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Enhancing the first- year English majored Students' Speaking Participation through Visual Aids: A Case Study at a University

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Research Article

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Abstract

Speaking competence is a key component of communicative competence in English language learning, yet many EFL learners in Vietnam continue to struggle with oral participation. This study investigates the use of visual aids to enhance students' motivation and participation in speaking lessons at a university. The research adopted a mixed-methods design combining classroom observation, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews with both teachers and students. Data were analyzed to determine how different types of visual materials, such as pictures, videos, charts, and PowerPoint slides, affect learners' confidence, engagement, and communicative performance. The findings revealed that visual aids significantly increased students' attention, motivation, and willingness to speak. Teachers reported that visuals helped contextualize topics, provided cues for vocabulary use, and reduced learners' anxiety during speaking tasks. The study concludes that visual aids are an effective pedagogical tool for promoting communicative participation in EFL contexts. Pedagogical implications for EFL instructors and curriculum designers are discussed, highlighting the importance of integrating visual media into speaking activities to foster learner-centered and interactive classrooms.

1. INTRODUCTION

English-speaking skills play a central role in communication and language learning, as they allow learners to express ideas, share opinions, and interact effectively in social and academic contexts. In the Vietnamese EFL classroom, however, developing students' speaking competence remains a persistent challenge. Although students often acquire a solid foundation in grammar and vocabulary, many still hesitate to speak due to low confidence, fear of making mistakes, and limited exposure to authentic communication (Richards & Renandya, 2002). This gap between linguistic knowledge and communicative ability has drawn growing attention among language educators and researchers who seek effective strategies to promote active student participation.

In recent years, the use of visual aids, including images, videos, slides, and real-life objects, has become an increasingly popular pedagogical approach in EFL instruction. Visuals can stimulate interest, contextualize meaning, and support learners in constructing and expressing ideas (Mai, 2020). Research suggests that visual materials not only improve comprehension and memory but also enhance motivation and reduce speaking anxiety (Chen et al., 2022). By providing visual context, teachers can encourage students to engage more actively in discussions and express themselves with greater ease.

At a given University, English-speaking courses aim to prepare students for real-world communication in professional settings. However, classroom observations reveal that many learners remain passive participants. Teachers often rely heavily on textbook-based activities, while students demonstrate minimal engagement during speaking tasks. These issues underscore the need for innovative, learner-centered techniques that encourage active involvement. Integrating visual aids may offer a practical solution to bridge the gap between knowledge and oral communication.

The present study, therefore, explores how visual aids influence students' motivation and participation in speaking activities at the university. Specifically, it examines teachers' and students' perceptions of visual aid use and evaluates the impact of visuals on classroom interaction. The study is guided by three key objectives:

- To identify the current challenges that students face in English-speaking lessons.
- To investigate teachers' and students' attitudes toward the use of visual aids in speaking activities.
- To assess the extent to which visual aids enhance students' motivation and participation during speaking lessons.

Through this investigation, the study seeks to contribute practical insights into how visual aids can be effectively utilized to support communicative teaching in EFL contexts. By highlighting both pedagogical benefits and classroom challenges, the research aims to inform language educators, curriculum designers, and teacher trainers who are striving to create more interactive and engaging English-speaking environments in Vietnam and similar educational settings.

The significance of speaking ability in the English language learning cannot be overstated. In both academic and professional contexts, the ability to communicate ideas clearly and confidently is often considered the ultimate goal of language acquisition (Namaziandost et al., 2022). However, many Vietnamese learners of English are accustomed to traditional teaching methods that emphasize grammar translation and written exercises, which leave limited room for oral practice (Pham, 2018). As a result, students may possess theoretical knowledge of English but struggle to use it effectively in real communicative situations.

Moreover, psychological factors such as anxiety, low self-esteem, and fear of negative evaluation have been found to inhibit students' willingness to speak (Sari, 2022). The affective dimension of language learning plays a crucial role in determining students' participation, particularly in cultures where public performance is often associated with the risk of "losing face." These barriers are compounded by large class sizes, exam-oriented curricula, and limited access to authentic speaking environments (Alqarni, 2022).

