

Teaching Strategies in Visual Text Interpretation in Higher Education

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Introduction

Visual literacy is an essential skill in the 21st century, as visual communication has become an integral part of our daily lives. It involves the ability to use and create visual media to communicate ideas and information. In the educational context, visual literacy can enhance critical thinking skills, promote creativity, and improve learning outcomes (Huang, 2018). Visual literacy can also foster empathy and promote cultural understanding by exposing students to different perspectives and ways of life (Thibodeaux, 2019).

Visual literacy in higher education curriculum in the Philippines is an area of growing interest, as there is a growing recognition of the importance of visual communication in today's digital age. However, according to Amatorio and Ramboyong (2018), visual literacy is not commonly integrated into higher education curriculum in the Philippines. The study revealed that there is a lack of awareness among instructors and students of the importance of visual literacy in higher education. In addition, the study found that there is a need for training and resources, such as visual aids and materials, to effectively integrate visual literacy into the curriculum.

De Leon and Borabo (2021) also focused on the role of visual literacy in enhancing the critical thinking skills of higher education students in the Philippines. The study highlights the need for visual literacy in higher education, as it can enhance critical thinking skills, facilitate learning, and prepare students for the demands of the 21st-century workforce. These challenges can result to a lack of proficiency in understanding and analyzing visual information, such as images, graphs, charts, and diagrams (Liu, 2013).

Also, it can cause several impacts to tertiary students, particularly in academics, communication, and even professional development. It can hinder students' ability to engage with visual materials used in various academic disciplines, leading to reduced comprehension and performance (Cohen & Weitzman, 2019). Inadequate visual literacy skills can impede students' ability to effectively communicate ideas using visual aids, restricting their capacity to convey complex information (Doyle, 2017).

Limited emphasis on visual literacy in the curriculum and inadequate instruction on visual analysis and interpretation contribute to students' lack of visual literacy skills (Gilliam, 2020). The last is technological dependence. Overreliance on automated design tools and software can result in a lack of understanding of fundamental visual principles and design concepts (Locher, 2015). These challenges should be addressed immediately by integrated visual literacy in the curriculum. Incorporating visual literacy instruction across disciplines can enhance the students' ability to analyze and communicate through visual means (Cox, 2021). Utilizing active learning approaches is another initiative to consider. Encouraging interactive and hands-on activities, such as visual analysis exercises and collaborative design projects, can foster visual literacy skills (Brumberger, 2011). Lastly, is the faculty development. Providing professional development opportunities

for educators to enhance their own visual literacy skills can improve instruction and mentorship in this area (Stahl & King, 2020).

To address the gap in the integration of visual literacy in higher education curriculum in the Philippines, Amatorio and Ramboyong (2018) suggested that higher education institutions should develop programs and workshops that promote the importance of visual literacy and train instructors on how to integrate visual literacy into their teaching. Hence, this study.

Research Objectives

The study delved into the teaching and interpreting of visual texts in higher education. Specifically, aimed to achieve the following.

1. Identified the visual literacy strategies that teachers use in teaching Art Appreciation.
2. Determined the specific visual strategies that students use in interpreting visual texts in learning Art Appreciation.

Research Design

This study used qualitative content analysis since key themes emerged from written outputs of participants in artwork and photo text interpretation. Transcribed interviews of teacher and student participants were coded and analyzed (Hoffman et al, 2011). Guo et al. (2019) has outlined content analysis as a study tool for spotting trends in transcripts of spoken or written interactions.

Research Locale and Participants

The study was conducted in a State College in the Bicol region. The institution was purposely chosen since it offers GEC-5 Art Appreciation, a general education course offered to all freshmen students every first semester of the academic year. Art Appreciation is a three-unit course that develops learners' ability to appreciate, analyze, and critique works of art.

The participants of this study were five teachers and twenty-five freshmen students, for a total of 30 participants selected through purposive sampling.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher sought the approval from the College President thru the Vice President for Academic Affairs of a State College to gather data from the respondents. After getting the approval, the researcher sought individual consent from the teacher participants who were teaching GEC 5 – Arts Appreciation course. Upon their approval, the researcher administered the interview and retrieved the needed data.

