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Adult English learners' perception of using pictures to learn English vocabulary at private coaching centers

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Abstract:

Nowadays, there has been a significant increase in the establishment of language centers due to the growing demand from learners. Many job opportunities require strong language skills, particularly proficiency in English. Vocabulary plays a crucial role in effective English communication, and the techniques employed for teaching vocabulary hold considerable importance in language instruction. Different methods yield varying outcomes, and students' perceptions of these methods can differ. This study aimed to explore the perception of adult students regarding learning English vocabulary through pictures. To gather data, a mixed-method design was utilized, comprising a questionnaire survey involving 100 learners and semi-structured interviews conducted with 10 learners. The study findings revealed that, according to the majority of students, learning vocabulary through pictures brings benefits such as increased motivation, improved vocabulary acquisition, and enhanced memory. However, the study also identified challenges associated with learning vocabulary through pictures, including issues related to image quality, difficulties in pronunciation, and struggles in distinguishing between concrete and abstract words.

Keywords:

Perception, EFL adult students, benefits, challenges, visual aids, picture.

1. Introduction:

English has become a key to the globe as a result of globalization, which indicates that mastering English is necessary to internationalize a nation (Rintaningrum, 2018). As people advance in age or in their chosen field, they often look for greater employment opportunities. Learning a second language can help you stand out in a competitive job market or help you keep the job you have (Raewf & Mahmood, 2021). This is because many companies and organizations strive to expand internationally, a trend that appears to necessitate the presence of multilingual employees (Stein-Smith, 2017). Vocabulary is crucial to effective communication in any language; a larger vocabulary facilitates the development of language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Susanto, 2017). The use of effective methods to transmit knowledge to students has become increasingly important (Tamura, 2006). According to Porter and Margaret (1992), using pictures of teaching vocabulary help students to easily absorb and commit knowledge to long-term memory.

(Wileman, 1993) asserts that humans have the ability to sense and absorb a lot of information through visual cues like pictures. Since it encourages student learning, the use of visual aids in the classroom, such as pictures or real objects, is a desirable and advantageous strategy. Therefore, teachers teach vocabulary through pictures make students absorb easily. However, some students have negative views regarding learning language using pictures because they find it difficult (Lai Thi Dao, 2021). While numerous research on students' perceptions at high schools, colleges, and universities have been conducted and the participants are primary or secondary students. It is acknowledged that there is a lack of research on the same topic with adult students generally at private English centers. Therefore, the aim of the study was to explore the adult students' perceptions of pictures being used as visual aids in their English classes at a private English center. The study aimed to investigate the following research question:

What are adult students' perception of the benefits and challenges of learning English vocabulary through pictures in the English class at private center?

2. Brief Literature Review:

According to McShane and Glinnow (2005), one of the key elements of psychology was perception since it

allows us to understand the many types of phenomena that exist in our surroundings.

Individuals perceive things differently. There were both positive and negative effects. Perception was the method by which we learned about and understood the world around us. It is said that someone would get information from their environment throughout the perceiving process. The individual would then interpret the information obtained. As a result, perception gives us the ability to grasp and interpret the information that is around us. Vocabulary was one of the linguistic factors considered important for language competence. The foundation of each language is its vocabulary, hence it stands to reason that teaching vocabulary is crucial to language development (Aqahtani, 2015). Human communication relies on words, thus it's obvious that learning a new language would be very difficult without them. The term "visual aids" refers to any "things that assist to explain or make a lesson easier to learn and remember (pictures, models, charts, maps, films, slides, actual objects, etc.). To put it another way, visual aids are various things that individuals may apply for learning purposes in order to understand or learn something. Visual aids, on the other hand, are regarded as representations used to grasp or improve a subject, giving pupils direct experiences. One of these useful tools is the picture (Hill 1990). In addition to providing images of reality, pictures may also provide some humor to the classroom. It is sometimes unexpected how much additional activities using graphics might influence a lesson. Pictures may be used in a variety of ways for teaching foreign languages, including expanding one's vocabulary.

