

# Study on the Utilization of Pictures in Vocabulary Instruction for International Chinese Language Education

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**Abstract:** Vocabulary is the fundamental component of discourse, and its teaching effectiveness will directly impact the construction of learners' Chinese language learning system. In order to enhance the effectiveness of vocabulary teaching, international Chinese teachers actively explore various teaching methods. Among them, pictures are considered an important and effective teaching tools that has been widely adopted and applied. Using pictures to assist in vocabulary teaching can enhance learners' understanding and retention of vocabulary. This paper delves into the advantages and potential issues of using pictures in vocabulary teaching. It also present specific opinions and suggestions, aiming at providing some references for international Chinese teachers in vocabulary teaching.

**Keywords:** Pictures; International Chinese Education; Vocabulary Instruction.

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## 1. Introduction

With the rapid development of network media, vision has become the primary channel for us to access information. Colorful pictures attract people's attention better than plain text. In the field of teaching, pictures are regarded as the carriers of knowledge. They can not only quickly transmit information and make it more vivid, but also stimulate learners' enthusiasm and improve the learning effect[4]. In recent years, pictures have gained popularity among the majority of international Chinese teachers due to their numerous features. Particularly in vocabulary teaching, pictures have become the preferred teaching method for many educators. Teachers are constantly exploring and thinking about how to use pictures to assist in vocabulary teaching in order to enhance the quality of instruction during lessons.

## 2. Utilization of Images in Teaching International Chinese Vocabulary

The goal of international Chinese education is to train learners to quickly master and use Chinese for communication. However, for foreign students, achieving this goal is not easy. Even though foreign students live and study in China, they still primarily use their native language. The daily communication objects mainly focus on domestic students or students from other countries who communicate in English. Even when they attempt to communicate in Chinese, they sometimes experience a phenomenon of "forgetting words" or resort to using English interlanguage to substitute for Chinese words. This lack of language practice hinders learners from fully understanding and effectively applying vocabulary beyond a theoretical level, making it challenging to use it flexibly in real-life communication. Therefore, when teaching Chinese vocabulary to international students, teachers typically use pictures to help explain the vocabulary. The aim is to create a situation using pictures, so that learners can comprehend vocabulary within the context. To create a diverse context for learners, it is beneficial to construct scenes that closely resemble real life. Increasing the

number of vocabulary exercise can enrich the expression of teaching content, allowing students to intuitively grasp the meaning of words and deepen their understanding of vocabulary.

## 3. Challenges of Using Pictures in International Chinese Vocabulary Instruction

Pictures are widely used in vocabulary teaching, especially in international Chinese vocabulary instruction. However, in actual teaching, picture-assisted vocabulary instruction has also revealed some issues, impacted its supportive teaching effectiveness, and even disrupting the teaching process. In the teaching of Chinese vocabulary to international students, there are several issues, such as the improper selection, excessive accumulation, and inadequate utilization of pictures by teachers. These problems can negatively impact students' learning outcomes.

### 3.1. Improper Picture Selection

Although most international Chinese teachers tend to use pictures as the primary teaching method for vocabulary instruction, there are indeed numerous challenges to address in the selection of appropriate images. Under normal circumstances, the main way for teachers to obtain images for creating courseware is to search the Internet or take their own pictures using a mobile phone camera. When faced with a large number of teaching courses, teachers often have limited time. When creating courseware, the selection of images may not fully achieve the desired impact.

The first aspect is the clarity of the picture. The clarity of pictures is often overlooked by teachers. When teachers prepare course materials, clarity of images on the computer is often constrained by the picture's resolution and the classroom lighting, among other objective factors. Consequently, when projected onto the screen, the images may exhibit a noticeable blur effect. For some learners who are afraid of difficulties or have poor eyesight in Chinese learning, this issues may prevent students from clearly

observing the details of pictures, thereby affecting their accurate understanding of vocabulary. This can increase the difficulty of learning and the time required for mastery.

