THE ROLE OF PICTURE DESCRIPTION TASKS IN ENHANCING EFL LEARNERS' SPEAKING SKILLS AND VOCABULARY ACTIVATION

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RASM TASVIRLASh TOPShIRIQLARINING EFL (INGLIZ TILI) O'RGANUVChILARINING GAPIRISh KO'NIKMALARI VA LUG'AT BOYLIGINI FAOLLAShTIRIShDAGI O'RNI

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РОЛЬ ЗАДАНИЙ ПО ОПИСАНИЮ ИЗОБРАЖЕНИЙ В РАЗВИТИИ НАВЫКОВ ГОВОРЕНИЯ И АКТИВИЗАЦИИ СЛОВАРНОГО ЗАПАСА У УЧАЩИХСЯ EFL

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Tayanch so'zlar: rasmlarni tasvirlash topshiriqlari, gapirish ko'nikmasi,,lug'at boyligi, lug'atni faollashtirish, vizual materiallar, kommunikativ yondashuv, ingliz tili.

Rezyume. Ushbu maqolada ingliz tilini o'rganuvchi talabalarning og'zaki nutq ko'nikmalarini rivojlantirish va lug'at boyligini faollashtirish vositasi sifatida rasmlarni tasvirlash topshiriqlarining samaradorligi ko'rib chiqiladi. Vizual materiallardan foydalanish o'quvchilarning nutqiy faolligini oshirish, faol lug'at boyligini kengaytirish va og'zaki topshiriqlarni bajarishda ishonchini mustahkamlash imkoniyatiga alohida e'tibor qaratiladi.

Ключевые слова: задания по описанию картинок, устная речь, активизация словарного запаса, беглость речи, обучение языку на основе заданий

Резюме. В статье рассматривается эффективность заданий по описанию картинок для развития устной речи и активизации продуктивного словарного запаса у изучающих английский язык как иностранный. Результаты 12-недельного исследования показывают положительное влияние систематических визуальных заданий на беглость речи, лексическое разнообразие, активизацию целевой лексики и грамматическую точность.

Key words: picture description tasks, EFL speaking, vocabulary activation, oral fluency, task-based language teaching.

Summary. This article examines the potential of picture description tasks for improving learners' descriptive speaking skills and activating vocabulary in English language classrooms. Particular attention is paid to the role of visual materials in encouraging learners to produce oral language, retrieve previously learned vocabulary, and organize their ideas into coherent descriptions. The study is grounded in theoretical perspectives on communicative language teaching, speaking development, vocabulary learning, and the pedagogical use of pictures.

Introduction. Developing oral proficiency is a major challenge for learners of English as a Foreign Language. Although students may possess considerable grammatical and lexical knowledge, they often experience difficulty retrieving appropriate words during spontaneous speech. Limited opportunities for communicative interaction can further increase hesitation, pauses, and dependence on general words such as "thing," "good," and "make." Effective classroom tasks therefore need to connect receptive language knowledge with fluent and meaningful oral production.

Within communicative language teaching and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), tasks should provide sufficient communicative challenge while keeping cognitive demands manageable. During oral production, learners must conceptualize a message, retrieve lexical items, formulate grammatical structures, and articulate speech in real time. For L2 learners, these processes may compete for limited working-memory resources. Picture description tasks can help because the visual stimulus supplies a concrete conceptual framework instead of requiring learners to construct the entire situation from scratch.

The theoretical basis of this approach is supported by Levelt's Speech Production Model and Paivio's Dual Coding Theory. Levelt's model describes speech production as involving conceptualization, formulation, and articulation. A visual prompt can support the conceptualization stage and allow learners to devote more attention to lexical and grammatical formulation. According to Dual Coding Theory, verbal and nonverbal representations can operate together. When learners associate words with visual information, the resulting connections may make lexical retrieval easier.

Picture-based activities have long been used as instructional and assessment tools, but empirical evidence concerning their combined effect on speaking performance and productive vocabulary remains comparatively limited. The present study therefore investigates whether a structured 12-week picture description curriculum can produce measurable improvements in intermediate EFL learners' oral fluency, lexical activation, and grammatical accuracy compared with conventional text-prompted speaking practice.

Methodology. *Research Design.* The study used a quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test control group design with a delayed post-test. The independent variable was the type of speaking intervention: picture description tasks for the experimental group and text-based discussion tasks for the control group. The dependent variables included oral fluency, lexical complexity and activation, and grammatical accuracy. Testing was conducted at Week 1, Week 12, and Week 16, with the final assessment following a four-week non-instructional retention period.

Participants. The sample consisted of 84 undergraduate non-English majors enrolled in an intermediate English communication program at a national university. All participants had an intermediate CEFR B1 level

confirmed by the Oxford Placement Test. They had approximately seven years of previous formal English instruction but limited opportunities for spoken communication outside the classroom. The participants were divided equally into an experimental group and a control group. Before the intervention, statistical comparisons indicated no significant baseline differences between the groups on the target linguistic measures.

