

Implementing Visual Aids into Teaching English Vocabulary for Children: Perspectives from Teachers at Ho Chi Minh City

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ABSTRACT

The Vietnamese education system highly values English as a compulsory subject for schools at all levels. Regarding this increasing demand, English teachers are encouraged to come up with new approaches and strategies to make the English learning process faster and more enjoyable, and one solution is applying Visual aids (VA) in teaching English vocabulary to children. This study adopts a quantitative research design. Data were collected through a questionnaire survey administered to 62 participants, including university lecturers, secondary school teachers, primary school teachers, and teaching assistants in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC). The questionnaire consisted of a Likert scale and one open-ended question to explore participants' perceptions and challenges. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. The findings show that VA is highly recommended by most participants; they claim that the benefits of using VA are undeniable. Several teachers share some of the challenges they encounter when implementing VA, even though most of the results collected are positive. This research concludes with some implications and recommendations for further studies.

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INTRODUCTION

The growing popularity of English encourages foreign countries to incorporate English as a compulsory subject in schools at all levels, and Vietnamese Education is not an exception. According to the Vietnamese Government's Decision No. 2371/QĐ-TTg (2025), this policy mandates that English will become a compulsory subject starting from Grade 1 in primary schools, moving away from its current status as an optional subject in Grades 1 and 2. Therefore, from the early start, English will become a companion to young children at Vietnamese Primary schools.

In response to the increasing demand for English, parents tend to apply their children into additional English courses, further accelerating the process of learning beyond the main classes at school (Vicontie & Santosa, 2023). It is encouraged that learning another language at a young age is highly recommended, as the benefits often outweigh the drawbacks. Especially invest in such a high-demanding language that plays a role as 'lingua franca', meaning an international language that is not only widely used but also seems not to have the sign of decreasing in terms of popularity and influence.

Therefore, teachers and teaching assistants strive to devise a range of approaches that can maximize the efficiency of English learning. There will be certain obstacles when teaching English to children that one might overlook, such as creating a lively environment, motivating the kids, and supervising them (Trilestari et al., 2024). However, those listed are mostly related to the external aspects; the internal aspects, which should be focused on, are the teaching styles and adaptation. One issue is fostering an effective way for children to learn English vocabulary more quickly and pragmatically.

An important component of English learning is vocabulary because a good command of vocabulary plays an essential role in comprehension, self-expression, and effective communication (Feranty, et al., 2024). This is supported by Dakhi and Fitria (2019) who by emphasizing that without vocabulary, nothing can be done because it is the basis for communication. However, English young learners often struggle to build vocabulary. To solve the problem, an idea that has been receiving lots of praise is integrating Visual aids (VA) into teaching vocabulary for these juveniles. VA are simply tools like images, maps, and videos used instead of the traditional style of learning vocabulary word by word. Several studies were conducted on this topic to explore how these devices facilitate more efficient vocabulary learning. While previous research has focused on some experiments with students, some have focused on the thoughts of teachers on this matter.

While VA enhances vocabulary learning internationally (Mayer, 2009), Vietnamese research on the perceptions of teaching assistants remains unstudied, although teaching assistants also obtain considerable understanding in teaching English. For example, prior studies on the use of audio-visual aids in the Vietnamese EFL context have predominantly focused on the perspectives of university lecturers (Dinh, 2023) and the learning experiences of non-English major students (Kien, 2024). This study addresses these gaps by surveying 62 HCMC educators, with most being teaching assistants, on VA effectiveness for vocabulary teaching, offering new perspectives on the idea of applying VA in teaching English vocabulary for young children. Regarding this, this study aimed to explore how VA are used in teaching English vocabulary to young learners and investigate teachers' perceptions of their effectiveness in enhancing students' vocabulary learning.

Based on the discussion above, this research was conducted to answer the following research questions:

1. How do teachers use VA in teaching English vocabulary to young learners?

2. What are teaching assistants' perceptions of the effectiveness of VA in vocabulary instruction?
3. What challenges do they encounter when using VA in teaching vocabulary to young learners?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Benefits of Early L2 Learning

First and foremost, it is suggested that early learning L2 poses no challenges to a child's cognition, which is proven in the study of Wallin and Cheevakumjorn (2020), as the authors provide solid evidence from Singapore's new policy on early bilingualism. According to Jalongo and Sobolak (2010), learning another language offers several advantages. One of the benefits is that it facilitates a long-term process, as an early start for children when they get to learn a new language gives them a slight edge over those who have not yet learned.