In addition, the content of the picture is divided into the following four points:

Firstly, the timeliness of the images. When teachers search for pictures on the Internet, they may find some that are relevant to the teaching content, but the information in these images may not be current. For example, when teaching the term "mobile phone", if the picture provided by the teacher shows a button mobile phone from a few years ago, it obviously does not match the modern popular smart touch screen mobile phone. This discrepancy may not only hinder students from grasping the precise meaning of words promptly but also impede the full expression of the progress in science, technology, and society in our country.

Secondly, teachers tend to ignore the teaching objects themselves when preparing lessons. Although the use of cartoon-style pictures as teaching aids can effectively attract the attention of lower-grade learners, thus improving the teaching effectiveness[1]. However, for adult learners, the simple lines, bright colors, and other features depicted in cartoon pictures are not aligned with the maturity and learning objectives of adult learners, as they may be perceived as too simplistic. For instance, cartoon-style illustrations can depict the word "mountain" with simple lines and vibrant colors, aiding students in grasping the tangible representation of the concept. However, this visual approach may not entirely capture the grandeur and profound implicit meaning associated with the word "mountain." In addition, the purpose of international Chinese education is to enable learners to acquire the ability to communicate in authentic contexts. The use of cartoon pictures is not conducive to learners accurately understanding the specific objects that the vocabulary represents in reality. It is difficult to create a genuine and effective context for learners. Moreover, international Chinese language education caters to learners from various countries with diverse nationalities and beliefs. Some words may have different meanings in different cultural contexts. However, some teachers fail to conduct in-depth research on the background of the students in the class beforehand. This can lead to the inadvertent use of images that touch upon certain taboos during the teaching process. This will not only mislead students in understanding the vocabulary but also may cause students to have a psychological reaction of not feeling respected, which can affect the effectiveness of teaching.

Thirdly, when teachers select images, there may be a mismatch between the pictures and the instructional content. For example, in explaining the adjective "deep," the example sentence given in the text is: "In summer, the water in the river also becomes deep." The term "deep" here refers to the depth of the water. However, when the teacher selected the pictures, he chose a black and a white picture for comparison. The use of "deep" to describe the intensity of color is clearly inconsistent with the message conveyed in the text, which hinders students' comprehension.

To conclude, when using pictures to explain words, some teachers fail to pay enough attention to the definition and parts of speech of words. Sometimes, they prioritize the visual effect of pictures too much, thus overlooking the close connection between pictures and words. For the phrase "change for money," for instance, a teacher might choose to illustrate the concept by showing a picture of a coin or

selecting an image of a person holding a coin in their hand. However, this does not accurately convey the meaning of the phrase "looking for money." The image of holding money can also be easily confused with phrases like "counting money," which further complicates learners' understanding. In addition, neglecting parts of speech is also a mistake that teachers tend to make when choosing pictures. For example, in the text, "painting" is used as a verb, while in the teacher's explanation, the picture shown is a painting, and the part of speech of "painting" has been transformed into a noun. Similarly, although many teachers tend to use pictures related to "crying" to explain the word "sad," there are still significant differences in the parts of speech and interpretation of the two. The word "sad" is primarily used as an adjective to depict a person's emotions and state; while "cry" is mainly used as a verb to describe the character's external actions. Although the two are related, the fact is that the state of distress takes many forms and is not limited to crying. When using "crying" to convey "sad," students must already understand the definition of "crying." This method of interpreting word by word is undoubtedly more challenging for students with a weak foundation in Chinese. Therefore, such picture examples not only fail to fully express the emotional connotation contained in the word "sad" but also may lead students to mistakenly believe that "sad" means crying, thereby restricting their comprehension and usage of the word.

