FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE: HOW VISUAL LITERACY TRAINING TRANSFORMS ENGLISH TEACHERS' COMPETENCES

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Abstract: In today's visually driven communication and learning environments, educators' proficiency in visual literacy is crucial for effective teaching. This study examines the effect of visual literacy training on English teachers' ability to create effective teaching materials at Kalam Kudus Elementary School in Bali. Employing a one-group pretest-posttest design, 21 English teachers underwent visual literacy training centered on the principles of Contrast, Repetition, Alignment, and Proximity (CRAP). The quantitative data were gathered through pre-and post-tests, complemented by a questionnaire evaluating changes in teachers' knowledge and application of visual literacy. Additionally, qualitative data from open-ended questions provided insights into the training's practical implications and the challenges teachers faced in integrating visual design principles into their materials. The results indicated a significant enhancement in teachers' visual literacy, with an average Gain score of 74.15%, classifying the training as moderately effective. Teachers reported a deeper understanding of visual design principles, resulting in more engaging and comprehensible educational materials. Despite these positive outcomes, educators encountered several challenges in implementing visual literacy, highlighting the need for continuous professional development in this area. This study highlights the benefits of visual literacy training and stresses its essential adoption in education.

Keywords: Visual literacy; teaching materials; EFL teachers; educational Effectiveness.

INTRODUCTION

The undeniable significance of English as a global medium of communication has led nearly all countries worldwide to incorporate English as a subject in their educational curriculum. Consequently, teaching English has become a key focus for governments aiming to equip their citizens with global literacy and proficiency in the English language (Poedjiastutie et al., 2021). In Indonesia, the emphasis on English education is particularly pronounced as it is perceived as a crucial skill for enhancing competitiveness in a globalized world. However, teachers who play a crucial role in this endeavor encounter various challenges in fostering their students' English language skills. Research identifies motivational issues as a significant challenge, with students often showing instrumental motivation driven by national examination requirements rather than integrative motivation (Yulia, 2013). Furthermore, the socio-cultural context, including economic

conditions and community beliefs, poses additional barriers to effective English teaching (Poedjiastutie et al., 2021). The complexity of Indonesia's linguistic landscape, with over 700 vernaculars, also complicates the teaching process, impacting the effectiveness of English language acquisition due to the substantial unconstructive influence of students' cultural backgrounds (Marcellino, 2015).

Indonesian teachers often face difficulties in accessing adequate resources, acquiring the necessary skills, and obtaining the requisite knowledge and expertise to teach English effectively. The lack of training and professional development opportunities further exacerbates these challenges, making it difficult for teachers to design and implement effective instructional strategies (Irasuti et al., 2024; Widiati et al., 2018). To address these issues, innovative approaches such as visual literacy training have emerged as valuable tools for enhancing teachers' capabilities and improving student outcomes (Ramdani et al., 2023). Visual literacy can play a pivotal role in transforming the teaching and learning process, making it more engaging and effective. Furthermore, the socio-cultural challenges, including economic conditions and community beliefs, add another layer of complexity to English teaching in Indonesia (Poedjiastutie et al., 2021a). As a result, addressing these multifaceted challenges requires a comprehensive and multi-pronged approach that includes continuous professional development and the integration of innovative teaching strategies (Renandya et al., 2018).

Visual literacy involves the ability to interpret, negotiate, and make meaning from information presented in the form of an image. This competency is essential in today's visually-oriented world and can significantly enhance the teaching of English by providing teachers with new ways to engage students and facilitate learning (Britsch, 2009). By leveraging visual literacy, teachers can design more engaging teaching and learning processes, resulting in improved English language proficiency among their students (Villamizar, 2018). Visuals such as pictures, photos, and videos are no longer mere decorative elements but can serve as meaningful objects for analysis, interpretation, and communication in the English classroom (Pantaleo, 2015). For instance, incorporating visual arts into the curriculum can make learning exciting, decrease language learning anxiety, and improve classroom atmosphere, which is vital for effective language acquisition (Thulasivanthana, 2020). Effective use of visual literacy in teaching not only supports the development of language skills but also fosters critical thinking and interpretative skills among students (Victoria, 2021).