The research has five phases: Phase 1: Performing visual interpretation activities and assessment of students' output. Phase 2: Conducting semi-structured interview; Phase 3: Data collection, Analysis, and Interpretation; and Phase 4 Development of pedagogical model.

Research Instrument

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the five teachers and twenty-five student participants. The teacher and student participants were asked questions from different interview guides. These questions were validated by the specified expert in the study as to their correctness, validity, and appropriateness. In addition, the validation ensured that the interview guide questions can answer the statement of the problem. Thus, the semi-structured interview questions were revised and validated by an associate professor at one of the state universities in Camarines Sur.

Data Analysis

The study used deductive qualitative data analysis. Deductive analysis, as defined by Bingham and Witkowsky (2022), entails using evidence to put hypotheses to the test. One way of looking at it is as a “top-down” method of analyzing data.

The first research question, “What teaching strategies do teachers use to develop students’ visual strategy?”, was responded to by the teacher and student participants. Individual semi-structured structured interviews were conducted to obtain sufficient data from both participants. Each of their answers was coded using Callow’s (2005) Three Dimension Model, namely: affective, compositional, and critical, and Abas’ (2019) Four Phases in Teaching Visual Analysis, namely: The Exposure Phase, The Exploration Phase, The Engagement Phase and The Self-Reflection Phase. The second research question, “What specific visual strategies do students use in interpreting multimodal texts?” was both answered by the teacher and student participants. Both of their answers in the semi-structured interview were coded using Liu’s (2013) Visual Interpretive Strategies – meta-interpretive strategy, perceptual strategy, analytical strategy, and socio-cultural strategy.

Methodological Limitations

Due to CoVid-19 pandemic, the last half of the 2nd semester of School Year 2019-2020 was done via flexible learning; thus, classroom observation was not conducted. Artworks and photos were the visual texts used in the study. But other than these, different types of visual texts such as moving pictures could have been used if face-to-face instruction was possible. A weekly classroom observation or eight classroom observations tantamount to two months could have been done so that enough data could be gathered, but as it is, the focus of this study was on the content analysis of student’s visual text interpretation.

Results and Discussion

Teaching Strategies to Develop Students’ Visual Literacy

Table 1a on the next page presents the first stage, the **Initiation Stage** in the teaching strategies to develop students’ visual literacy based on the 12 statements from the teacher participants and 24 statements from the student participants which were gathered from the interviews. Table 1a reveals that the top 3 strategies according to the replies of the teachers and students include providing visual and giving explanation (41%), followed by asking for message, purpose and intended audience of the image (26%), and getting students’ first impression (24%).

Table 1a Stage 1 of the Teaching Strategies to Develop Students' Visual Literacy

Themes	Activities						Total	
I. Initiation stage Presentation of Topic	Teachers	F	%	Students	F	%	F	%
Providing visuals and giving explanation	Teachers showed visual texts in class and provided explanations about it.	4	33%	On the students' perspectives, their teachers provided visuals and explained them.	10	42%	14	41%
Asking for message, purpose and intended audience of the image.	Teachers asked questions from lower-order to higher-order thinking skills.	3	25%	According to the students, their teachers asked them questions.	6	25%	9	26%
Getting students' first impression	Teachers asked students what they can see and their impression to the visual presented.	2	17%	Students expressed that their teachers ask them about their impressions.	6	25%	8	24%
Asking students' feelings	A teacher asked students about their feelings upon seeing the artwork.	1	8%	Students expressed their feelings about the visual texts.	2	8%	3	9%
Probing understanding about the image context	Teachers asked questions that describe the context of the image.	2	17%					
TOTAL		12	100%		24	100%	34	100%

Providing visuals and giving explanations are deemed advantageous in improving students' visual literacy. As Jandhyala (2017) emphasized, visual texts enable students to comprehend materials and engage in effective communication. Also, Anstey and Bull (2006), Jaffe (2011), Comminos (2012), and Kim et al. (2017) acknowledged that through visual texts, students gain new understanding, develop abstract and concrete reasoning, and think critically and express themselves through art.

Another teaching strategy that is indispensable to yield better results in teaching visual literacy to students in higher education is asking for message, purpose and intended audience of the image. Based on the responses of teachers and students, it can be viewed and understood that the learning skills and competencies related to visual literacy are also hierarchical in nature and organization. Lee and Kim, et al. (2018), Chen and Hu (2019), Park and Song (2017), Kintsch (2018), and Zhang and Wildemuth (2019) also posited these ideas that viewers make several thinking processes, like making inferences, to construct meaning of the texts.

