



The Significance of Visual Literacy in Second Chance Schools in Greece

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Abstract

Visual literacy, the ability to interpret and create visual information, is an essential skill in today's digital age. In the context of Second Chance Schools in Greece, where students often face complex barriers to traditional education, the importance of visual literacy takes on new dimensions. This conference paper explores the significance of visual literacy as a powerful tool for improving educational outcomes and promoting social inclusion in Second Chance Schools across Greece. Second Chance Schools in Greece cater for individuals who have dropped out of mainstream education, offering them a second chance to acquire basic education, skills and qualifications. A significant number of these students come from disadvantaged backgrounds, with diverse learning needs and experiences that can be challenging to address. Visual literacy can act as a bridge to overcome these challenges by providing a more accessible and engaging way of learning. The paper discusses the theoretical underpinnings of visual literacy, emphasising its role in developing critical thinking, improving communication skills and promoting cultural sensitivity. It also highlights the practical aspects of implementing visual literacy in Second Chance Schools, including the use of multimedia resources, digital tools and hands-on projects. Practical examples and case studies from Second Chance Schools in Greece illustrate the transformative impact of visual literacy on student engagement and retention. The paper also explores the societal and economic benefits of promoting visual literacy in Second Chance Schools. By equipping students with visual communication skills, they are better prepared to access higher education or enter the labour market. This in turn helps to break the cycle of poverty and social exclusion that many of these students face. The findings and insights presented here provide valuable guidance for educators, policymakers and stakeholders in improving the educational landscape for underserved and marginalised learners in Greece and beyond.

Keywords: Visual Literacy; Second Chance Schools; Adult Education; skills

1. Introduction

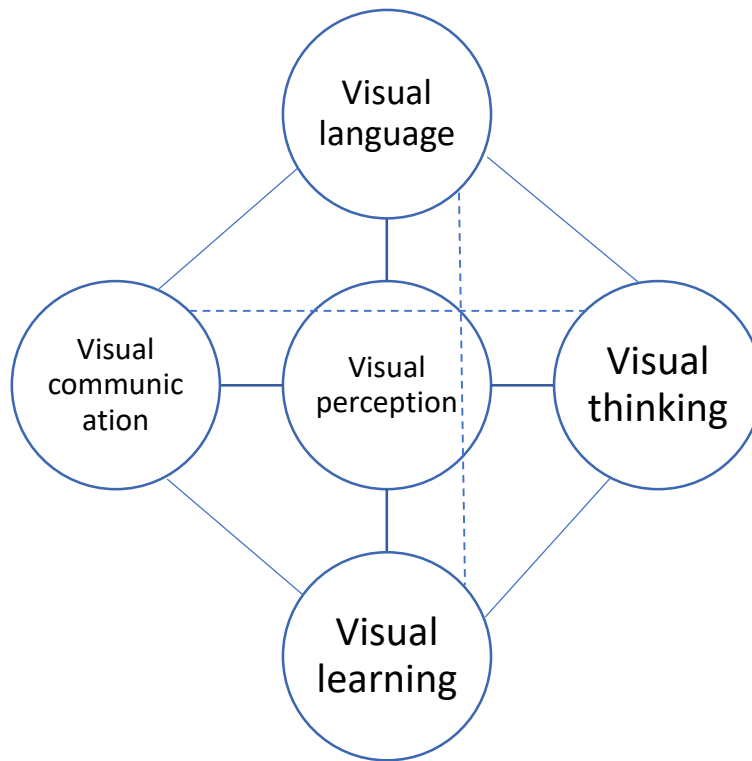
A plethora of scholars have attempted to examine the integration of the digital age into pedagogy, while approaching learning methods that aim to increase student involvement. Despite the acceptance that digitalisation has enjoyed among younger people, adult learners may experience certain disadvantages due to a lack of skills and adaptability. In an attempt to identify the tendencies and trends in visual literacy research, Brumberger's (2019) findings showed that visual literacy is a subject matter that is growing, with its focus shifting to incorporate technological advances and educational priorities. A significant topic that was tested during the COVID-19 pandemic, where learning abruptly shifted, testing the skills and abilities of both learners and teachers. Its importance became more apparent through the extensive attempts to use visuals in the science discipline, where students could be further engaged in the learning process.

