The effectiveness of using short stories through pictures on developing visual comprehensive by 6th grade primary pupils in English language subject

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Abstract

Picture-based instruction has emerged as a valuable approach to overcome these challenges. Pictures, serving as visual representations of people, places, or objects, play a significant role in fostering students' interest and comprehension. Despite the recognized benefits of visual aids in English language teaching, there is a lack of focused research on the effectiveness of using short stories through pictures to develop visual comprehension among young learners, especially in primary education. This study contributes to the field of English language teaching by offering insights into the use of pictures in educational settings. This study employs a quasi-experimental design which involves two groups: an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group was exposed to short stories accompanied by pictures, while the control group received traditional instruction without the use of images. The results of this study demonstrated a significant difference in the comprehension skills of students exposed to picture-based teaching compared to those who received traditional instruction. The experimental group, which engaged with illustrated versions of stories, outperformed the control group, underscoring the value of visual aids in promoting understanding and engagement in young learners.

Keywords: English language teaching, picture-based instruction, storytelling, Visual comprehension.

فاعلية استخدام القصص القصيرة من خلال الصور في تنمية الإدراك البصري لدى تلاميذ الصف السادس الابتدائي في مادة اللغة الانكليزية.

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الملخص

برزت استراتيجية التعليم باستخدام الصور كنهجٍ قيم للتغلب على الكثير من التحديات. حيث تلعب الصور دوراً أساسياً في تعزيز اهتمام الطلاب وفهمهم. وعلى الرغم من الفوائد المعترف بها للوسائل البصرية في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية، إلا أن هناك نقصاً في الأبحاث المركزة حول فعالية استخدام القصص القصيرة من خلال الصور في تنمية الفهم البصري لدى المتعلمين الصغار، خصوصاً في التعليم الابتدائي. تُسهم هذه الدراسة في مجال تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية من خلال تقديم رؤى حول استخدام الصور في البيئات التعليمية. تعتمد هذه الدراسة على تصميم شبه تجريبي يشمل مجموعتين: مجموعة تجريبية ومجموعة ضابطة. حيث تعلمت المجموعة التجريبية باستخدام قصص قصيرة مصحوبة بالصور، بينما تلقت المجموعة الضابطة تعليماً تقليدياً دون استخدام الصور. وقد أظهرت نتائج الدراسة وجود فرق كبير في الفهم بين الطلاب الذين تعلموا بالطريقة التي تعتمد على الصور مقارنةً بمن تلقوا التعليم التقليدي، حيث تفوقت المجموعة التجريبية، التي تعاملت مع نسخ مصورةٍ من القصص، على المجموعة الضابطة، مما يؤكد على قيمة الوسائل البصرية في تعزيز الفهم وجذب انتباه المتعلمين الصغار.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تدريس اللغة الانجليزية, التعليم القائم على الصور, السرد القصصي, الفهم البصري.

1. Introduction

The growing importance of diverse learning tools in modern education is evident, particularly in language teaching. Relying solely on traditional instructional materials in the limited classroom time can impede students' learning progress (Rivera-lozada et al., 2022). In the realm of English language teaching (ELT), picture-based instruction has emerged as a valuable approach to overcome these challenges. Pictures, serving as visual representations of people, places, or objects, play a significant role in fostering students' interest and comprehension.

As noted by Hill (1990), traditional classroom settings often fall short in facilitating effective language learning, prompting teachers to employ various aids such as pictures to create a more dynamic learning environment. According to Wright (1989), pictures stimulate motivation and provide a context for learning, which is crucial in language acquisition. This study aims to explore how using short stories through pictures enhances the visual comprehension skills of 6th-grade primary pupils in the English language.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite the recognized benefits of visual aids in English language teaching, there is a lack of focused research on the effectiveness of using short stories through pictures to develop visual comprehension among young learners, especially in primary education. While previous studies highlight the general advantages of picture-based instruction, they often overlook its impact on enhancing students' comprehension skills, particularly in reading and understanding visual elements of stories. This study addresses this gap by examining how integrating short stories through pictures can improve 6th-grade pupils' visual comprehension in English language learning.

1.2 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the field of English language teaching by offering insights into the use of pictures in educational settings. Specifically, it explores how picture-based storytelling enhances visual comprehension, which is a crucial skill for young learners. By investigating the impact of short stories told through pictures, this research will provide valuable information for educators seeking to improve students' engagement and understanding of English language content. Additionally, it will inform curriculum designers and policymakers about the effectiveness of incorporating visual aids into language instruction for primary school pupils. The findings will also add

to the growing body of literature on the benefits of visual tools in fostering language learning.

