Visual Art as an Affective Scaffold: Supporting Speaking Confidence and Communicative Language Ability in Beginner L2 Learners

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Abstract

Speaking anxiety and low self-confidence frequently limit oral participation in beginner-level second language classrooms. Previous research has shown that visual art can support cultural learning and identity development. However, its role in increasing speaking confidence and encouraging oral participation among beginner L2 learners has received little research attention. Drawing on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which conceptualizes learning as socially mediated meaning-making, this study investigates how visual art can function as a mediational tool that supports speaking confidence in beginner L2 Hebrew learners.

Fifteen students enrolled in Hebrew 102 participated in a six-week art-mediated instructional mini-unit featuring Israeli artworks. Each session followed a structured progression from guided observation to interpretation and personal response, culminating in a brief discussion of the artwork designed to scaffold oral production. By shifting focus from linguistic accuracy to shared interpretation and expression, the unit aimed to reduce affective barriers and encourage oral engagement.

Data were collected through pre- and post-intervention speaking confidence surveys, a structured classroom observation rubric administered at three points during the study, and a group interview conducted at the conclusion of the instructional unit. These findings suggest that the instructional unit supported increases in students' speaking confidence, willingness to participate, and sustained oral production, creating conditions that may support the development of communicative language ability.

The study proposes art-mediated instruction as an affective scaffold supporting oral participation in beginner SLA pedagogy.