A study conducted by Gawi (2011) shows that, through observing the children in class, teachers conclude that it is best to start adopting another language. It is believed that proficiency in using L2 would be enhanced significantly if the individual starts learning from an early childhood because it fosters flawless pronunciation skills and critical thinking in L2. Conversely, L2 late learners would encounter significant obstacles in terms of pronouncing the word accurately (Archila-Suerte et al., 2014).

Apart from the encouragement from parents, teachers are also the driving factor behind children's engagement to learn a new language. Schools provide opportunities for children to talk and play with foreign teachers, experienced teachers integrate games and music into each lesson, and students learn new wonders of other cultures in another language. These factors further motivate them to keep investing in L2. On the other hand, factors such as limited free time and a reduced openness to new experiences can slow down the effectiveness of language acquisition compared to when one is a child (Dey et al., 2024).

Challenges in Teaching English Vocabulary to Young Learners

The challenge that every teacher, from novice to highly experienced, encounters is maintaining the engagement of every student in the class in order to have an effective lesson (Elmahdi & Hezam, 2020). Some students easily lose their motivation, and this leads to low vocabulary retention. The roots of this might stem from the traditional teaching styles, as teachers often write words on the board, tell the students to note them down in their notebooks, and memorize them. This traditional way of learning (or so-called 'decontextualized learning and teaching'), is believed to not deliver the most comprehensive learning outcomes as learning words separately without contextualization would make learners take in words in a robotic fashion, and be more time-consuming.

A study conducted by Bedilu and Degefu (2024) highlighted that one of the major issues in teaching vocabulary acquisition to children is the oversized classes, which can compromise the quality of learning. Todd (2013) suggests that the larger the class, the less productive the lesson will be. The suitable number of students in a class would be best before 25 children; 45 children in a class would cause significant problems in grades. With a crowded classroom filled with mostly mischievous children, even teachers associated with teaching assistants would encounter trouble in class managing, checking, and focusing on each child due to the overwhelming size of the class (Todd, 2013).

Another drawback is that the attention span of young learners are generally shorter than adults, this means that they will easily forget what they have just learned in a matter of time (Lelawati et al., 2018). This requires teachers to continuously have their vocabulary

checked in the lessons afterward. Moreover, teachers would need to spend more time planning activities and minigames that include new words to attract children's attention and this can sometimes be frustrating. Therefore, a new approach to learning vocabulary must be suggested, which is integrating VA.

Visual Aids in Vocabulary Teaching

Shabiralyani et al. (2015) define VA as the learning materials used in classrooms to improve students' learning experience. VA includes learning through different visual tools such as videos, pictures, charts, and others. These devices are proven to assist students in making learning more engaging, thinking more creatively, and being more precise in their actions. Some of these visual devices are beneficial as follows:

Pictures/videos: Compared to writing an entire lesson on the board with letters, learning through films makes the study experience much more enjoyable (Munir, 2016). Moreover, with each section of the lesson attached with an image aside, students will find it easier to understand, expand their imagination, and be more eager to come to school the next day with a positive attitude, as they acknowledge that there will be something new awaiting them, rather than just pages of paper filled with blocks of words.

Charts/ diagrams: Instead of using word lists, applying charts and diagrams is not only more beneficial for memorizing numbers but also for remembering words and information better (Maharani et al., 2012). Moreover, students are likely to develop critical thinking skills, and they are more cautious to see how the data and numbers fluctuate or expand mindsets when analyzing different and complex diagrams.

However, the positive aspects of combining VA into classroom lessons are not without their downsides. There are certain concerns regarding the integration of visual materials. Notably, the excessive use of videos or pictures throughout the entire thirty to sixty-minute duration of the classroom would cause high distractions. The engagement of pictures and films often misdirects the purpose of studying, as pupils would be hooked by the amusing content from videos and eye-catching images.

Moreover, other side effects of VA involve time of preparation and planning, since instructors need to be versatile and collect vast materials for each lesson throughout the entire course. Also, the visual materials must be reviewed carefully to ensure relevance to the lesson. Overall, it is clear that the purpose of VA is not to fully replace traditional learning, but rather, they should be considered as an essential accessory of teaching.