Wright (1990) pointed out, using pictures in teaching vocabulary language help motivate and drawing learner's attention. They make it very apparent what one is referring to and what kind of stimulus is being used in a certain piece of language. Without motivation, the teaching-learning process will not be successful. It suggests that employing visual aids to engage pupils in the learning process is more successful. It can have a positive impact on their performance, particularly in terms of vocabulary. One form of media that might assist the teacher in engaging the students and boosting their enthusiasm is pictures. Hidayanti (2022) conducted a study to investigate students' perceptions of learning vocabulary via lists of tables with images and to learn about the growth of students' vocabulary in learning vocabulary through lists of tables with pictures. The outcomes of learning vocabulary through a list of tables with images were quite helpful in improving their vocabulary, and they also believed that there is no problem in learning. According to Koren (1997), learning foreign words with visuals might be simpler and more remembered than words without pictures. As a result, many teachers in English language schools utilized pictures to help students develop their vocabulary and speaking abilities.

This capstone project was conducted by Afianti (2009) with the aim of explaining the use of images in teaching vocabulary to the fifth grade of SDN 01 Bolon, highlighting the challenges

of using pictures, and presenting the remedies for these issues. The challenges include the size and clarity of the images, the time constraints, and the lack of adequate instructional aids. Nurmala and Suryaman (2022) performed research to find out how middle school pupils felt about using flashcards to improve their vocabulary. This kind of narrative inquiry is used in qualitative research for its descriptive qualities. Three ninth-graders from a school in East Jakarta took part in the research. Findings from this research indicate that students had positive views regarding using flashcards as learning material, including positive attitudes toward the causes, approaches, benefits, and drawbacks associated with using flashcards. Most students enjoyed using flashcards as a learning companion, found them helpful in studying vocabulary, found them effective, and found that they were supportive of students' metacognitive improvement while using them. However, there were certain problems associated with using flashcards, such as students having trouble pronouncing the words on the cards, which meant that the continual learning process had to be closely monitored. Concrete words are easier to recall than abstract ones, according to research by Nelson and Schreiber (1992). Concrete words (those that represent actual things) are more involved with physical associations based on the visual receptors, according to the embodied approach and dual coding theory (Paivio, 1986) (Vigliocco et al., 2014). Abstract words (those that represent concepts and ideas) are more involved with emotional associations based on affective experiences.

3. Methodology:

3.1. Research site and participants:

The data were collected at a private Englishcenter. It is an English center dedicated to teaching communication. The total number of students was 100 students, including 50 beginner-level students and 50 elementary-level students. The students were EFL adult students ranging in age from 18 to 40. The survey had 100 students, 38 of whom were male, accounting for 38% of the total. The other 62 students were all female, accounting for 62% of the total. There were 34 students below 25 years old, which accounted for 34% of the total students. 55 students aged from 25 to 35, which accounted for 55% of total. The remaining 11% (11 students) were over 35 years old. More than a third (33 students, equivalent to 33%) had studied English for fewer than 3 years. 18 students (18%) had studied English for a period between 3 and 5 years. Furthermore, 49 students (49% of the total number) had been studying English for more than 5

years. In terms of the duration of learning English at the English center, the periods were divided into three categories: Fewer than 3 months, 3-6 months, and over 6 months. 54 students (or 54% of the total), had studied communicative English for fewer than 3 months. The other two groups, comprising 23% each, include those who have been studying for a duration between 3 to 6 months and those who have been studying at the center for over 6 months, respectively.

3.2. Research instrument:

The research used a hybrid strategy, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques. Information was gathered via a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. To ensure the accuracy and consistency of the data, an expert in the field of English language studies reviewed the questionnaire and interview questions prior to their distribution among the study students. The questionnaire has two parts. Part I included 7 questions elicited background information of the students, including their age, occupation, time period of learning English and gender. Part II included 21 questionnaire items. The questions asked the students' perception of the benefits and challenges of vocabulary learning using pictures. The questionnaire used a 5-point Likert scale, including Strongly disagree (SD); Disagree (D); Neutral (N); Agree (A), and Strongly agree (SA). The measurement of Cronbach's Alpha yielded a score of .87, indicating the reliability of the question items. Additionally, an interview was conducted to validate the responses provided in the questionnaire.

