



DVL-integrated Instructions to Enhance EFL Learners' Speaking Proficiency: The Digital Image Guide Method

Somayeh Fathali *

Mohsen Shirazizadeh **

Shiva Rezavand ***

Abstract

The rapid development of technology and its impact on the creation of images have made it essential to provide students with digital visual literacy (DVL) practices to help them explore and understand the images. More importantly, images have valuable connections to language learning and hold the potential for teaching English effectively. Accordingly, the present study investigated the impact of the DVL-integrated instructions in an English-speaking course on EFL learners' speaking proficiency. The Digital Image Guide (DIG) method was conducted for the DVL instructions. A total of 18 female Iranian EFL learners aged 18-27 from a national university participated in the study, undergoing ten instructional sessions. Various components, such as visual elements in several images, flyers, brochures, memes, and book covers, were introduced to the learners throughout the treatment phase. Using mixed-methods research, quantitative and qualitative data were collected. The quantitative phase employed a pretest-posttest one-group design, and data was collected through the speaking section of the Cambridge English Qualification Test. The qualitative phase collected data on the learners' attitudes toward the course. The data were analyzed using SPSS and content analysis. The findings of a paired-sample t-test examining oral proficiency test data revealed the effectiveness of the course on the speaking proficiency of the learners. The analysis of the interview data revealed that the students held positive attitudes toward the course and the instructions. The findings of this study demonstrated that teaching digital visual literacy through the Digital Visual Literacy (DVL) approach and Digital Image Guide (DIG) Method could help learners with their speaking proficiency.

Keywords: Digital Visual Literacy, Digital Image Guide Method, Speaking Proficiency, EFL Learners

* Received: 01/12/2023

Accepted: 06/03/2024

* Assistant Professor Department of English, Faculty of Literature, Alzahra University, Tehran, Iran. (Corresponding author) s.fathali@alzahra.ac.ir

** Associate Professor Department of English, Faculty of Literature, Alzahra University, Tehran, Iran. m.shirazizadeh@alzahra.ac.ir

*** Instructor Department of English, Faculty of Literature, Alzahra University, Tehran, Iran. sh.rezavand@student.alzahra.ac.ir

How to cite this article:

Fathali, S., Shirazizadeh, M., & Rezavand, S. (2024). DVL-integrated Instructions to Enhance EFL Learners' Speaking Proficiency: The Digital Image Guide Method. *Teaching English as a Second Language Quarterly (Formerly Journal of Teaching Language Skills)*, 43(2), 87-110. doi: 10.22099/tesl.2024.48986.3247



DVL-INTEGRATED INSTRUCTIONS TO ENHANCE EFL

Learning a second/foreign language has been increasingly popular in various nations, and how a language is learned has been one of the most contentious issues for many researchers. Among the four primary English language skills, speaking plays an essential role in language learning (Shadiev & Liu, 2023). According to Fulcher (2003), "speaking is the verbal use of language to communicate with others" (p. 23). Although the ability to communicate in the English language with others is the ultimate goal for many learners in English classes (Albogami & Algethami, 2022; Bárkányi, 2021; Renandya & Nguyen, 2022; Sari & Iswahyuni, 2019), its difficulty poses serious challenges in accomplishing this goal (Azizi et al., 2022; Bora, 2012; Hsu et al., 2021; Huang, 2018; Sari & Iswahyuni, 2019; Soodmand et al., 2016). Additionally, regardless of their knowledge of English, English as a foreign language (EFL) learners usually face many speaking difficulties (Bora, 2012; Renandya & Nguyen, 2022; Hsu et al., 2021; Tai, 2022). Accordingly, teachers can benefit from pedagogical innovations to improve the quality of classroom interactions to help learners improve their speaking skills (Chappell, 2018).

As Victoria (2018) stated, visual elements are suitable materials for motivating learners. These materials could help learners to develop their interactions and speaking skills (Ekoç, 2021). Therefore, many teachers try to use images as authentic materials in English classes to enhance language learning (Baker, 2015; Rao, 2019). However, it is believed that this pedagogical potential cannot be fully utilized unless teachers help their pupils build visual literacy (Hecke, 2014), especially digital visual literacy (DVL) in the recent technological era. According to Spalter and Van Dam (2008), "Like other literacies (textual literacy, numeracy), digital visual literacy (DVL) is the ability both to create and to understand certain types of information, in this case, visual materials created with a computer" (p. 93). As stated by Thompson (2019), digital visual literacy competency cannot be acquired by being exposed to various images regularly, and teachers are responsible for teaching learners to read images critically. The digital image guide (DIG) method, for instance, is an innovative teaching approach that addresses the urgent need for the development of DVL in university courses (Thompson, 2019). It provides learners with a four-step method (Analysis, Interpretation, Evaluation, and Comprehension) to critically examine images. Having differentiated between two types of images, deep and shallow, the DIG can be used to examine, analyze, and comprehend photographs available on social media and the Internet.

However, despite the importance of DVL instructions and the positive impact of images on learning a new language (Hecke, 2014; Hekmati et al., 2018; Liando et al., 2022), digital visual literacy has been overlooked in higher education (Kędra, 2018) and

DVL-INTEGRATED INSTRUCTIONS TO ENHANCE EFL

academic institutions (Romero & Bobkina, 2021). Consequently, due to the importance of digital visual literacy and speaking skills and the lack of research and practice in this regard, the current study using a pretest-posttest one group design tried to investigate the impact of the DVL approach on the oral proficiency of the Iranian university EFL learners in a DVL-integrated speaking course. The DIG method was implemented to teach learners to critically analyze digital images and express their ideas through classroom discussions. Moreover, according to most research findings, a positive attitude increases learners' enthusiasm for studying a second language (Chen et al., 2022; Orphan, 2020; Pham, 2021). Additionally, students' acquisition of skills for lifetime learning will be ensured by positive attitudes (Kara, 2009). Consequently, in this study, the learners' attitudes toward the DVL course and the impact of the course on their speaking ability were investigated through semi-structured interviews. The following two research questions guided the present study.

RQ 1: Is there any significant difference in EFL learners' speaking ability before and after a DVL-integrated speaking course?

