

Selecting Wordless Picturebooks for English Read-Alouds in EFL Teacher Education

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Abstract

This presentation reports on a practice-based study focusing on pre-service teachers preparing for elementary education and their selection of wordless picturebooks for English read-aloud use. In a teacher education course, students were asked to select a wordless picturebook suitable for English read-alouds in elementary EFL settings. They considered criteria such as target grade level, instructional purpose, visual clarity, narrative coherence, and the feasibility of oral storytelling without written text. Students documented their selection rationales, which were then analyzed to identify common patterns and challenges. The analysis revealed that students tended to prioritize visual appeal while initially overlooking narrative continuity and cognitive load. The findings suggest that explicit guidance in picturebook selection helps pre-service teachers develop a more pedagogically grounded approach to instructional materials.

Introduction

Wordless picturebooks have attracted increasing attention as effective instructional materials for elementary EFL settings. Because they contain no written text, they offer unique opportunities for oral storytelling and creative language use.

However, **how pre-service teachers select** appropriate wordless picturebooks for read-aloud activities has received little scholarly attention. This study examines the selection criteria and rationales that university students apply.

Read-Aloud Scene



Method

Context: Teacher education course at a Japanese university. **Task:** Students selected one wordless picturebook suitable for EFL read-alouds. **Criteria:** Target grade level, instructional purpose, visual clarity, narrative coherence, oral storytelling feasibility. **Data:** Written selection rationales analyzed for patterns and challenges.



Key Selection Criteria for Wordless Picturebooks

Visual Aspects

- Clarity of illustrations
- Age-appropriate artwork
- Visual storytelling cues
- Page layout and flow

Narrative Quality

- Story coherence
- Logical sequence
- Emotional engagement
- Cognitive load balance

Pedagogical Fit

- Grade-level suitability
- Instructional purpose
- Oral storytelling potential
- Language output goals

Findings

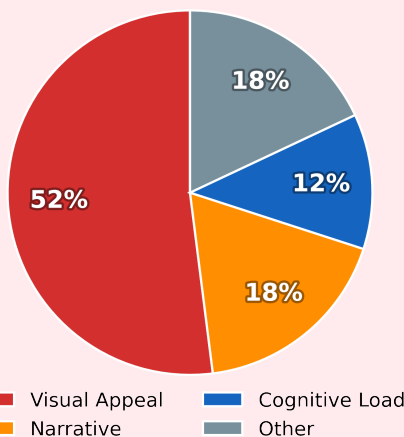
Key Patterns:

- Students **prioritized visual appeal** as the primary criterion.
- **Narrative continuity** was initially overlooked.
- **Cognitive load** considerations were underrepresented.

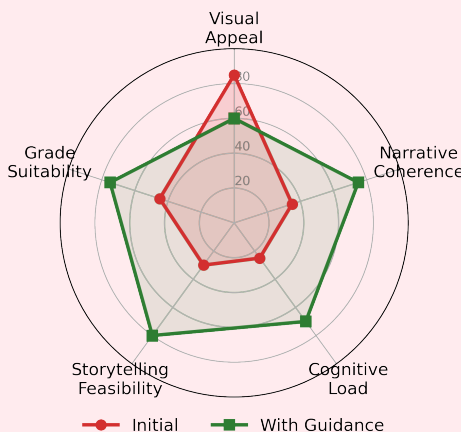
Common Challenges:

- Difficulty distinguishing visually attractive vs. pedagogically effective books.
- Selection based on personal preference rather than learner needs.
- Limited experience evaluating narrative structure in wordless formats.

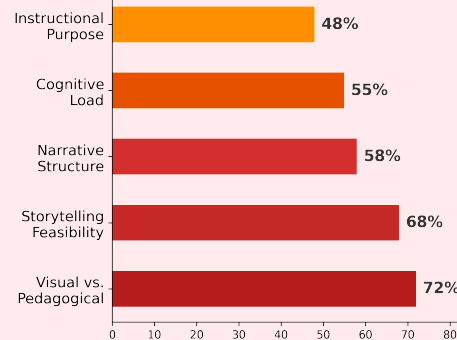
Initial Selection Priorities



Criteria Emphasis



Common Challenges in Selection (%)



Conclusion, Implications & Future Directions

Conclusion:

Pre-service teachers initially relied heavily on **visual appeal** when selecting wordless picturebooks, while pedagogically important factors such as narrative coherence, cognitive load, and oral storytelling feasibility were frequently overlooked. These findings confirm that **explicit guidance in picturebook selection** is essential for developing a more critically informed approach to instructional materials in EFL teacher education.

Implications for Teacher Education:

- Integrate systematic criteria for evaluating wordless picturebooks into coursework.
- Provide scaffolded frameworks that balance visual, narrative, and pedagogical dimensions.
- Foster reflective practice through structured selection rationale writing tasks.

Future Directions:

- Investigate how selection criteria evolve **after** read-aloud practice and peer feedback.
- Compare selection patterns across different proficiency levels and teaching contexts.
- Develop and validate a standardized rubric for evaluating wordless picturebooks.

Key References:

- Arizpe, E., & Styles, M. (2016). *Children Reading Picturebooks* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Mourão, S. (2015). The potential of picturebooks with young learners. In J. Bland (Ed.), *Teaching English to Young Learners* (pp. 199-218). Bloomsbury.