

The role and characteristics of images in language and culture teaching

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Abstract---This research paper examines the role of educational images in language and culture teaching by analyzing their concept, characteristics, and pedagogical functions, in addition to their various types and the role of modern technology in enhancing their presence within the educational process. The study shows that educational images represent an effective didactic tool that contributes to simplifying abstract concepts, bringing meanings closer, and enhancing learners' linguistic achievement by strengthening memory and developing lexical repertoire. The results also highlight the important role of images in fostering imagination and creativity, stimulating linguistic expression, and their ability to increase learning motivation and overcome individual differences among learners, making them more interactive and engaged in knowledge construction. The study further confirms that the integration of images and text, along with the use of digital media, contributes to improving comprehension and developing communicative competence, giving learning a more realistic and effective dimension. The study concludes that educational images have become a fundamental component of modern education, requiring systematic and well-planned use to achieve effective learning based on interaction and the development of linguistic and cultural competencies among learners.

Keywords---educational image, language teaching, linguistic competence, expression and creativity, digital media.

Introduction

Educational images are considered one of the most important modern pedagogical tools that have contributed to the development of teaching and learning methods, especially in the field of language teaching and cultural transmission. They are not limited to being a means of presentation or illustration,

How to Cite:

Djermouni, R. (2026). The role and characteristics of images in language and culture teaching. *The International Tax Journal*, 53(2), 946–955. Retrieved from <https://internationaltaxjournal.online/index.php/itj/article/view/605>

The International tax journal ISSN: 0097-7314 E-ISSN: 3066-2370 © 2026

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Submitted: 25 February 2026 | Revised: 27 February 2026 | Accepted: 02 March 2026

but rather constitute a comprehensive interactive tool that connects visual meaning with linguistic and cultural knowledge, and enhances learners' abilities in perception, expression, and creativity.

Images play a central role in enhancing linguistic achievement and strengthening memory, as they help to (consolidate) vocabulary and meanings in the mind in a clearer and more effective way than written texts alone. They also contribute to developing learners' artistic sense and creative imagination by providing space for personal expression and making learning enjoyable and engaging, which stimulates critical and creative thinking from early stages of learning.

Educational images are classified into several types, including static images such as photographs, maps, charts, and cartoons; moving images such as films and videos; and audiovisual images that combine sight and sound. The importance of this diversity lies in its ability to attract learners' attention, facilitate understanding of concepts, overcome individual differences, and enhance active participation in the classroom.

Modern technology plays a significant role in enhancing the effectiveness of educational images, as digital media, videos, and interactive applications provide advanced tools for delivering information in an engaging manner. They also facilitate cultural communication among learners from different backgrounds and open new horizons for acquiring knowledge and skills.

The design of educational images is of particular importance, as it requires defining general learning objectives, understanding the cognitive and psychological characteristics of the target group, selecting appropriate learning content, and formulating precise behavioral objectives. Practical stages include preparing materials, producing the tool, testing its effectiveness, modifying it according to results, and evaluating its impact to ensure the achievement of the desired educational efficiency.

Educational images are a powerful motivator for learners, allowing them to interpret information and connect it with their reality and personal experience. They help them express themselves freely, develop their vocabulary, and enhance their intellectual and cultural abilities. They also stimulate thinking and broaden comprehension in a comprehensive and objective manner, making them an indispensable tool in language teaching and cultural transmission.

Axis One: The Role of Images in Language Teaching

First: The Concept of Educational Images:

Images are among the most prominent pedagogical tools that have received increasing attention in the educational field, especially in language teaching, due to their ability to bring meaning closer and embody abstract concepts. They are not merely decorative elements in textbooks but play a functional role that contributes to building learning and facilitating language acquisition in a more interactive and effective way.

Definitions of educational images vary depending on researchers' cognitive backgrounds and theoretical references, as well as the objectives pursued by the educational process. From this perspective, educational images can be viewed as a set of selected and organized images according to the main stages of the lesson: introductory, formative, and evaluative stages. These images fall (within) what is known as teaching aids, which teachers rely on to present lessons through explanation, interpretation, guiding learners toward conclusions, and finally evaluation¹.