To overcome these challenges, contemporary communicative language teaching (CLT) approaches advocate the integration of multimodal resources that engage learners cognitively and emotionally (Salam & Luksfinanto, 2024). Visual aids are one such resource that can make abstract concepts more concrete and meaningful. When students are exposed to visual stimuli such as pictures depicting real-life contexts or short video clips illustrating cultural scenarios, they are more likely to generate ideas, activate prior knowledge, and respond spontaneously. This aligns with Dual Coding Theory (Mir et al., 2023), which posits that visual and verbal inputs processed together enhance comprehension and recall.

In addition, visuals can facilitate interaction among students by serving as common reference points for discussion. For example, a picture story sequence can prompt collaborative storytelling, while a short video clip can spark debate and critical thinking (Hwang et al., 2023). By reducing the cognitive load of

language production, visual aids let learners focus more on fluency and meaning-making instead of grammatical accuracy only.

Given the pedagogical promise of visual aids, this study aims to systematically examine their impact within the Vietnamese EFL context. While previous studies have explored visual media in listening or vocabulary lessons (Hu & Deng, 2019; Mai, 2020), research on their application to speaking participation remains relatively scarce especially in vocational settings where communication skills are highly valued. This study addresses this gap by exploring how visual aids can enhance learners' engagement, confidence, and willingness to communicate during English speaking lessons at Sai Gon University. Thus, the study is novel as it addresses both academic and professional contexts regarding use of visual aids in ensuring learning effectiveness in first year students which had not been explored previously.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Speaking Skill in EFL Contexts

Speaking is widely recognized as the most complex and demanding of the four language skills (Alqarni, 2022). It involves not only linguistic competence but also pragmatic, sociolinguistic, and strategic abilities that enable effective oral communication (Sari, 2022). In EFL contexts such as Vietnam, the development of speaking proficiency is particularly challenging because learners have limited exposure to English outside the classroom. According to Nunan (1999), speaking is a productive skill that requires real-time processing of ideas, grammatical forms, and pronunciation under communicative pressure.

Vietnamese students often struggle to express themselves fluently due to a lack of vocabulary, pronunciation difficulties, and limited opportunities to use English in authentic contexts (Nguyen, 2015). Traditional language teaching in Vietnam has long emphasized grammatical accuracy and exam preparation rather than oral fluency (Pham, 2018). Consequently, learners frequently demonstrate "passive competence"; they understand English but hesitate to speak it. This imbalance reflects what Richards (2008) calls the "input-output gap," where students receive sufficient linguistic input but produce minimal spoken output.

Furthermore, classroom conditions such as large class sizes and teacher-centered instruction can further limit learners' opportunities to practice speaking (Le, 2017). In these environments, creating supportive and engaging conditions that promote meaningful interaction is essential for language development. Therefore, teachers must employ creative pedagogical strategies to help students overcome linguistic and psychological barriers to speaking.

2.2 Motivation and Participation in Speaking Activities

Motivation is a critical factor influencing learners' willingness to communicate and their overall success in acquiring a second language. Gardner (1985) distinguished between instrumental motivation, learning for practical benefits, and integrative motivation, learning to connect with the target language

community. In EFL contexts, instrumental motivation often dominates, as students view English proficiency as a requirement for employment or academic advancement (Dörnyei, 2001). However, such motivation alone may not sustain active classroom participation unless learners also experience intrinsic enjoyment and personal relevance in speaking tasks.

Research has shown that learners' engagement increases when classroom activities are interactive, meaningful, and connected to real-life situations (Ushioda, 2011). Conversely, monotonous drills and excessive teacher talk can lower students' interest and reduce opportunities for authentic communication. Anxiety and fear of making mistakes also negatively affect students' participation (Liu & Jackson, 2008). In Vietnam, cultural norms emphasizing respect for authority and avoidance of public error further contribute to students' reluctance to speak (Nguyen & Boers, 2019).

To address these affective barriers, teachers are encouraged to create supportive, non-threatening learning environments that foster confidence and peer collaboration (Brown, 2007). Visual aids, as motivational tools, have been shown to play an important role in stimulating learners' curiosity, providing contextual clues, and helping them express ideas more freely (Wright, 2010).