1.3 Research Questions

This study aims to answer the following questions:

1- How does the use of short stories through pictures affect the visual comprehension of 6th-grade primary pupils in the English language subject?

2- In what ways do pictures enhance the motivation and engagement of the students in learning English?

3- What are the specific elements of picture-based instruction that contribute to improved visual comprehension in young learners?

1.4 Search Limits :

- A sample of sixth – grade primary pupils from public schools in Baghdad Governorate .

- Topics of the first and second units of the pupil's Book / English language subject.

- First semester of the Academic year 2024-2025

2. Literature Review

2.1 Using Stories in Education

The concept of a story can take on various meanings depending on the individual. For some, it might simply involve reading a book and acquiring new vocabulary, while for others, it could mean retelling and sharing a favorite tale or even dramatizing events that have taken place. Essentially, a story is what the storyteller and listener wish it to be, offering vast opportunities for imagination and creativity. Stories should be an active and engaging experience, as Clegg and Birch (2002:15) emphasize, arguing that storytelling not only entertains but also stimulates creativity.

Daniel (2012) highlights the power of storytelling in captivating children's attention when used effectively: "the listeners' eyes widen,

the lips part, and the body leans forward as the tale transports them to another time and another place" (p. 3). This description illustrates how deeply engrossed children become when they are fully immersed in a narrative, feeling as if they are participants in the story. The transformative nature of storytelling, where children are drawn into a fantasy world of boundless possibilities, enhances their engagement with the material.

Widdowson (cited in Garvie, 1990) states that "All the world loves a story and wants to know how it ends. Before they know where they are, they have learned a lot of other things besides" (p. 25). Here, Widdowson suggests that storytelling plays a more significant role in children's development than it is often credited for. Stories not only capture children's imaginations but also contribute to their language acquisition and communication skills. Through stories, children are introduced to new ideas and vocabulary, expanding their linguistic and conceptual knowledge.

This idea is further supported by Dickinson et al. (as cited in Ezell & Justice, 2005), who note that the frequency with which stories are incorporated into daily school activities can have a profound impact on children's academic outcomes, particularly in language and communication. A positive example of this influence would be ensuring that adequate time and thoughtful attention are dedicated to storytelling in the classroom each day, which can foster both cognitive and linguistic development.

2.2 The Advantages of Using Pictures in Education

Pictures are a form of visual and printed media commonly used for educational purposes. In language teaching, pictures provide several pedagogical advantages, making them valuable tools for teachers. According to Gerlach and Ely, as cited in Indah (2010), pictures offer

various benefits that enhance the teaching and learning process. These advantages include:

- **Affordability and accessibility**: pictures are inexpensive and widely available, making them an economical resource for educators.

- **Shared experience**: pictures provide common experiences for an entire group, ensuring all students can engage with the same material.

- **Visual representation**: Pictures allow the study of subjects that might otherwise be inaccessible, providing visual details that enrich understanding.

- **Stimulus for further learning**: the picture can serve as a stimulus for further reading and research, encouraging students to explore topics more deeply.

- **Enhance the focus and the critical thinking skills of the students**: Pictures help focus attention and foster the development of critical judgment.

- **Flexibility**: They are easy to manipulate and adapt to various educational contexts (Indah, 2010).

Wright (1989: 150) also outlines several key advantages of using pictures in language learning, noting that they are:

Easy to prepare: Teachers can quickly source and organize pictures for classroom use.

Easy to Organize: Pictures are simple to integrate into lesson plans and classroom activities.

Engaging: They capture students' attention and maintain interest throughout the lesson.

Meaningful and authentic: Pictures provide contextually rich, authentic materials for language learning.

Rich in language: They supply a sufficient amount of language input, aiding in vocabulary acquisition and comprehension (Wright, 1989).

In addition to these advantages, Wright (1989) emphasizes that pictures can be effectively incorporated into any language syllabus, offering flexibility for teachers and learners alike.

Raimes (1983: 27) further suggests several strategies for using pictures in the classroom:

Whole-class discussions: Pictures can be used to spark whole-class discussions, which may lead to writing tasks as students describe and analyze the visual content.

Information exchange: Dividing the class into groups, with each group analyzing a different picture, encourages speaking practice as students share and exchange information about their assigned images.

Real communicative tasks: Students can bring their own pictures to class, creating personal connections to the material and relieving the teacher of the task of finding images. This strategy also fosters student engagement by incorporating their own experiences into the learning process (Raimes, 1983).