3.3. Procedures for data collection and analysis:

In terms of data collection procedures, it was crucial to ensure that the questionnaires were understandable and valid. Therefore, it was necessary to assess, review, and modify them before they were given to the students. The students spent roughly ten minutes reading and responding to the questions. Based on the feedback received, various aspects of the questionnaire, such as unclear language, grammatical errors, and typographical errors, were modified. One hundred students filled out the survey, and ten of them agreed to take part in the semi-structured interview. The last interview questions and questionnaire took the students around 10 minutes to complete, and the whole process took about 15 minutes. One hundred students filled out the survey, and ten more agreed to sit down for a semi-structured interview. The final questionnaire took the students around 15 minutes to complete, and the interviews took about 10 minutes. Researchers used "descriptive statistics" in SPSS Statistics version 22

to examine the questionnaire data by computing mean scores and standard deviation. For each strategy, students' mean scores were averaged to get an idea of how well they were doing. Disagree (M = 1.00-1.80), disagree (M = 1.81-2.60), remain neutral (M = 2.61-3.40), agree (M = 3.41-4.20), and strongly agree (M = 4.21-5.00). "Content analysis" was used to examine the transcripts of the interviews. Those who participated in the interviews were given one of five codes (B1, B2, B3, B4, or E1, E2, E3, or E5). The researchers encoded the interviewees' responses using these codes and categorized them into broader themes.

4. Results and Discussion:

4.1. Results:

Quantitative and qualitative information pertinent to answering the research question are presented here. The presentation starts with the quantitative data followed by the qualitative data. Table 1 provides an overview of the six categories of benefits and challenges identified by the students in learning English vocabulary through pictures. These categories were found to be moderately utilized, with mean scores ranging from 3.18 to 4.45. Among the benefits, the category of "increasing motivation" received the highest mean score (M = 4.45, SD = .469). The categories of "enhancing vocabulary acquisition" and "supporting memorization" obtained slightly lower mean scores with M = 4.31 and 4.30, and SD = .656 and .687, respectively. As for the challenges, the category of "Poor quality of picture design" received the highest mean score (M = 4.23, SD = .733). The remaining categories, namely "difficulty with pronunciation" and "difficulty in differentiating abstract versus concrete vocabulary," obtained lower mean scores of M = 3.31 and 3.18, with SD = 1.288 and 1.411, respectively.

Regarding "increasing motivation" feature perceived by adult students. The two items including "Using pictures make classes more interesting" and "Using pictures in lessons increases my interest in learning vocabulary" received the highest mean scores (M= 4.55, SD=.52) and (M=4.51, SD=.50) respectively. The remaining items are "The use of pictures draws my attention to learning vocabulary", "The use of pictures encourages me to take part in learning vocabulary activities", "I get inspired to learn new words whenever I use visual aids," "The use of pictures strongly encourages me to interact with teachers" received a high mean score (M=4.46, SD=.64), (M=4.42, SD=.65), (M=4.40, SD=.58) and (M=4.41, SD=.66), respectively. It indicates that the majority of students strongly believed that using pictures to teach was

beneficial in increasing motivation. In addition, qualitative data from the interviews revealed students' similar opinions as follows: "I wish that the teacher taught vocabulary through pictures when I was a primary student, I would like English more. Learning English with pictures is very interesting and lively, making me more focused on the lesson." (E4). "When learning vocabulary with pictures, I feel less bored, feel more engaged in the lesson, and increase my motivation to learn vocabulary, I really enjoy participating in class activities." (E3). "The visuals stimulate my senses, make me feel more excited when learning vocabulary, promote participation in classroom games as well as interaction with teachers." (B3).

Table. 1: Descriptive statistics of benefits and challenges of learning English vocabulary through pictures.