RQ 2: What is learners' attitude toward learning speaking skills through the DIG method in a DVL-integrated speaking course?

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in EFL learners' speaking ability before and after a DVL-integrated speaking course.

Literature Review

Images have proved to play a crucial role in language enhancement (Hekmati et al., 2018), and they can help learners improve their oral proficiency (Faridha et al., 2023; Hecke, 2014). According to research on the relationship between verbal and visual language, the mental corpus, which serves as the limit of speech, also "serves as the boundary of visual processing" (Hecke, 2014, p. 176). Additionally, the importance of integrating digital visual literacy into teaching in general (Hattwig et al., 2013; Spalter & van Dam, 2008) and into teaching English in particular has been emphasized by many researchers (Abas, 2019; Faridha et al., 2023; Hecke, 2014; Parsaiyan et al., 2022; Takaya, 2016; Zakime, 2017).

The advancement of technology brought about many changes in our daily lives, one of which is related to the creators and publishers of visual elements. Previously, designing visual elements was done by proficient figures in this field; however, nowadays, whoever has access to computers can create visual elements and disseminate them quickly (Spalter & Van Dam, 2008). This phenomenon has positive and negative impacts. It can make it

DVL-INTEGRATED INSTRUCTIONS TO ENHANCE EFL

easier to find visual elements online and, at the same time, can lead to our exposure to fake photos (Spalter & Van Dam, 2008). Therefore, Spalter and Van Dam (2008) proposed an approach that emphasizes teaching digital visual literacy to higher education students. According to Spalter and Van Dam (2008), digital visual literacy (DVL) skill is defined as the ability to read and write through visual materials.

As stated by Thompson (2019), DVL competency cannot be acquired by merely being exposed to various images regularly, and teachers are responsible for teaching learners to read images critically. As a result, she proposed a method for teaching digital visual literacy to higher education students. She collected relevant information by studying visual literacy and critical thinking. The proposed method was called the digital image guide (DIG). This method of teaching digital visual literacy is based on four steps. It enables learners to distinguish between two types of photos that may seem similar in online environments. Thompson calls these two types of photos shallow images and profound images. She highlights that her proposed method enables higher education students to differentiate these images, go beyond the deep versions, and discover their intended messages. As defined by Thompson (2019), deep images are those types of photos created and shared online for different reasons, such as to inform the users, mislead them, or persuade them. As a result, since students are experiencing these visuals (Crider, 2015), they should learn to analyze these images for their intended meaning. However, this learning cannot occur by being exposed to the technology (Spalter & Van Dam, 2008; Metros, 2008; Brumberger, 2011; Matusiak et al., 2019; Thompson, 2019). The DIG method contains four steps, 1) Analysis, 2) Interpretation, 3) Evaluation, and 4) Comprehension. Firstly, students should attempt to verbalize their reactions to the image after seeing it and explain the information included in it. Secondly, they are asked to search for the image to learn more about it and its message. The third phase requires them to research data about the image's accuracy and dependability and describe how they comprehended it. In the last step, students must assemble the data they acquired via the previous three phases and assess whether prejudice influences their choices.

Rahimi et al. (2021) and Nushi et al. (2022) conducted studies to examine the effectiveness of the DIG method. Rahimi et al. (2021) investigated the effects of DIG on visual literacy skills in a study conducted in a university setting. This study involved 22 students and was conducted throughout nine sessions. The outcome demonstrated the course's significant influence on participants' visual literacy. The study conducted by Nushi et al. (2022) also revealed the positive impact of the DIG method on enhancing learners' intercultural competence enhancement.

DVL-INTEGRATED INSTRUCTIONS TO ENHANCE EFL

Considering the importance of EFL learners' digital visual literacy and speaking skills, Faridha et al. (2023) proposed English language teaching materials based on the concept of digital visual literacy. It was determined that the given educational materials are valuable resources for enhancing the speaking ability of ESP learners. Furthermore, Parsaiyan et al. (2022) did a qualitative study to investigate the effects of teaching visual literacy on general English courses. One hundred female students, aged 18 to 28, were divided into three groups and enrolled in the DVL-integrated General English course for this study. The outcomes indicated that the program could significantly assist students in learning English.

Ekoç (2021) looked into the effects of artworks on students' oral and visual literacy skills in a qualitative study. According to the data analysis, 70% of the participants taking part in the interview had a favorable opinion of the course's capacity to improve their verbal and visual literacy skills. The researcher concluded that the course improved students' speaking, thinking, and visual literacy skills. Moreover, Hekmati et al. (2018) explored how watching movies affected English language learners' writing abilities through action research. The training course on this topic was broken up into numerous sections so that the students would gradually get familiar with essential keywords and be able to write more significant pieces. The performance of these learners, based on the results of the study, revealed that visual literacy could quickly become used as a source for material development and activity design and motivate those facing problems regarding writing skills.

Despite the flourishing era of visual literacy-based studies in EFL contexts, most of the available studies are related to checking the beneficial impacts of visual literacy in terms of visual literacy enhancement (e.g., Romero & Bobkina, 2021; Parsaiyan et al., 2022; Rahimi et al., 2021), or working on factors such as intercultural competence in English courses (Nushi et al., 2021). Moreover, regarding the enhancement of skills and sub-skills of language learning, most of the conducted studies have focused on the impact of this skill on listening skills (Karimi & Biaria, 2014) or writing skills (Hekmati et al., 2018). Additionally, two previous studies focusing on the impact of visual literacy on speaking skills were implicated either by utilizing pieces of art (e.g., Ekoç, 2021) or evaluating DVL-based books in ESP courses (e.g., Faridha & Tuminah, 2022; Faridha et al., 2023); thus, making it essential to work on this skill through other visual elements (Ekoç, 2021) such as digital images and using other methods. As a result, the present study was conducted utilizing the DIG method, which, according to Thompson (2019) is an innovative method for teaching DVL (Thompson, 2019) to investigate the impact of

DVL-INTEGRATED INSTRUCTIONS TO ENHANCE EFL

DVL-integrated speaking courses on Iranian EFL learners' oral proficiency. Moreover, the learners' attitude toward the course was evaluated in a semi-structured interview.