Previous Research

Yunus et al. (2013) surveyed to gather students' opinions on VA. The survey included 52 participants; the results showed that most educators praised the use of VA. According to some teachers, pupils from different levels of proficiency find it more engaging when they learn vocabulary integrated with different tools, such as images or videos.

Dalali and Mwila (2022) investigated the effects of VA applied in a secondary school in Ilemela Municipality, Tanzania. 111 individuals, such as students, instructors, and academic masters, were invited. The survey's main research instruments were interviews and questionnaires. The results were that the advantageous aspects of VA were greatly utilized by the educators, further supporting the undeniable effectiveness of VA in enhancing both teaching and learning processes.

Hoa et al. (2022) examine 194 teachers and students at Can Tho city on the use of VA in classes; most participants agree that VA should be incorporated more to increase the

enjoyment of learning language and other subjects. VA also alleviates dullness and increases the class’s overall activeness.

Mahmood et al. (2024) experimented on 30 secondary students in a secondary school in Pakistan, the findings show that academic results of the students improved significantly after applying VA in learning.

Research Gap

International studies consistently show VA's positive impact on vocabulary learning through enhanced engagement and retention. However, Vietnamese research on this idea remains limited, particularly in Ho Chi Minh City, with few studies addressing vocabulary acquisition for young learners specifically. For instance, Nguyen and Pham (2024) examined the effectiveness of VA among first-graders, finding significant improvements in vocabulary acquisition through the use of visual materials. However, their study employed an experimental design focused on student outcomes, thereby excluding teacher perspectives crucial for implementation. Furthermore, as mentioned above, some other research overlooks the insights of teaching assistants (Dinh, 2023; Kien, 2024), despite their substantial role in the classroom. Thus, this study examines how HCMC educators, particularly teaching assistants, evaluate VA effectiveness for young learners' vocabulary instruction.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research setting

This study employed a quantitative survey research design. The survey consists of 62 English teachers and teaching assistants (34 male, 28 female) in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, during the second semester of the year 2025. Questionnaires were distributed both face-to-face at Ho Chi Minh University of Banking (HUB), primary/secondary schools, and English centers, and online via social media platforms to maximize participation. All participants invited to this survey were asked for permission to collect their answers before taking part, and they all agreed to participate.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Characteristic	N	Percentage
University lecturers	4	6%
Secondary school teachers	13	21%
Primary school teachers	11	18%
Teaching assistants	34	55%
Total	62	100%

Research instruments

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire that included demographic information, VA usage patterns in English vocabulary teaching, and Likert-scale items measuring perceived effectiveness. The information were collected via a questionnaire in Google form. Specifically, participants were asked about years of enrolling in teaching English, visual and non-visual tools used in teaching vocabulary, such as word lists, games, videos, and images. Lastly, responders were asked to rate their satisfaction with using them. One open-ended question gathered additional insights into implementation challenges. At

the end of the survey, each participant will be asked an optional question about their own thoughts on visual devices, on the benefits and drawbacks of using them in classrooms.

Data Analysis

After the survey, the results were analyzed using SPSS. The outcome concluded which VA tool is recommended most, the rate of their satisfaction with applying VA, and additional opinions on using VA. The data collected from the Google Form were analyzed to identify the most effective Visual Aids (VA) tools and the overall level of teacher satisfaction. For the quantitative analysis, a 5-point Likert scale was utilized to measure participants' opinions, with each level assigned a specific numerical value: 1 for Strongly Disagree, 2 for Disagree, 3 for Neutral, 4 for Agree, and 5 for Strongly Agree. These values were subsequently processed to calculate average scores and percentages to provide a clear overview of the findings. Regarding the qualitative data, the responses from the open-ended question at the end of the survey and the information from the interviews were used primarily to gather more detailed insights into the specific difficulties and challenges that teachers encountered when implementing VA in their classrooms.

Ethical Consideration

Participation in this study was entirely voluntary. Before starting the survey, all respondents were informed about the study's purpose and their right to withdraw at any time. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, no personal identification such as names or emails was required, and the collected data were used for academic purposes only.

