

Original Article

# Use of Picture Books: An Effective Tool for Language Learning Students

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**Abstract** - Picture books are considered effective tools to teach language to young learners. As they draw perceptive attention, children find them engaging in a language class. Pictures help in learning all four skills of language, thereby making the class creative and insightful. Studies indicate that picture books engage young learners to interact and take part in many learning activities and also learn language faster. Small children have a fancy for liking varied kinds of picture books. They also associate them with their lives.

**Keywords** - Adults, Children, Cognitive, Creativity, Emotions, Imagination.

## 1. Introduction

Pictures are associated with minds easily. Whether they are as simple as traffic symbols or as abstract as paintings by Picasso, they appeal to human eyes and emotions. Most often, it is seen that people react to pictures more than they do the words. Attractive illustrations and pictures convey messages that pierce human minds. We often see people identify things with the help of pictures. When I was a child, I did not understand English words on a signboard, but I could say, "It was a place where a large bull stood."

Men, especially young children, are curious to see pictures and try to examine meanings in them. According to Matthew Rampley (1999), pictures and visuals are pervasively used in several cultures. Pictures shape visual modes of expression and cannot, therefore, be limited to sight. That is, pictures and visuals contain a large scope, embodying social, psychological, cultural, and artistic trends and values of life.

Pictures communicate meanings through color symbols, artistic designs, and patterns. Some of the pictures are culturally so entrenched and people of that culture rasp it. It is said that some fifteen thousand years ago when human beings lived in caves, they used to carve pictures on the wall to communicate feelings and intentions. Pictures connect imaginary and fictitious moments with real situations of life and broaden human knowledge.

Several studies indicate picture books as effective and innovative resources for teaching language creatively. They can open up several approaches to language teaching possibilities. Malau (2013) states, "Today, English language teaching and learning can no longer be restricted to print on paper. Students must be able to read, write, speak, listen, view, and represent meaningful texts that may include words, images, movements and sounds". Picture books, thus, may be useful resources to activate young children in multiple acts of language learning.



## 2. Purpose of Picture Books

Children make creative learning activities from picture books and enhance emotional and cognitive understanding better than the books without them. Picture books perpetuate entertaining experiences to involve several creative possibilities. In addition, stories in picture books rouse emotions like fear, compassion, love, connection, and resentment. Teachers can find classes based on interesting picture books to become more participatory. Picture books may bring new pedagogical insights to language teachings on the part of teachers as well. Since color printing and graphic design came into existence and prolific publications of such books prevailed in the market, picture books became part of the syllabus in many primary schools. In some homes, parents teach alphabets and numbers through nice illustrated picture books before students are sent to school. I recall our alphabet learning experiences. We had a picture book (not color printed like these in the modern times) through which I learned basic alphabets.

In addition, parents and children make quality time to read different valuable picture books. And reading aloud for children and then asking them to read aloud has a greater advantage. This helps children's motive in reading books, imitating pronunciation skills, and confidence in communication. Chien (2013) finds picture books resourceful for language teaching from varied perspectives. As he states, "The use of picture books for reading instruction has several benefits for young learners due to the increasing pictures, dialogues, and plots. Besides their wonderful and thought-provoking illustrations, picture books are great for English learners –the words or sentence patterns are repeated often enough to enable students to predict their appearance and thus contribute to an advanced reading ability". The instructive purpose of picture books is far-reaching. Children get reinforcement of learned language skills through repetition. Cross (2011), on the other hand, has developed a theory that studied picture books as the source of humor in three fundamental ways. He points out that humor has relief; it stimulates cognitive discoveries and superior feelings that analyze people's responses to events.

According to Pavio (2008), picture books connect two channels while children read. They see pictures through visual channels and also utilize their verbal channels. This means they can develop their visual literacy and verbal literacy simultaneously. This, thus, helps them be compatible with a broader understanding of the meanings of the pictures and infer and generate hidden messages.