### 3.2. Too Many Pictures are Stored

In the process of teaching vocabulary, some teachers display multiple pictures simultaneously to help students grasp how vocabulary is used in various scenarios. However, not all concepts can be effectively conveyed through an abundance of pictures. This type of expansion may enhance learners' comprehension but it can also lead to confusion and hinder their ability to accurately grasp the core meaning of words. At the same time, presenting a large number of pictures can also lead to visual fatigue, causing individuals to focus too much on the images and overlook the significance of the words themselves. For teachers, too many pictures will undoubtedly increase the complexity of vocabulary explanation, teaching time, and the burden of lesson preparation. Therefore, the use of a large number of pictures in teaching is not helpful to students' learning and can not obtain good teaching results[7].

### 3.3. Insufficient Use of Pictures

When some teachers use pictures for vocabulary teaching, they often simply show the pictures to students and then directly tell the students the words represented by the pictures. However, this single and monotonous teaching method fails to fully utilize the benefits of visual and engaging pictures. As a result, in this teaching process, teachers not only fail to delve deeply into the meaning of pictures but also lack the guiding power to lead students to observe and interpret pictures, thus affecting students' understanding of the meaning of words.

### 3.4. Pictures are Arranged Haphazardly

In the process of creating courseware, teachers often lack a clear and unified criterion, which leads to a more arbitrary approach to courseware development. Details such as the number of words to be placed on each slide, the number of pictures corresponding to each word, and the exact position of the pictures on the slide are determined by the teacher. In the same presentation, one slide may contain three words,

while another slide may increase to six words. The placement of pictures is also chaotic. Some pictures are on the left, some on the right, and the size of the pictures is adjusted to fit the remaining space on each slide. This absence of normative production will not only hinder students' vocabulary acquisition but also impact the overall aesthetics of the courseware.

## **4. How to Use Pictures Effectively in Teaching International Chinese Vocabulary**

In order to fully utilize the advantages of pictures in international Chinese vocabulary teaching, teachers need to master how to choose and use pictures effectively. Therefore, in preparing vocabulary teaching, teachers need to pay attention to the following points:

### **4.1. Accurate Picture Selection**

First of all, teachers need to pay attention to the clarity of the pictures and prioritize the use of high-definition images. Under normal circumstances, teachers primarily source images from the Internet, but some pictures found online may lack clarity. Generally, the resolution of the typical network image is higher than 800\*600. While such images may appear clearer on a computer screen, when projected in a classroom setting and enlarged, the level of blurriness becomes pronounced. Therefore, when teachers choose pictures, they should opt for high-definition images with a resolution of 1280\*720 or 1920\*1080[4]. It is not only convenient for students to see the details of the picture and understand the meaning of words, but also to enhance the teaching effectiveness, stimulate students' interest in learning, and capture their attention.

Meanwhile, concerning the content of the picture, we should pay attention to the following four points:

Firstly, teachers should pay attention to the timeliness of vocabulary teaching pictures when selecting them. The objects depicted in the selected pictures should align with current trends and real-life situations, showcasing social development and changes. It is important that the images reflect contemporary realities rather than outdated ones that lack relevance and timeliness.

Secondly, choose the content of the picture based on the learner's preferences. Before teaching, teachers should have a thorough understanding of the age, learning objectives, cultural background, and religious beliefs of their students. They should select visual content based on these factors. For younger learners, colorful cartoon-style pictures can be used to attract students' attention and increase their interest. For teenagers and adult learners, using concise, clear, and targeted pictures can help enhance vocabulary learning. Similarly, for different learning purposes, the style of auxiliary teaching pictures will vary. For international students, teachers should select images that reflect everyday life, enabling learners to apply them adaptably in their daily routines. For foreign business learners, teachers should select auxiliary vocabulary pictures that are more business-oriented to better cater to the requirements of their professional field. Moreover, students in international Chinese education come from diverse cultural backgrounds. Therefore, teachers should have a good understanding of the countries and religious beliefs of the learners in the class before selecting pictures. In this way, selecting images will help prevent cultural conflicts or

misunderstandings stemming from cultural differences or religious taboos, ensuring the smooth progression of teaching and demonstrating respect for students.