Method

The method used to investigate the research questions of the present study was mixed-methods research. In mixed-methods research, the researcher coordinates the ideas of both quantitative paradigm and qualitative in a single investigation. The quantitative phase of the study was conducted through a pretest-posttest one-group design due to the lack of access to the required number of students to design an experimental study. The qualitative phase took place through basic qualitative research using content analysis (Ary et al., 2010).

Participants

The present study was conducted in the English department at Alzahra University, Tehran, Iran. Using convenience sampling, 18 adult females aged 18-27, EFL undergraduate freshman students in the English-speaking course participated in the study. It is worth mentioning that to decrease the potential impact of other courses, students were not taking part in any other speaking courses during the treatment phase of the study. The treatment was proposed in ten sessions; one session in each session lasted for 90 minutes, and the whole treatment took place in about four and half a month. All the participants signed an informed consent form at the beginning of the course, and their anonymity was ensured.

Materials and Instruments

Cambridge English Qualification Tests (B2 First)

In order to answer the first research question, two different speaking samples of the speaking section of the Cambridge English Qualification Tests (B2 First) were utilized. Cambridge English Qualification tests are available for learners with different English proficiency levels. The results of the tests are acceptable for many required courses in English-speaking nations and undergraduate English courses in non-English-speaking nations. The B2 First is a Cambridge speaking qualification test that evaluates the test-taker's effective performance in face-to-face interactions. According to the Cambridge English scale explanation, there are 60 marks available for the speaking test section of B2 first, and the lowest mark reported in the test was 14. This test is divided into four sections, and the speaking section measures candidates' ability to speak independently and communicate with the examiner and the other candidate in 14 minutes (Cambridge,

DVL-INTEGRATED INSTRUCTIONS TO ENHANCE EFL

<https://www.cambridgeenglish.org>). The data obtained through the two sample tests in this study (pre and post) were collected individually. Students' ability to interact with the examiner and create more extended units of discourse while communicating with their partners was tested through the 7th speaking test sample (Kenny & Loque-Mortimer, 2014). Then, the participants' oral proficiency was once more measured in the posttest using another sample (the 8th sample) of the speaking part of the Cambridge English Qualification test (Kenny & Loque-Mortimer). This test was conducted immediately after the treatment phase of the study. The researchers recorded all the test procedures and then transcribed them to be scored based on the Cambridge English Qualifications rubric. Inter-rater reliability was conducted to check the reliability of the speaking pretest and posttest scores. A colleague who is an expert in speaking test scoring also scored the collected data. Cronbach's alpha was used to examine the scores, and the findings indicated acceptable measures of reliability for both the pretest (0.89) and the posttest (0.97).

DVL materials

The concept of DVL was introduced to the participants through various components, such as visual elements in several images, flyers, brochures, memes, book covers, etc. The researchers developed some of the images, and some were taken from the Internet (samples are presented in Appendices A, B, and C). The participants were familiarized with the critical analysis of digital images through the DIG method (Four phases of analysis, interpretation, evaluation, and comprehension). During the analysis phase, the students were required to thoroughly describe the images, considering all the available visual and textual information. To gain more knowledge, their initial responses to these visuals were also questioned in order to help them in the last step of the DIG method procedures, evaluate their understanding before and after the steps taken, and avoid biases. They were instructed to search images on the Internet by responding to questions during the interpretation phase. These inquiries centered on details about the images' context, message, and source. Then, they were asked to go through the next phase, where they could evaluate the visuals. Images' validity and covert objectives, such as misrepresentations or deceptions, were also examined at this phase. The students were given instructions to evaluate and comprehend the images using both their personal views and the information available on the Internet. Additionally, they were tasked with examining any biases in their evaluations and, in the end, expressing a conclusion about the motives driving the development or dissemination of those images.

Semi-structured interviews

The qualitative phase of the current study was conducted to provide insight into the students' attitudes regarding the DVL-integrated course and its relationship with oral proficiency. Similar to structured interviews, semi-structured interviews follow a pre-prepared framework (Dörnyei, 2007). Accordingly, six interview questions were developed by the researchers, and all the students were interviewed immediately after the treatment phase. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. The purpose of the first four questions was to get insight into how students felt about the course. The interviewee's judgment regarding the relationship between the independent variable (A) and the dependent variable (B), as well as the long-term usefulness of the course, were the subject of the remaining questions. Concerning the same issues raised by the studies—namely, students' attitudes towards the course and whether or not they discovered independent and dependent variables—the questionnaire was developed based on the attitude questionnaire developed by Fathali and Sotoudehnama (2015). Consequently, the items were modified following the current study's factors.

Moreover, to add more details about the learners' attitudes towards the course, an item related to the efficacy of the course in the long term was added using one of the items in Tajabadi's (2014) attitude questionnaire. The interviews were conducted in English (where necessary L1 was used) and lasted about 30 minutes with each participant. These interviews were recorded for the qualitative analysis.

Results and Discussion

The first research question of the present study was designed to check the impact of DVL-based practices on EFL learners' speaking ability. In order to answer this question, SPSS was used to analyze the quantitative data obtained. The descriptive statistics of the pretest and posttest are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1.
Descriptive Statistics of Oral Proficiency Tests (Pretest /Posttest)

Speaking test ime1	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error of Mean
	18	45.78	5.29	1.25
Speaking test ime2	18	48.56	5.51	1.30

DVL-INTEGRATED INSTRUCTIONS TO ENHANCE EFL

As illustrated in Table 1, the mean score of the pretest phase (M= 45.78) differs from that of the posttest (M=48.56), and in order to check the significance of this difference, a paired sample t-test was utilized. Repeated measures, commonly known as paired sample t-tests, compare data obtained from a group of individuals at two different times (Pallant, 2016). The normal distribution of the data is one of the fundamental presumptions for applying the paired-sample t-test (Hinton et al., 2004; Pallant, 2016). The results of the one-sample K-S statistical analysis approved the normal distribution of the data. The significant value of oral proficiency scores of the pretest (0.66) and the posttest (0.20), at <0.05, indicated that the data distribution of both phases was normal (Pallant, 2016).

