

Teachers' Perceptions of Using Visual Media to Teach English Vocabulary to Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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ABSTRACT

This study explored teachers' perceptions of using visual media in teaching English vocabulary to students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and the challenges encountered during its implementation. Employing a descriptive qualitative design, the study involved one English teacher at an inclusive elementary school in Indonesia. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and documentation and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that visual media helped students maintain attention, understand vocabulary more easily, and retain vocabulary more effectively. Flashcards were identified as the primary visual medium used in instruction, supported by visual schedules and picture-based worksheets. Students also showed positive responses through increased participation and engagement. However, challenges such as loss of focus, boredom, and tantrums occasionally affected the learning process. The study concludes that visual media are effective instructional supports for teaching English vocabulary to students with ASD, while their successful implementation requires teachers' flexibility in addressing students' diverse learning needs.

ABSTRAK

Studi ini mengeksplorasi persepsi guru tentang penggunaan media visual dalam pengajaran kosakata bahasa Inggris kepada siswa dengan Gangguan Spektrum Autisme (ASD) dan tantangan yang dihadapi selama implementasinya. Dengan menggunakan desain kualitatif deskriptif, studi ini melibatkan satu guru bahasa Inggris di sebuah sekolah dasar inklusif di Indonesia. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dan dokumentasi serta dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa media visual membantu siswa mempertahankan perhatian, memahami kosakata dengan lebih mudah, dan mengingat kosakata dengan lebih efektif. Kartu flash diidentifikasi sebagai media visual utama yang digunakan dalam pengajaran, didukung oleh jadwal visual dan lembar kerja berbasis gambar. Siswa juga menunjukkan respons positif melalui peningkatan partisipasi dan keterlibatan. Namun, tantangan seperti kehilangan fokus, kebosanan, dan tantrum kadang-kadang memengaruhi proses pembelajaran. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa media visual merupakan dukungan instruksional yang efektif untuk mengajarkan kosakata bahasa Inggris kepada siswa dengan ASD, sementara keberhasilan implementasinya membutuhkan fleksibilitas guru dalam menangani beragam kebutuhan belajar siswa.

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1. Introduction

Vocabulary learning is a fundamental component of English language acquisition because it forms the basis for the development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), vocabulary mastery enables learners to understand texts and express ideas effectively [1]. For students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), however, learning new vocabulary may present distinctive challenges. These challenges are often related not only to language development but also to differences in social communication, attention regulation, sensory processing, and verbal comprehension. Consequently, students with ASD require instructional approaches that are structured, visually supported, and responsive to their specific learning characteristics in order to facilitate meaningful language learning experiences.

According to the [2] approximately one in every 100 children worldwide is diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Autism Spectrum Disorder is characterized by differences in social interaction, communication, and patterns of behavior. Many students with ASD experience difficulties in understanding abstract language and maintaining attention during verbal instruction. Therefore, teachers are required to utilize appropriate teaching approaches that can facilitate language learning and vocabulary development among students with ASD.

One instructional approach that has been widely recommended for students with ASD is the use of visual media. Visual media refer to instructional materials that present information through visual representations such as pictures, images, diagrams, videos, flashcards, realia, and animations. Research suggests that visual supports can help students with ASD better understand instructions, organize information, and retain new vocabulary [3] and [4]. Visual elements provide concrete representations that reduce reliance on purely verbal explanations and facilitate vocabulary learning.

Several studies have reported that visual media contribute positively to vocabulary learning by increasing students' engagement, attention, and understanding. For students with ASD, visual supports are particularly beneficial because they align with learners' strengths in visual processing. Visual media can reduce confusion, support memory retention, and create more meaningful learning experiences [5] Therefore, visual media can function not merely as supplementary materials but as essential instructional supports for students with ASD.

The use of visual media in language instruction is supported by Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning. This theory proposes that learners process information through visual and verbal channels, and learning becomes more effective when

both channels are activated simultaneously [6] Since learners have limited cognitive capacity, instructional materials should be designed in ways that reduce unnecessary cognitive load and facilitate meaningful learning. For students with ASD, the integration of visual and verbal information may enhance comprehension because visual representations can support the processing of language input and vocabulary concepts.

