

Audio-Visual Aids in EFL Classroom:

Integrating Technology in Language Teaching According to Students' Learning Styles

“Teachers need to integrate technology seamlessly into the curriculum instead of viewing it as an add-on, an afterthought, or an event,” (Heidi-Hayes Jacobs, 2009)

Through this paper, our aim is to present and discuss the findings of a research study conducted by Mathew and Alidmat (2013) on “the Usefulness of Audio-Visual Aids in EFL Classroom: Implication for Effective Instruction”. However, we also want to go beyond, and expand the concept about audio-visual aids citing some researchers that can explain different issues related to the topic in order to build an idea about the importance of integrating these technological aids in the process of learning a foreign language, but taking into account that not all learners achieve language objectives in the same way. Before starting to discuss the article, it is important to state some ideas that can be meaningful to understand the topic and the arguments we are going to present.

The process of learning and teaching languages has become a reciprocal system in which five components are very important to achieve the objectives of learning a language. Those components are: “students, a teacher, materials, teaching methods, and evaluation,” Kitao (1997). Although these elements have a crucial role in the educational curriculum, there has been given higher importance to students as the center of the class. For instance, Kitao (1997) expresses that since the 1970's, some changes have focused on making learners the center of the language learning, so teachers have had to adapt their teaching methods and materials to students' characteristics and needs. In the same way, Kilickaya (2004) claims that nowadays, teachers debate how to incorporate materials in an EFL classroom that fit students' traits. Some materials that teachers usually incorporate are video and audio tapes, slides, and visual aids, Kitao (1997).

According to Cakir (2006), language learning is a process that must be associated with technology because this issue is the result of providing aid to people needs. Therefore, technology is used by teachers according to the teaching situation. In addition, Kitao (1997) argues that with the expansion that technology has had, visual material and audio material have become meaningful elements for teachers to keep in mind when planning their teaching lessons. The author also explains that those materials are available everywhere, but teachers have the challenge to be able to work with technology and to evaluate what materials select to guide students in the learning process. On the other hand, Tomlinson (2012) emphasizes on making a distinction between CALL materials which are those materials available from internet, online courses, and computer software; from ICT resources that can be the medium to use audio-visual materials.

Based on the article in discussion, Mathew and Alidmat (2013) conclude in their research that using audio-visual material in the classroom is useful for teachers to

develop interesting language classes, and motivate and engage students to focus on the language learning process to succeed. From our experience as English foreign language teachers, the use of audio-visual aids has been helpful to catch students' attention, to help them to grasp the meaning of difficult concepts or clarify ideas, to build rapport with learners, to decrease anxiety in students, and to control their affective filter.

Regarding to audio-visual materials, the use of visual aids as flashcards guide learners to figure out information, understand ideas, and generate predictions about the topic (Canning, 2000). On the other hand, Fisher (2003) points out that the use of slides or Power Point presentations have increased in ESL classrooms because they are helpful material that can be used for teaching, for practice, for games, and for reviews. Fisher (2003) describes slides as presentation software that allows including text, images, and sounds in the same place. Moreover, Power Point comes in Microsoft® packages that are commonly found in computers and laptops.

Equally important is to mention the purposes of using audio-visual material when teaching a foreign language in the classroom. Seven and Engin (2007), in their research about the importance and effect of using aid materials in foreign language teaching in a Turkey university cite Leyla (1995) to list a group of purposes that teachers must take into account when planning to use audio-visual materials:

- 1- Materials provide economy in time and speech
- 2- Materials simplify the course
- 3- Make the course vivid and clear
- 4- Materials increase students' interest and motivation
- 5- Materials help to explain complex explanation easily
- 6- Materials create desire of learning
- 7- Materials make abstract concepts concrete
- 8- Materials enrich the course
- 9- Materials provide the chance for practicing on subjects

It is also essential to mention the advantages of using audio-visual material for teaching languages. For instance, Canning (2000) considers that the use of visual aid and videos improve language learners' comprehension, hold students interest, and help learners to understand ideas. However, the author cites Balatova's (1994) studies to contrast her ideas expressing that audio-visual material can help learners to understand the message in a general way but not necessarily in a complete form. Furthermore, Kilickaya (2004) cites Matsuta (n.d.) to claim that audio-visual material not only improves learners' comprehension but also guide beginning students to be familiarized with authentic materials, so they do not feel frustrated in their learning process and feel comfortable in the learning environment.

On the other hand, Mathew and Alidmat (2013) state in their research that "native speakers' accent, rhythm and intonation" found in most of the audio-visual materials represent a barrier in students' learning progress, because it is difficult for learners to understand what they are listening to. However, we think that learners should have the opportunity to be exposed to audio-visual material from native speakers since they begin the language learning process in order to develop listening skills which help them to learn the language easily.