The results of the paired sample t-test comparing the mean scores of the pretest and posttest are provided in Table 2. According to the results shown in Table 2, students' scores on the oral proficiency test had a statistically significant increase from the pretest (M=45.78, SD= 5.29) to the posttest (M=48.56, SD= 5.51), $df (17) = -2.234, p = .039 <.05$ (two-tailed). The Eta Squared statistics was 0 .23, which, according to Pallant (2016), indicates a large effect size ($r >.14$).

Table 2.
Paired sample t-test

	Mean		SD		Paired Differences		t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
					Std. Error of Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
						Lower				Upper
Pair 1 Speaking test 1-2	-2.78	5.28	1.24	-5.40	-0.15	-2.234	17	0.039		

Drawing upon the study results, one might reasonably assert that the students' speaking skills had significantly improved due to the DVL-integrated speaking practices using the DIG method, and the hypothesis of the study was rejected. As an example of the factors that contributed to the outcomes of the present study, we can point to the potential of images for boosting meaningful discussions. Because of the inextricable connection between language and images (Victoria, 2018), images could be utilized as a primary teaching tool (Villamizar, 2018). Studies have shown that the mental corpus supervises the stages of the development of visual language, just as it does with verbal language (Hecke, 2014). For this reason, it is argued that visual language parallels verbal

DVL-INTEGRATED INSTRUCTIONS TO ENHANCE EFL

language; therefore, the language learning context could be the best learning context for integrating visual literacy (Baker, 2015).

RQ 2: What is learners' attitude toward learning speaking skills through the DIG method in a DVL-integrated speaking course?

In order to answer the second research question, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the students immediately after the treatment phase. The first four questions focused on the course and its content, and the last two questions asked about the impact of the course on the students' speaking skills. Approximately 540 minutes of interview data from the audio file were transcribed. The interview transcriptions were then analyzed through qualitative content analysis. In this study, priority coding was used to analyze the data. As stated by Ary et al. (2010), "the researcher may begin with a framework for analysis, a set of a priori concepts derived from the literature that are used as codes" (p. 484). The questions and answers are provided below. We didn't mention the students' names to keep them confidential, and we used the word "student."

1. Did you enjoy digital visual literacy practices in your classes? Why/why not?

Within the first question of the interview, learners' attitude towards DVL practices was examined. The findings revealed that most learners enjoyed practicing DVL in the class and found it helpful and exciting. These interviewees admitted that before participating in the course, they did not have visual literacy skills or had not allocated time to learn this skill. However, they found these practices helpful and exciting. One of the learners, for instance, asserted that "although I had a vague idea about DVL, I never took time to read about it, let talking to others and adding to my knowledge. So, I found it a pretty interesting topic". These findings align with Takaya's (2016) findings that although today learners are exposed to images, they do not have the skills to understand these digital elements. Moreover, the findings show that students must acquire the skills to interpret images (Ekoc, 2021; Ervine, 2016; Hattwig et al., 2013; Takaya, 2016). A few of the learners believed that the classroom exercises were helpful for them. In addition to improving their speaking skills, DVL practices helped them process the images they see online daily. However, they believed that exercises that required deep thinking were unnecessary. One of them stated, "I enjoyed our discussions, and I think they helped me speak better and analyze images I see every day. But, sometimes, we had to check many things about pictures, and I didn't like them."

2. At which level do you think digital visual literacy practices should be taught? (early/late, lower/higher levels)

DVL-INTEGRATED INSTRUCTIONS TO ENHANCE EFL

Regarding the second question, most learners believed in the necessity of teaching DVL from the lower levels of learning English. Many of these learners asserted that living in this digital era necessitates equipping learners with DVL skills. As stated by one of the learners, "DVL should be taught from the lower levels since we live in a digital world, and we need this ability." These results support numerous assertions about this issue (e.g., Thompson, 2019) and emphasize the significance of this skill. On the other hand, some of the learners maintained that in higher levels of language learning, students can express their ideas clearly and talk for a more extended time. As a result, the higher levels of English language proficiency are suitable sets for visual literacy exercises. A related quotation, for instance, is as follows: "Higher levels would be better because they have the basic knowledge and can think deeply about the things they learned, and they can say what they think about each issue. So, they have confidence." This look may arise from learners' anxiety over speaking tasks (Chen & Hwang, 2020; Ekoc, 2021) or from their desire to keep their academic shortcomings hidden (Riadil, 2020), making speaking exercises less of an opportunity to advance their language proficiency and more of a risk (Hanifa, 2018).

3. How did you find digital visual literacy practices in your class? (helpful or a waste of time)

Learners provided three distinct answers to this question. One group acknowledged that the course had improved their speaking ability while picking up on subtleties. For instance, it was claimed by one of them, "When we compare pictures together, we learn how to just look from the other side to the simple pictures. Actually, it helps us to speak better and to notice the things that we have not noticed before". The above finding emphasizes how important it is to incorporate DVL into courses on English as a foreign language (Parsaiyan et al., 2022). Another group of learners noted that detailed activities sometimes prevented them from engaging with the tasks. These difficulties could be encountered because they had never experienced these kinds of activities before or because they were used to covering materials at the surface level. Contrary to these difficulties, however, some of the activities, such as advertisement-based activities, were regarded as useful tasks by these learners. One of them, for instance, stated, "It was useful for me... For example, I loved the part about advertisement..., but sometimes, when it was so detailed, I just could not feel good about it." Among all the students one of them believed that the practices were not useful.

4. Which of the activities did you enjoy more?

DVL-INTEGRATED INSTRUCTIONS TO ENHANCE EFL

The insight gathered from the fourth question revealed that more than half of the learners referred to visual elements of flyers, brochures, and book covers as the most enjoyable part of the course. For example, one learner stated: "Flyers and brochures were the most enjoyable for me. Because I'm interested in them and through the course, I got familiar with creating and using them". These findings reveal that DVL-based practices are captivating enough in that they are related to the way of communication that emerged during this century. As a result, even without focusing on the positive impacts that these practices could have on learners' speaking ability, we can claim that they are motivating materials for EFL learners. These findings align with existing literature, supporting the usefulness of memes in inspiring and motivating EFL learners (e.g., Al Rashdi, 2020). The other group of learners found discussions on visual components of memes and digital images related to traveling because of their personal interests. Others acknowledged external influences as factors affecting their attraction to these subjects. One learner mentioned, "I enjoyed analyzing the photos of traveling and also memes because I'm interested in other cultures and traveling." The other one stated that "memes are what we are experimenting these days and use them a lot, so I got interested to those topics." These findings highlight that the modes of communication have evolved (Cheung & Jhaveri, 2016), and communication nowadays goes beyond written or spoken modes (Avgerinou, 2009; Cheung & Jhaveri, 2016).

