

# Non-Textual Elements in Sustaining ESL and EFL Learning

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The use of non-textual elements has been regarded as an effective teaching approach to support English as a second language (ESL)/English as a foreign language (EFL) learners in language learning. Much of the research regarding non-textual elements has shown that they have significantly contributed to learners' motivation, active participation, and communication.

[EFL](#)[ESL](#)[non-textual elements](#)[supplementary strategy](#)[complementary strategy](#)

## 1. Introduction

For the last few decades, the use of non-textual elements has been regarded as an effective teaching approach to support English as a second language (ESL)/English as a foreign language (EFL) learners in language learning. However, few studies have examined how non-textual elements interact with textual elements as a combined strategy for instructional resources and approaches in language classrooms. Recently, people have considered the use of non-textual elements differently, despite the emergence of technology in this 21st-century world. Past studies have revealed that the growth of technology also affects the types of non-textual elements used as teaching aids and approaches among educational practitioners. Ideologies and how teachers use non-textual elements have changed the teaching and learning processes in language classrooms.

Over the past five years, non-textual elements, such as photos, videos, graphics, pictures, multimedia, and flashcards have played supplementary and complementary roles in improving ESL and EFL learners' learning performance. Supplementary materials, which are defined as materials designed to be used in addition to the core materials of a course [\[1\]](#), are significant in encouraging and sustaining learners' effective learning outcomes [\[2\]](#). "Supplementary" means that the non-textual element is not key to the process; it is something additional in the content. In other words, non-textual elements are used in supplementary ways to enhance learning, with extra value added to the learning process, and to improve or foster significant positive outcomes. "Complementary" is defined as a method or a combination of methods used to enhance or emphasize the qualities of another individual [\[3\]](#). It refers to information that is built in to reinforce the learning process. In education, teachers often create and adapt complementary materials to enhance their lessons. The use of suitable supplementary materials has always been the main focus of language teaching [\[4\]](#). Visualization formats can vary and complement motivation, memory, understanding, and attention [\[5\]](#). Thus, the roles of non-textual elements positively contribute to ESL and EFL learning and the teaching process.

Past studies have reported that English educators or teachers often search for more impactful approaches to improve language classrooms. Language learning has become more varied as a result of incorporating non-textual elements and technology into class activities. In education studies, non-textual elements, such as pictures, photos, flashcards, videos, and infographics, have a vital function in supporting learning among English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) learners. Several studies conducted in education from primary to tertiary levels [6][7][8][9][10] have defined visuals as anything one person observes within a given frame. Our world is visually oriented, and most responses are stimulated non-verbally, with verbal information better processed through visual cues. The method that the learners use to observe and classify the information from their environment is defined as visual proficiency.

Moreover, Stafford (2011) defines a non-textual element as historical material which covers items that are not written and includes still and moving images, audio recordings, artefacts, and places [11]. Non-textual elements can also be characterized as illustrations that involve moving images. Collin MacArthur's theory of iconography (1972; pp. 23–24), as cited in [12], also discusses how images on screen create a sense of genre for the audience. He points out that the ongoing forms of visual imagery support them in their understanding of the characters and elements of the plot and enable the audience to recognize swiftly the type of film they are watching. Similarly, moving images represented in audio-visual aids or videos, which are widely used by educators globally, act as a tool for enhancing and engaging students' interest in learning. One of the non-textual elements commonly used in language classrooms is video. Teachers and students have various multimedia tools, such as YouTube videos, available as teaching and learning aids. Thus, the use of video for learning has been widely used among ESL and EFL teachers to arouse learners' interest in learning.

## 2. The Importance of Non-Textual Elements

The use of non-textual elements in learning positively impacts learners' comprehension of content, generates thoughts and ideas, and helps them to overcome learning difficulties through the use of video, pictures, flashcards, and other technologies. The roles of non-textual elements and how they are used can be highly engaging in the educational structure to develop ESL and ESL classrooms [13]. In recent years, non-textual elements in teaching strategies and approaches have been used extensively alongside education publications. The use of non-textual elements in language classrooms is a versatile method that can be utilized to cope with 21st-century learning.