For instance, in recent years, some of the audio-visual materials that have been used consistently by teachers and learners through the process of learning a language are videos, visual aids, and slides made by using power point. Canning (2000) describes video as the material which helps learners to make connections among images, words and meaning. Moreover, the author cites Arthur (1999) to illustrate an appropriate definition about the use of video as audio-visual material:

"Video can give students realistic models to imitate for role-play; can increase awareness of other cultures by teaching appropriateness and suitability; can strengthen audio/visual linguistic perceptions simultaneously; can widen the classroom repertoire and range of activities; can help utilize the latest technology to facilitate language learning; can teach direct observation of the paralinguistic features found in association with the target language; can be used to help when training students in ESP related scenarios and language; can offer a visual reinforcement of the target language and can lower anxiety when practicing the skill of listening."

Regarding the use of video, Canning (2000) also states that integrating video with technology as the learning lab, CD-ROM, and computers helps students to be active learners in their classes. In addition, Cakir (2006) comments that the use of video has become important in language classes because of the development of communicative techniques that have found in this kind of material a way to stimulate and challenge students in the learning process and to scaffold comprehension. The author also reports that 2 minutes of video can be the introduction to an hour of class or to different activities to develop.

From the previous paragraph, we can see a similarity about what Canning (2000) expressed with the integration of technology in education and what Mathew and Alidmat (2013) comment in the article, in which they point out that using devices like smart boards, LCD projectors, and digital labs is the way to change language learning environment. Although the authors' idea is meaningful in the EFL scenarios, it not possible to generalize this thought because there are places where is very difficult to have access to technology. For instance, in our Colombian context, the possibility to have those technological devices for students learning process is just for private schools which have the resources to pay for the maintenance of the devices. Rarely public schools' teachers have the opportunity to integrate technology in their language classroom.

Taking into account the problems previously mentioned, it is important to cite Cakir (2006) who says that some disadvantages of using audio-visual material could be the cost, inconvenience and maintenance of the technology, and sometimes the quality of the audio, the images, and the copies. In addition, Canning (2000) claims that "visuals are ineffective in the learning process when the visual is too small; when the visual or video uses stereotypes; when the visual or video is a poor reproduction; when the picture is too far away from the text illustration; when the video has irrelevant captioning; when the video or visual offers too much information related or unrelated to the picture; when the video or visual is poorly scaled; and when the picture is not esthetically meaningful."

To summarize the relevance of audio-visual aids in language classroom, it is important to highlight that audio-visual material have become useful for teachers to plan and develop their language classes because those materials give support to students in their language learning process. However, teachers could not generalize this type of material in all their classes because teachers must keep in mind that all learners are different; it means, learners have different *learning styles*, so teachers need to bear in mind these differences when planning a lesson.

Taking into account the integration of technology in education, we find a new concept: *learning styles*. Based on the Mathew and Alidmat's article, we can deduce from their first finding related to the table 1, that authors took for granted that the students who answered the question "Do you find the need for the English teachers to use audio-visual aids in the classroom?", in a negative way were those ones who do not consider important or necessary the implementation of audio-visual material in the language classes. However, we think the authors should examine why those students did not enjoy this methodology, maybe, were they kinesthetic or logical learners? We think that as teachers, we need to go in deep and know our students' abilities, likes and dislikes in order to plan a lesson that engage all our students in the class.

In reference to learning styles, Landrum and McDuffie (2010) cite Dunn and Dunn (1979) to say that learning styles have been present in education for more than forty years, and it has been a questionable theory for all this time. The authors affirm that learning styles are based on the different forms in which a learner understand information; also, these styles describe different conditions of the process of learning as combination of environmental, emotional, sociological, physical and psychological aspects that give positive or negative conditions to acquire the knowledge. According to Gardner (1985) there are three types of learning styles. The first is the visual style, in which EFL learners have to see body language, and facial expressions to understand the lesson. The second is the auditory style, in which EFL learners learn better through verbal lectures, discussions and speaking activities. In the third style, the kinesthetic, EFL learners learn better through their hands actively exploring the world around them.

Moreover many researchers have been developed in order to show the relevance between learning styles and the process of learning. For example, Coffield, Moseley and Ecclestone (2004) developed an investigation in which they design an evaluation to analyze the main models of learning styles and consequences in teaching and learning. In this investigation, the authors affirm that measurement of learning styles in the students could be used as a tool in the development of the lessons and to enhance their learning process.

In addition, Gilbert and Swanier (2008) conducted a research project at Auburn University in which they analyze how learning styles fluctuate in learning. The study is focused on discussions about how learning styles can affect the lessons and focus on students in computer science and engineering. Researchers propose that sometimes learners do not acquire a deeper understanding because the lessons are not conducted based on students' learning styles. Gilbert and Swancer (2008) cited Gilbert and Han

(1999) and Gilbert (2000) to note that learning styles can improve the process of learning and impact in the comprehension of lessons.

To conclude, we want to express that technology and learning styles must be linked by the teacher in a way that can be helpful not only for teacher to save time and change teacher centered classes, but also for learners to be motivated, to feel comfortable, and to be receptive to all the opportunities that using audio-visual aids can bring to enrich the language learning process.

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