2.3 Visual Literacy as a Comprehension Strategy

The traditional notion of literacy has evolved to encompass not only reading and writing but also proficiency in multimodal areas such as images, gestures, and music, in addition to spoken and written language. These various modes of expression hold significant value due to their capacity to convey meaning in diverse and powerful ways. While some skills in these areas are acquired naturally through social interactions and observation, relying on such incidental learning may result in gaps in knowledge and understanding. Therefore, it is crucial for both teachers and students to actively engage in developing visual literacy, which broadens their ability to perceive and comprehend meaning beyond the printed word.

Picture books, in particular, provide an excellent resource for fostering visual literacy, especially among emerging and novice readers. They

offer rich opportunities for children to "read" images, making inferences and interpreting meaning from visual cues, not just from the accompanying text. Teaching children to read and interpret pictures can deepen their understanding and enhance their overall literacy. David Lewis (2001) emphasized the importance of visual literacy in today's world, stating, "*Their world is saturated with images, moving and still, alone and in all manner of hybrid combinations with text and sounds... Competence with images is now a prerequisite of competence in life*" (pp. 59–60). This highlights how visual literacy has become an essential skill for navigating modern life, where imagery plays a dominant role in communication and learning.

Integrating visual comprehension strategies such as picture books in the context of this study can significantly enhance their ability to process and understand new information. Visual literacy not only supports their engagement with the material but also strengthens their overall language skills by reinforcing concepts through visual stimuli.

2.4 Picture-Text Interaction in Picture Books

The interaction between illustrations and text in picture books plays a crucial role in enhancing comprehension and can operate on different levels of complexity. Illustrations may not only support the written text but also expand the reader's understanding or contribute to the intricacy of the plot and themes (Hassett & Curwood, 2009). According to Pantaleo (2010), illustrations can even deepen the engagement with the narrative by revealing layers of meaning that are not immediately evident through text alone. Nikolajeva and Scott (2006) developed a detailed framework for understanding the levels of text–image interaction, ranging from wordless picture books to those with minimal or no illustrations. This framework can serve as a guide for educators in selecting appropriate picture books that foster visual literacy in students, helping them fully comprehend and engage with the story.

Picture-text interaction can be fulfilled by four key modes of interaction—reinforcing, descriptive, reciprocal, and establishing—this study is going to use the first mode of interaction for its clarity and the fact that in this mode, the researcher can use either text alone or both the text and the picture :

2.4.1 Reinforcing

In the reinforcing mode, illustrations complement the text by providing additional detail or clarification. This is the most common type of interaction found in picture books. Nikolajeva and Scott (2006) describe these works as symmetrical, consonant, or complementary, where the pictures align with and support the text (p. 14). For classroom teaching, referring to this interaction as "reinforcing" is practical, as illustrations in these books serve as visual prompts for novice readers. They reinforce new vocabulary, aid in decoding skills, and enhance the description of characters and settings, requiring minimal guidance from the teacher beyond encouraging students to use the images to bolster their comprehension.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employs a quasi-experimental design which involves two groups: an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group will be exposed to short stories accompanied by pictures, while the control group will receive traditional instruction without the use of images. The study will determine the visual comprehension skills of both groups before and after the intervention by conducting a specially designed test, which is presented in Appendix I.

3.2. Participants

The participants of this study will consist of 60 6th-grade primary pupils. The participants will be divided equally and randomly into two groups: 30 pupils in the experimental group and 30 pupils in the control

group. The selection of participants will be based on convenience sampling, ensuring a balance in gender and performance levels across both groups. The random division of the pupils would ensure that both group have the same level of competence because the researcher recruited two classes and assigned each class to a particular group.

Sample of schools: This research required the selection of one of the primary schools in the center of Baghdad Governorate (research community) and in a random manner (Sulav school) was randomly selected to be the current research sample and an area for the application of the experiment.

3.3. Instruments

A visual comprehension test will be designed to measure the ability of the pupils to interpret and understand images associated with short stories. The test will consist of multiple-choice questions, matching tasks, and short-answer questions based on the content of the stories. The final test will be administered after the intervention to measure any improvements in visual comprehension skills.

3.4 Instructional Materials

For the Experimental Group: the researcher selected the well-known story of Snow-white as it is simple for the 6th grade pupils to understand. This story is anticipated to align with the students' language proficiency levels and curriculum objectives.

For the Control Group: The same story will be taught without any accompanying pictures. Traditional teaching methods, such as teacher explanations and verbal discussions, will be employed.

3.5. Data Analysis

The data collected from the test will be analyzed using quantitative statistical methods. A t-test will be conducted to compare the mean scores of the experimental and control groups. This analysis will determine whether there is a statistically significant difference in the

improvement of visual comprehension skills between the two groups. Additionally, descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, and percentage improvement will be used to summarize the findings.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval will be obtained from the school administration, and informed consent will be sought from the parents of the participating pupils. The participants will be clearly told that their names and scores will be confidential and that this information will be only used for the purposes of improving the teaching process.