1	Increasing motivation (IM)	4.45	.469	Moderate
2	Enhancing vocabulary acquisition (EA)	4.31	.656	Moderate
3	Supporting memorization (SM)	4.30	.687	Moderate
4	Poor quality of picture design (PD)	4.23	.733	Moderate
5	Difficulty with pronunciation (DP)	3.31	1.288	Moderate
6.	Difficulty in differentiating abstract versus concrete vocabulary (DV)	3.18	1.411	Moderate
Total		3.96	0.874	Moderate

Regarding the "Enhancing vocabulary acquisition" feature, all three items were utilized moderately, with the item "Pictures make me better understand the meaning of words" receiving the highest mean score ($M = 4.35$, $SD = .744$). The remaining items, "When I look at the picture I can guess the meaning of vocabulary easily" and "The pictures displayed could support my imagination," obtained high mean scores of $M = 4.27$ ($SD = .790$) and $M = 4.32$ ($SD = .750$) respectively. It indicates that the majority of students strongly believed that using pictures to teach was beneficial to enhance acquisition. The qualitative data from the interviews provided further support for the quantitative data, as follows: "Learning vocabulary through pictures helps me understand words more clearly and not be confused when naming the same thing but with slightly different characteristics. For example tables and desks. Pictures that

clearly show the characteristics of that difference help me understand the word better.”(B5) E2, E3, and E4 students agreed that using pictures when learning vocabulary made it easier for them to associate words with pictures, stimulated their imagination, and aided them in understanding the meaning of words. “When looking at pictures, my brain feels more interested, increases association, the brain is forced to work to understand the meaning of words, I can find a connection between the picture and the teacher's explanation. the word member understands the meaning of the word.” (E3)

Regarding the "Supporting memorization" aspect, all five items were moderately utilized, with the item "Using pictures helps me recognize the meaning of words" receiving the highest mean score ($M = 4.39$, $SD = .863$). The remaining items, "Working with pictures helps me retrieve vocabulary easily" and "I can read the words faster when teachers use pictures to review vocabulary," obtained similar high mean scores of $M = 4.29$ and $SD = .832$, $.880$, respectively. This indicates that the majority of students strongly believed that using pictures to teach vocabulary was beneficial in supporting memorization. The qualitative data from the interviews further supported this notion. For instance, B5 expressed, *"I feel that my vocabulary has significantly improved by learning words through pictures." Moreover, using pictures for vocabulary learning helped students recognize words more quickly and apply them in real-life situations.* B3 explained, *"I can recognize words faster when the teacher shows pictures, and my response time significantly increases when learning and reviewing vocabulary through picture-based games."* Similarly, E1 and E3 students agreed that pictures were particularly useful for learning abstract vocabulary, which can otherwise be challenging to remember. One student, E3, stated, *"Pictures stimulate my brain and help me remember abstract words for a longer period."* In relation to the "quality of picture design" aspect, both items were moderately utilized, with the item "I find it challenging to perceive when pictures are not clear" obtaining the highest mean score ($M = 4.27$, $SD = .763$). The other item, "It becomes difficult to observe the pictures when they are small in size," received a high mean score of $M = 4.19$ and $SD = .813$, indicating that most students strongly agreed that using pictures for teaching purposes becomes challenging when the quality of picture design is poor. The qualitative data from the interviews provided further support for this observation. For instance, B3 mentioned, *"When I am seated far away from the teacher, I cannot clearly see the picture, which makes it difficult for me to guess the meaning of words and identify them."* E3 also added, *"I lose interest when the picture is blurry and unattractive, which makes it uninviting to learn vocabulary."*

In relation to the "Difficulty with pronunciation" aspect, all three items were moderately utilized. The item "I struggle with pronouncing vocabulary without the support of teachers"

received the highest mean score ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 1.473$). The other items, "I find it challenging to pronounce the words correctly" and "I tend to mispronounce words when learning vocabulary through pictures," obtained high mean scores of ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 1.408$) and ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 1.385$) respectively, indicating that most students strongly agreed that using pictures for teaching faced challenges in pronunciation. The qualitative data from the interviews further supported this finding. For example, E5 mentioned, *"When the teacher presents the words with pictures and pronounces them, I am able to pronounce them correctly. However, if the teacher shows the same picture to review the word the next day, there is a high chance that I will pronounce it incorrectly."* However, some students revealed that utilizing pictures to learn jargon assists them with recollecting the words and the correct pronunciation. B1 mentioned, *"I find it easier to pronounce words when the teacher uses pictures to teach vocabulary, as the teacher's pronunciation leaves a better impression on me."*