5. Do you think that your speaking skills will improve if you continue this kind of practice?

Many learners agreed that participating in DVL tasks allowed them to investigate various images and that speaking became more manageable due to having other students listen to and discuss their interpretations and analyses of digital images. The welcoming environment that offered them the necessary confidence to communicate, together with the requirement to know and apply new vocabularies and structure for each topic in order for the targeted activities to be practical, were two key reasons mentioned by these learners for finding the continuation of these types of activities helpful in terms of working on their skills. Some examples were like these: "I think the fact that we got the chance to communicate with each other and share our opinions on different stuff helped us out in our speaking and can be useful to continue these activities."; Another learner mentioned, "I think the fact that we got the chance to communicate with each other and share our opinions on different stuff helped us out in our speaking and can be useful to continue these activities."

DVL-INTEGRATED INSTRUCTIONS TO ENHANCE EFL

The other student believed that they "needed to know some new words to talk about topics in the class. So, I think it helped with vocabulary and using them. I enjoyed the group discussions, too. We had fun, and it helped my confidence. If you compare this interview with the beginning of the semester, I have more confidence right now."

The outcome of this phase supports the study's quantitative findings and aligns with studies by Ekoç (2021) and Pimienta Giraldo (2013), among others. It also highlights the roles of images in pushing learners to boost their ability and use more complex features of language (Baker, 2015).

On the other hand, a few learners could not find any relationship between these two skills; thus, they opted to answer the question negatively. For example, one of the learners maintained, "I think they are different things, and at no point they get together, so I don't think so." When asked for the reason behind her decision, she stated: "I don't know what to say about the reason for that; I just think they are two different skills." Besides these learners, there were other learners that, according to the perspective of the final group of learners, the perceived connection between digital visual literacy skills and speaking skills is contingent upon the topics and the exercises within the classroom. One of them, for example, maintained that "I think in digital visual literacy courses, students need to talk and share their ideas, and when activities let them express themselves, we can say that DVL is related to speaking, but if they can't share their ideas, no. For example, in many of our sessions, we discussed visual factors of different things. In those sessions, I experienced what I mentioned:" Upon this idea and the same ideas of others in this group, it might seem reasonable to state that from these learners' point of view in case of giving agency to learners and engaging them through tasks, DVL could positively impact their speaking skills.

- 6.** Do you see any relationship between digital visual literacy and oral proficiency? Why/why not?

Most participants pointed out that DVL activities were good conversation starters since they allow for individual interpretations and analyses based on the investigated images. As a result, speaking skills and this skill could be connected. A student stated that "...DVL is something that could be different for any person like everyone could have their interpretation of it. And so, because of that, it's something that people can discuss about easily. It's a good topic for anyone to talk about. And every person has a thing to talk about it ...". This finding highlights the importance of utilizing authentic materials in English courses (Baker, 2015; Thornbury, 2022) and the fact that they can be used to push students to extend their outputs (Victoria, 2018).

DVL-INTEGRATED INSTRUCTIONS TO ENHANCE EFL

For a group of three participants, this relationship was mutual. They taught that the more you work on one of these skills in the course, the better you can participate in tasks related to the other one. This view may result from these learners' experiencing improvement in their speaking thanks to working on DVL practices or on the other hand, their DVL skills owing to trying to learn how to express themselves in English and become better at doing the DVL-based activities. A student, for instance, asserted, "They both improve with each other. Like, the more you educate yourself on this, the better you get at that".

The last category of this question included the idea that there is no relation between digital visual literacy and oral proficiency skills, given that the ideas were the repetition of the ideas provided about the previous question by those who did not find any relationship between these two skills; they were not mentioned again. However, it is worth saying that the view that these two skills do not have any relation diverges from the prevailing opinions found in the literature and overlooks the potential of images in elicitation (Hecke, 2014), content enrichment (Baker, 2015), and output-provoking (Victoria, 2018).

Conclusion

The findings of the present study demonstrated that DVL-integrated instructions in an English-speaking course have been efficient to enhance EFL learners' speaking proficiency. Additionally, the semi-structured interviews at the end of the course indicated that more than half of the learners (61%) appreciated visual literacy activities and regarded them as an outstanding approach to developing their speaking proficiency. Moreover, (11%) of the participants believed that in terms of preparing suitable activities, DVL practices can help them to improve their speaking skills. Consequently, the findings of the study can contribute to the field by informing teachers and instructors that the use of DVL practices especially through the DIG method with suitable numbers of speaking activities could significantly assist the learners in building efficient classroom interactions and improving their speaking skills.

It should be noted that the present study was conducted with EFL female first-year learners in a national university. Accordingly, generalizability of the findings should be done cautiously and future research could explore the effectiveness of DVL practices on students from other EFL contexts or male students. Moreover, due to not having access to other students taking part in the same course in the mentioned semester, the one-group design was chosen for the present study, but other studies could be conducted where a

DVL-INTEGRATED INSTRUCTIONS TO ENHANCE EFL

control group is also presented in the study. Another limitation of the study that can be addressed is related to the Hawthorn effect, which could possibly impact participants' points of view regarding the course and its relationship with speaking ability.