Non-textual elements have been extensively used in lessons to improve learning. The use of illustrations as visual prompts can attract the student's interest, encourage learning, and develop the growth of their critical intellectual support (Duchastel and Waller, 1979; Levie, 1987; Winn, 1982), as cited in [14]. In other words, the learners are easily engaged in an active learning process through using illustrations, and it can facilitate their understanding of a particular topic effectively. In this way, implementing non-textual elements as a teaching approach motivates the learners to desire to learn more. Furthermore, Nor Pazilah et al. (2019) reports that the use of visual aids can be adapted to modern and traditional ways of teaching, which could depend on students' preferences and the school environment [15]. Many different types of non-textual elements support materials, classifying them according to form and function. Pictures with multimedia methods were used most in education articles between 2018 and 2022. The

author of *Using Non-Textual Sources: A Historian's Guide*, Armstrong (2016) also points out that the use of the Internet has revolutionized the way learners study using non-textual sources [12]. For instance, Abdul Samat and Abdul Aziz (2020) report that the use of multimedia in language learning is impactful in developing indigenous pupils' comprehension skills [16]. Multimedia methods assist learners in visualizing information immediately while they are not overly dependent on their prior knowledge.

The issues related to incorporating non-textual elements into learning are widely known in ESL and EFL language classrooms. Most ESL and EFL learners still encounter challenges in mastering the four main language skills. For instance, Ahmad (2019) revealed that lack of student engagement is one of the causes of the reading comprehension problems encountered by EFL learners [17]. Poor competency in reading comprehension influences learners' understanding of what they read and learn. Furthermore, reading strategies, lack of motivation, and unavailability of good materials are also factors that negatively affect EFL learners during reading comprehension [18]. Some studies have also reported that most ESL and EFL learners experience difficulty because of their restricted word choice [18][19][20]. In addition, the lack of motivation among ESL and EFL learners to speak the target language is one of the reasons why students cannot speak the English language in the language classrooms. Numerous studies have observed that motivation plays a fundamental role in speaking the English language [21][22][23]. One complaint that learners have is that they cannot speak from memory and are not motivated to express themselves. This complaint is supported by Leong and Mosaumeh (2017) who observed that learners do not have enough material for the subject matter their teachers choose and thus falter in expressing themselves [24]. Non-textual elements are one of the alternative approaches that language educators use to address this problem.

### 3. Roles of Non-Textual Elements in the Teaching of ESL and EFL Learning

Non-textual elements, such as pictures, flashcards, infographics, motion pictures, or graphics, paint a thousand words in language learning. The question is, "What are the roles of non-textual elements in supporting ESL and EFL learners in language classrooms?" Similarly, in respect of practically any other teaching resource, non-textual elements can be used to enhance students' motivation to learn and engage them in an active learning environment.

The importance of non-textual elements as a supplementary strategy must be recognized in the teaching and learning process, especially in ESL and EFL language classrooms. Studies have reported that non-textual elements have a positive impact on improving learners' motivation and stimulating their active learning. Motivation has been extensively acknowledged as one of the main aspects influencing effective performance among ESL and EFL learners [25]. According to Gardner's theory [26], motivation is the main aspect affecting learners' cognition, and includes effort, willingness, and the desire to learn, as well as being the effect of their enjoyment of a certain task. Motivation is the primary driver for L2 learning and is probably the underlying factor. In addition, motivation is known as the main issue, given that high motivation usually leads to effective learning. For instance, the use of picture media improves learners' motivation in learning English [27][28]. Through pictures, learners are encouraged to gain more information in language classrooms, particularly in terms of reading skills and vocabulary mastery.

