

THE IMPORTANCE OF VISUAL ELEMENTS IN DIGITAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT IN ESP CLASSROOM

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Abstract: *This study examines students' preferences regarding visual aids in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classrooms, with a focus on PowerPoint (PP) presentations and YouTube videos. A survey was conducted to assess students' perceptions of the importance of images, text length, and video content in instructional materials. The findings indicate that PP presentations with photographs are perceived as the most valuable visual aid, with a strong preference for concise text, though longer explanations are accepted when necessary. While students favor photos over illustrations, they do not express a strong aversion to the latter. Aesthetic appeal in presentations is appreciated but not considered essential. In contrast, YouTube videos are viewed as a moderately engaging, with only a minority of students considering them more useful than PP presentations. The results suggest that structured, static visual aids facilitate quick access to key information, making PP presentations the preferred learning resource in ESP instruction. The findings highlight the need for a balanced approach in designing instructional materials, integrating structured visual elements with selective multimedia content to enhance student engagement and motivation.*

Keywords: *ESP, visual aids, digital learning, digital resources*

INTRODUCTION

In today's ESP classroom students need to be sure that their lessons are applicable in real business situations, and that the vocabulary and grammatical structures they study are clearly explained, which often implies the use of visuals in the classrooms. In other words, as Maley (2018) noticed, the course materials should be in harmony with the learners' interests and should be perceived as having relevance to what is being learnt. It is clear that nowadays most lectures in ESP classrooms rely on PP presentations and video material as digital content that accompany teacher's lectures. That is why this paper focuses on the students' perception of the importance and usefulness of the visual elements such as photos and the length of the text on PP presentation as well as video materials. The aim was to determine students' preferences so that teachers can adapt to them in order to enhance students' motivation in ESP classroom.

Visuals introduced by digital media in most of ESP classes in the higher education environments usually include PP presentations where photos serve to illustrate the topic, provide a visual support for new vocabulary or enhance the overall impression of the presentation by pointing at a broader situational context in business environment. Videos are also a strong visual element in an ESP class and beside their importance for developing listening skills they also serve as a visual tool bringing real life business situations closer to students and providing contact with the realistic appearance of business environment.

In recent years, the integration of digital visual aids in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classrooms has gained significant attention, as well as the use of all digital resources and digital media tools (Buzarna-Tihenea, 2019). The visual aids are the best way of improving the quality of lesson plans and motivating students to gain subject knowledge as most students are visual learners especially when it comes to learning new words Eliwbay & Muratbaevna (2022). Research indicates that PowerPoint presentations are prevalent tools in educational settings, offering a platform for instructors to present material in a structured and visually engaging manner. However, a variety of visual tools have been present in an ESP classroom including posters, pictures, flashcards as well as digital tools such as interactive whiteboard and learning labs on computer, as well as different sorts of presentations such as PP presentations but also Prezi (Lavinia, 2018). The ability to incorporate various media formats, such as images, diagrams, and videos, enhances the learning experience by catering to different learning styles. The use of videos in ESP classrooms has been studied continuously in

order to determine its relation with student motivation (V. Jurkovič & D. Mertelj, 2015; Radosavlevikj & Hajrullai, 2019; Abidin, & Morat (2011).

However, the use of digital visual aids should always remain selective so that their overuse does not negatively affect class interactions (Lavinia, 2018).

The current trends in ESP while addressing the growing need to re-examine current approaches and teaching methods within the scope of ESP are reflected in V-interESP – an international joint research project involving students and faculty from Lithuania, Portugal and Serbia (Vieira Vasconcelos, 2021), among other recent studies (Hronova & Knihova, 2020; Barbuceanu, 2020)

In order to determine which digital resources to use and how to enhance students' motivation teachers need to assess students' preferences and incorporate the insights into the preparation of their ESP classes.