Images play a central role in the educational process, going beyond being mere drawings or decorative visuals to become effective learning tools. These visual media help simplify abstract concepts and

¹ Mohamed Mahmoud Al-Hila, *Design and Production of Educational Learning وسائل*, Dar Al-Masirah for Publishing and Distribution, Amman, Jordan, 2001, p. 125

facilitate understanding of educational content more clearly and effectively. Educational images are purposeful and goal-oriented, used in the educational field, especially in classrooms, transforming from simple visuals into directed didactic tools for learning².

They are important explanatory tools that contribute to explanation and understanding, helping both teachers and learners convey information clearly and directly. Through these images, complex aspects of lessons can be interpreted, detailed elements clarified, and complicated ideas analyzed in a tangible and visible way, enhancing learners' comprehension.

Thus, educational images are more than visual tools; they are multidimensional teaching (means) that combine explanation, interpretation, and analysis, making learning more interactive and realistic. Their role goes beyond decoration to become a central component in developing learners' skills and understanding. They function as a medium enabling teachers and learners to perform specific educational functions such as presentation, description, explanation, justification, synthesis, and evaluation³.

When used effectively, images help learners build independent knowledge, develop various cognitive skills, and make lessons more dynamic and engaging, thereby increasing interaction and understanding (within) the classroom.

Second: Types of Educational Images:

Educational images vary according to their nature and mode of presentation, and differ in their impact on learners. The choice of image type depends on the educational objective and the skills targeted for development. The main types include:

1. Static Images:

These rely primarily on the sense of sight, such as photographs, illustrations, maps, charts, and cartoons. They help transform abstract concepts into tangible elements that learners can easily understand, and allow accurate presentation of facts through shape, size, and color. They play an important role in teaching vocabulary, sentence structures, grammar representation, and conveying cultural or scientific elements that are difficult to observe directly⁴.

2. Moving Images:

These include films, videos, recordings, and television or cinema presentations. They are characterized by their ability to place learners in realistic contexts, allowing them to experience the learning situation fully, which facilitates understanding and retention. They also help shape learners' behavior and increase their interest in lessons⁵.

3. Audiovisual Images:

These combine sight and sound, such as videos with audio narration or multimedia presentations. They are powerful teaching tools that attract learners' attention, stimulate motivation, and develop listening, speaking, and pronunciation skills.⁶ They also help overcome spatial and temporal limitations.

Third: The Impact of Technology on Enhancing the Role of Images:

Technology has brought about a real revolution in the field of educational and media images. Digital media is no longer just a tool for transmitting information but has become an interactive and powerful means of influencing learners. Digital images and videos integrate visual, auditory, and textual elements

² Mohsen Ali Atiyah, *Communication Technology in Effective Education*, Dar Al-Manahij for Publishing and Distribution, Amman, 2008, p. 89

³ Salah Fadl, *Reading the Image and the Image of Reading*, Dar Al-Shorouk, Cairo, Egypt, 1997, p. 218

⁴ Rushdi Ahmed Taima, *Linguistic Concepts in Children: Their Foundations, Skills, Teaching, and Evaluation*, 1st ed., Dar Al-Masirah for Publishing, Distribution and Printing, Jordan, 2007, p. 165

⁵ Hassan Shehata, *Teaching Arabic Language Between Theory and Practice*, Modern University Office, Alexandria, Egypt, 1990, p. 155

⁶ Salah Fadl, *Reading the Image and Images of Reading*, Dar Al-Shorouk, Cairo, Egypt, 1997, p. 168

to deliver rich content that combines logic and emotion, making them highly effective for communication and persuasion.

Digital images are used in education to achieve specific objectives, with clear components and realistic visual elements that enhance direct observation in the classroom, they allow learners to perceive fine details that may be difficult to observe in reality.