Recent studies underscore the critical role of visual literacy in educational settings, emphasizing its integration with traditional language skills. Bristor and Drake (2016) argue for the development of visual literacy alongside reading, writing, speaking, and listening in English classrooms as essential for comprehensive learning outcomes. They further highlight that visual-based language instruction fosters a creative and meaningful communicative environment, significantly enhancing student engagement and motivation, which in turn improves English language skills. However, Lopatovska (2016) notes that students often struggle with interpreting visualizations due to a lack of experiential learning and misconceptions, underscoring the necessity for teachers to develop robust visual literacy skills. Other research supports the need for visual literacy, indicating that it enhances understanding and retention of information, and that incorporating visual literacy in education can bridge gaps in comprehension (Duchak, 2014).

In a study by Thulasivanthana (2020), the importance of educators understanding the significant effect of visuals on learning was emphasized, given the frequent incorporation of various images into teaching materials. Teachers may think that pictures are self-explanatory, and their function is to make the subject matter easier. Therefore, embedding visual literacy into teacher education programs is crucial, especially for new teachers at the beginning of their careers who are still developing their pedagogical methodologies (Duchak, 2014). Bristor and Drake (2016) demonstrated the effectiveness of using a visual picture economics textbook based on problem-based learning (PBL) in improving reading literacy skills, further highlighting the potential of visual literacy in enhancing educational outcomes.

Damayana et al. (2018) argued that one of the factors contributing to students' difficulties in understanding scientific concepts is the lack of visualization of phenomena related to the material being studied. Visualization can facilitate critical thinking and comprehension by providing students with a clearer understanding of the concepts being taught (Alper et al., 2017). Ruiz-Gallardo et al. (2019) pointed out that the lack of teachers' abilities to communicate through visual language often stems from inadequate training in effective visual communication during their pre-service education. This gap highlights the need for comprehensive visual literacy training for teachers.

Visual literacy training centered on the principles of Contrast, Repetition, Alignment, and Proximity (CRAP) can provide a structured framework for improving teachers' visual communication skills. Yeh and Cheng (2010) described how pre-service teachers could enhance their ability to understand and interpret visuals using these design principles. The aims of visual design are to ensure legibility, simplify messages, increase learner engagement, focus attention on important points, and provide an alternative channel of communication, leading to better engagement and retention (Reyna, 2013). Thus, equipping teachers with knowledge about CRAP principles can significantly improve their ability to create effective instructional materials.

Ruiz-Gallardo et al. (Ruiz-Gallardo et al., 2019) highlight that the absence of visual literacy in educational settings is often due to its omission from initial teacher training and ongoing professional development. Consequently, there is a pressing need for dedicated pedagogical research in this domain, particularly focusing on in-service teachers. Pass and Czirr (2015) further emphasize that visual literacy is essential for an in-depth comprehension of all forms of media, suggesting that explicit teaching methods must be incorporated into teacher education programs to bridge this gap. As visual literacy enhances critical thinking and comprehension, embedding it into teacher training is vital for equipping educators with the necessary skills to foster effective learning environments.

Based on the background of the study, this research aims to investigate the effect of visual literacy training on English teachers' knowledge and skills in creating teaching materials in Kalam Kudus Elementary School in Bali. The participants of the current research will be equipped with knowledge about the CRAP (Contrast, Repetition, Alignment, Proximity) visual design principles, which they will then employ in developing more visually engaging teaching materials. This research is significant as it contributes to the improvement of teaching practices and the overall learning experience at Kalam Kudus Elementary School in Bali, addressing a notable gap in the existing literature and enhancing educators' proficiency in utilizing visual elements effectively.

The current study was guided by two following research questions.
1. Does English teachers' visual literacy knowledge differ before and after receiving training materials related to the design principles of contrast, repetition, alignments, and proximity (CRAP)?
2. How effective does visual literacy training help teachers enhance their skills in creating teaching materials?

METHOD

Research Design and Participants

The research adopted a quasi-experimental quantitative design with a one-group pre-test and post-test approach. This design was selected to assess the changes in English teachers' knowledge and abilities before and after undergoing a specific visual literacy training program. The pretest-posttest framework allowed for the measurement of immediate effects by comparing participants' competencies at two distinct points: before the training (pre-test) and after the training (post-test).

The sample consisted of 21 English teachers from SD Kalam Kudus in Bali, purposefully selected for their information-rich characteristics (Bachtiar, 2024) and to provide insights into the specific context of English language teaching at the school. This purposive sampling aimed to explore how visual literacy training could influence teaching practices within a localized setting, thereby offering a focused examination of the training's effectiveness in a particular educational environment.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection involved two primary instruments: pre-test and post-test assessments and a visual literacy questionnaire. These instruments incorporated a mix of multiple-choice questions, close-ended questions, and open-ended questions to capture a comprehensive view of the teachers' understanding and application of visual literacy principles.