Regarding the "Difficulty with abstract and concrete words" aspect, both items were moderately utilized. The item "Understanding abstract vocabulary through pictures is challenging" obtained the highest mean score ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 1.501$). The other item, "Visualizing abstract vocabulary through pictures is difficult," received a high mean score of $M = 3.15$ and $SD = 1.445$, indicating that students found it challenging to use pictures for teaching abstract and concrete words. The qualitative data from the interviews further supported this finding. For example, E1 mentioned, *"I can easily recognize specific words like table, chair, red, blue, etc. However, for abstract words such as goal, dedication, grace, etc., it is hard for me to grasp the importance of words through pictures without the teacher's explanation."* Similarly, student B1 also agreed with this idea: *"I can easily grasp the meaning of words through pictures. Using pictures stimulates my imagination, so I enjoy learning vocabulary through pictures."*

4.2. Discussion:

The following section provides a discussion of the study findings. The results indicated that when it comes to learning vocabulary through pictures, students perceived several benefits. These benefits included increased motivation, improved vocabulary acquisition, and enhanced memory. However, there were also challenges encountered in vocabulary learning through pictures, such as low image quality, difficulties in pronunciation, and the struggle to differentiate between concrete and abstract words. These findings align partially with a previous study conducted by Nurmala and Suryaman (2022). In their research, Nurmala and Suryaman emphasized the positive attitudes of students towards using flashcards as a learning tool,

highlighting the reasons, approaches, benefits, and limitations. Students expressed positive opinions about flashcards, finding them enjoyable, helpful, effective, and supportive of their metacognitive development. Nevertheless, challenges were also identified, including pronunciation difficulties and the need for consistent monitoring of the learning process.

Regarding adults' motivation, research shows that students felt more motivated, engaged in lessons, and more interested in participating in classroom activities when learning vocabulary with pictures. These discoveries are in accordance with the review directed by Wright (1990), which underlined that photos give an unmistakable comprehension of the language setting and act as a source of perspective point or improvement. Without motivation, the effectiveness of the learning process is greatly compromised. Therefore, incorporating visual aids to actively engage students in the learning process proves to be a more successful approach. Pictures have a positive impact on students' vocabulary performance. Lai Thi Dao (2021) further supported this notion by asserting that the use of pictures enhances student motivation. The integration of pictures fosters increased student motivation, as evidenced by their active participation in the lesson, including addressing questions and answering the instructor's clarifications.

In terms of vocabulary acquisition, the students expressed a strong consensus that they were able to absorb vocabulary more effectively when using pictures. The visual element facilitated their imagination and enabled them to quickly infer the meaning of words. This aligns with the findings presented by Hidayanti (2022) in their article, where they emphasized that utilizing pictures as a learning tool for vocabulary not only enhanced enjoyment but also resulted in faster comprehension and retention compared to other methods. The immediate connection established between the vocabulary and the accompanying pictures, especially when presented by the teacher, proved to be particularly impactful for the students.

In relation to the influence of pictures on memory, the majority of students concurred that pictures played a significant role in enhancing their ability to remember words for a longer duration and retrieve them more effectively. These findings are consistent with the research conducted by Armstrong (2000), Hashemi and Pourgharib (2013), and Nait Chabane and Lounis (2017), which have demonstrated the positive impact of pictures on improving word memorization.

In terms of the challenges encountered, the findings indicate that using pictures to teach vocabulary presents certain difficulties, such as poor image quality, pronunciation issues, and the ability to differentiate between concrete and abstract words. Specifically, when it comes to adults' perception of poor-quality design, the students agreed that small and blurry pictures made

it challenging for them to observe, recognize, and internalize the vocabulary. These findings align with the research conducted by Afianti (2009), which also highlights challenges related to image size, clarity, time constraints, and the availability of appropriate instructional aids.

In terms of pronunciation, the students expressed agreement that they faced difficulties in pronouncing words accurately when relying solely on pictures. This finding is supported by the research conducted by Muliati, Islamiah, and Aprizani (2020), who also concluded that using visuals for vocabulary acquisition poses challenges in achieving correct pronunciation. Additionally, Nurmala and Suryaman (2022) highlighted that the use of flashcards presented various challenges, including difficulties in pronouncing the words depicted on the cards.