Changes in pedagogical priorities became evident through the transition from the traditional approach, where the emphasis was on knowledge transfer and assessment of results, to a student-centred approach, where learning was associated with engagement. This shift changed the pedagogical approach from information transfer to active participation and critical thinking. Visual literacy became a vessel that provided skills such as interpretation, analysis and the creation of visual messages that complemented the verbal and communication skills of individuals (Boden, 2023; Bramford, 2013). The realisation that visual literacy could foster creativity, critical thinking and problem solving was embraced as a tool to enhance knowledge and skills in an age where visualisation is the key component in most interactions (Thornhill-Miller, et al., 2023).

2. Visual Literacy

Understanding visual literacy makes it possible to formulate a visualisation of the process while engaging in it. Human development has explained the mechanisms of learning and has indicated the importance of visual literacy as a pillar that precedes verbal learning (Flattley, 1998). In essence, a child has the ability to recognise objects before he has the ability to verbalise them (Berger, 1972). This process is supported by the Dale Cone of Experience model, which is based on the premise that learning proceeds from the concrete to the abstract (Sinatra, 1986); thus, it can transform observation into abstract representations that allow reconceptualisation and understanding prior to verbalisation (Sachpatzidis, 2020).

As suggested by Avgerinou (2011), visual literacy could be examined through the prism of five elements, with the link between them being prominent, as previous research has shown.



Adopted by Avgerinou, (2011, p.5)

Visual perception, the ability to interpret and derive meaning from visual stimuli, therefore plays a central role in our cognitive processes and overall understanding of the world around us. By decoding the visual cues and symbols found in our environment, we can derive meaning and context from what we observe; visual language, relies heavily on the use of images, symbols and other visual representations to express ideas and concepts. This unique approach enables the expression of thoughts through visualisation. Visual learning, involves gathering information and understanding through visual methods. This type of learning taps into our innate visual processing abilities and uses visual stimuli such as graphs, charts and diagrams to enhance comprehension and retention (Seels, 1994). Visual thinking, as part of the cognitive process of using visual processing to engage and facilitate thinking, which can enable individuals to access their visual perceptual abilities to examine, combine, and arrange information in a manner that is both efficient and effective (Avgerinou, (2011) and visual communication, where ideas and information are conveyed through visual forms, its use allows for an increase in the clarity and impact of the intended message.

But how does visual literacy affect the effectiveness of learning? Can it be implemented in different educational environments to achieve maximum results? These questions are of paramount importance because learning is a lifelong process that is accessed by different age groups, with different levels of knowledge and technological skills. Understanding how this affects learning provides a blueprint for its capabilities when its implementation focuses on knowledge transfer. Feinstein (1993) provided the reasons why visual literacy should be seen as an important vessel in the educational process, highlighting the use of both hemispheres of the brain, thus providing a holistic approach to thinking. It also enhances the brain's ability to understand abstract ideas by making them concrete and familiar (p.92), enabling individuals to grasp them. From the research that has been conducted, it is clear that the ability to comprehend visual information allows for the interpretation and navigation of the complex, ever-increasing visual environment (Guney, 2019). In essence, by integrating perceptual design language and incorporating visuals into instruction, visual literacy enhances the learning process, engages

students and fosters holistic thinking. Furthermore, it empowers students to interpret complex visual environments and enhances their decision-making skills. In addition, visual literacy facilitates the creation of instructional materials that are aligned with instructional goals and support visual perception.

The visual thinking that emerges from the process activates personal knowledge and experience, where cognitive dissonance and self-discovery are encouraged. This cultivation of the inquiring mind emerges as a way of appreciating multiple perspectives and tolerating ambiguity. Interestingly, it develops critical thinking and communication skills in diverse populations, including those with learning disabilities, as supported by Hailey, Miller and Yenawine (2015). Supporting the aspects of communication skills and critical thinking has been widely discussed in the work of Supsakova (2016), where the shift in visual media is mentioned as part of the process of understanding why visual literacy has become the core method of information dissemination. A process that needs to be understood in order to gain the skills to decipher, process and communicate meanings. A method of communication that is particularly valuable in the case of adult learners, where market demands have shifted in terms of desirable communication skills.