The pre-test and post-test assessments were administered at the respective phases of the training to measure the immediate impact. The visual literacy questionnaire was designed to gather additional insights into the participants' experiences and perceptions. The questions were meticulously crafted to ensure they effectively captured the nuances of the teachers' knowledge and practical application of visual literacy principles.

Instrument Development

The development of research instruments was grounded in established frameworks of visual literacy and educational assessment. Multiple-choice and close-ended questions were developed based on key principles of visual literacy, ensuring they accurately measured the teachers' knowledge and skills. Open-ended questions were designed to elicit detailed qualitative responses, providing deeper insights into the participants' experiences and the challenges they faced in integrating visual literacy into their teaching practices.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study was comprehensive and multi-faceted, employing both quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a holistic understanding of the training's impact. Quantitative data, derived from multiple-choice and close-ended questions, were analyzed statistically using SPSS, with paired-sample t-tests conducted to identify significant changes in participants' knowledge and skills post-training. This statistical analysis provided objective measures of the training's effectiveness, highlighting significant improvements in visual literacy competencies. Qualitative data gathered from open-ended questions were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved systematically coding the responses to identify recurring themes and patterns (Bachtiar et al., 2024). This approach aimed to uncover deeper insights into the participants' experiences, practical application of their learning, and the challenges they faced in integrating visual literacy into their teaching materials. The combination of these methods provided a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the training's overall impact.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study comprehensively examines the impact of visual literacy training on English teachers' proficiency in creating effective teaching materials, specifically utilizing the CRAP (Contrast, Repetition, Alignment, Proximity) design principles. The quantitative analysis, encompassing pre-tests and post-tests alongside closed-ended questions in the questionnaires, reveals substantial improvements in the teachers' understanding and application of these principles. The normality test confirmed the data's normal distribution, allowing for the application of a Paired Sample T-Test. The test indicated a significant enhancement in visual literacy, as evidenced by an average Gain score of 74.15%, underscoring the moderate effectiveness of the training program (see Table 1).

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

Participants' responses to close-ended questions, collected via a Likert scale, demonstrate a high level of endorsement for the integration of visual literacy in teaching. All 21 teachers acknowledged its importance in enhancing student comprehension, with 15 teachers strongly agreeing and 6 somewhat agreeing on its significant impact on student engagement and understanding in English teaching. This unanimous recognition reflects a solid consensus on visual literacy's pivotal role in the classroom.

A detailed analysis of the CRAP principles reveals that the principle of contrast was particularly well understood, with 8 teachers strongly agreeing and 12 somewhat agreeing

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on its importance in creating visually compelling teaching materials. Similarly, the principle of repetition was well received, with 15 teachers strongly agreeing and 5 somewhat agreeing on its value in reinforcing key concepts in English lessons. The application of alignment and proximity also garnered significant recognition, indicating that teachers felt confident in utilizing these principles effectively, even though specific numbers were not provided.

Despite these positive outcomes, the study uncovered varying levels of confidence among teachers in applying the CRAP principles, highlighting the need for continuous learning and practice. Previous studies have consistently emphasized the importance of teacher confidence in effective teaching practices. Graven (2017) explored the centrality of confidence in teacher learning, suggesting that continuous professional development is essential for building and maintaining teacher confidence. Berry (2014) found that self-study approaches can help build individual and collective confidence among teachers, indicating that reflection and self-assessment are crucial components of professional development programs aimed at enhancing teacher confidence in applying CRAP principles. Additionally, Peters (2012) and Bachtiar (2020) highlighted that while many pre-service teachers felt confident in managing student behavior, their strategies were often limited, underscoring the need for comprehensive training that broadens pedagogical strategies.

The acknowledgment of visual literacy's role in language acquisition by the majority of teachers underscores its perceived value in the educational process and emphasizes the necessity for ongoing professional development to fully leverage its benefits in teaching. Consequently, the varying levels of confidence among teachers in applying the CRAP principles point to a significant need for ongoing professional development that focuses on enhancing teacher confidence through continuous learning, reflection, and broadening pedagogical strategies to fully leverage the benefits of visual literacy in language acquisition.

Qualitative insights from open-ended questions reveal that teachers have gained a deeper understanding of visual literacy's role in enhancing student learning, aligning with the Dual-Coding Theory. This theory posits that integrating visual and verbal information enriches learning experiences.