2.3 The Role of Visual Aids in Language Teaching

Visual aids encompass a wide range of materials, pictures, flashcards, videos, maps, charts, and multimedia slides—that support comprehension and language production (Harmer, 2001). These resources provide multisensory input that complements verbal explanations and caters to different learning preferences (Gilakjani, 2012). According to Dale's (1969) Cone of Experience, visual experiences bridge the gap between abstract concepts and concrete understanding by allowing learners to "see" meaning rather than merely hear it.

Empirical evidence supports the effectiveness of visual aids in improving vocabulary retention, comprehension, and fluency (Canning-Wilson, 2001; Wright, 2010). Visuals provide contextual clues that help learners generate ideas, structure discourse, and produce more meaningful utterances. They can also serve as communicative prompts for pair work, role play, and storytelling, thereby increasing opportunities for authentic oral interaction (Gebhard, 2006). Paivio's (1991) Dual Coding Theory further explains that information processed through both verbal and visual channels is more easily stored and retrieved, enhancing comprehension and memory.

Beyond cognitive benefits, visual aids contribute significantly to affective and motivational outcomes. Krashen (1982) argues that reducing learners' anxiety can facilitate language acquisition; visuals achieve this by offering cues that compensate for lexical or grammatical gaps, thereby increasing learners' sense of competence. Teachers report that visual-rich lessons not only sustain attention but also make speaking practice more enjoyable (Mai, 2020).

In the digital era, technological tools such as online videos, infographics, and interactive slides have expanded opportunities for visual-based instruction and communicative learning (Hu & Deng, 2019). However, as Cakir (2006) cautions, the pedagogical impact of visuals depends on how they are selected

and integrated. Overuse or poor alignment with learning goals can distract students or reduce genuine communication. Effective use of visuals, therefore, requires strategic integration that balances aesthetic appeal with pedagogical intent, ensuring that images and media support authentic language use.

2.4 Previous Studies on Visual Aids in EFL Speaking Instruction

Several studies have examined the use of visual aids to improve speaking skills in various EFL contexts. Canning-Wilson (2001) found that video-based activities increased learners' motivation and provided authentic language input that stimulated spontaneous speech. Similarly, Arslan (2014) reported that using pictures and PowerPoint slides as prompts encouraged students to speak more confidently and fluently. In Vietnam, Tran (2017) observed that visuals helped students overcome hesitation and participate more actively in pair and group discussions.

Despite these positive findings, most previous studies have focused on general language teaching rather than vocational or technical education contexts. There remains a need to explore how visual aids function in institutions like Sai Gon University, where English communication skills are essential for career preparation. The present study aims to fill this gap by analyzing both teachers' and students' perspectives on visual aid use in speaking lessons, as well as its impact on classroom participation and motivation.

This study is based on an integrated theoretical framework that draws on Dual Coding Theory (Paivio, 1991), and the Affective Filter Hypothesis (Krashen, 1982), for explaining how visual aids affect speaking participation of learners in EFL contexts. The framework tends to conceptualize the visual aids like pictures, charts, videos, and PowerPoint slides as independent variables that directly and indirectly have an impact on the speaking participation of the students (dependent variable). In this study, speaking participation is operationalized to be the frequency of students' verbal contribution, willingness to communicate, and engagement in pair or even group speaking activities.

A core mediating mechanism in this link is explained by Dual Coding Theory, postulating that information processed by both visual and verbal channels improves comprehension, retention in memory, and idea generation (Paivio, 1991). In the case of EFL speaking, visual aids give concrete representations regarding abstract linguistic content, which enables learners to access the vocabulary easily and organize their thoughts before speaking (Arslan, 2014). Thus, the learners face poor cognitive load in the language production, which allows them to focus more on fluency and communicative meaning instead of solely on grammatical accuracy.

Referring to the cognitive support, the framework incorporated the Affective Filter Hypothesis, emphasizing the role of emotional variables like anxiety, confidence, and motivation in language acquisition (Krashen, 1982). Furthermore, visual aids are considered to lower learners’ affective filter with the creation of a supportive and less intimidating learning environment. If the students are given the visual prompts, they tend to feel less pressure for producing the language spontaneously while not

having any support, which reduces fear of making mistakes and enhances their willingness to take part in speaking activities.