Thirdly, content determines form, and form serves content[6]. Teachers should review the entire lesson before preparing for the vocabulary lesson. A word often has multiple meanings, but when explaining it, teachers should first clarify the exact meaning of the new word in the lesson and use this as the benchmark for understanding and expansion. On this basis, the corresponding extension of word meaning can be used as a supplement. This teaching method not only ensures learners' accurate understanding of the text content but also effectively expands their vocabulary knowledge. If you encounter abstract words or concepts that are challenging to represent directly with pictures, the teacher can supplement the explanation by providing descriptions, examples, or utilizing other teaching methods.

To conclude, enhance the capability of image screening. When using pictures to explain words, teachers should make it clear that the primary goal is to enhance the effectiveness of vocabulary instruction. The visual effects of the pictures are important, but the pictures are only used as aids to enrich the teaching methods, not to dominate. Therefore, when selecting pictures, teachers should pay attention to their pertinence and relevance, and ensure that the selected pictures are closely related to the vocabulary being taught[2]. At the same time, efforts should be made to avoid the ambiguous meaning of the picture to ensure the accurate transmission of information. If it is difficult to explain vocabulary with just one picture, teachers can also choose multiple pictures to provide context and make the meaning more concrete and simple. Teachers should also be clear about the parts of speech. For example, when explaining the word "sad," the teacher should make it clear that "sad" is an adjective and emphasize the characteristics it uses to describe the mood of the person. At the same time, using specific example sentences and a series of pictures depicting the character's depressed mood can help create a scene that allow students intuitively understand the meaning of the word. With only a single display of "crying" pictures to assist the explanation, learners may find it more challenging to understand, and the teachers' content may seem lacking.

### **4.2. Display Pictures Appropriately**

When using pictures to assist in vocabulary teaching, teachers should pay attention to the principle of using an appropriate amount and avoid using too many or too few pictures. The number of pictures shown in each slide can be adjusted based on the complexity of the vocabulary and the students' comprehension abilities. For relatively simple words or terms that students are already familiar with, the use of pictures can be reduced appropriately. However, for complex or unfamiliar words, pictures can be added appropriately to aid students' understanding. When encountering words related to previously learned vocabulary, you can skillfully use pictures to review the old concepts with the new ones and consolidate the memory.

### **4.3. Guide Students to Observe and Interpret Pictures**

To be student-centered, teachers should only take on a guiding role and encourage students to take initiative and be creative. Therefore, in vocabulary instruction, teachers should encourage students to actively observe and interpret pictures.

Some questions or tasks can be prepared in advance to help students observe pictures, utilize pictures to enhance and connect vocabularies, and practice describing and explaining the vocabularies they have learned. This approach aims to enhance the effectiveness of vocabulary learning. At the same time, teachers can effectively control the display time of each picture to ensure that students have ample time to observe and think, thereby regulating the teaching rhythm.

#### 4.4. Adjusting the Image Display Mode

At present, there is no unified standard for creating courseware in the field of international Chinese education. However, teachers should prioritize ensuring internal consistency and standardization when developing courseware. In the process of teaching vocabulary, teachers should adjust the arrangement of pictures based on requirements, carefully manage the amount of text shown on each slide, and determine the size and placement of pictures to prevent overcrowding or scattering. This will help ensure that students can easily observe and comprehend the specifics of each picture.

### 5. Concluding Remarks

Vocabulary is the fundamental building block of language, making it crucial for learners to enhance their proficiency in Chinese and communication skills. Therefore, in the actual teaching process of international Chinese education, teachers also need to pay attention to the selection and use of pictures to avoid issues such as inappropriate picture selection, excessive accumulation of pictures, and underutilization of pictures. In general, selecting and utilizing images in the teaching of international Chinese vocabulary is a crucial task.

Teachers need to attach great importance to this aspect, constantly enhance their ability to develop and utilize image teaching resources, in order to better serve the Chinese learning of students.

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