The roles of non-textual elements in supporting language learning have been significant contributing factors to learner motivation and active participation in class activities and communication. The central idea of using learning materials in a supplementary way is to provide learners with extra resources to increase their interest and their motivation to learn [2]. Such experience is supported by [29], who points out that supplementary resources introduce the usage of real language via engaging and extended content, motivating and activating students in language learning through participation. In addition, Abbasi (2015) also remarks that the usage of supplementary materials helps learners improve their self-guided learning of English, bolstering comprehension in reading and various skills [30]. Furthermore, teachers should develop supplementary learning materials that will encourage learners and introduce contextualized and diversified teaching materials that can suit various types of learners [31].

Non-textual elements used in complementary strategies supporting ESL and EFL learning also contribute to positive learning outcomes. Non-textual elements play a significant role in engaging teachers and students to participate actively in the learning process. Generally, how a successful language classroom can further enhance learning depends on the degree of interesting, practical, realistic, and appealing instructional materials [32]. Effective non-textual elements provide students with opportunities in which to practice skills in new contexts with the help of visual, moving visual, or technology tools, which improve retention and help learners to see how different language skills are applied successfully. When ICT is used, student engagement is greatly increased [33], as it serves to attract their attention to learning.

The complementary role of using non-textual elements, such as visual elements, also helps learners capture and recall information longer than with texts alone. For instance, Singh et al. (2017) reported that students had positive experiences when using picture series in their guided writing activities [34]. The study reveals that the students encountered challenges when they were asked to write using only guided words and did not know what they should write. After using picture series in writing lessons, the students claimed they were interested in writing using pictures as visual aids. The technique also helped them to focus on the writing lessons. Wright (1989) observed that the experience of acquiring a target language will become more meaningful when visuals are significantly used as a stimulus related to learners' lives [35]. Visuals also help activate the learners' interest and motivation. They can also provide knowledge of the language context and a focused reference or stimulus [20]. Hence, visuals elements are crucial in supporting ESL and EFL learning efficiently.

## 4. How Have the Roles of Non-Textual Elements Changed in Sustaining the Teaching and Learning of ESL and EFL

The use of non-textual elements in enhancing ESL and EFL learners' language learning also provides an interactive atmosphere in language classrooms. The growing access to technology has become an important aspect of enhancing language learning in ESL and EFL learners' learning settings. Most educators use technology in their classroom teaching and learning activities because it plays a major role in motivating and enhancing students' language learning [36]. The incorporation of non-textual elements with technology are both supplementary and complementary in nature, supporting ESL and EFL learning outcomes. One effective method recommended by the researchers is the multimedia method used in non-textual elements for teaching in language classrooms.

Compared with the traditional method of using non-textual elements in language classrooms, the multimedia method is a supplementary way of engaging and motivating students in learning via the integration of ICT. The learning process becomes engaging and collaborative through the emergence of technology in interactive classroom settings [37]. In this competitive world, mastering the English language is crucial to increasing the competence of ESL and EFL learners

The incorporation of user-friendly technology in teaching and learning has made a significant contribution to enhancing language learning, making it more interactive among the learners, and enabling the learning to go beyond the walls of the classroom. Past studies have revealed that English teachers often explore more impactful approaches to teaching ESL and EFL in classrooms. Educators are encouraged to create novel modern methods to improve on the shortcomings of normal teaching. They should change plain content into lively, engaging, audio-visual, and dynamic language-learning content. The impact of incorporating technology and non-textual elements into teaching is positive. They stimulate learners' thinking, inspire their paths of thinking, and strengthen their discovery capacity and problem-solving abilities. Even though the aforementioned non-textual elements can result in positive experiences in respect of their uses, education practitioners should be aware of whether the types of materials selected suit the learners' interests and needs in language lessons. For instance, Abdul Samat and Abdul Aziz (2017) pointed out that educators should note students' interests before choosing multimedia content to avoid a mental block in understanding the materials [16]. In considering the roles of non-textual elements in supporting ESL and EFL learning, educators and practitioners also need to develop suitable and appropriate types of non-textual elements with which to prepare visually rich materials.

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