Moreover, motivation and confidence are the moderating variables that influenced the strength of the relationship between the visual aids and speaking participation. Explicitly, visual aids are expected to increase the intrinsic motivation of learners, including self-confidence, which in turn intensifies their engagement in the communicative tasks. The students feeling more motivated and confident are probably at taking risks, initiate conversations, and sustain the interaction in English. Depending upon this framework, the study proposed that the use of visual aids in speaking lessons improves the participation of students both directly with the provision of linguistic and contextual support, and indirectly by increasing the level of motivation and decreasing anxiety. The dual pathway highlighted the combined cognitive and affective benefits of visual materials in the EFL speaking instruction.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods design that combined both quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore the impact of visual aids on students' participation in English-speaking classes. The mixed-methods approach was selected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how visual materials influence learning behavior and motivation (Creswell, 2012). Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires distributed to students, while qualitative data were obtained from semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. This triangulation of data sources ensured validity and reliability by allowing for cross-verification of results.

The study focused on identifying teachers' and students' perceptions of visual aid use and evaluating its effects on learners' motivation, confidence, and oral participation. The research was descriptive in nature, aiming to interpret existing classroom practices and determine how visual aids can be effectively implemented to enhance communicative learning.

3.2 Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at Sai Gon University, an institution in Ho Chi Minh City offering vocational and language training programs. The college provides English courses designed to improve students' communication skills for both academic and professional purposes. Participants included both teachers and students enrolled in English-speaking courses during the second semester of the 2024–2025 academic year. A total of 80 students and 10 English teachers participated voluntarily. The student group consisted mainly of first- and second-year learners aged between 18 and 22, representing a range of English proficiency levels (from elementary to pre-intermediate). The teacher participants were experienced EFL instructors with teaching experience ranging from 3 to 10 years. The demographic details of participants are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1
Participant demographics

Group	Number	Gender	Experience/Level
Teachers	10	6 female, 4 male	3–10 years teaching experience
Students	80	54 female, 26 male	Pre-intermediate

3.3 Research Instruments

Three main instruments were used to collect data: questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations.

- Questionnaires: Two sets of questionnaires were developed, one for teachers and one for students. The student questionnaire consisted of 20 items measuring learners' attitudes toward speaking, frequency of visual aid exposure, and perceived motivational impact. The teacher questionnaire included 15 items focusing on pedagogical practices, benefits, and challenges of using visuals in speaking instruction. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree).
- Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five teachers and ten students selected randomly from the questionnaire respondents. The interviews aimed to gather deeper insights into participants' experiences with visual aids, classroom engagement, and perceptions of their usefulness in improving speaking skills.
- Classroom Observations: Three English-speaking classes were observed over four weeks. The researcher took detailed field notes regarding student participation, teacher strategies, and types of visual materials employed during lessons. Observation data were used to support and interpret questionnaire and interview findings.

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

Data collection took place over six weeks. Initially, permission was obtained from the academic board and teachers to conduct the study. The researcher administered questionnaires during regular class hours to ensure high response rates. Subsequently, interviews were scheduled outside class time and recorded with participants' consent. Classroom observations were carried out unobtrusively to minimize interference with natural teaching and learning processes.

Quantitative data from questionnaires were tabulated and analyzed using descriptive statistics (percentages and mean scores). Qualitative data from interviews and observations were coded thematically to identify recurring patterns and themes related to visual aid use, student motivation, and classroom participation.

3.5 Reliability and Validity

To ensure the reliability and validity of the instruments, all questionnaires and interview questions were piloted with a small group of students and teachers before the main study. Necessary adjustments were made based on feedback to improve clarity and relevance. Triangulation among data sources—questionnaires, interviews, and observations were used to enhance credibility. Furthermore, teacher and student participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, encouraging honest and reflective responses.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval

was obtained from the administration of Sai Gon University. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were informed about the study's objectives and their right to withdraw at any time. Data were collected and reported confidentially, with all personal identifiers removed from the analysis. The researcher-maintained transparency and objectivity throughout the research process to ensure academic integrity.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Survey Results

The survey results are presented in Fig. 1. Based on the survey data on enhancing first-year English majors' speaking participation through visual aids, all items had a p-value of less than .001.