The findings of the present study may help EFL teachers understand that although students may not have the literacy needed for analyzing digital images at the outset of the course, they gradually become aware of the messages behind these products and can apply their knowledge in both classroom contexts and real-life situations. Moreover, it may help teachers to understand that despite the novelty of discussing digital images for their messages, students' experiences with technology and social media make them curious enough to go through images more thoroughly and analyze them without thinking about speaking. The findings may also help teachers in preparing topics that are more suitable for EFL students, given that students asserted that they found topics such as travel, festivals, and special days that could familiarize them with other cultures interesting to encourage them to speak more. The findings of the qualitative part of the study provide the teachers with the information that when students find the topics related to their daily experiences and are asked to collaborate with their friends in pairs or groups, they can engage in the tasks with increased confidence and motivation. It was also revealed that the students can understand the benefits of digital images for their oral proficiency and communicative skills. Therefore, it would be easier for teachers to use digital images in EFL courses. Finally, it is hoped that teachers and researchers would implement the DIG method for the analysis of images. This way of using images ensures that their full potential is used, going beyond mere decorative elements or simple concepts in the instructional materials.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the editorial team of TESL Quarterly for granting us the opportunity to submit and publish the current synthesis. We would also like to express our appreciation to the anonymous reviewers for their careful, detailed reading of our manuscript and their many insightful comments and suggestions.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest concerning the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for this article's research, authorship, and/or publication.

References

- Abas, S. (2019). Reading the world—teaching visual analysis in higher education. *Journal of Visual Literacy*, 38(1-2), 100-109. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1051144X.2019.1574120>
- Albogami, A., & Algethami, G. (2022). Exploring the use of WhatsApp for teaching speaking to English language learners: a case study. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ)*, (2), 183-201. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4036732>
- Al Rashdi, M. (2020). A small-scale exploratory study on Omani college students' perception of pragmatic meaning embedded in memes. In *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ) Proceedings of 2nd MEC TESOL Conference*, (2), 298-313. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3798154>
- Ary, D., Jacobs, L. C., Sorensen, C., & Razavieh, A. (2010). *Introduction to research in education* (8th Ed.). Cengage Learning.
- Avgerinou, M. D. (2009). Re-viewing visual literacy in the "bain d' images" era. *Tech Trends*, 53(2), 28-34. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11528-009-0264-z>
- Azizi, Z., Namaziandost, E., & Ashkani, P. (2022). Active learning as an approach to fostering EFL learners' speaking skills and willingness to communicate: A mixed-methods inquiry. *Issues in Language Teaching*, 11(2), 93-128. <https://doi.org/10.22054/ilt.2023.70542.744>
- Baker, L. (2015). How many words is a picture worth? Integrating visual literacy in language learning with photographs. *English Teaching Forum*, 53(4), 2–13. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1084470.pdf>
- Bárkányi, Z. (2021). Motivation, self-efficacy beliefs, and speaking anxiety in language MOOCs. *ReCALL*, 33(2), 143-160. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0958344021000033>
- Bora, F. D. (2012). The impact of emotional intelligence on developing speaking skills: From brain-based perspective. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 46, 2094-2098. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.05.434>
- Brumberger, E. (2011). Digital natives and visual literacy: An examination of the millennial learner. *Journal of Visual Literacy*, 30, 19-47. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23796529.2011.11674683>
- Chappell, P. (2018). Inquiry dialogue: A genre for promoting teacher and student speaking in the classroom. In A. Burns & J. Siegel (Eds), *International Perspectives on Teaching the Four Skills in ELT: Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing*, (pp. 97-110). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-63444-9_7
- Chen, M. R. A., & Hwang, G. J. (2020). Effects of a concept mapping-based flipped learning approach on EFL students' English-speaking performance, critical thinking

DVL-INTEGRATED INSTRUCTIONS TO ENHANCE EFL

- awareness and speaking anxiety. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 51(3), 817-834. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjet.12887>
- Chen, M. P., Wang, L. C., Zou, D., Lin, S. Y., Xie, H., & Tsai, C. C. (2022). Effects of captions and English proficiency on learning effectiveness, motivation and attitude in augmented-reality-enhanced theme-based contextualized EFL learning. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 35(3), 381-411. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2019.1704787>
- Cheung, C. K., & Jhaveri, A. D. (2016). Developing students' critical thinking skills through visual literacy in the new secondary school curriculum in Hong Kong. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 36(3), 379-389. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2014.959470>
- Crider, A. (2015). Teaching visual literacy in the astronomy classroom. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 141, 7-18. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tl.20118>
- Dörnyei (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ervine, M. D. (2016). Visual literacy in instructional design programs. *Journal of Visual Literacy*, 35(2), 104-113. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1051144X.2016.1270630>
- Ekoç, A. (2021). Teaching speaking with works of art in a preparatory class at university. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 15(5), 415-427. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2020.1824232>
- Faridha, N., & Tuminah, T. (2022). "Digital Visual Literacy": Case Study of Developing Speaking Textbook. *International Journal of Education, Information Technology, and Others*, 5(5), 93-98.
- Faridha, N., Adisiswanto, A. E., & Rahma, V. (2023). Developing teaching materials based on digital visual literacy. *Journey: Journal of English Language and Pedagogy*, 6(1), 24-30. <https://doi.org/10.33503/journey.v6i1.2534>
- Fathali, S., & Sotoudehnama, E. (2015). The impact of guided writing practice on the speaking proficiency and attitude of EFL elementary learners. *Teaching English as a Second Language Quarterly (Formerly Journal of Teaching Language Skills)*, 34(1), 1-25. <https://doi.org/10.22099/jtls.2015.3456>
- Fulcher, G. (2003). *Testing Second Language Speaking*. Britain: Pearson Education Limited
- Hanifa, R. (2018). Factors generating anxiety when learning EFL speaking skills. *Studies in English Language and Education*, 5(2), 230-239. <https://doi.org/10.24815/siele.v5i2.10932>
- Hattwig, D., Bussert, K., Medaille, A., & Burgess, J. (2013). Visual literacy standards in higher education: new opportunities for libraries and student learning. *portal: Libraries and the Academy* (13), 61-89. <https://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2013.0008>
- Hecke, C. (2014). Visual literacy and foreign language learning. In M. Bigelow & J. Enser-Kananen (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of educational linguistics* (pp. 171-184). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315797748>