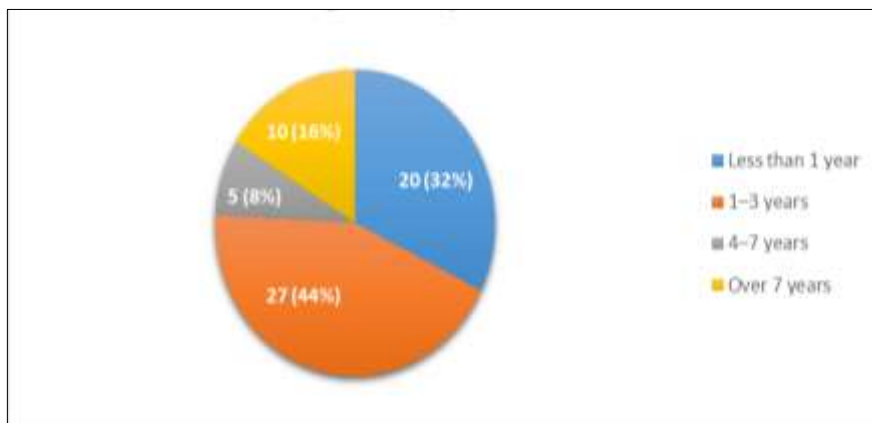
FINDINGS

Teachers' Usage of Visual Aids

RQ1: How do teachers use VA in teaching English vocabulary to young learners?

Figure 1

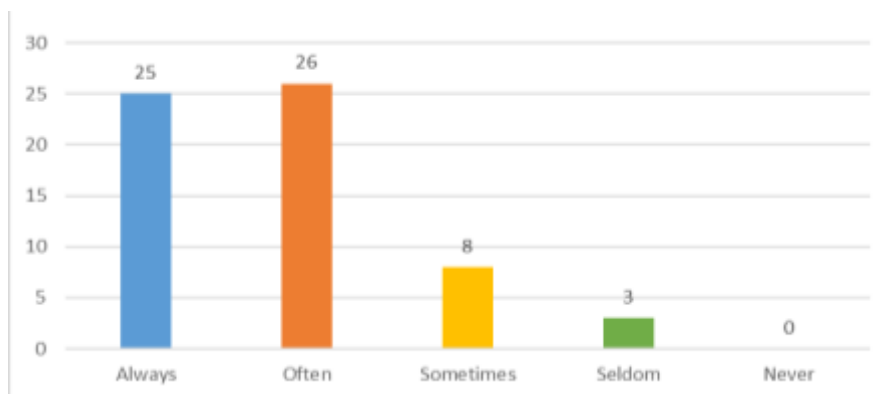
Experience in Teaching English (in Year)



One of the most notable features in this survey is that it includes the majority of teaching assistants and novice teachers, both accounting for 76% more than two-thirds of the total participants (Figure 1). 8% represent those who have at least 4 years of experience in teaching, and nearly one-fifth of the participants have accumulated above 7 years of teaching, which includes experienced teachers and university lecturers.

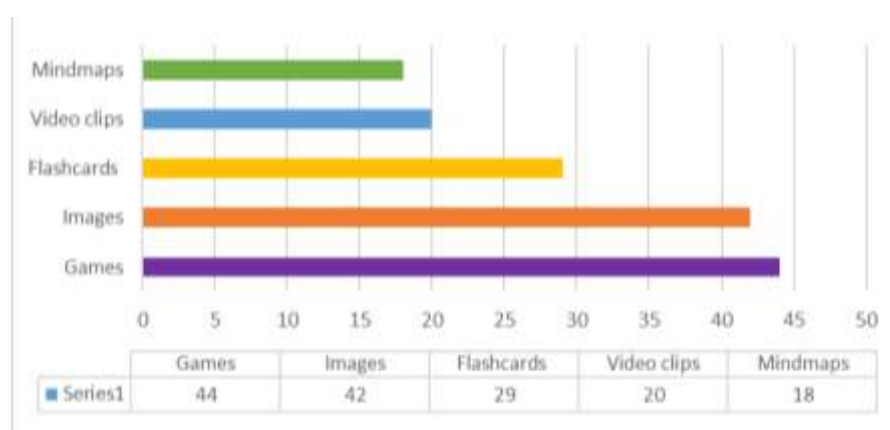
Figure 2 shows that the total number of participants who always and often use VA is 51 respondents (82%). They claim that they apply VA in teaching vocabulary for young learners at a very high rate, almost every time a new lesson about vocabulary appears. Conversely, the remaining 18% suggest that VA are used inequently; they claim that not using these devices so often is due to high distractions if used excessively.