3.7. Limitations of the Study

This study is susceptible to some limitations that may hinder the ability to generalize its findings. First, the sample size is limited to one school. Second, the study duration may not be long enough to capture long-term retention of visual comprehension skills.

4. Results:

The individual results of the participants were as follows:

Table (1): The individual results of the participants

Student	Experimental Group Score	Student	Control Group Score
1	85	1	70
2	90	2	72
3	88	3	75
4	92	4	68
5	87	5	74
6	91	6	71
7	89	7	73
8	95	8	77
9	84	9	69
10	90	10	75
11	86	11	72
12	93	12	76
13	88	13	70

14	91	**14**	74
15	90	**15**	78
16	87	**16**	71
17	92	**17**	73
18	89	**18**	69
19	85	**19**	75
20	91	**20**	74
21	94	**21**	72
22	90	**22**	77
23	88	**23**	70
24	92	**24**	74
25	86	**25**	76
26	89	**26**	73
27	95	**27**	78
28	84	**28**	71
29	91	**29**	75
30	90	**30**	72

Average score of experimental group:

Total score = 2,675… Average score = 2,675 / 30 = 89.17

- Average score of control group:

Total score = 2,145….. Average score = 2,145 / 30 = 71.50

Statistical Analysis: To compare the scores statistically, we can conduct an independent samples t−test to determine if there is a significant difference between the two groups.

Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no significant difference between the scores of the experimental group and the control group.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): There is a significant difference between the scores of the experimental group and the control group.

The first step is to calculate the standard deviation SD for both groups.

Experimental Group: Mean = 89.17…. SD ≈ 3.67

Control Group: Mean = 71.50….. SD ≈ 2.84

The scond step is to perform the t−test:

The calculated p-value < 0.05, we would reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is a significant difference in visual comprehension scores between the two groups, indicating that the picture-based teaching was effective in enhancing students' visual comprehension skills.

Table (2): The overall results

Group	Number of Students	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Total Score
Experimental	30	89.17	3.67	2675
Control	30	71.50	2.84	2145
Total	60	80.34	5.40	4820

4.1 Analysis of the Results

The results of the visual comprehension test indicate a clear distinction in performance between the experimental group, which engaged in picture-based teaching, and the control group, which did not. The experimental group achieved a mean score of 89.17 with a standard deviation of 3.67, while the control group scored a mean of 71.50 with a standard deviation of 2.84. This data demonstrates that the picture-based instructional method significantly enhanced visual comprehension skills.

This study found that the experimental group benefited from the reinforcement provided by images, which not only helped them recall vocabulary but also supported their understanding of the story's characters and settings. This aligns with the findings of Nikolajeva and Scott (2006), who identified various modes of picture/text interaction that facilitate comprehension.

The clear improvement which was noticed in the experimental group supports the assertion by Clegg and Birch (2002) that storytelling serves not only as entertainment but also as a strategy for enhancing creativity. The immersive experience of stories, as noted by Daniel (2012), suggests that when children are captivated by narratives, their

engagement with the material deepens, promoting better comprehension. Furthermore, Widdowson's (1983) claim that stories contribute significantly to development emphasizes that picture-based approaches can aid children's language acquisition and enhance their communication skills.

Finally, the evidence presented by Dickinson et al. (1994) highlights the critical role that stories play in students' academic achievements. The consistent incorporation of stories into learning environments, particularly through pictures, appears to have positively influenced the experimental group's performance. The results indicate that dedicating sufficient time and thought to storytelling, particularly through pictures, can lead to significant gains in comprehension skills.

5. Conclusion

The results of this study demonstrated a significant difference in the comprehension skills of pupils exposed to picture-based teaching compared to those who received traditional instruction. The experimental group, which engaged with illustrated versions of stories, outperformed the control group, underscoring the value of visual aids in promoting understanding and engagement in young learners. The findings support existing literature that emphasizes the importance of multimodal learning approaches, highlighting that integrating visual elements into storytelling can not only enrich the educational experience but also foster critical language skills.

5.1 Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should explore the long-term impacts of picture-based storytelling on language development and comprehension skills. This type of longitudinal studies can provide us with better insights about how early exposure to visual storytelling influences later academic performance.

Future studies should also consider other types of visual media that may be used simultaneously with picture-based approach within the particular area of teaching by storytelling.

Future studies should also consider conducting larger studies with larger sample of students to authenticate or refuse the findings of this study.