Beyond linguistic understanding, good picture books help children learn cognitive aspects of language. They see pictures, their form, pattern, different color textures, illustrations, and graphic design. Furthermore, one of the great assets of the picture book is visual literacy, which makes them familiar with diverse visuals. It can help them learn things and evaluate pictures to infer meanings on their own. That is why it is considered a very effective tool to help in language acquisition in the second language as well. Furthermore, they learn about pictures, art, color contrast, and color meanings. Picture books can be effective tools for teachers to engage students in pair or group activities. Group and pair works are good for making teaching and learning acts funny and exciting.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1. What are Picture Books All about?

While teaching language to the young, it is said that words are not sufficient. Neither are pictures sufficient. However, the combination of words and pictures makes a great deal of things. That is, a picture book, should not be just about pictorial forms. Rather, it is the combination of a holistic combination of visual, verbal, symbolic, and semiotic representations.

Commonly, a picture book has a distinct form and feature. Page-wise, it should have 32 pages. Furthermore, a good picture book should have:

- 500 words length
- Attractive font for children-friendly reading
- Appealing format
- Good illustrations and pictures
- Children-friendly words and sentences

### **3.2. Types of Picture Books**

- Teachable picture books that can be taught in class.
- Non teachable picture books, which are just for observations.

Wordless picture books where there are just for mentally associating and observing pictures. Picture books with words and pictures that are meant to be read and observed. Many language experts and educationalists contend that the activity of language learning should not merely be based on knowledge and information centered. Rather, a holistic language learning activity should be based on the full experience of language, giving space for language learning fun and delight. It is a common human psychology that when things are learned in fun and entertainment, they leave a long-lasting impression. Picture books are good sources for this. In modern times, the internet and digital formats help in creative reading and learning. It can help in displaying pictures and formats so that students learn things easily.

Learning fun is one of the crucial things that picture books provide to children. Teachers engaged in teaching young children often prefer picture books because children have prolonged attention in the study, and classes also become more motivated and engaging. Further to note, psychologists contend that every human being has a peculiar kind of brain to associate with pictures. Children are fond of nice illustrated picture books through which they learn words, values, and literary insights. "A picture book is a kind of literature that communicates to children as young as six months of age and as mature as adolescents and young adults of eighteen or nineteen" (Cianciolo, 2000). Picture books can benefit children of different ages. Many educationists agree that picture books become effective tools for teaching language as well as creative and critical insights to children because children not only read them but also think of interacting and sharing their information with their peers and love to engage in several activities. Furthermore, Malu also points out that "The narrative good children's book flows with a steady rhythm that makes it an excellent read-aloud. The voices of the characters convince and appeal to readers. The plot entices them to turn the pages nonstop from beginning to end. These texts are short, usually less than 500 words long". Such texts make children feel comfortable in learning.

Picture books can be a useful source for bilingual and cross-cultural communication because pictures do share more than words. It can include all the skills inherent in reading, writing, listening and speaking why it is so because pictures and illustrations make the message more reliable and convincing. They facilitate communicative competency in young children, which thereby enhances skills. Picture books open up another avenue: visual faculty through image and color. The image and color create delightful learning experiences because when students see the pictures they adapt certain content portrayed by the picture and images. A considerable amount of studies indicate that picture books can be instrumental in conducting language classes even in differently capable students in native and foreign language classes. Reading, writing, and speaking capacities through picture books may be different from student to student.

### **3.3. Stories in Picture Books**

Picture books contain interesting stories to read. Such stories embody creative insights, sparkling imagination and curiosity. Children always like nice stories because they want to hear and know about wonderful things in the universe. They enjoy stories which are life-like characters, nice plots, and interesting stories. Eleni Griva (2007)

highlights: "Stories exercise learners' imagination and creativity and they like fantasy and imagination with the child's real world. We must bear in mind that our students are still young and we can address them as learners who want to play, draw, or create something and not as adults of responsibilities". Studies indicate that picture books help children to get interested in reading because they feel so connected with the characters. S. Phillips says, "Stories are a feature of all cultures and have a universal appeal. They fascinate both students and adults, and they can be used to great effect in language classroom". Stories can help students learn language well.