Another theoretical foundation is Dual Coding Theory proposed by [7] This theory explains that information is processed through two interconnected systems: the verbal system and the visual system. Learning is enhanced when information is encoded through both systems because learners can establish multiple pathways for retrieving information. In vocabulary learning, visual representations can strengthen the connection between words and meanings, making vocabulary easier to understand and remember.

Teachers' perceptions are also important in understanding the implementation of visual media. According to [8] teachers' beliefs influence how they interpret instructional situations and make pedagogical decisions. Similarly, [9] argues that teachers' cognition plays a significant role in shaping classroom practices. In the context of teaching students with ASD, teachers' perceptions may influence decisions regarding the selection, adaptation, and implementation of visual media. Although visual media offer numerous benefits, teachers may encounter challenges when implementing them in classroom settings.

These challenges may include limited preparation time, insufficient instructional resources, lack of professional training, and difficulties in adapting visual materials to diverse student needs. Such challenges may affect the effectiveness of visual media and influence how frequently and successfully they are used during instruction. However, despite the documented benefits of visual media, its implementation in classroom practice is not always consistent with expectations. Ideally, visual media are expected to facilitate vocabulary acquisition, improve students' engagement, and support comprehension. In reality, teachers often encounter practical challenges that may hinder the successful implementation of visual supports. This condition reflects a gap between the expected effectiveness of visual media and the realities faced by teachers during classroom practice.

Furthermore, previous studies have primarily focused on students' learning outcomes and vocabulary achievement. Relatively limited attention has been given to teachers' perceptions and experiences regarding the implementation of visual media, particularly in teaching English vocabulary to students with ASD. Therefore, further investigation is needed to explore how teachers perceive the use of visual media and the challenges they encounter during its implementation. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on teachers' perceptions

and classroom experiences in using visual media to teach English vocabulary to students with ASD. Unlike previous studies that mainly examined students' learning outcomes, this study provides a more contextual understanding of how visual media are implemented in authentic classroom settings and highlights the practical challenges teachers face during instruction. Based on the discussion above, this study aims to explore teachers' perceptions of using visual media in teaching English vocabulary to students with ASD and to examine the challenges they encounter during its implementation. Therefore, this study addresses the following research questions: (1) How do teachers perceive the use of visual media in teaching English vocabulary to students with ASD? and (2) What challenges do teachers encounter in implementing visual media in vocabulary instruction for students with ASD?

2. Research Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of teachers' perceptions of the use of visual media in teaching English vocabulary to students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). A qualitative approach was chosen because the study focused specifically on teachers' perceptions regarding the use of visual media in vocabulary instruction for students with ASD. Teachers' perceptions were viewed as subjective constructs shaped by their professional knowledge and classroom context. In line with the view that qualitative research seeks to explore and interpret meanings constructed by participants within specific contexts [10] a descriptive design was applied to portray the phenomenon as it naturally occurred, without manipulating variables or quantitatively measuring students' learning outcomes.

The participant of this study was one English teacher who taught students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) at the elementary school level in an inclusive school in Indonesia. The participant was selected through purposive sampling, based on the criterion that the teacher had direct experience in using visual media to teach English vocabulary to students with ASD. This study did not aim to generalize findings to a wider population. Instead, it sought to obtain an in-depth understanding of the teacher's perceptions, instructional practices, and challenges encountered within a specific and authentic classroom context [11].

The data for this study were collected through semi-structured interviews and documentation. Semi-structured interviews were used as the primary method of data collection because they allowed the researcher to explore the participant's perceptions and experiences in depth while maintaining flexibility during the interview process. The interview questions focused on teachers' perceptions of using visual media in teaching English vocabulary to students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and the challenges encountered during its implementation. Documentation was used as supporting data to complement and

strengthen the interview findings. The documentation included teaching materials, visual media resources, lesson-related documents, and other relevant instructional materials used by the teacher. These documents provided additional information regarding the implementation of visual media in vocabulary instruction and helped support the interpretation of the interview data [12].

The instruments consisted of a semi-structured interview guide and a documentation checklist. The interview guide was developed based on the research objectives and relevant literature related to teachers' perceptions, visual media, and English vocabulary instruction for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The questions were organized into several sections addressing teachers' perceptions, instructional implementation, and challenges encountered in the use of visual media. The documentation checklist was used to identify and record relevant instructional materials and visual media utilized by the teacher. This instrument helped ensure that the collected documentation remained aligned with the focus of the study and supported the analysis of the interview findings.