4.2 Overview

This section presents and interprets the findings of the study regarding (1) students' challenges in English speaking activities, (2) teachers' and students' perceptions of visual aid use, and (3) the influence of visual aids on students' motivation and participation. Quantitative results from the questionnaires are complemented by qualitative insights from interviews and classroom observations to provide a comprehensive understanding of how visual aids affect speaking performance at Sai Gon University.

4.3 Students’ Challenges in English Speaking

The data revealed that most students encountered several barriers when participating in English-speaking lessons. As shown in Table 2, the most frequently reported difficulties included limited vocabulary, lack of confidence, and fear of making mistakes.

Table 2
Students' Reported Challenges in Speaking English (N = 80)

Challenges	Percentage of Students Reporting
Limited vocabulary and ideas	78%
Fear of making grammatical or pronunciation mistakes	72%
Lack of confidence or anxiety when speaking	68%
Inadequate pronunciation practice	60%
Insufficient opportunities to speak in class	55%

Table 2 shows that majority of the participants faced problems in having limited vocabulary and ideas i.e. 78%. 72& of them had fear of making grammatical or pronunciation mistakes. 68% of them lacked confidence or anxiety when speaking. 60% had poor pronunciation and 55% had insufficient opportunities to speak in class.

These findings support earlier studies indicating that linguistic and affective factors often hinder EFL learners' oral participation (Liu & Jackson, 2008; Nguyen, 2015). Interviews with students further confirmed that many were afraid of "losing face" if they spoke incorrectly. One participant explained, "I know the words, but I'm scared to say something wrong in front of the class." Such remarks illustrate the strong influence of cultural and psychological barriers on speaking performance.

4.4 Teachers' and Students' Perceptions of Visual Aids

Both teachers and students expressed highly positive attitudes toward the use of visual aids in speaking lessons. Approximately 90% of teachers and 85% of students agreed or strongly agreed that visual materials made lessons more engaging and helped students understand topics better.

Teachers reported that visuals provided clear contextual cues, stimulated idea generation, and allowed students to associate vocabulary with images rather than relying solely on translation. One teacher noted, "When I show a picture or a video, students immediately start talking; they feel less nervous and more creative."

Students echoed similar sentiments, stating that visuals made lessons "more interesting," "easier to understand," and "less boring." Many participants also mentioned that pictures and videos helped them remember vocabulary and speak more fluently. These perceptions align with Harmer (2001) and Wright (2010), who emphasized that visual aids can motivate learners by presenting meaningful and concrete contexts for communication.

4.5 Effects of Visual Aids on Motivation and Participation

The integration of visual aids was found to have a significant positive impact on learners' motivation and participation. Classroom observations showed that when teachers incorporated visuals—especially

videos, flashcards, and illustrated slides—students demonstrated higher levels of engagement and interaction. In lessons without visual support, fewer than half of the students volunteered to speak; in contrast, classes using visuals saw participation rise to nearly 80%.

Table 3
Change in Student Participation Levels Before and After Visual Aid Integration

Lesson Type	Average Participation Rate
Without visual aids	45%
With visual aids	78%

Table 3 proves that there was a major change in student participation levels after visual aids that is 78% however, before it was 45%. These results confirm the motivational value of visual media. The improvement in participation can be attributed to the ability of visuals to reduce anxiety and provide non-verbal support for idea generation (Krashen, 1982; Paivio, 1991). When students could "see" what they were discussing, they were less dependent on memorized language structures and more willing to take communicative risks.

Furthermore, visual aids fostered peer collaboration and interaction. In group speaking tasks using picture prompts or short video clips, students engaged in spontaneous exchanges, negotiating meaning and sharing opinions. This observation resonates with communicative language teaching (CLT) principles, which advocate authentic interaction as a pathway to language development (Richards, 2006).

