

The semantic implications of educational images and their impact on the development of linguistic competence in students: A Case Study of the Arabic Language Textbook for Second Grade Primary Education

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Abstract:

This study aims to highlight the semantic role of educational images as a means that transcends the explanatory function to become a carrier of linguistic and cultural meanings that contribute to the development of linguistic competence in primary school learners. The Arabic language textbook for second-grade primary education was used as a practical model to analyse the meanings conveyed by images in the context of lesson construction and to monitor their contribution to vocabulary development and the ability to express and understand.

This research paper also emphasises the role of educational images in conveying meaning through their visual and suggestive structures, which have a variety of psychological and educational implications. This makes them an effective semantic medium that contributes to the development of linguistic thinking in young learners. In conclusion, we argue that images are a fundamental element of the educational process as they help embed meaning and stimulate linguistic interaction. Therefore, their use within textbooks must be carefully considered.

Keywords: Semantics; educational image; impact, linguistic competence; student; textbook; primary education.

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1.Introduction:

The educational process has undergone significant development in recent years, particularly through the integration of visual media into curricula. Educational images have become effective teaching tools that facilitate meaning-making and knowledge transfer, particularly in the early stages of primary education. The importance of images extends beyond their explanatory function to include their semantic content, as they convey cognitive, cultural and linguistic information that engages with learners and contributes to the development of their cognitive and linguistic abilities.

In the second year of primary school, learners rely heavily on visual perception to understand concepts, making images a medium that conveys meaning, aids vocabulary development and stimulates their ability to express themselves and understand. In light of this, this study asks: To what extent do the semantic implications of educational images contribute to the linguistic development of second-grade students? What is the nature of the relationship between the semantic dimension of images and the formation of linguistic meaning in learners?

The study aims to reveal the semantic function of images in textbooks and highlight their impact on building linguistic competence in learners. This will be achieved by analysing examples from an Arabic language textbook for second-grade primary education. The study will derive the educational and linguistic objectives of lessons, such as helping learners to express themselves correctly, which is important at this stage as they have not yet acquired the vocabulary necessary for producing sentences and phrases in writing. By practising projecting the meanings and ideas contained in images and expressing them orally and in writing, learners nurture and develop their linguistic abilities.

2. The concept of image:

2.1 Linguistic perspective:

The Arabic term for 'image' is derived from the root (ر, و, ص), which has several meanings: 'shape'. It can also refer to the act of imagining or conceiving something, as in 'I pictured it', and to depictions such as statues. The form of an action or command is described as its 'image' or 'character'¹.

According to Al-Muajam Al-Wasit, 'image' refers to shape and three-dimensional representation. In the Holy Quran, it is stated: 'He created you, then shaped you, and fashioned you in whatever form He wished' (Al-Infitar: 8). The image of a question or matter signifies its nature, while the image of a thing represents its abstract essence and mental or cognitive representation².

In the Dictionary of Human Studies and Fine Arts Terms, Ahmed Zaki defines it as "a representation of people, objects or scenes on paper or similar media, created through photography or drawing"³. In language, therefore, an image is the form and character of a

thing, which can be physically embodied through a machine or drawing, or conceived mentally.

One of the names of Allah is ‘Al-Musawwir’ (The Fashioner), signifying that He shapes all creatures, giving each a unique form and appearance⁴. This is reflected in the verse: ‘He is the Creator, the Initiator, the Fashioner’ (Al-Hashr: 24). The root (صور) appears in the Quran in the context of creation, as in: ‘And Allah is the One Who made the earth a resting place for you and the sky a canopy, and fashioned you and made your forms beautiful’ (Ghafir: 64). It also appears in: ‘Indeed, We created you, then We fashioned you’ (Al-A’raf: 11), and ‘He is the One Who shapes you in the wombs as He wills’ (Al-Imran: 6).

2.2 Terminologically:

Aristotle stated: ‘The soul never thinks without images’⁵, emphasising that human memories, as well as present and future thoughts, are tied to images. Whenever one thinks of something, an image or set of images comes to mind.

An image is defined as ‘a form of art that conveys a certain reality or invents a scene based on tangible reality’⁶. It is also described as ‘a representation of an aspect of the world, captured by sensory perception and being simultaneously individual, general and exemplary. Images add something new to the world, captivating and enchanting us through the duality of what they convey’⁷.

Additionally, an image can represent likeness and similarity, corresponding to matter, as it can be either a physical embodiment, such as a sculpture created by an artist, or a mental conception, such as a scene envisioned by a writer. In both cases, it reflects the original features either wholly or partially⁸.

