "English through the mode of viewing". In this curriculum, different types of visual materials are used. These include film clips, comic strips, graphic novels, posters, picture books, and art (Victoria State Government, 2018). Evidence of these types of materials is found in the project findings where students gave their opinions on the types of visual materials they preferred. The majority preferred art and a significant number stated their preference for design and multimedia.

The most profound finding in this project is that both teachers and students saw the significance of using visual language to improve their learning, especially in English. In addition, there are many types of visual materials that can be used to learn English and art at the same time. However, there is still more that can be done to improve incorporation of visual language in Saudi Arabia curriculum. It has not yet been recognized as a useful tool to use in classroom. As such, more research needs to be done to determine which visual materials can be useful in the Saudi context. The point of entry for implementing the project in KSA would have to be the Ministry of Education. A recommendation of the visual language viability supported with results from other jurisdictions could initiate a pilot in a number of schools.

**Summary**

This project has been [prompted by Saudi Arabia Vision 2030 in which developing a curriculum has been given prominence (MOE, 2019). The project also takes cognizance of the fact that the use of visual language is not new in the country, having relied upon visual images to represent Saudi social and cultural practices. This includes how women are depicted, as well as people from other cultures (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014). The purpose of the project has been to examine how visual language can be incorporated in Saudi Arabia curriculum, especially learning the English language through art. Learning in this way is important since there are an increasing number of English L2 users in the country.

To guide this project have been two research questions: How do teachers in ( AGGS) in New Zealand schools use visual language to improve students' learning across English & Art? In which ways can the Saudi education system be changed to enhance English literacy through the use of Art? Qualitative and Quantitative approaches were used to get answers. As to the first research question, it has been found that, indeed, visual language is used and visual materials deployed to help students learn. In fact, a survey of 19 students found that 68.4 percent preferred to use Art while 31.6 percent of the students preferred to use design and multimedia.

According to the teachers in this study, visual arts help children to read and recognize words in images, and language skills can be developed when learning art skills. These findings are not unique since visual language teaching is present in AGGS School in New Zealand and in the Victorian curriculum where visual literacy is addressed through what is termed "English through the mode of viewing". These

findings, therefore, have set the stage for making the requisite recommendations supported with research findings to the Saudi Arabia Ministry of Education. Through this contact, it is hoped that a pilot project with a number of schools to incorporate visual language in the teaching of English can be started.

 **My implementation plan**

**The researcher will try the following plan with their class.**

**After the first trial, the research will meet the English teachers at school to discuss how the plan could be used to improve students learning of the English language**

a. Making a plan that includes how do teachers used visual language in AGGS in New Zealand schools, such as the integration of art by drawing words in deep meaning or through photography and writing feedback to what the student did. b. It takes place in the first semester.

c.   Track student use and achievement.

d.   Review progress after time period and share achievement results with school.

e.   Discuss with other teachers about how to implement the use of visual language to improve their learning

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