METHODOLOGY

This paper examines the results of a survey conducted among 95 first-year and second-year students completing ESP course at the Academy of Applied Studies Belgrade in the departments College of Tourism and College of Hospitality. The survey was conducted in October 2024, after the students were exposed to a number of ESP classes which included abundant visual tools in the form of PP presentations and several short videos played in class. The survey contained 7 questions where students were asked to assess the importance of visual elements in class on a scale from 1 to 5 or to decide which visual aid they preferred.

The PP presentations that were used in ESP classes in question included photos which served the following two major purposes: to illustrate the vocabulary learned (a photo of an object and its name) or to illustrate the business situation discussed. The short videos used mainly represented dialogues between clients and employees or presentations of various positions held by employees as well as instructions on how to behave in business environment. An average length of the videos was 2-3 minutes.

DISCUSSION

The results of the survey can be summarized by presenting the statistics for each answer to the seven questions. The questions were as follows:

1. On a scale from 1 to 5, how important are photos used in PP presentations used in ESP class? (1 = Not important at all, 5 = Extremely important)

The majority of the respondents, 72 respondents or 75.79%, selected the highest score of 5, which means that the photos are considered very important, while 15 (15.79%) chose the score of 4, 7 (7.37%) selected the score of 3. Only one respondent chose 1 as the lowest score. Obviously, most respondents expressed strong agreement on the importance of photos in PP presentations used in ESP class.

2. On a scale from 1 to 5, how important are You Tube videos for you in the ESP classroom? (1 = Not important at all, 5 = Extremely important)

A total of 95 respondents provided insight into the importance of You Tube videos for their ESP class. The majority (46 respondents, 48.42%) assigned a score of 5, indicating the highest level of importance. A score of 4 was chosen by 10 respondents (10.53%), while 26 respondents (27.37%) selected a score of 3, representing a moderate level of importance. Lower ratings were less frequent, with 8 respondents (8.42%) assigning a score of 2, and only 4 respondents (4.21%) giving a score of 1, indicating the lowest perceived importance. These results suggest that the majority of respondents considered the subject highly important, with relatively few rating it as unimportant. However, compared to the importance of photos in PP presentations, as indicated in the previous question, it is evident that You Tube videos are not perceived as important as the photos.

3. Do you prefer PP presentations with photos to You Tube videos in your ESP class and which do you consider more important?

As an answer to this question 75 (78.95%) of the students chose PP presentations with photos as more important and useful, while 20 students (21.05%) perceived You Tube videos more relevant, which is in line

with the previous two questions, indicating PP presentations with photos are the major resource for learning as well as more important resource than You Tube videos.

4. On a scale from 1 to 5, how important is the aesthetic appeal of photos in PowerPoint presentations during your ESP class? (1 = Not important at all, 5 = Extremely important)

The highest score of 5 was selected by 37 respondents (38.95%), indicating the strongest level of importance. A score of 4 was chosen by 14 respondents (14.74%), while 28 respondents (29.47%) selected a score of 3, reflecting a moderate level of importance. Lower ratings were less common, with 8 respondents (8.42%) assigning a score of 2, and 8 respondents (8.42%) selecting a score of 1, representing the lowest perceived importance. Although the majority of respondents rated the aesthetic appeal as important, the distribution of scores suggests that it is not universally perceived as a top priority, with nearly half (46.32%) assigning it a moderate to low level of importance (scores 3, 2, or 1).

5. On a scale from 1 to 5, how well do You Tube videos hold your attention in class?

The majority expressed a positive view, with 18 respondents (18.9%) rating their importance as 5 (extremely important) and 31 respondents (32.6%) selecting 4. A moderate level of importance was indicated by 24 participants (25.3%) who chose a score of 3. Meanwhile, 17 respondents (17.9%) rated their importance as 2, and only 5 participants (5.3%) considered them not important at all, selecting 1. These results suggest that while You Tube videos are generally valued as a learning tool in the ESP classroom, there is variability in their perceived significance, with a substantial portion of students considering them moderately or highly beneficial.