Figure 2
Frequency of Using VA in Teaching



Among 62 participants, 44 chose games as the most commonly used visual tool in the classroom, which accounts for 71% of the responses. The second most utilized visual aid is images, which were chosen by 42 participants (67.7%) for vocabulary lessons. Flashcards, while preferred by only 29 participants (46.8%), are mainly selected by younger teachers who have firsthand experience with VA. Finally, video clips and mind maps are the least utilized tools for teaching English vocabulary, with 20 participants (32.3%) selecting video clips and 18 participants (29%) choosing mind maps.

Figure 3
Visual Aids Use Frequencies



Perceptions of VA Effectiveness

RQ2: What are teaching assistants' perceptions of the effectiveness of VA in vocabulary instruction?

Table 2 shows that using VA increases the engagement of children in learning English vocabulary (M=4.21, SD=1.01), and the participants also agree that visual devices are suitable for young learners (M=4.22, SD=0.952). These visual devices also ease the way students understand the meaning of each word without too many difficulties (M=4.24, SD=0.787), and they also improve vocabulary retention of children (M=4.16, SD=0.978).

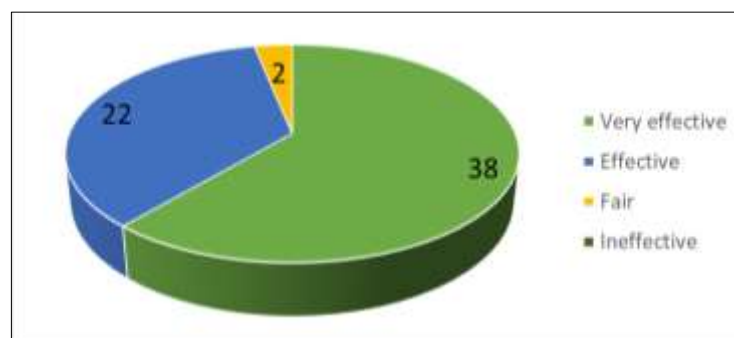
Table 2
Opinions of Participants on Likert Scale

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Make learning vocabulary more interesting for students	62	1.0	5.0	4.21	1.010
Appropriate for primary students	62	2.0	5.0	4.22	.952
Help students understand the meaning of words more easily	62	2.0	5.0	4.24	.787
Help students remember vocabulary longer	62	1.0	5.0	4.16	.978

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As Figure 4 illustrates, only two respondents (3.2%) described the use of VA as "fair." However, survey results indicate that 38 respondents (61.3%) believe VA are effective tools for teaching new English words to young learners.

Figure 4
Evaluating the Effectiveness of VA



Challenges in VA Implementation

RQ3: What challenges do they encounter when using VA in teaching vocabulary to young learners?

Additional opinions of the participants.

At the end of the survey, all participants were invited to answer an optional question on challenges when applying VA to their teaching. Their responses highlight key barriers, classified below into four primary categories: (1) Time constraints: Preparing VA is often seen as time-consuming and creatively demanding. (2) Equipment constraints: Insufficient school-provided materials or devices limit VA use. (3) Technical issues: Connectivity or device problems disrupt lessons. (4) Distraction risks: Overuse of VA can reduce focus in young learners.

Table 3
Summary Table of Responses

Category	Participant	Quote
Time constraints	P14	"It takes a lot of time to prepare and find suitable material"
Time constraints	P43	"Preparing VA takes a lot of time and requires a high level of creativity"
Equipment constraints	P58	"If the classroom isn't equipped with a television or a projector, I need to print pictures to show my students and it is not so convenient"
Technical issues	P24	"Technical problems sometimes, lost of internet connection inside the class"
Distraction risks	P62	"I don't usually have any trouble with using VA in teaching vocabulary, but one thing that I can think of is that the students who are exposed to this method too much tend to be more easily distracted and can't learn as effectively without VA"

DISCUSSION

This study explores how 62 educators at a variety of levels in Ho Chi Minh City view Visual Aids (VA) not just as extras, but as fundamental tools for helping young learners pick up new vocabulary. With a strong 82% of participants regularly integrating these tools into their lessons, our findings align with the previous studies of Hoa et al. (2022) in Can Tho and Dalali & Mwila (2022) in Tanzania. Moreover, the findings align with the results from the former studies that were conducted in different regions (Mansourzadeh, 2014; Sanjaya et al., 2022; Aziz and Sulicha, 2016), further confirming that visual tools are indispensable in the modern classroom.