The data were analyzed using Thematic Analysis proposed by [13]. The analysis began with familiarization, in which the researcher repeatedly read the interview transcripts and reviewed the collected documents to gain a comprehensive understanding of the data. The researcher then identified meaningful units of information and assigned initial codes. Related codes were subsequently grouped into broader categories, which were further organized into potential themes. Finally, the themes were reviewed, refined, and interpreted to provide a comprehensive understanding of teachers' perceptions and challenges in using visual media to teach English vocabulary to students with ASD. Documentation data were used to support and clarify the themes generated from the interview findings.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, this study applied the criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was enhanced through methodological triangulation by comparing information obtained from interviews and supporting documentation. Transferability was achieved by providing detailed descriptions of the research context and participant characteristics. Dependability was ensured through clear documentation of the research procedures and data analysis process. Confirmability was maintained by preserving an audit trail and grounding interpretations in the collected data.

3. Result and Discussion

Results

This study explored teachers' perceptions of the use of visual media in teaching English vocabulary to students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The findings were obtained through semi-structured interviews and documentation analysis

in the form of lesson plans. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, three major themes emerged from the data: teachers' positive perceptions of visual media, the implementation of visual media in vocabulary instruction, and challenges in implementing visual media.

Table 1. Themes, Subthemes, and Summary of Findings from Interview Data

Theme	Subtheme	Summary of Findings
Teachers' Positive Perceptions of Visual Media	Enhancing Students' Attention	Visual media help students maintain attention during learning activities.
	Supporting Vocabulary Comprehension	Visual representations facilitate vocabulary understanding. Students remember vocabulary more effectively through visual supports.
	Improving Vocabulary Retention	
Implementation of Visual Media in Vocabulary Instruction	Use of Flashcards	Flashcards were identified as the primary visual medium used in vocabulary instruction.
	Vocabulary Presentation	Vocabulary was introduced through flashcards followed by pronunciation practice.
	Use of Visual Schedules	
	Positive Student Responses	Visual

		schedules helped students understand classroom routines and learning sequences. Students showed enthusiasm and active participation during learning activities.
Challenges in Implementing Visual Media	Loss of Focus Boredom During Learning Activities Behavioral Challenges Instructional Adaptation	Students occasionally lost attention during lessons. Some students became bored and less engaged in learning tasks. Tantrums and emotional conditions sometimes disrupted instruction. Teachers adjusted strategies according to students' needs and classroom situations.

Table 2. Documentation Findings from the Lesson Plan

Aspect	Findings
Topic	Farm Animals
Learning Media	Flashcards, Visual Schedules, Picture-Based

	Worksheets
Vocabulary Items	Cat, Cow, Goat, Turkey, Donkey, Rooster, Sheep, Chicken, Horse, Rabbit, Dog, Duck
Learning Activities	Observing flashcards, vocabulary repetition, picture identification, and matching activities
Assessment	Oral assessment and worksheet-based assessment
Learning Objective	Students recognize and pronounce farm animal vocabulary correctly

Teachers' Positive Perceptions of Visual Media

The findings revealed that the participant held positive perceptions regarding the use of visual media in teaching English vocabulary to students with ASD. According to the teacher, visual media are important because students tend to respond more positively to visual information than to verbal explanations alone. The participant stated that visual media are important because students are more interested in pictures and materials that can be seen directly. The teacher further explained that visual media facilitate vocabulary learning by providing concrete representations of word meanings. Through pictures and visual illustrations, students are able to connect vocabulary items with their meanings more easily, which helps them understand new vocabulary more effectively.

The participant also reported that students can understand and remember vocabulary more easily when pictures or flashcards are used during instruction. In addition, visual media were perceived as effective in maintaining students' attention during classroom instruction. The teacher reported that students often experience difficulties sustaining focus during lessons; however, visual supports help them remain engaged in learning activities. Furthermore, visual media contribute to vocabulary retention by enabling students to remember words more effectively over time. These findings indicate that visual media support students' attention, facilitate vocabulary comprehension, and assist vocabulary learning among students with ASD.