6. Do you prefer photos or illustrations in PP presentations or you do not mind?

The majority (63 students, 66.32%) prefer photos, while 32 students (33.68%) stated they did not mind. No respondent stated they preferred illustrations which indicates strong preference of photos, but it does not necessarily imply a dislike for illustrations, rather a lack of explicit preference for them.

7. Is it important to you that the text on the PP presentation is short? Do you mind longer texts on PP presentations?

The majority, 47 participants (49.5%), expressed a preference for shorter text, indicating a general tendency toward concise slides. In contrast, 32 respondents (33.7%) favored longer text, suggesting that a significant portion values detailed information within the slides. Meanwhile, 16 participants (16.8%) stated that they had no preference regarding text length. We can conclude that a balanced approach, incorporating both concise and more in-depth slides, may optimize comprehension and accommodate diverse student needs and preferences.

The summary of responses to scale-based questions (1 = Lowest, 5 = Highest) as well as of the preference-based responses is given in the tables below (Table 1, Table 2).

Table 1: Survey results: Questions Rated on a Scale from 1 to 5

Perceived Importance Score	1	2	3	4	5
Importance of photos in PP presentations (ESP class)	1 (1.05%)	-	7 (7.37%)	15 (15.79%)	72 (75.79%)
Importance of You Tube videos in ESP classroom	4 (4.21%)	8 (8.42%)	26 (27.37%)	10 (10.53%)	46 (48.42%)
Importance of aesthetic appeal of photos in PP presentations	8 (8.42%)	8 (8.42%)	28 (29.47%)	14 (14.74%)	37 (38.95%)
How well You Tube videos hold attention in class	5 (5.3%)	17 (17.9%)	24 (25.3%)	31 (32.6%)	18 (18.9%)

Table 2: Survey results: Preference-Based Questions

Preference of PP presentations with photos or You Tube videos	PP presentations with photos 75 (78.95%)	You Tube videos 20 (21.05%)	
Preference of photos or illustrations in PP presentations	Photos 63 (66.32%)	Illustrations 0 (0%)	No preference 32 (33.68%)
Preference of short or longer text in PP presentations	Shorter text 47 (49.5%)	Longer text 32 (33.7%)	No preference 16 (16.8%)

The results of the survey clearly indicate that students unanimously perceive PP presentations with photographs as an extremely important visual aid in ESP classroom. They believe that shorter texts are necessary on the presentations, but if the need for explanation arises the longer texts are acceptable. Although photos seem to be the preferred form of pictures, students do not mind illustrations as a means of visual support. The aesthetic appeal of the photos does not appear to be crucial for students, though the majority of them appreciate it.

However, You Tube videos in ESP class hold moderate attention of students, and a small percentage of students (21.05%) consider You Tube videos more useful or important than PP presentations. Given that the You Tube videos used in class were relevant, authentic and closely related to the subject matter, the possible interpretation of this result may indicate that despite all the advantages, the videos require active participation in terms of discerning what is the most relevant information for learners, whereas PP presentations offer static and structured visual aid which clearly point at the highlights of the lesson. It can be concluded that students need to quickly access the information they are supposed to acquire and that PP presentations with visuals serve this purpose best.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study highlight the importance of visual aids in the ESP classroom, showing that PowerPoint presentations with photos are the most preferred learning tool. Students find them useful because they provide structured and clear information, making it easier to follow lessons. While most students prefer shorter text on slides, they accept longer explanations when necessary. The aesthetic appeal of images is appreciated but not essential for learning. On the other hand, YouTube videos are considered helpful, but they require more active engagement, which may explain why they are not seen as more useful than structured PP presentations.

These findings suggest that ESP teachers should focus on creating well-organized PP presentations with relevant images and balanced text length. Videos can still play an important role, but they should be used selectively to support learning rather than replace structured slides. By adapting materials to students' preferences, teachers can improve motivation and make lessons more effective. Future research could explore new digital tools and how they can further enhance learning in ESP classrooms.

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