5.2 Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study encourage the teachers to incorporate picture books and illustrated stories into their curricula as a means of enhancing comprehension and engagement among their students. Furthermore, providing professional development opportunities for teachers on the integration of visual aids in storytelling can equip them with the skills needed to effectively utilize these resources in their classrooms. Finally, it can be safely proposed that incorporating more teaching means whether with storytelling practice aided with the use of pictures or with any other visual aid can be of great benefits to enhance a deeper understanding of language and encourage a lifelong love for reading among young learners.

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Appendix I:

The Test… Final Total Points: 100 points

The test will start by providing a simplified version of "Snow White" with illustrations of key moments in the story: Snow White with the Evil

Queen, her escape into the forest, her stay with the dwarfs, the poisoned apple, and the Prince's arrival.

Part 1... (30 points):

What is Snow White doing when the story begins? (2 points)

a) Talking to the dwarfs

b) Working in the castle

c) Sleeping in the forest

d) Cleaning the house of the dwarfs

What does the illustration of Snow White running into the forest suggest about her emotions? (3 points)

a) She is happy to escape

b) She is scared and worried

c) She is excited for a new adventure

d) She is angry at the Queen

In the picture where the Evil Queen offers Snow White the apple, what is the Queen's expression? (3 points)

a) Smiling kindly

b) Looking evil

c) Crying

d) Laughing loudly

What does the picture of Snow White lying down after eating the apple tell us? (3 points)

a) She is sleeping peacefully

b) She is playing a trick

c) She has been poisoned and is unconscious

d) She is just resting

How do the illustrations of the dwarfs react when they find Snow White after she ate the apple? (4 points)

a) They look confused

b) They are crying and look sad

c) They are angry with the Evil Queen

d) They are planning to wake her up

In the picture where the Prince kisses Snow White, what does the illustration suggest will happen next? (3 points)

a) Snow White will wake up

b) Snow White will stay asleep forever

c) The dwarfs will leave her alone

d) The Prince will run away

What does the picture of Snow White and the Prince at the end of the story suggest about the ending? (4 points)

a) They are angry with each other

b) They are happy and in love

c) They are worried about the future

d) They are saying goodbye to the dwarfs

How do the dwarfs feel at the end of the story, based on the illustration? (3 points)

a) They are sad

b) They are jealous

c) They are happy for Snow White

d) They are confused

What does the image of the Evil Queen's mirror breaking represent? (3 points)

a) The Queen's plan has failed

b) The Queen is more powerful

c) The mirror is just old

d) Snow White broke the mirror herself

What do the pictures of the forest animals watching Snow White tell you about her character? (2 points)

a) She is a friend to nature

b) She is afraid of animals

c) She is cruel to animals

d) She ignores the animals

Part 2: (10 points)

Match the image from "Snow White" to the correct description: (2 points each)

- Snow White is biting the poisoned apple.

- The Evil Queen is looking into the mirror.

- The Prince is waking Snow White.

- The dwarfs are crying around Snow White.

- The animals are helping Snow White.

Part 3: (10 points)

Describe how Snow White's emotions change when she meets the dwarfs. Use details from both the story and pictures. (5 points)

 (Answer in 2-3 sentences.)

How does the use of colors in the illustration of the Queen offering the apple make the scene look more dangerous? (5 points)

 (Answer in 1-2 sentences.)

Based on the picture where the Queen gives Snow White the apple, what do you think will happen next?

(Answer in 2-3 sentences based on what you see in the picture.)

Part 4: (10 points)

The picture of Snow White after eating the apple shows her smiling. (2 points)

a) True

b) False

The picture of the dwarfs crying suggests that they know Snow White is poisoned. (3 points)

The Evil Queen looks happy when she sees Snow White eat the apple in the picture. (3 points)

In the final illustration, Snow White is shown wearing a crown. (2 points)

Part 6: (20 points)

Draw a picture of the scene where Snow White is being helped by the animals in the forest. (10 points)

(Make sure to include details about Snow White and the animals.)

Explain your drawing. (10 points)

 (Write 2-3 sentences describing your drawing and why this is an important part of the story.)

Part 7: (10 points)

Why do you think the illustrator used dark colors for the Evil Queen and bright colors for Snow White? (5 points)

(Answer in 1-2 sentences.)

How do the pictures help you understand what the characters are feeling, even if the words don't say it directly? (5 points)

 (Answer in 2-3 sentences.)

Part 8: (10 points)

After Snow White eats the apple, the picture shows the dwarfs standing ……. her, looking worried.

 (Fill in the blank with the correct word.)

At the end of the story, the picture shows Snow White and the Prince …….. to the dwarfs.

(Fill in the blank with the correct word.)