The inclusion of visual literacy can be seen in the STEAM approach, where science, technology, engineering and mathematics are enhanced by the arts. As Sachpatzidis, Fragoulis and Antoniadis (2022) explain in their work, the integration of the arts in STEM education provides a living curriculum that can adapt to the diverse cultural backgrounds and individual interests of students. This approach exposes them to innovative methods, such as art-in-museum activities and the use of Lego robots, which not only engage primary school students but also develop their problem-solving and creative thinking skills. It also addresses gender bias by promoting equality through activities such as 'Draw a Scientist', which challenges stereotypes and promotes inclusivity in STEM. The potential benefits of the specific approach within the Second Chance Schools will benefit the participants by exposing them to new technologies while motivating them to reach their learning potential.

3. Second Chance Schools

Recognising the fundamental role of the second chance school in reintroducing adults to skills and practices that have not been used, there are barriers and risks associated with re-entering school to acquire knowledge and skills that are in demand in the labour market. This process cannot be viewed solely through the prism of education and learning, but rather from a perspective that includes past disadvantages and current societal pressures. An interesting article by Savelsberg, Pignata and Weckert (2017) explores the issue of second-chance education within the Australian framework, where they point out that the main benefits and risks associated with second-chance education are quite significant and multifaceted. On the one hand, it builds self-esteem, confidence and social skills, but on the other hand, it fosters the possibility of participants not progressing to the next level. In addition, the level of literacy and numeracy that individuals possess may not contribute to their engagement with the material due to their inability to understand it.

The Second Chance School in Greece is dedicated to adult basic education programmes. Its main purpose is to address the problem of social exclusion among adults who have not completed their compulsory secondary education and who lack the necessary qualifications and skills to adapt to the demands of modern working life. The innovative nature of SCSs stems from their unique approach of working without pre-determined curricula, using novel teaching

and assessment methods, and providing students with the necessary counselling services, as highlighted by Efstathiou (2009).

Understanding the desires and intentions that are present when one chooses to attend a Second Chance School has led to research that points to specific needs and barriers that may have contributed to the dropout rates, thus pointing to the need to promote practices that engage and create individuals who have the skills to progress and flourish while gaining maximum knowledge through their studies. Understanding the reasons why individuals return to school allows factors such as society, peers, family and economic needs to become an integral part of the learning process, while implementing visual learning to remove any barriers that may contribute to the demotivation of participants. This is where the study by Kiprianos and Mpourgos (2022) becomes a valuable tool in recognising the population that participates in second chance education, allowing for the development of approaches and the implementation of learning methods that would be beneficial, providing skills that will be used in today's ever changing society. Needs related to personal development and self-improvement were identified, while the contribution of significant others in the return process was crucial. Instrumental benefits, such as career progression and the ability to get a job, were also documented. Social inclusion was also part of the reasons for returning, showing how second-chance schools provide both economic and social benefits.

This is where adult education changes the way students are approached because, as Kokkos (2005) explained, they have previous experiences and ways of learning that may hinder their learning process. Avoiding this barrier by understanding the need for active learning follows the paradigm of visual learning, where active learning and individual characteristics become the premises of knowledge transfer. Especially when we know that the people who do not participate in adult education are the ones who need it most, as they tend to get more out of it. For those who do participate, the attraction of acquiring new knowledge and skills is a strong motivating force for students attending adult education schools in Greece. In addition, the prospect of improving their professional standing and securing employment opportunities further strengthens their inclination to engage in such educational endeavours. However, the motivations that lead individuals to enrol in adult education institutions go beyond mere professional aspirations. The multifaceted nature of these reasons is reflected in the wide range of objectives expressed by students. Some seek to use community colleges as a means of securing suitable employment, while others seek to improve their professional status or enhance their skills (Kiprianos & Mpourgos, 2022).

4. Visual Literacy in Second Chance Schools

The importance of visual literacy in Second Chance Schools in Greece is evident from the various researches that have been conducted. The needs of the students as adult learners are related to aspirations, personal development and job search. It is interesting to see how these parameters are achieved through empowerment, motivation, engagement, personalisation and understanding of different social environments through the implementation of different materials and approaches in the process.