Thus, an image may resemble the depicted object by reflecting its original features or highlight the most significant aspects of these features. An image can also be literary, such as figurative language, or mental, formed by an ordinary person when thinking of a specific thing.

3. Educational images:

Presenting an image of something is more abstract than presenting the thing itself or a model of it, since an image is more realistic than the abstract words that describe the thing. Images are superior to words for expression and communication because the sense of sight is the simplest of the senses in mental processes. Most mental representations are visual, which is why the Chinese proverb states, ‘A picture is worth a thousand words.’⁹ ‘A picture is worth a thousand words.’ An image can convey what one wishes to express when words alone struggle to explain and clarify. Additionally, images can shorten speech and save time.

Therefore, images have become a successful educational tool for conveying information to students, particularly younger ones. These are known as educational images and differ from general images in that they are directed towards a specific purpose and audience. An educational image is ‘a purposeful and beneficial image used in education, particularly in the classroom’¹⁰. They are clarifying tools and important pedagogical instruments that assist both learners and teachers in conveying, understanding and clarifying lessons by elucidating complex details in a tangible and specific manner — a useful feature, given that learners often struggle to grasp abstract concepts.

Furthermore, an educational image can be described as ‘a cognitive, emotional, and kinetic image’¹¹.

Educational images are used to make abstract concepts more accessible to students, for example in geography lessons to illustrate the sources and mouths of rivers or the lives of different peoples. They are also used in language lessons to teach different languages, adding various dimensions of meaning that make abstract ideas more concrete, thus facilitating understanding¹².

Educational images help students to follow and organise the stages of a lesson in their minds, enabling them to absorb the material. This then solidifies and transforms into acquired knowledge that they can use in the future to discover new knowledge.

They are an effective educational tool, particularly for teaching illiterate people, and they also help to clarify written material. They facilitate students’¹³ understanding of written texts by linking text and image, thereby enhancing their linguistic competence.

4. Types of Educational Images:

Educational images can be divided into two main categories: moving images and still images. Still images can be further divided into two types: photographic and digital¹⁴.

4.1 Still images:

Still images are photographic representations of the things we see around us, such as people, animals, buildings, vehicles and nature. They depict objects in only two dimensions: length and width. To overcome this limitation, three-dimensional objects can be photographed from multiple angles. The variety of images provides learners with different perspectives of the object, helping them to understand and visualise it¹⁵.

Still images rely on sight for perception and do not require complex skills to create. They can be presented without specialised equipment and aid the study of facts by providing information on shape, size and colour, and clarifying the meaning of words and ideas. Still images can also show objects in both enlarged and reduced formats, making them suitable for individual or group education.

Although still images lack motion, movement can be represented by taking a series of images, and motion can be frozen for detailed study to distinguish correct actions from incorrect ones¹⁶.

Still images fall into two categories:

4.1.1 Photographic images:

These are still images captured using known cameras. They may depict people, landscapes, nature or ordinary objects¹⁷. They are condensed representations of real-world space, size, angle, perspective and imagination, reflecting the photographer's touch, thoughts and viewpoints, as well as their subjective and objective perceptions¹⁸.

These images can be presented to students in printed form in various sizes, either in colour or black and white.

4.1.2 Digital images: Digital images:

Digital images are 'ready-made images that can be downloaded from the internet', greatly facilitating the process of composing textbooks for authors and publishers as they are modern and functional images associated with computers and digital networks¹⁹.

Unlike photographic images, digital images are generated by computers and can be easily accessed by teachers and students alike.

In addition to the aforementioned types of educational image, we can also include drawings, still films (35 mm, colour or black and white) and transparent slides that can be displayed optically²⁰.

Drawings are images that teachers use to illustrate their lessons and can be created by the teacher or others.

4.2 Moving Images:

Moving images are characterized by motion, representing life as it is through the movement and performance of functions they depict. These images can be either silent or sound, including educational television, closed-circuit television networks, cinematic films, educational videos, computer programs, and educational content on the internet²¹.

What distinguishes this type of image from still images is its vitality and movement, which students enjoy. Therefore, moving images can be more effective in conveying and reinforcing abstract ideas in their minds, simulating the scenes presented.