Serafini (2010), Liu (2013), Cutajar (2020) and Matusiak (2020) similarly mentioned that students will also be able to describe who an image is meant for, look into how images send messages about gender, ethnicity, and other social and cultural categories, validate their interpretations and analyses of images by talking with others, and critically look at how persuasive or manipulative techniques may have been used in the making of an image to change how it is seen.

The third frequent teaching strategy used by teacher participants in their class is getting students' first impression. Allowing the students to state their impression of the visual materials or elements presented is also an opportunity to build connection between their prior knowledge and current perspectives about the visual text. Similarly, Locher (2015) and Jandhyala (2017) recognized the importance of eliciting students' impression of the visual texts because this contributes to the overall meaning of the texts, and it aids students to better comprehend visual texts since it stimulates their emotions.

Another effective strategy to involve them in meaning making is asking students' feelings. Visual literacy instruction draws strong cognitive and artistic support from emotional domains. Corollary to this, Tillmann (2012) explained that students' feelings about the visual texts help them to comprehend and communicate with images since these texts provide wide range of emotions.

The last strategy teachers employ to develop students' visual literacy is probing students' understanding about the image. Such strategy allows students to comprehend, ask questions, develop a sense of meaning making and make a stand from the message an image conveys. Rowsell et al. (2012), Haydn & Harris (2015) and Pickles (2010) believed that through the historical facts that are found in visual texts, students can be drawn into a dialogue and share personal meanings from the students that could be related to other issues.

Table 1b presents the Stage 2, the Lesson Proper or the Discussion in developing students' visual literacy based on the 22 statements of the teacher participants and the 19 statements from student participants which were extracted from the interviews. It reveals the strategies teacher participants employ based on the interviews conducted. These include identifying elements of visual texts and asking students to self-reflect and scaffold. It can be gleaned that 24% of the teacher participants asked their students to identify elements of visual texts, asked their students about the meaning of a visual text by looking closely to each element (15%), and asked students to share their ideas about the visual text (24%).

In asking students to reflect, teachers gave them reinforcement activity (10%) and asked them to probe their understanding (17%). In scaffolding, teachers asked students to interpret and analyze the visual texts and share them to the class (7%), and present the interpretation to the class, form groupings and formulate answers (3%). Asking students to identify visual elements and how they work together allows students to impact valuable contributions in terms of funds of knowledge, concepts and ideas during visual analytical activities and tasks.

Identifying visual elements and visuals provides for the foundation of the basics of visual literacy instruction. Recognizing visual clues is equal to the training of the students in interpreting the meanings represented by visual elements and texts. This is true of Karchmer-Klein and Shinas (2012), Abas (2019) and Mbelani (2013) who posited that it is significant for learners to identify visual elements, design their own visual texts, and convey information other than the use of words alone.

The second strategy in the Lesson Proper Stage is asking students to reflect. The teacher participants considered self-reflection as one of the reinforcement activities to develop students' visual literacy. McWilliams (2022) also emphasized the practice of introspection to be incorporated into art appreciation lessons as it allows learners to use creative visualization to map out their ideas. Scaffolding also becomes more effective when the concepts and meanings being shared by the groups are accurate, substantial, and meaningful that it contributes to the knowledge acquisition in visual literacy of their fellow learners. Callow (2005), Pantaleo