Another challenge observed in vocabulary learning through pictures is the struggle to distinguish between abstract and concrete words. The students acknowledged that it was more challenging for them to recognize and understand abstract words compared to concrete ones when presented in picture form. This finding aligns with the results obtained by Bates and Son (2021), who discovered that students tend to have better recall of concrete words than abstract words. Furthermore, De Groot and Keizjer (2000) found that abstract words are more easily forgotten compared to concrete words.

Similar to the survey findings, the results obtained from the interviews revealed that the majority of students agreed on the numerous benefits of using pictures for vocabulary learning. These benefits encompass increased motivation, enhanced word acquisition, and improved memory retention. The students expressed that learning vocabulary through pictures stimulated their motivation, captured their attention, and facilitated longer-term word recall. These findings align with prior research conducted by Dao Ra Ta Na and Nguyen Huynh Trang (2022) and Ta Thanh Nam and Lap Quan Trinh (2012). Dao Ra Ta Na and Nguyen Huynh Trang (2022) emphasized the positive influence of visuals on vocabulary retention and student motivation, while Ta Thanh Nam and Lap Quan Trinh (2012) underscored how visual aids contribute to better comprehension, classroom engagement, and student interest.

However, the students also identified several challenges associated with vocabulary learning through pictures. These challenges encompassed issues related to low image quality, difficulties in pronunciation, and struggles in grasping the importance of dynamic words. The under studies found it challenging to learn vocabulary through pictures when the images were small, blurry, and when differentiating between abstract and concrete words was difficult. These findings align with previous research conducted by De Groot and Keizjer (2000), Muliati and Aprizani (2020), and Afianti (2009). De Groot and Keizjer (2000) discovered that students

tend to encounter more difficulty in remembering abstract words compared to concrete words. Muliati and Aprizani (2020) emphasized the challenge of accurately pronouncing words when utilizing visuals for vocabulary acquisition. Afianti (2009) identified additional challenges, including image size and clarity, time constraints, and a lack of adequate instructional aids when learning vocabulary through pictures.

5. Conclusion:

The current study aimed to examine the perception of adult learners regarding the procurement of English jargon using pictures, as well as to investigate whether there are any variations in this perception among learners with different levels of English proficiency. The researcher focused on two key aspects: the advantages and challenges associated with learning vocabulary through pictures. The benefits of utilizing pictures include increased motivation to learn vocabulary, improved acquisition of vocabulary, and enhanced memory retention. On the other hand, the challenges identified encompass issues related to the quality of pictures, difficulties in pronunciation, and struggles in recognizing abstract words.

The review's discoveries have a few ramifications for the two understudies and instructors. For students, it is important to address the difficulties they encounter when learning vocabulary through pictures, such as pronunciation challenges and difficulties in understanding word meanings. To alleviate these difficulties, students should focus on the teacher's pronunciation during vocabulary instruction, engage in regular memorization and revision exercises to improve pronunciation accuracy. Furthermore, students can enhance their learning experience by previewing the topics they will be studying, facilitating better connections between words and pictures, and facilitating easier identification of word meanings. For teachers, it is crucial to ensure clear pronunciation when introducing vocabulary and to create activities that provide ample opportunities for students to practice and remember words. Incorporating the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) on the pictures can also be beneficial in assisting students with pronunciation. Careful preparation of pictures, including using clear colors and drawings, and ensuring they are large enough for students to easily see and comprehend, can further enhance the effectiveness of visual aids in vocabulary learning. To address the challenges experienced by students, it is essential for learning material designers to actively gather feedback from both teachers and students. This feedback can provide valuable insights into the obstacles faced by learners, such as unfamiliar or complex topics, and unclear or unengaging pictures that impede the learning process. By actively seeking and incorporating

feedback, designers can make necessary modifications, replacements, or removals of content that is deemed unintelligible. Additionally, they can introduce more suitable and relevant learning materials that effectively support vocabulary acquisition through pictures.

Given the constraints of time and resources, it is important to acknowledge that the survey conducted for this study had limitations. The sample size was limited to only 100 students from a single campus, which may not fully represent the broader population of adult students at the private English Center. Therefore, it is necessary to exercise caution when generalizing the characteristics observed in this sample to adult students on a larger scale. The findings of this study may have limited applicability and further research involving a more diverse and representative sample is recommended to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the topic.

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