While most research in Vietnam has focused on university lecturers (Dinh, 2023) or non-English majors (Kien, 2024), this study decided to offer a new perspective by highlighting the voices of teaching assistants (55%). Interestingly, some people might still misunderstand their role in them. Even though the title "teaching assistant" conjures up someone who only sits in the back of the class and only helps when needed, but these assistants are often facilitated opportunities to lead classes, mostly with children, and actively apply activities, including VA, to boost learning.

The results prove that Visual Aids (VAs) are extremely helpful for understanding what words mean (M=4.24) and remembering them for a long time (M=4.16). This suggests that when integrating vocabulary in to pictures, videos or diagrams, it helps children memorize faster than the conventional method of just writing down the word into their notebooks. Since 61.3% of teachers rated VAs as 'Very Effective,' it shows that these tools are the perfect cure for robotic and boring memorization. Instead, they make learning feel more natural, engaging for the students.

Nevertheless, there are also several limitations regarding this study, including adopting VA in remote areas and a lack of professional practice (Anggela et al., 2024). Firstly, most participants in the survey are teachers whose workplaces are in universities, urban primary schools, and English centers. So it is clear that they are equipped with cutting-edge technology, such as projectors, televisions, and so on, to create the best learning environment and apply a variety of tools to learn vocabulary from images to digital video games. However, there are a lot of schools in remote areas that also encourage students to learn English but lack technological tools, thus the teachers there can only use images or flashcards. Another point to make is that in this modern time with Artificial Intelligence (AI), teachers in rural areas will have less exposure to experts in the field to sharpen their skills of making full use of this technology in teaching English. This is another drawback that this study has not addressed and is open for further studies in the foreseeable future.

Regarding AI, to address one of the most common challenges reported in this study, specifically time constraints and the constant need for high creativity (P14, P43), the integration of AI offers a promising future for teaching tools and lesson design. In modern times, educators can spend significantly less time brainstorming suitable images and games because AI can handle these tasks efficiently. As Wei et al. (2025) suggest, the benefits of using AI to generate teaching aids often outweigh the potential downsides. By training both teachers and teaching assistants to utilize AI for creating customized visual tools that reflect their unique teaching styles, the heavy burden of brainstorming new ideas can be reduced significantly, leaving more spare time for other, more important tasks. This approach is not only time-efficient and convenient but also makes the implementation of Visual Aids (VA) more sustainable and far less frustrating for busy educators.

Overall, the data prove that Visual Aids (VA) are highly appropriate and should be used more in language classrooms. With over 80% of responders using them regularly and over 60% rating them as "Very Effective". Furthermore, teachers reported that VA clearly helps children understand meanings more easily, as demonstrated in the findings ($M=4.24$) and remember vocabulary longer ($M=4.16$). However, there are still some challenges, such as time-consuming preparation and a lack of equipment in schools in remote areas. Since this study focused mostly on Ho Chi Minh city, which is an urban area, future research on this idea is highly encouraged to explore the experiences of teachers in remote schools where technology is limited. Additionally, more studies are needed to see how Artificial Intelligence (AI) can help teachers generate visual tools more easily and save time.

CONCLUSION

This paper explores the use of VA in teaching English vocabulary to children and collects opinions from 62 teachers and teaching assistants across Ho Chi Minh City through a survey with questionnaire and an open-ended question. The results indicate that visual devices should be incorporated more frequently during vocabulary lessons, not only to increase effectiveness but also to create a more engaging classroom. Most participants agree that the benefits of VA are undeniable, however, some also expressed that they should be used appropriately to avoid distractions. Regarding this study's limitation, the research mainly focuses on teachers and teaching assistants in urban areas with access to modern technology, so the findings may not fully represent the situation in remote schools where teaching tools and professional training are limited. To address these gaps, further research can be conducted on how teachers encounter challenges when teaching English vocabulary in remote areas and how they can be prepared to integrate AI into their lessons.

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