5. Criteria for Selecting Educational Images:

Textbooks contain many illustrative images to help students understand the topics they cover. Additionally, teachers may choose other images based on their expertise. Several points must be considered when selecting these images, including:

- **Engagement:** The image should capture students' interest and attract their attention.
- **Simplicity:** The image should be simple to maximise its usefulness.
- **Educational value:** The content should be educational to help achieve the lesson's objectives.
- **Accuracy:** Information must be scientifically valid and up to date.
- **Artistic quality:** The image should be artistically well-produced; beauty and clarity attract the eye, while ugliness and a lack of harmony repel it.
- **Size appropriateness:** The size of the image should be appropriate for the number of students and the presentation method. Coloured images are not necessarily better than black and white ones, even though they may attract more attention. The selection criterion should focus on the realism that the image portrays rather than its colour²².
- **Relevance:** Images should not be disorganised, unclear, dirty, too small, lacking in taste, or irrelevant for educational purposes. They must also be suitable for the content of the lesson to prevent misunderstandings and appropriate for the age of the students so that they can easily understand and relate to them. They should also not violate norms and traditions and be relevant to the nature of the society in which they live²³.

In summary, the criteria for selecting educational images can be condensed into the following principles:

- **The Law of Smallness:** A small shape stands out against a larger background.
- **Law of Simplicity:** A simple shape is more prominent than a complex one.
- **Law of Order and Contrast:** The organised and contrasting arrangement of elements within a specific shape.
- **Law of Difference:** A unique or unusual shape stands out more²⁴.

6. The importance of images and drawings in education:

One of the most challenging tasks teachers face is explaining, simplifying and conveying concepts to learners, and then reinforcing these concepts in their minds. Teachers attempt to overcome these challenges through various means, the most important of which is the use of images. These play a crucial role in explanation and clarification, as well as enhancing students' knowledge and linguistic competence. The significance of images also lies in:

- Capturing students' attention: Images attract students' interest in the subject being explained.
- Information encoding: They help students to encode, remember and interpret the information extracted from the image.
- Relevance to Students' Interests: Images become more important as they relate to students' interests and needs.
- Structured presentation: presenting images in a specific order helps students to follow the presented idea and develop a comprehensive understanding of the topic²⁵.

Like other educational tools, images can:

- Enjoyment and motivation: They provide learners with enjoyment, excitement and motivation during the learning process.
- Assisting Teachers: They help teachers present, assess and manage educational material effectively.
- Time and effort efficiency: images save teachers time and effort.
- Overcoming temporal and spatial limits: They help teachers transcend the limitations of time and space within the classroom.
- Encouraging participation: Images encourage learners to participate and engage with various classroom activities.
- Conveying information and skills: They facilitate the transmission of information, attitudes and skills to learners.

Maintaining information clarity: Images keep information vivid and clearly represented in learners' minds²⁶.

7. Teaching Skills for Reading Images:

Teachers should instruct their students on how to read displayed images as carefully as they teach them to read written words. There are three levels of reading images:

- **First Level:** At this level, learners identify and name the contents of an image.
- **Second Level:** The learner pinpoints specific details in the image and describes what they see. Second level: the learner pinpoints specific details in the image and describes what they see.

- **Third level:** The learner draws conclusions about the objects or people present in the image, linking the past, present and future while interpreting what they observe in light of their learning experiences²⁷.

Students should accurately describe what they see in the image, including facial expressions and their meanings, the significance of colours, the components of the scene and how these elements connect to reveal their meanings and objectives. Consequently, they engage in multiple processes: description, extraction, analysis, synthesis, and conclusion.

Acquiring these skills helps students to improve their verbal reading abilities and develop their linguistic competence.

8. The Functions of Educational Images:

Images perform several functions in education, including:²⁸

8.1 Educational function: this involves using images to help students achieve learning goals during lessons.

8.2 Instrumental function: Images serve as procedural tools or methodological means for building, explaining, clarifying and linguistically and visually interpreting lessons.

8.3 Expressive function: images can express a range of subjective and objective meanings and issues that can be explored during the lesson.

8.4 Influential function: educational images aim to influence the recipient positively or negatively, stimulating their cognitive, emotional and sensory-motor attention.

8.5 Communicative or preservative function: images maintain communication between teacher and learner by engaging students' attention and stimulating them cognitively, emotionally and physically. This encourages self-directed learning and the use of creative imagination.

9. The semantic dimension of the image in the second grade primary textbook:

The textbook serves as the foundation upon which students build their future knowledge. Those responsible for preparing it should therefore pay special attention to it, particularly with regard to primary school books, as they are directed towards a sensitive and impressionable age group that requires simplified educational tools and methods appropriate for their age in order to convey educational material effectively.