### 3.4. Activities Based on Picture Books

- Showing them and describing them. It is the process of elicitation. It is one of the dynamic processes of teaching children to learn several skills.
- Picture books are found to create the power of self-expression in children.
- Memorization of certain words, phrases, and sentences.
- Semiotic symbols and metaphors ....image and text.

Some other activities:

- Picture narrating
- Picture descriptions
- Guessing pictures on some stories (The teacher gives a small narrative theme and has students draw pictures in sequence)
- Giving some pictures and having students finish with the stories....
- Showing pictures and engaging students in conversation:

Group A

- What do you see in the picture?
- How many images are there?
- What is the big image about?

Group B

- Well, I see ....
- There are .....
- It is about ....

- The teacher can show some pictures for ten to twenty minutes and ask students about it.
- Asking them to write and share with each other ....the teacher can play it again so that the students can add missed information ...
- Asking one group to draw pictures, and another group will color them....
- The teachers will collect different picture signs like traffic signs and others and ask students what these signs stand for.
- Teachers have students collect discarded magazines, books, and newspapers bearing pictures and ask them to find pictures. He can assign the students to different groups. He can have them collect animals, buildings, natural scenes and others and make a story out of that.

Teachers can give the students some single letters like A C D M F G H N U O K....

Find the pictures out of them:

- DUCK
- GUN
- COCK
- .....

Kress (2003) is of the opinion that modern teaching learning materials have been supported by technological output and make use of multi-modal approaches that enhance social and cognitive understanding, thereby giving space for the students to explore more as what was not possible in the normal printing lettered materials. These days, many linguists and authors emphasize that wordless stories are full of insights because they give space for

the children to involve, think, critically examine and see the mysterious facts of life. Since picture books reflect society, culture, lifestyles, and so many other things in life, that is, many educators think that picture books go beyond pedagogical strategies and teachers can engage in several activities for young children.

In some cases, the language in the children's book is of great trouble for young children as they lack several formal meanings of the language used in the stories. The considerate teachers need to replace the words---replacing hard words with the easy ones. This can be a great relief for the children. Many language teachers find stories to be read aloud are very effective language activities for young children. They have many opportunities to learn several things,

- Words
- Pronunciation
- Parts of speech
- Intonation
- Accent
- Ideas about how language is built
- And other cognitive competence

In some cases, it has been seen that children fantasize about some characters and adore the books as if they would read them forever...

It is also seen that some children memorize some lines and of the stories if the lines are humorous, funny, and tuned to their child friendly psychology. Reading aloud has another equally important aspect as well. When the parents and teachers read them aloud, then they can be asked to tell what they have listened to. This exercise will be beneficial.

In some circumstances, we can put picture books into two forms:

- Teachable children's books
- Non-teachable children's books

Picture books have always been powerful and useful resources for children over the years in developing reading activities, thereby increasing critical and creative insights in personal interactions and understanding. The picture books have two things: the apparent picture content and the unapparent deeper and connotative aspect of language. Picture books can provide creativity and insights. Besides, they are great sources of humor and fun that children are always seeking in texts. Cross (2011) has developed a theory that studied picture books as the source of humor in three fundamental ways. He points out that humor has relief; it stimulates cognitive discoveries and superior feelings that analyze people's responses to events. What is so important use of picture books is they help in reading culture that is becoming less practiced in modern times. Several studies indicate that picture books for young can revive the reading culture and make children explore speaking with confidence in life.

What is more important about picture books is it has sufficient literary insights that arouse the interests of young children. Children try to see beyond their lives and understand values like love, human feelings, or sacrifice. Moreover, they find themselves beings engaged in pursuing some hidden meanings of life. Furthermore, literary values help children adapt to some imaginative and colorful experiences of life that life is beautiful, funny, and joyful .... Rebecca Lukens (1995) and Donna Norton (1995) specifically discuss about the basic features of picture books.