Table 1b Stage 2 of the Teaching Strategies to Develop Students' Visual Literacy

Themes	Sub-themes	Activities						Total	
		Teachers	F	%	Students	F	%	F	%
II. Lesson Proper- Discussion Identifying elements of visual texts	Teacher asked students to identify elements.	Teachers asked the students to look into the elements of the visual text.	1	4%	On the students' perspectives, they were asked to give meaning to visual elements.	9	47%	10	24%
	Teachers asked them to identify how elements of visual texts work together.	Teachers asked students about the meaning of a visual text by looking closely to each element and their connections which serve as clue for its meaning.	6	27%	According to students, they were asked to identify the meaning of the text using its elements.			6	15%
	Teachers asked them to share their thoughts/opinions	Teachers asked students to share their ideas about the visual text.	3	14%	Students were asked to share their ideas as to the meaning of visual texts	7	37%	10	24%
Asking students to self-reflect	Teachers gave reinforcement activity or assignment	Teachers gave activities that reinforce the knowledge and skills of students.	2	9%	Students accounted that they were given activities to reinforce their learning.	2	11%	4	10%
	Teachers asked them to self-reflect.	Teachers probe students' understanding about the context of the visual text.	7	32%				7	17%
Scaffolding (Teacher uses reinforcement activity)	Teachers asked them to interpret and analyze visual texts. Teachers asked them to present their understanding through group presentation.	Teachers gave tasks of interpretation by group and asked to share their analysis to the class.	3	14%				3	7%
	Teachers asked them to use pictures, form groupings, and formulate answer.				On the students' perspectives, they brainstorm to make meaning to visual texts.	1	5%	1	3%
TOTAL			22	100%		19	100%	41	100%

(2018), Botha et al. (2019) and Vie and Dieterle (2016) similarly stressed the importance of teacher's strategy and student's interpretive strategy developed through support and scaffolding and opportunities.

Table 1c on the next page presents the third stage, Assessment Phase, which includes the following strategies frequently used by teachers in developing students' visual literacy based on the 13 statements of teacher participants and the 7 statements from the student participants which were extracted from the interviews. These are collaborative task (35%), followed by writing task (25%), while peer assessment and question and answer both have (20%).

Asking students to work in groups is an effective way to allow them to assess the visual texts that they interpret. Based on the responses of teachers and students, it can be gleaned that the concept of collaboration in visual literacy instruction is not just limited to collective endeavor among students or merely by group works. This is because in visual literacy, the context of collaboration can also be viewed in terms of the interaction of students to the environment and the visual elements found in it. Likewise, Lasley et al. (2016), Chen and Chen (2019), Wang and Vásquez (2018), Shiel and McDonald (2019), Lee (2017), and Dezuanni and Beavis (2019) asserted that it is important for students to work collaboratively when obtaining and organizing information and interpreting and manipulating a set of ideas to comprehend and identify relevant data.

Table 1c Stage 3 of the Teaching Strategies to Develop Students' Visual Literacy								
Themes	Activities						Total	
III Assessment Phase	Teachers	F	%	Students	F	%	F	%
Asking students to work in groups	Teachers asked students to group themselves and gave differentiated task.	7	54%				7	35%
Asking students to do writing activities	Teachers asked them to interpret visual texts in written form.	3	23%	Students were given various writing tasks to students which help them understand the visual texts better.	2	29%	5	25%
Asking students to assess their peer's works	Teachers asked them to assess their peer's visual interpretation.	2	15%	Students were encouraged to practice peer assessment where they rate and give comments to their classmates' work.	2	29%	4	20%
Asking students questions	Teachers provide them with questions.	1	8%	Students were provided guided questions for students to make meaning from visual texts.	3	42%	4	20%
TOTAL		13	100%		7	100%	20	100%

The second strategy teachers employed in assessing students' visual interpretation is asking students to do writing activities. The findings are similar to Moses and Mohamad (2019), Abdullah (2019), and Samosa et al. (2021) who posited that students' visual literacy can be developed through written activities.

Another teaching strategy in the assessment phase that teachers employ in developing students' visual literacy is asking students to assess their peer's works. In visual literacy instruction, the assessment process is not just intended for evaluative purposes. Moreover, peer assessment also serves as a potential visual literacy training for the students as they get to critically assess and analyze both their own visual works and their peers' visual presentation, which is equal to more ample sources of visual literacy knowledge. This is also true of Li and Lehman (2020), Ponce and Mayer (2014), Kistler (2014), Rosenthal and Kistler (2015), and Thompson (2012) who all claimed that peer collaboration even during assessment develops students' visual literacy.

Conclusion

Based on the key results and findings, the researcher has come up with the following conclusions: The teachers' subject for this study focused more on the literal meaning of the visual text; thus, they employed a limited number of teaching strategies that will aid the continuous development of visual literacy in the classroom. This means that teaching strategies have a big impact on how students interpret what they see, and that the stages of aesthetic development can only be reached if teachers have the knowledge and skills to teach visual literacy.

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