4.6 Pedagogical Implications

The findings suggest that visual aids not only enhance comprehension but also cultivate a more dynamic and learner-centered classroom environment. Teachers should consider integrating visuals systematically throughout the speaking curriculum to scaffold learners' expression and confidence. Effective use involves more than merely showing pictures or videos; it requires strategic selection, task design, and guided interaction. For example, visuals can be used to introduce new topics, model dialogues, or stimulate group discussion.

Additionally, teacher training programs should include modules on multimedia pedagogy to help educators design interactive materials that balance visual stimulation with communicative goals. The study also highlights the importance of aligning visuals with students' interests and cultural contexts to sustain engagement.

4.7 Discussion

This study projected three key objectives: (1) to identify the challenges faced by first-year English-majored students in speaking lessons, (2) to explore teachers’ and students’ attitudes toward the use of visual aids, and (3) to examine the extent to which visual aids enhance students’ motivation and

speaking participation. Thus, the discussion below presents the quantitative and qualitative findings related to these objectives and situates them within the existing EFL research.

Regarding the first objective, the results indicate that students tend to experience both linguistic and affective barriers in speaking English. Limited vocabulary. They have a fear of making mistakes and also have low confidence that was one of the most frequently reported challenges. The findings are consistent with preceding studies in Vietnamese EFL contexts, that highlights anxiety, fear of negative assessment, and inadequate speaking opportunities as main obstacles to oral participation (Daymiel et al. 2022; Liu & Jackson, 2008; Nguyen, 2015; Pham et al. 2022). Moreover, classroom observations and interview data even revealed that students, every so often, hesitated to speak in front of peers because of concerns regarding “losing face,” which shows the strong impact of cultural and psychological aspects. This ensures that improvement in speaking participation needs not just linguistic support but even pedagogical strategies which lower anxiety and develop a supportive learning environment (Du et al., 2024).

Referring to the second objective, both teachers and students showed overwhelmingly positive attitudes toward using visual aids in terms of speaking lessons. Teachers had perceived visuals to be effective tools to contextualize topics, stimulate ideas, and support vocabulary use, whereas students considered them as motivating, engaging, as well as helpful for comprehension. The perceptions link with Saida’s (2024), Harmer’s (2001) andWright’s (2010) assertions that the visual materials give meaningful contexts, which make language use highly accessible and less intimidating. Notably, the shared positive perceptions among teachers and students recommend a strong pedagogical fit for visual aids in such an instructional context and increase the likelihood of effective classroom implementation (Vu, 2025).

The third objective paid heed to the effect of visual aid on the motivation and participation of students, and the findings give strong evidence regarding their effectiveness. Quantitative data showed a considerable increase in the participation rates when visual aids were included into speaking lessons, increasing from 45% to 78%. Qualitative observations even illustrated that students were willing to initiate speech, be a part of group discussions, and express opinions when supported through pictures or videos. Such results tend to support Krashen’s (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, as visual aids seemed to reduce anxiety and increase the willingness of learners to communicate. Similarly, the findings coincide with Paivio’s (1991) Dual Coding Theory, representing that the combination of visual and verbal input facilitates the generation of ideas and spoken output.

Beyond the individual participation, visual aids were even found to promote interaction and collaboration amongst the students, which is a key principle of communicative language teaching (Richards, 2006). Visual prompts worked as shared reference points, promoting the peer negotiation of meaning and spontaneous exchanges instead of rote or memorized responses (Thong, 2023). This recommends that visual aids function not just as supplementary materials but as catalysts for communicative interaction (Sheerah & Yadav, 2022). Hence, the discussion signifies that visual aids address the notorious speaking challenges effectively by decreasing anxiety, enhancing the level of motivation, and sharing cognitive

support for language production. Though their success is dependent upon thoughtful integration linked with communicative objectives. When strategically used, visual aids can help transform traditionally passive speaking classrooms into even more interactive, learner-centered environments, predominantly in Vietnamese EFL higher education contexts.

5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Summary of Findings

This study investigated the use of visual aids to enhance students' motivation and participation in English speaking lessons at Sai Gon University. The study used mixed-methods design involving questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations. The results proved that visual materials such as pictures, videos, and PowerPoint slides significantly improved learners' engagement, confidence, and willingness to speak. Both teachers and students reported positive attitudes toward visual aid use, recognizing its potential to make lessons more interactive and meaningful.