Implementation of Visual Media in Vocabulary Instruction

The findings showed that flashcards were the primary visual media used by the teacher in teaching English vocabulary to students with ASD. According to the participant, flashcards were practical, easy to prepare, and effective in attracting students' attention. Vocabulary instruction was typically conducted by showing pictures, pronouncing the vocabulary items, and encouraging students to repeat the words. Through this process, students were able to connect visual representations with spoken language, which supported vocabulary

comprehension and retention. In addition to flashcards, visual schedules were used to help students understand classroom routines and learning sequences. The teacher emphasized that visual media were adapted to students' individual characteristics and learning needs.

Furthermore, students showed enthusiasm and active participation when visual materials were introduced, indicating that visual media helped create a more engaging learning environment. The documentation findings supported the interview results. The lesson plan showed that flashcards, visual schedules, and picture-based worksheets were integrated into vocabulary learning activities, including vocabulary repetition, picture identification, and matching tasks. These findings demonstrate that visual media were systematically incorporated into the instructional process as essential supports for vocabulary learning.

Challenges in Implementing Visual Media

Although the participant expressed positive views regarding the use of visual media, several challenges emerged during classroom implementation. The teacher reported that the primary difficulties were not related to the visual media themselves but rather to students' behavioral and emotional conditions. According to the participant, students occasionally became bored, lost focus, or experienced tantrums during learning activities. Furthermore, students demonstrated varying levels of concentration, participation, and learning readiness depending on their emotional condition, making it challenging to sustain their attention throughout the lesson.

These situations sometimes disrupted the learning process and required additional efforts from the teacher to maintain engagement. To address these challenges, the participant employed various strategies, such as redirecting students' attention, providing alternative activities, and adapting instructional approaches according to students' individual needs. These findings suggest that the successful implementation of visual media depends not only on the instructional materials used but also on the teacher's ability to manage classroom situations and respond flexibly to students' diverse characteristics and learning needs.

Teachers' Perceptions of Using Visual Media to Teach English Vocabulary to Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder

The findings of this study indicate that visual media play an important role in supporting English vocabulary learning among students with ASD. The teacher perceived visual media as beneficial because they help students maintain attention, understand vocabulary more easily, and retain vocabulary more effectively. This may be because visual representations provide concrete and meaningful input that is easier for students with ASD to process than abstract verbal explanations. These results are consistent with [14] and [15] who reported that visual media contribute positively to vocabulary learning by increasing

students' engagement and understanding. Similar observations were reported by [16] and [17] who emphasized the effectiveness of visual supports in facilitating learning among students with ASD.

The present study also supports [6] Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning, which suggests that learning becomes more effective when information is presented through both visual and verbal channels. In this study, vocabulary instruction involved the use of flashcards accompanied by verbal explanations and pronunciation practice. Through this approach, students received information through multiple channels, enabling them to process vocabulary more effectively. [18] Dual Coding Theory explains that information is more easily remembered when it is encoded through both visual and verbal systems. The combination of pictures and spoken vocabulary allowed students to establish stronger associations between words and meanings, thereby supporting vocabulary retention. This interpretation is further supported by [1], [19], and [20] who highlighted the importance of meaningful and repeated exposure to vocabulary in language learning.

A notable finding of this study concerns the prominent role of flashcards as the primary visual support used during instruction. The teacher identified flashcards as the most effective visual medium for introducing and reinforcing vocabulary because they were practical, accessible, and capable of attracting students' attention. The frequent use of flashcards suggests that visual supports can serve as effective tools for simplifying vocabulary instruction and providing concrete representations of word meanings. This aligns with [21] and [22] who highlighted the importance of visual supports in facilitating learning and communication among students with ASD. Similarly, [23] argued that visual supports provide structure, clarity, and predictability, enabling students with ASD to participate more effectively in classroom activities.

The documentation findings further strengthened the interview results. The lesson plan demonstrated that flashcards, visual schedules, and picture-based worksheets were systematically integrated into vocabulary instruction. The use of visual media throughout different stages of learning indicates that visual supports functioned as essential instructional tools rather than supplementary resources. A comparable conclusion was reported by [24] who identified visual supports as evidence-based practices that enhance participation, communication, and learning outcomes among students with ASD. Another important aspect emerging from the findings relates to students' positive responses toward visual media. The teacher observed that students were more enthusiastic and actively involved when visual materials were used during instruction. Increased participation may occur because visual materials make learning activities more concrete, engaging, and easier to understand.