In the era of the internet and social media, images and videos have gained significant importance. For example, users on Facebook share more than 300 million images daily, and images receive higher engagement rates compared to other content types. They have become a universal visual language that transcends linguistic barriers, allowing individuals to communicate ideas instantly without lengthy explanations.

Technology also enables the production of high-quality educational images and videos, designed by specialized teams that integrate sound, text, and visuals in a balanced way. These media enhance learners' impressions, stimulate engagement, and support cognitive and behavioral development, while allowing teachers to present content in an attractive and effective manner⁷.

It is clear that technology has significantly enhanced the role of educational images, expanding their capabilities and making them more engaging and interactive. They now provide learners with a rich educational experience that transcends time and space, making learning more innovative and effective.

Second Axis: Functions and Characteristics of the Image

First: Pedagogical Functions of the Image

Educational images play a central role in the teaching process. They are not merely a means of decorating books or classrooms, but rather a multi-functional tool that helps convey information, motivate learners, and facilitate understanding of academic content. These functions vary according to the theoretical backgrounds of researchers and educational experts, Some have identified eight basic functions of educational images, including stimulation, arousing motivation, organization, interpretation, aiding visualization and repetition, decoration, compensation, and transmission, while others have reduced these functions to three main axes: attracting attention, clarification, and long-term retention of information. These functions appear to varying degrees within the following roles:

1- The communicative function:

The image is an important means of visual communication. It is not limited to language alone, but also includes signs, gestures, and facial and eye expressions, allowing for effective non-verbal communication. Educational images help convey a large amount of information and knowledge, and are considered a key tool in language teaching in a communicative way, through developing the four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, within an integrated relationship between language and communication⁸

The communicative function of the image makes it a bridge between the learner and information, facilitating the understanding of complex messages in a fast and clear visual way, especially in language learning and interaction.

2- The educational and didactic function:

The primary function of educational images lies in supporting the educational process, as they are used to achieve specific learning objectives during different stages of the lesson: introductory, formative, and final. The image works as a learning motivator and a link to understanding the names of objects. It is essential in school textbooks from primary to middle levels, where it is often attached to texts or words to explain and clarify concepts.

⁷ Abbas Mustafa Sadiq, *The Digital Image as a Main Element in the Structure of New Media: Requirements of Processing and Use on the Internet and Multimedia*, Jordan, 2008, p. 122

⁸ Faisal Ben Ali, *The Role of Educational Image in Developing Communicative Competence among Primary School Learners*, "Alefi: Language and Media for Society" Journal, Vol. 6, No. 2, 2019, p. 163

The educational image provides strong support for the lesson, helping the learner to understand and assimilate, and linking theoretical information with visual experience, which enhances the learning process and increases student interaction⁹

3- The function of the image in the presence of text:

The image is not an end in itself but refers to the content of the text and supports it. It acts as a signifier that complements the linguistic content, whether through anchoring and (fixation) or through explanation and expansion. The text may clarify the meaning of the image, or the image may add meanings to the text that the text alone cannot express, Thus, text and image form an integrated unit that reveals precise meanings that are difficult to understand when relying on only one of them.

The integration of text and image enhances the learner's ability to comprehend complex information, making the lesson clearer and richer, and facilitating the connection between theoretical concepts and practical application.

4- The cultural function:

The educational image also carries cultural and civilizational content, as it reflects human awareness and the level of technological, scientific, and literary development. Therefore, selecting an appropriate image for the text is not random but is subject to precise criteria that take into account the intellectual, linguistic, psychological, social, and cultural level of learners, in addition to their age and cognitive characteristics.