DVL-INTEGRATED INSTRUCTIONS TO ENHANCE EFL

- Hekmati, N., Ghahremani Ghajar, S. S., & Navidinia, H. (2018). Movie-generated EFL writing: discovering the act of writing through visual literacy practices. *International Journal of Language Studies*, 12(2), 51-64.
<http://www.ijls.net/pages/volume/vol12no2.html>
- Hinton, P. R., Brownlow, C., & McMurray, I. (2004). *SPSS explained*. Psychology Press.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203642597>
- Hsu, M. H., Chen, P. S., & Yu, C. S. (2021). Proposing a task-oriented chatbot system for EFL learners speaking practice. *Interactive Learning Environments*, 1-12.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10494820.2021.1960864>
- Huang, Z. (2016). An empirical study on the application of memetics to the teaching of college English writing. In *SHS Web of Conferences (Vol. 25, p. 01015)*. EDP Sciences. <https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/20162501015>
- Huang, L. S. (2018). Teaching speaking to adult learners. In J. I. Lontas (Ed.), *The TESOL encyclopedia of English language teaching*, (pp. 1-7). John Wiley & Sons
<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118784235.eelt0714>
- Karimi, M., & Biria, R. (2014). The Impact of motivating Iranian EFL learners via visuals on their listening comprehension. *Theory & Practice in Language Studies*, 4(11), 2322-2329. <https://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.4.11.2322-2330>
- Kara, A. (2009). The effect of a 'learning theories' unit on students' attitudes toward learning. *Australian journal of teacher education*, 34(3), 100-113.
- Kędra, J. (2018). What does it mean to be visually literate? Examination of visual literacy definitions in a context of higher education. *Journal of Visual Literacy*, 37(2), 67-84.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1051144X.2018.1492234>
- Kenny, N., & Luque-Mortimer, L. (2014). *Cambridge English First: Practice Tests Plus 2 with Key*. Pearson Education Limited.
- Krelić, P., & Matijević, A. S. (2015, September 18-19). *A picture and a thousand words: Visual tools in ELT*. The international language conference on the importance of learning professional foreign languages for communication between cultures. University of Applied Science, Baltazar Zaprešić, Zaprešić, Croatia.
- Liando, N. V. F., Tatipang, D. P., Tamboto, G., Poluan, M., & Manuas, M. (2022). Pictures as a learning media in teaching vocabulary. *Jurnal Ilmiah Universitas Batanghari Jambi*, 22(3), 1944-1949. <http://dx.doi.org/10.33087/jiubj.v22i3.2832>
- Matusiak, K. K., Heinbach, C., Harper, A., & Bovee, M. (2019). Visual literacy in practice: Use of images in students' academic work. *College & Research Libraries*, 80(1), 123. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5860/crl.80.1.123>
- Metros, S. E. (2008). The educator's role in preparing visually literate learners. *Theory into practice*, 47(2), 102-109. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405840801992264>
- Nushi, M., Rahimi, S., & Rahimi, F. (2021). The effect of digital image guide on EFL learners' intercultural communicative competence. *Critical Language and Literary Studies*, 18(26), 267-298. <https://doi: 10.52547/clls.18.26.267>
- Orfan, S. N. (2020). Afghan undergraduate students' attitudes towards learning English. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 7(1), 1723831.

DVL-INTEGRATED INSTRUCTIONS TO ENHANCE EFL

- <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2020.1723831>
- Pallant, J. (2016). *SPSS survival manual: A step by step guide to data analysis using SPSS program* (6th Ed.). McGraw-Hill Education.
- Parsaiyan, S. F., Jalilian, M., & Karimi Alavijeh, K. (2022). Learning a thousand words: EFL learners' development of vision competencies. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning University of Tabriz*, 14(30), 245-263.
<https://doi.org/10.22034/ELT.2022.53401.2506>
- Pham, T. (2021). Attitude and motivation in language learning: A review. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, 3(5), 64-72.
<https://doi.org/10.32996/jeltal.2021.3.5.7>
- Pimienta Giraldo, E. M. (2013). Reinforcing students' speaking skills through visual literacy with images (Unpublished master's thesis) Universidad de La Sabana.
<http://hdl.handle.net/10818/9272>
- Rahimi, F., Rahimi, S., & Nushi, M. (2021). Investigating the effect of digital image guide on visual literacy. *Iranian Journal of Information processing and Management*, 37(2), 617-639. <http://doi.org/10.52547/JIPM.37.2.617>
- Rao, P. S. (2019). The effective use of authentic materials in the English language classrooms. *Shanlax International Journal of Arts, Science and Humanities*, 7(1), 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v7i1.556>
- Renandya, W. A., & Nguyen, M. T. T. (2022). Teaching speaking in L2 contexts. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of Practical Second Language Teaching and Learning* (pp. 269-280). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003106609>
- Riadil, I. G. (2020). A study of students' perception: identifying EFL learners' problems in speaking skill. *International Journal of Education, Language, and Religion*, 2(1), 31-38. <https://doi.org/10.35308/ijelr.v2i1.2256>
- Romero, E. D., & Bobkina, J. (2021). Exploring critical and visual literacy needs in digital learning environments: The use of memes in the EFL/ESL university classroom. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 40, 100783. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2020.100783>
- Sari, A. B., & Iswahyuni, D. (2019). The students' speaking anxiety on the YouTube video project in EFL learning in Indonesia. *Premise Journal of English Education and Applied Linguistics*, 8(2), 176-192. <https://doi.org/10.24127/pj.v8i2.2179>
- Shadiev, R., & Liu, J. (2023). Review of research on applications of speech recognition technology to assist language learning. *ReCALL*, 1-15.
[doi:10.1017/S095834402200012X](https://doi.org/10.1017/S095834402200012X)
- Soodmand Afshar, H., & Asakereh, A. (2016). Speaking skills problems encountered by Iranian EFL freshmen and seniors from their own and their English instructors' perspectives. *Electronic journal of Foreign language teaching*, 13(1), 112-130.
<https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:44878526>
- Spalter, A. M., & Van Dam, A. (2008). Digital visual literacy. *Theory into practice*, 47(2), 93-101. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405840801992256>