The findings demonstrated that visual aids help learners overcome common barriers to speaking, such as limited vocabulary, low confidence, and fear of making mistakes. They also fostered peer collaboration and spontaneous communication, aligning with communicative language teaching principles. The study thus confirms that integrating visual materials into speaking instruction can bridge the gap between linguistic knowledge and communicative performance in EFL contexts.

5.2 Pedagogical Implications

The results of this study carry several implications for EFL teaching and curriculum development. First, teachers should incorporate visual aids strategically throughout the speaking curriculum to motivate learners and contextualize language use. Visual materials should not merely serve as decorative tools but as integral components of communicative tasks that stimulate discussion and idea generation. For example, teachers can use video clips to model conversations, images to prompt storytelling, or infographics to introduce real-world issues for debate.

Second, teacher training programs should include instruction on the effective design and use of multimedia and visual materials. Educators need to understand how to balance visual stimulation with language learning goals to ensure that visuals support rather than distract from communication. Third, institutions should invest in technology and resources that enable teachers to create and adapt visual content appropriate for students' linguistic levels and cultural backgrounds.

5.3 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

While the study provides valuable insights, several limitations should be acknowledged. The research was limited to a single institution, which may affect the generalizability of the results. The sample size, though adequate for a case study, could be expanded in future research to include different types of institutions or regions in Vietnam. Additionally, the study focused primarily on speaking skills; future

investigations could examine the impact of visual aids on other language competencies, such as listening or writing. Longitudinal studies might also explore how sustained exposure to visual-rich instruction influences language proficiency over time.

5.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this study affirm that visual aids are a powerful pedagogical tool for enhancing EFL learners' speaking motivation, engagement, and communicative competence. By providing visual context, stimulating interest, and reducing anxiety, visuals help transform traditionally passive classrooms into dynamic, learner-centered environments that encourage authentic communication. The integration of visual stimuli such as pictures, videos, and infographics supports learners in developing both linguistic and paralinguistic skills, facilitating not only fluency but also confidence in oral expression. For Vietnamese EFL learners, who frequently encounter linguistic, cultural, and affective barriers to speaking, visual aids serve as an effective scaffold for overcoming these challenges. The use of images and multimedia prompts can help students activate prior knowledge, generate vocabulary, and express ideas more freely. Moreover, visuals act as shared frames of reference that promote peer interaction, collaborative learning, and negotiation of meaning, all essential processes in communicative language teaching.

Abbreviations

EFL
English as a Foreign Language
CLT
Communicative Language Teaching
IRB
Institutional Review Board
SGU
Sai Gon University

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of Sai Gon University, Vietnam (Approval No.: SGU-ELT-2024-017). All procedures involving human participants were conducted in accordance with institutional ethical standards. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection.

Consent for publication

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Author Contribution

Pham Ngoc Diem was solely responsible for the conception and design of the study, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of results, and the writing of the manuscript.

Data Availability

The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are not publicly available due to ethical considerations and participant confidentiality but are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Figures

Binomial Test

Variable	Level	Counts	Total	Proportion	p	95% CI for Proportion Lower	Upper
item1 agree	0	4	50	0.080	< .001	0.022	0.192
	1	46	50	0.920	< .001	0.808	0.978
item2 agree	0	3	50	0.060	< .001	0.013	0.165
	1	47	50	0.940	< .001	0.835	0.987
item3 agree	1	50	50	1.000	< .001	0.929	1.000
item4 agree	1	50	50	1.000	< .001	0.929	1.000
item5 agree	0	5	50	0.100	< .001	0.033	0.218
	1	45	50	0.900	< .001	0.782	0.967
item6 agree	0	10	50	0.200	< .001	0.100	0.337
	1	40	50	0.800	< .001	0.663	0.900

Note. Proportions tested against value: 0.5.

Figure 1

Survey results showing students' responses regarding the effectiveness of visual aids in enhancing speaking participation.

Supplementary Files

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- Appendix.docx