These observations support previous studies suggesting that visual supports promote motivation, participation, and engagement among learners with special educational needs [25] and [26].

Despite the positive benefits of visual media, several challenges were identified during classroom implementation. Interestingly, the challenges were not associated with the visual media themselves but rather with students' behavioral and emotional conditions. Students occasionally lost focus, became bored, or experienced tantrums during classroom activities, which sometimes disrupted the learning process. Similar issues were noted by [27] who reported that students with ASD often experience difficulties related to attention, engagement, and adaptation within educational settings.

In addition, [28] emphasized that educational interventions for students with ASD should be individualized because learners demonstrate diverse behavioral and learning characteristics. An interesting finding of this study is that the challenges identified were different from those commonly reported in previous studies. Earlier research frequently highlighted limited resources, insufficient preparation time, and lack of professional training as barriers to implementing visual media in educational settings. However, the present study found that the primary challenges were related to students' behavioral and emotional conditions, including loss of focus, boredom, and tantrums. This finding suggests that classroom management and instructional adaptation may play a more significant role than material availability in the successful implementation of visual media for students with ASD.

Therefore, teachers' ability to respond flexibly to students' needs becomes an essential factor in ensuring effective vocabulary instruction. The findings also highlight the importance of teachers' pedagogical flexibility when teaching students with ASD. Effective implementation of visual media requires teachers to continuously adapt instructional strategies according to students' individual characteristics and learning needs. The teacher's efforts to modify instructional approaches, redirect students' attention, and provide alternative learning activities demonstrate the significance of responsive teaching practices in inclusive classrooms. This perspective is consistent with [16] and [23] who emphasized that inclusive educational practices require instructional adaptation and responsiveness to accommodate diverse learners. Furthermore, the teacher's actions reflect the important role of teacher beliefs and professional judgment in classroom decision-making [29] and [7].

Unlike many previous studies that focused primarily on students' vocabulary achievement, this study specifically explored teachers' perceptions and classroom experiences regarding the use of visual media in teaching English vocabulary to students with ASD. The findings provide a contextual understanding of how visual media are implemented in authentic

classroom settings and reveal that behavioral factors, rather than instructional resources, constitute the primary challenge in practice. Therefore, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on inclusive English language teaching by highlighting teachers' perspectives and practical experiences in supporting vocabulary learning among students with ASD.

4. Conclusion

This study explored teachers' perceptions of using visual media in teaching English vocabulary to students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and the challenges encountered during its implementation. The findings revealed that the teacher perceived visual media positively because they helped students maintain attention, understand vocabulary more easily, and retain vocabulary more effectively. Visual media, particularly flashcards, visual schedules, and picture-based worksheets, were integrated into classroom instruction and contributed to creating a more engaging learning environment. Students also demonstrated positive responses through increased participation and enthusiasm during learning activities. The study further found that the main challenges were not related to the visual media themselves but rather to students' behavioral and emotional conditions, such as loss of focus, boredom, and tantrums. To address these challenges, the teacher adapted instructional strategies according to students' individual needs and classroom situations. These findings suggest that the effectiveness of visual media depends not only on the materials used but also on teachers' ability to implement flexible and responsive teaching practices.

This study contributes to the understanding of how visual media are used in authentic classroom settings for students with ASD by highlighting teachers' perspectives and practical experiences. The findings support the importance of visual media as instructional tools that facilitate vocabulary learning and enhance student engagement in inclusive and special education contexts. However, this study involved only one participant from a single educational setting. Therefore, future studies are recommended to involve more participants from different schools and educational contexts to obtain broader perspectives regarding the use of visual media for students with ASD. Future researchers may also investigate the effectiveness of different types of visual media or examine students' perspectives and learning outcomes to enrich the existing literature. In addition, teachers are encouraged to continue utilizing and adapting visual media according to students' individual characteristics and learning needs in order to create more meaningful and effective vocabulary learning experiences.

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