DVL-INTEGRATED INSTRUCTIONS TO ENHANCE EFL

- Tai, T. Y. (2022). Effects of intelligent personal assistants on EFL learners' oral proficiency outside the classroom. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 1-30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2022.2075013>
- Taj Abadi, A. (2014). A Sociocultural Study of Vocabulary Acquisition, Retention, and Attitude of Iranian Threshold EFL Learners. master's thesis. Arak university, Iran. <https://ganj.irandoc.ac.ir/viewer/68b60fd711894afc843c0d846596dcf8>
- Takaya, K. (2016). Exploring EFL students' visual literacy skills and global understanding through their analysis of Louis Vuitton's advertisement featuring Mikhail Gorbachev. *Journal of Visual Literacy*, 35(1), 79-90. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1051144X.2016.1197561>
- Thompson, D. S. (2019). Teaching students to critically read digital images: a visual literacy approach using the DIG method. *Journal of Visual Literacy*, 38(1-2), 110-119. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1051144X.2018.1564604>
- Thornbury, S. (2022). Materials for developing speaking skills. In J. Norton, H. Buchanan (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Materials Development for Language Teaching* (pp. 218-232). Routledge. <https://www.routledge.com/The-Routledge-Handbook-of-Materials-Development-for-Language-Teaching/Norton-Buchanan/p/book/9780815382577>
- Victoria, M. (2018). The verbal and the visual in language learning and teaching: insights from the 'Selfie Project.' *The Language Learning Journal*, 49(1), 93-104. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2018.148479>
- Villamizar, A. G. (2018). Examining intersections between visual literacy and digital technologies in English language programs for higher education. *Journal of Visual Literacy*, 37(4), 276-293. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1051144X.2018.1522089>.
- Zakime, A. (2017). Using Pinterest to promote genuine communication and enhance personalized learning. In K. Donaghy & D. Xerri (Eds.), *The image in English language teaching*, (pp. 59-70). ELT Council. Retrieved from <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/professional-development/teachers/managing-resources/articles/image-English-language-teaching>.

Appendix A Images

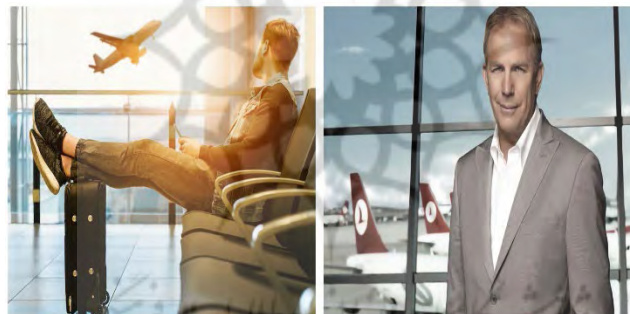


Case name: Rogers vs. Koons

(Right image: <https://www.flickr.com> ; Left image: <https://en.wikipedia.org>)

DVL practice: Copy right vs. Fair use

Discussion Topic: inventions and innovations



Case name: Travel agency images

(Left image: <https://www.Unsplash.com>; Right image www.celebrity.co.uk/booking-agent-advertising)

DVL practice: Deep vs. shallow images

Discussion Topic: Travel

Appendix B Flyers



Case name: Bookstore flyers

(Flyers created by the researchers using Canva: <https://www.canva.com/>)

DVL practice: Visual elements of flyers

Discussion Topic: Which book would you buy?

پروژه نگاه علوم انسانی و مطالعات فرهنگی
پرتال جامع علوم انسانی

DVL-INTEGRATED INSTRUCTIONS TO ENHANCE EFL



Case name: Language class flyers

(Left image: Flyer created by the researchers using Canva: <https://www.canva.com/> ;

Right image: <https://www.georgetownisd.org/Page/26006>)

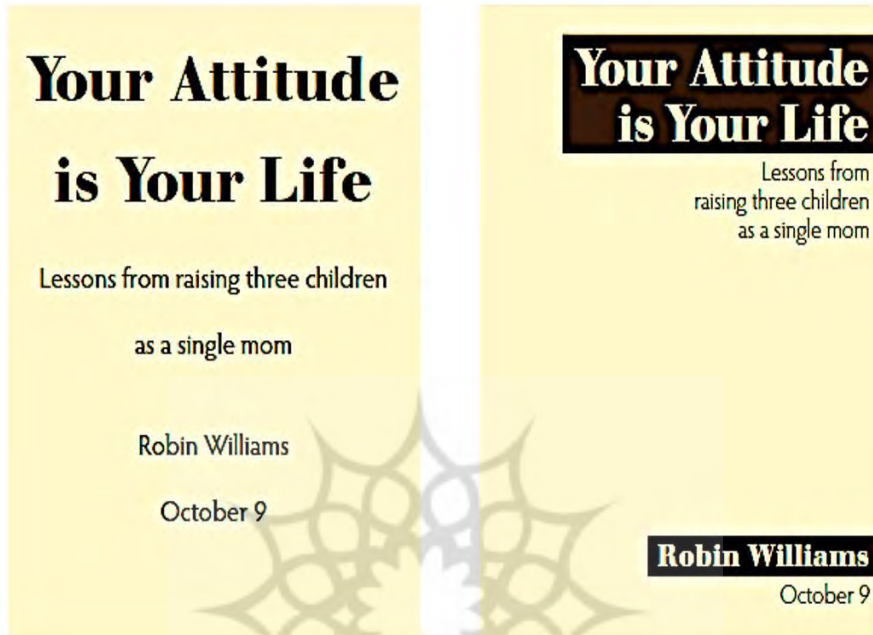
DVL practice: Visual elements of flyers

Discussion Topic: Advertisements

پژوهشگاه علوم انسانی و مطالعات فرهنگی
پرتال جامع علوم انسانی

Appendix C

Book covers



Case name: Robin Williams' book covers

(Images taken from *Non-designers' design book* by Robin Williams)

DVL practice: Visual elements of book cover design

Discussion Topic: Reading books

Appendix D

Interview Question

Did you enjoy digital visual literacy practices in your classes? Why/Why not?

At which level do you think digital visual literacy practices should be taught? (early/late, lower/higher levels)

How did you find digital visual literacy practices in your class (helpful or waste of time)

Which of the activities did you enjoy more?

Do you think that your speaking will improve if you continue this kind of practices?

Do you see any relationship between digital visual literacy and oral proficiency? Why/why not?