- They think that picture books should be based on realism

- The stories and plot should be chronological
- The themes should be based on children's needs and
- There should be musical and carefully chosen words

Picture books discuss the importance of picture images and their profound and lasting impact on children. Spitz (1999) points out that effective children's books with pictures can be important resources for knowing the values of life in the most convenient and effective ways. Children will learn about love, friendship, trust, confidence, and so many others that can impact them in their whole life.

### **3.5. Emotional Intelligibility through Picture Books**

A large number of studies indicate that pictures can help children associated with different kinds of emotional in life, without which they can fall victim to emotional intelligence. Emotions impact human thoughts and reasoning powers, and children can also establish relationships with the things they see and encounter in life. According to Schiller (2009), emotional literacy plays a significant role in children's literacy and ability to manage their feelings and emotions in different situations in life. They have good marks on children.

The power of acquisition and cognitive skills, as well as social skills and interpersonal skills, are part of emotional intelligence that children develop through nice picture books based on authentic resources and children-friendly content. When children read and see nice picture books, studies indicate, they can interact and share their ideas confidently as compared to those who are deprived of those opportunities in life. When children look at picture books, they can easily notice how characters behave in anger, frustration, compassion, and fear. Good picture books reflect all that because characters have facial and bodily movements and gestures to represent their emotions.

Furthermore, picture books help children entertain by getting information, values, literary insights, and acquisition of words and meanings through which they can create a larger paradigm of life and its diverse situations (Benedict & Carlisle, 1992). According to Pavio (2008), picture books connect two channels while they read. They see pictures through visual channels and also utilize their verbal channels. This means they can develop their visual literacy and verbal literacy simultaneously. This helps them to be compatible with a broader understanding of the meanings of the pictures and infer and generate messages and meanings.

Picture books can help young children grasp schemata of the reading and learning materials, comparatively longer text. They can guess or explore the spatial and temporal development of the stories and textual framing. Moreover, picture images and illustrations communicate visually as an outward layer of the text for the first time, and then they can exercise cognitive efficiency and perception of motor skills.

This is, however, not just one approach but a combination of many, including perceptive and mental interactions. Numerous studies indicate that pictures cannot only support the educational attainment of normal children but quite significantly to those children who suffer from autism and other Down syndrome. Some of the researchers indicate that picture books also support soft skills and cognitive adaptation. Other benefits are:

- Humanistic elements
- Bilingualism
- Cross-cultural communication

### **3.6. Creative Activities Associated with Picture Books**

Teachers can ask children to cut pictures from old cartoon books or any other magazines and make a story out of them. They can give them stories like:

- Hungry Fox chasing the rabbit

- Butterflies in the garden sucking tulip flowers
- Pigeons cooing on the roof

### 3.7. Writing Ten Lined Stories and Selecting the Right Pictures for It

The teacher can give them instructions to write ten lined stories for the children:

- Once there was a hungry cat in a house .....
- Once, a crocodile came to the bank on a river on a very sunny day....it saw a crow there on a branch of elm tree.....

### 3.8. Picture Books can Help Teachers Make Good Lesson Plans for Creative Lesson Plans

Teachers can apply the following techniques:

#### Materials Needed

- Time
- Level of the students
- Size of the students
- Objectives
- Language focus

#### Activities

- Class-based activities
- Beyond class activities
- Observational activities

## 4. Conclusion

Picture books help reinforce things that have been learned or understood. Without a picture is partial information that does not impact, and it may be forgotten over the course of time. However, seeing picture books enhances knowledge and the power of cognitive adjustability, as it is commonly said that to see is to believe. In the formative years, children have sparkling curiosities when they read picture books, which transcend their imaginative faculties by increasing their motor skills and soft skills of language. The teachers and guardians should select effective picture books and spend time reading with them, creating body gestures and other bodily language to rouse their curiosity. Substantial studies indicate that children share the stories that they like most, and good picture stories remain in the mind for a long time in life, expanding social, cultural and emotional horizons. The concept of text and textual materials have gone through a transformation in modern times as we come across glaring sources of picture books, videos, graphic textures and so on. That is, the text is not merely printing materials that we commonly understand. It, however, goes far beyond that.

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