Pedagogical Intervention. Both groups received two 90-minute sessions per week for 12 weeks from the same certified EFL instructor. The groups followed the same thematic syllabus, including urbanization, ecological conservation, technological innovation, interpersonal conflict, culinary cultures, and occupational routines. The same target vocabulary and grammatical structures were therefore available to both groups.

The experimental group spent 35 minutes of each session on structured picture description tasks. Three types of visual activities were used. First, static complex scenes required learners to identify objects, describe spatial relationships, and infer mood. Second, sequential picture strips presented chronological events and encouraged the use of narrative tenses, temporal expressions, causal conjunctions, and cohesive devices. Third, comparative visual pairs required learners to describe differences and similarities and use comparative constructions, modal verbs, and evaluative vocabulary.The tasks followed a three-stage cycle: a short period of silent visual observation and individual brainstorming, a pair or collaborative description stage with guided target-word use and clarification, and an individual oral report recorded digitally. The control group spent the same amount of time on the same thematic content and target vocabulary, but their speaking prompts were presented through written questions and discussion outlines without pictorial input.

Assessment Instruments. Individual oral performances were digitally recorded at the three testing points. The recordings were transcribed using CLAN software and coded by two trained applied linguists who were blind to group assignment. Inter-rater reliability was high, with Cohen's Kappa values of 0.91 for error classification and 0.94 for syntactic boundaries. Speaking fluency was measured through speech rate, calculated as syllables per minute, and Mean Length of Run (MLR), representing the average number of syllables produced between fluent pauses. Lexical performance was assessed through Measure of Textual Lexical Diversity (MTLD) and a target vocabulary activation score ranging from 0 to 30. Grammatical accuracy was measured using the percentage of error-free clauses (%EFC).

Results and Discussion. The pre-test results showed comparable performance between the two groups. After the 12-week intervention, however, the experimental group demonstrated stronger gains across the main measures. Speech rate increased from 114.2 to 148.6 syllables per minute in the experimental group, while the control group increased from 115.8 to 129.4. At the delayed post-test, the experimental group maintained a rate of 145.1 syllables per minute, whereas the control group recorded 126.3.

Mean Length of Run also showed a substantial improvement. The experimental group increased from 4.82 syllables at pre-test to 7.64 at post-test and retained 7.41 at delayed post-test. The control group increased from 4.91 to 5.88 and later recorded 5.62. These findings indicate that learners working with pictures were able to produce longer continuous stretches of speech, suggesting improved planning and reduced hesitation.

The clearest differences appeared in vocabulary-related measures. The experimental group's MTLD increased from 48.3 to 72.8 and remained at 69.4 at delayed post-test. The control group increased from 47.9 to 58.6 and later declined to 55.1. The target vocabulary activation score in the experimental group rose from 8.4 out of 30 to 22.7, with 20.9 retained after four weeks. In comparison, the control group rose from 8.7 to 14.8 and declined to 12.2. Thus, the visual intervention was associated not only with immediate vocabulary activation but also with stronger delayed retention.

Grammatical accuracy improved in both groups, but the experimental group achieved a larger gain. The percentage of error-free clauses increased from 44.5% to 61.2% in the experimental group, compared with an increase from 45.1% to 53.4% in the control group. The delayed result for the experimental group remained relatively high at 59.8%, suggesting that visual support did not simply increase fluency at the expense of accuracy.

These results can be interpreted through cognitive theories of speech production. Visual prompts provide learners with ready-made situational, spatial, and relational information. As a result, learners do not need to spend as much working memory on inventing a context and can redirect attention to lexical retrieval, grammatical encoding, and articulation. This interpretation is consistent with Levelt's model and with task-based accounts of cognitive load.

The vocabulary findings are also consistent with Paivio's Dual Coding Theory. A picture can activate visual and semantic representations at the same time, creating additional associations for lexical items. Sequential picture tasks are particularly useful because learners must continuously refer to people, objects, actions, locations, and changes over time. This encourages the retrieval of more specific nouns, verbs, adjectives, and prepositions rather than allowing learners to avoid difficult vocabulary.

The delayed post-test provides further support for the value of visual scaffolding. The experimental group's target vocabulary score decreased only from 22.7 to 20.9, whereas the control group decreased from 14.8 to 12.2. This pattern suggests that repeated association between lexical items and meaningful visual contexts may support deeper encoding and longer-term retention.

Conclusion. The study demonstrates that structured picture description tasks can make a meaningful contribution to EFL speaking development and productive vocabulary activation. Compared with text-based speaking activities, the visual intervention produced greater improvements in speech rate, Mean Length of Run, lexical diversity, target vocabulary activation, and error-free clauses. The delayed post-test further indicated stronger retention of productive vocabulary among learners who participated in picture-based tasks.

The findings suggest that pictures should not be treated merely as decorative classroom materials or short warm-up activities. Instead, they can function as systematic cognitive scaffolds within task-based speaking instruction. A practical sequence is to begin with brief visual observation

and vocabulary brainstorming, continue with pair-based description and clarification, and finish with individual oral production. Such a sequence can help learners transform passive vocabulary knowledge into active spoken language.

Future research could compare static pictures with dynamic video prompts and examine how individual cognitive variables, such as working memory and visual literacy, interact with task complexity and proficiency level.

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