Audiovisual media, the use of which was addressed by Romi & Schmida (2009), where they explained the differences when compared to traditional methods, this is due to the inherent power of combining images and sounds, which creates a captivating sensory experience for the individual. In addition, the appeal of these media lies in the incorporation of spectacle and aesthetic appeal, which attracts learners and engages them on a deeper level. A parameter that was seen in the research where the implementation of audiovisual in adult education, in Greece,

was conducted by Sachpatzidis, (2022) where the results of the research, indicated that there was an effort in engaging in the use of longer sentences, together with a rather sophisticated vocabulary. This essentially comes to explain the motivational parameter of the process, by further supporting it with the expression of motivation to continue in a lifelong learning. In addition, the level of satisfaction of the participants has increased, indicating the need for further implementation of the aforementioned approach.

In addition to audio-visual media, the project-based approach was used extensively as a learning tool. Its ability to enhance cognitive skills related to argumentation and reflective thinking, together with the development of skills related to initiative and cooperation, further indicate its potential use within the Second Chance Schools as a means of providing skills that can be effective within the social and economic prism. More importantly, it comes as a vessel to combat social marginalisation, while promoting self-awareness, self-regulation and self-confidence (Wurdinger & Enloe, 2011; Papanikolaou & Boubouka, 2010; Schraw, et al., 2006). Within the concept of project-based learning, the work of Koutrouba and Karageorgiou (2013) found that social maturity, reflective thinking, application of knowledge, collaboration, development of metacognitive awareness, increased observation skills, effective time management and argumentation skills were enhanced in the process. Skills that are of paramount importance in the process of re-entering the labour market, equipped with skills and abilities that will broaden the job search premise.

Further research in the field of audiovisual media and adult education evaluates the pedagogical outcome of such practices, including the attitudes of adult learners when exposed to this type of learning. From the findings of Nicolaou and Kalliris (2020) we have come to the understanding that adult learners have a favourable disposition towards the inclusion of audiovisual media communication in the field of education. This inclination is likely to be influenced by the perception that the use of such multimedia platforms is associated with a reduced sense of fatigue and an increased ability to concentrate. In addition, adult learners tend to perceive audiovisual media communication as having a positive effect on their psychological well-being, i.e. a reduction in fatigue and tiredness, as well as an increase in concentration and mental focus. These individuals recognise the potential of audiovisual media communication to make a positive contribution to their mental health and overall state of mind.

The above results serve as a blueprint for the implementation of strategic approaches to visual learning, when audiovisual media are fully exploited for the purpose of arming participants with skills and knowledge that can be applied in real life settings, thus giving them the opportunity to re-enter the workforce fully equipped with skills that are highly sought after by potential employers. At the same time, they are exposed to new approaches to information dissemination and communication, enabling them to recognise messages and respond appropriately. All this has an enormous impact on their self-esteem and sense of belonging, freeing them from any sense of community marginalisation they may have experienced in the past.

Statistical data, although part of mathematical literacy, includes graphs which are part of the visual understanding of results. Therefore, it can be inferred that they are also part of the visual learning process in which participants gain skills in interpreting visual mathematical results. The study by Kontogianni and Tatsis (2018) investigated this issue and produced interesting results, showing how this approach allows critical evaluation and decision making to become a strong ability. Such a skill not only enhances development, but also prevents the misrepresentation of facts when they are presented in a graph. In essence, they acquire the ability to critically balance knowledge, beliefs and experience within a graph, thereby recognising misrepresentation of data.

It is evident that the ability to transform graphs into knowledge, excluding personal opinions when interpreting them, promotes social participation by removing personal beliefs from reality. As Arcavi (2003) has noted, Goethe embodied the ability to understand in the phrase "see what we know, not what we actually see".

5. Conclusion

Virtual learning is an evolving field that is attracting the attention of many researchers, both in terms of the applications that can be incorporated and the potential benefits that will have. This is particularly important in a world where images and visualisations have taken over the majority of tasks and everyday thinking. Adding the pandemic event to the visual learning equation, the shifts and changes within the educational system have provided significant insights into the importance of such an approach.

In the case of the Second Chance School, this significance is even more important, since the majority of participants are individuals who are looking for ways to incorporate the new market demands and to improve their place in society. All the research in Greece points to the benefits of such an approach and supports the view of further implementation within an educational framework that is equipped to promote individual needs and current societal demands.

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