The participating teachers described their shift from content-centered approaches to a balanced incorporation of visual elements, utilizing contrast, repetition, alignment, and proximity to create dynamic and interactive teaching. Lynch (2022) highlighted the potential of Visual Thinking Strategies to enhance critical inquiry and creativity, supporting these findings. Similarly, Stenliden et al. (2017) emphasized the need for innovative didactic designs incorporating visual analytics to bolster visual literacy. Grushka et al. (2018) also discussed how visual learning fosters higher cognitive processes and creativity, resonating with teachers' strategic use of visual elements. These studies collectively underscore the transformative impact of visual literacy on teaching practices and student learning.

However, this transition presented challenges. Teachers faced difficulties in selecting appropriate colors and images that support the learning process, indicating a potential gap in their training. The need for continued practice and exploration was emphasized to fully integrate these principles into everyday teaching practices. Time constraints were a significant barrier, with teachers noting the extensive effort required to create 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 to streamline the material creation process. Stenliden et al. (2017). discussed similar challenges in developing innovative didactic designs, emphasizing the necessity for teachers to learn effective visual analytics. Grushka et al. (2018) also noted the pedagogical challenges in integrating visual learning, underscoring the need for teachers to adapt and rethink their instructional strategies. Christ et al. (2019) further highlighted that selecting technology with affordances that support lesson objectives can be a significant success factor, though it requires substantial planning and knowledge.

The findings of this study align with previous research (Grushka et al., 2018; Stenliden et al., 2017), which demonstrated the significant challenges and benefits of integrating visual literacy into pedagogy through professional development programs. Stenliden et al. (2017) further highlighted the necessity for innovative didactic designs and visual analytics to support teachers' development of visual literacy skills. Grushka et al. (2018) discussed the pedagogical challenges teachers face in adapting their instructional strategies to include visual learning, underscoring the importance of ongoing professional development. This current research extends these findings by specifically focusing on English teachers and their capabilities in material creation. Post-training feedback indicated a strong appreciation for visual literacy's role in enhancing student comprehension and engagement, aligning with the principles of Dual-Coding Theory. Furthermore, Lynch (2022) emphasized the potential of Visual Thinking Strategies to enhance critical inquiry and creativity among students, which mirrors the positive feedback received from teachers in this study. These studies collectively reinforce the importance of integrating visual literacy into teacher training programs to address the highlighted challenges and leverage the benefits for student learning.

Generally, this current study confirms that visual literacy training significantly 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. The study contributes to the field by providing empirical evidence of the positive impact of visual literacy training and advocates for its broader adoption to improve teaching and learning experiences. Continuous professional development and the provision of practical tools and strategies are essential to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, ensuring teachers can confidently and effectively implement visual literacy principles in their pedagogy.

CONCLUSION

The current study underscores a significant enhancement in teachers' comprehension and application of visual literacy principles, underscoring the training's efficacy in improving student comprehension, engagement, and retention. Participating teachers shifted from a content-focused approach to a more visually strategic method, highlighting a greater appreciation for visual literacy in bolstering teaching effectiveness. However, the research also identified challenges, such as difficulties in selecting appropriate colors and a need for further skill refinement, revealing a gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. These findings support the integration of visual literacy training

into teacher education programs, emphasizing its critical role in developing visually engaging and pedagogically effective materials. The study also suggests the necessity for additional support to assist teachers in overcoming these challenges and fully incorporating visual literacy into their teaching practices.

The findings of this study emphasize the significant impact of visual literacy training on the effectiveness of English language teaching, particularly through the application of CRAP principles. This underscores the necessity of integrating visual literacy into teacher training programs, not only to enhance the creation of engaging teaching materials but also to foster a deeper comprehension among students. By equipping teachers with these visual design skills, educational institutions can significantly improve the overall quality of teaching and learning, leading to better educational outcomes. Additionally, the study advocates for continuous professional development initiatives to ensure that teachers remain adept at employing visual literacy in their instructional practices.

Despite the positive outcomes, this study is limited by its focus on a single educational institution, which may affect the generalizability of the results to other contexts. Furthermore, the one-group pre-test and post-test design does not account for external factors that may have influenced the teachers' performance post-training. Another limitation is the reliance on self-reported data for qualitative insights, which may introduce bias in the participants' responses. Future research should consider a more diverse sample and incorporate a control group to strengthen the validity and reliability of the findings. Additionally, longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into the long-term effects of visual literacy training on teaching practices and student learning outcomes.

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