During this critical phase of their education, students need to develop their linguistic skills by expressing themselves in Arabic, their spoken language. However, they also need to develop these skills to become eloquent speakers.

The textbook's comprehensive competency aims for students to be able to: 'Communicate orally and in writing using correct grammar and vocabulary; read simple texts

consisting of forty to sixty fully vowelled words accurately; and produce them in written form in meaningful, communicative situations.²⁹ By the end of the academic year, students should therefore be able to express themselves correctly about their surroundings, both orally and in writing.

9.1 Description of the book:

The book is large and consists of 175 pages. The cover is light purple, with the title written in pink and black in the centre of the top part of the page. The word ‘My Book’ is in pink, while ‘Arabic Language, Islamic Education, Civic Education’ is in black.

Below the title is a large image of a smiling boy and girl in aprons entering school. The girl is holding the same book and the image includes various school supplies, such as pens, a backpack and notebooks. Behind the children is a picture of the schoolyard with students playing in it.

The phrase (Second Grade Primary Education) at the bottom of the image indicates the target audience for the book.

On the back cover, a school library is depicted, with a group of students browsing books and revising their lessons while others receive books from a librarian. This image fosters a love of reading and encourages students to engage in reading activities.

The book covers eight themes: School Life; Family; Neighbourhood and Village; Sports and Recreation; Environment and Nature; Nutrition and Health; Communication; and Cultural Heritage³⁰. Each theme consists of three educational units, along with a memorisation text, three Islamic and civic education lessons, and one project for each unit.

9.2 Each linguistic unit features a variety of activities, including:

- **Understanding the spoken text:** Through texts, images and drawings related to the unit topic.
- **Reflecting and Speaking:** Free expression followed by guided expression through comprehension and discussion questions.
- **Using forms:** Discovering grammatical structures through sentences found in the spoken text.
- **Constructing:** identifying grammatical constructions through sentences in the spoken text or selected sentences.
- **Oral Production:** Accompanied by the phrase ‘I observe the scenes and express their events.’

- **Reading:** followed by explanations of vocabulary meanings and comprehension questions.
- **Discovering and distinguishing:** utilising the text as a reference for reviewing required letters and distinguishing between sounds and shapes.
- **Improving my reading:** Practising reading performance according to the required reading indicators.
- **Practising Written Production:** Students practise written production.

The significant aspect of these activities, which we will analyse, relates to images and linguistic competence, such as oral and written expression.

9.3 Use of images in the second-grade textbook:

The second-grade primary school textbook contains a variety of coloured images and illustrations, including photographs and drawings. Almost every page is accompanied by images that support the text, helping students with linguistic performance and enabling them to express themselves, acquire language skills, develop their imagination and enrich their knowledge and linguistic repertoire.

Most of the images reflect the reality experienced by students, aiding their understanding of the content and details. Examples include images of parents, family, nature and school. Furthermore, most of the activities in the book rely on these images to help students construct sentences and express themselves orally and in writing. The images provide students with a starting point for forming their vocabulary and constructing expressive sentences, helping them to transition from an abstract world, which is difficult to comprehend, to a tangible reality that is easier for them to grasp.

9.4 Analysis of Selected Activities Based on Images in the Book:

The analysis focuses on lessons from the Communication unit related to images.

- Educational unit: Communication.
- Understanding the Spoken Text: The Phone.

9.4.1 Activity for Understanding the Spoken Text:

Before describing what they see in the image, students listen to the spoken text read by the teacher several times, without it being written on the board. This activity relies on hearing, enabling students to summarise what they have heard and answer related questions, using the provided image in the book for help.

▪ **Understanding the spoken text: The Phone.**

The home phone rang and Ahmed picked up the receiver, saying, ‘Hello, who’s calling?’ A pleasant voice replied, ‘Hello Ahmed. It’s your uncle calling from the desert. Are you well?’ Ahmed responded, ‘I’m fine, Uncle. I’ll call my father so he can talk to you.’

After finishing his conversation with his father, Ahmed’s uncle said, ‘How easy it is to contact family members now! In the past, before mobile phones existed, it was difficult to communicate. Now we can talk to whomever we want, wherever they are, at any time.’

Comprehension questions:

- Who called Ahmed and his father?
- What type of phone is in Ahmed’s house?
- Did the uncle use a mobile phone, a landline or the internet to call Ahmed?³¹

▪ **Analysis of the accompanying image:**

The attached image reflects the content of the accompanying text. The upper part of the image shows a man dressed in desert attire holding a mobile phone next to palm trees and sand, with a man riding a camel in the background. In the bottom part of the image, a child (who is Ahmed in the text) is holding the receiver of a landline phone placed on a desk. There is a window behind him with a beautiful view.

The image encapsulates the text’s content through details such as the sand, the camel, the palm trees, the attire of the uncle, and the mobile phone in his hand, indicating that he is calling from the desert. Ahmed is holding the landline receiver and the window behind him shows a natural scene, implying that he lives in an area without desert.

The image combines the old and the new by showcasing both a mobile phone and a landline, adding a modern touch.

Thus, the image helped the student to answer the teacher’s questions and understand the text, reinforcing the information in their mind. Not all students can concentrate on the teacher while reading the text, so using the sense of sight through the image makes it easier for them. The details within the image help to activate their memory, enabling them to recall what the teacher said.



9.4.2 Activity: I Observe and Speak.

In this activity, an image related to the text is displayed in front of the students, accompanied by a question to help them analyse the content of the image.

Examining the page containing the lesson reveals that there are two images³², each accompanied by a question.



The first image depicts an envelope and is accompanied by the question: 'Name what you see in the image. What is it used for?' This question helps students to build a clear and understandable idea that they can express verbally. For example, they might say: 'The image represents an envelope that holds a letter and is sent by post to the person it was written for.'

The second image shows a landline phone and is accompanied by the following question: 'Describe this device and mention its benefits.' The image is simple and clear, free from complexity and excessive detail. The accompanying question directs students towards the ideas and vocabulary they will use to describe the image. They could say: 'The image

represents a landline phone, which cannot be moved and is kept at home. It is large and allows us to communicate with anyone we want.'

The simplicity and clarity of the two images makes it easier for students to express their ideas verbally. This demonstrates that images serve as tools for conveying information and enabling learners to articulate it verbally. They translate what they observe into meanings and interpretations derived from the image, which they then convert into words that form useful sentences. This process enhances their language skills and gradually builds a rich vocabulary. Listening to their peers' explanations also helps them to acquire new skills. However, it is important that the image is clear, simple and suitable for the content of the text being understood.

9.4.3 Activity: I Produce Orally

The image is accompanied by the phrase, 'Describe the mobile phone and mention its benefits.'³³



The image depicts a mobile phone with a screen displaying a set of numbers. The accompanying question specifies the required task or content of the image, so the student is not left wondering what to say. The task is to describe the mobile phone and mention its benefits. The student might respond as follows: 'The mobile phone is small and can fit in a pocket. We can use it to contact family and friends from anywhere, not just from home. We can also use it as a calculator...'

9.4.4 Activity: I Produce in Writing.

This activity involves using a series of images to create a written text.



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The images depict the stages of writing and sending a letter. For each image, the student produces a sentence, which collectively form a written text. For example, they might say: 'I write the letter on white paper. I fold it and put it inside the envelope. I write my friend's address on the envelope and stick on a postage stamp. Finally, I go to the post office and put it in the mailbox.'

Arranging the images in an orderly and organised manner helped the students to express the process in simple, sequential sentences, resulting in coherent texts that did not omit any stage. Rather than asking the student to write about the stages of writing a letter directly, images representing each stage were provided to make it easier for them to express their thoughts, allowing them to focus on writing their text.

10. Conclusion:

In conclusion, we can say that the second-grade primary textbook extensively and clearly relies on images, reflecting their significant role in the educational process. Images serve as a clarifying and explanatory tool that facilitates comprehension and understanding for students. For images to perform this effective role, certain conditions must be met, including:

- Clarity and simplicity: If an image is unclear, particularly in terms of shape and colour, it may confuse students and hinder their thinking.
- Relevance to the subject matter: Images should be accompanied by guiding questions and contain relevant details. They should also be connected to the student's environment and reality, avoiding unfamiliar settings.
- Modernity and realism: images should be an appropriate size to enable students to express themselves comfortably.

Using images in the education system can significantly contribute to equipping students with various language skills in a simple, enjoyable and entertaining way, thereby increasing their engagement with the lesson.

This study confirms that educational images are an effective semantic tool in the teaching process. They not only clarify lessons visually, but also convey meaning and help students build concepts. The images in the Year 3 primary school textbook have demonstrated their ability to enhance learners' linguistic repertoire, stimulate their expressive and oral skills, and develop their understanding of texts and vocabulary in an enjoyable and effective educational context. Therefore, it is pedagogically necessary to utilise images purposefully and thoughtfully to ensure that students benefit from their semantic dimensions in developing language skills and achieving curriculum objectives.

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