The cultural function of images makes them more than just a teaching tool; they transmit cultural values and knowledge, contribute to broadening the learner's perspective, and make them more aware of their environment and cultural heritage¹⁰

Second: Distinctive Characteristics of the Image

The educational image is characterized by several features that make it an effective tool in the teaching process. It is not limited to being a visual means, but represents an integrated element that contributes to improving the learner's understanding and enhancing their abilities in observation and analysis. Its selection depends on several criteria to ensure its suitability for the educational situation and the cognitive level of the target group, as follows:¹¹

- Clarity of the image and quality of presentation: The image should be clear in its features and display all elements of the subject completely, without complexity or distortion, so that the learner can easily understand its content.
- Limitation to essential information: The educational image is effective when it focuses only on important information and avoids overcrowding, to prevent distracting the learner's attention.
- Connection to the educational context and learner's environment: The image should correspond to the nature of the educational content and the learner's environment, taking into account temporal and spatial factors that affect understanding.
- Inclusion of aesthetic elements: It is important that the image contains aesthetic elements that add visual value without compromising the educational content, in order to attract attention and stimulate interest.
- Suitability of size and method of presentation: The image should have an appropriate size for display, whether in printed materials, information boards, or projection devices, according to the educational situation and target group, and should stimulate discussion and questions.
- A good educational image: is one that is directly related to the lesson content and objectives, enriches the learner's experiences and ideas, develops visual language and free expression, while

⁹ Naima Rouabah, Teaching Language Communicatively – Image Technique as a Model, "Approaches in Didactics" Journal, Vol. 1, No. 1, June 2018, p. 96

¹⁰ Faisal Ben Ali, previous reference, p. 164

¹¹ Hachlafi Lakhdar, The Role of Modern Tools in the Educational Process – The Educational Image as a Model, Educational Journal, Vol. 3, No. 7, University of Djelfa, Algeria, 2015, p. 57

considering their cognitive and age abilities. It should be clear in content and colors, and up-to-date in its elements, especially in scientific and geographical curricula, to increase the effectiveness of teaching and learning. In addition, the educational image is characterized by ease of use, low cost, and availability in various forms and types, making it a practical and flexible tool for both teacher and learner.

Third: Designing the Educational Image

Designing the educational image is an essential part of developing teaching aids, as it ensures compatibility with lesson objectives and learner characteristics, and achieves maximum benefit from available resources. The design process is not random but follows organized stages that help produce an effective educational tool aligned with modern teaching standards. It includes the following steps:

Selecting available teaching materials: using existing resources that can be directly employed to support learning.

Modifying available materials: adapting images or media to fit lesson content and learner needs.

Designing new teaching materials: producing original images or media that serve specific educational goals.

Using teaching materials: applying tools in the classroom in an effective and engaging way.

Learner participation and response: activating the learner's role through practical activities and observing reactions to ensure understanding of content.

Evaluation and revision: assessing the effectiveness of the educational tool and making necessary improvements.

Stages of designing the educational tool:

Defining general educational objectives: The design begins by identifying general objectives, which describe the abilities that the learner is expected to demonstrate after using the tool. This step helps in selecting and organizing content according to the learner's readiness, motivation, abilities, and academic and social background, to achieve objectives with minimal effort and time. Educational objectives are the foundation of designing the educational image.

Considering learner characteristics: Social, economic, physical, educational, cognitive, and psychological characteristics must be considered. Although it is difficult to define all these precisely, acknowledging them ensures designing a suitable educational tool for the target group.

Determining learning content: The tool is designed based on the content it serves and must be directly related to the lesson.

Defining specific behavioral (performance) objectives: These are formulated after determining general objectives and analyzing content, ensuring coverage of all concepts and skills. This ensures the image becomes a precise tool for achieving learning outcomes.¹²

Additional stages include:

Designing the tool: preparing a clear design plan based on previous stages.

Preparing production materials: collecting all necessary resources (images, drawings, audio-visual elements).

Producing the educational tool: creating the tool in alignment with objectives, possibly with technical experts.

Testing on a sample: applying the tool to a small group of learners to assess effectiveness.

Development and modification: improving the tool based on feedback.

Evaluation of impact: using objective measures to assess effectiveness and improve continuously.¹³

These stages confirm that designing an educational tool is not merely producing visual content, but a comprehensive process involving planning, production, testing, development, and evaluation. This approach ensures the tool becomes an effective means that enhances learning and supports learners in achieving educational goals.

¹² Muhammad Mahmoud Al-Hila, *Educational Technology between Theory and Practice*, Dar Al-Masira, Amman, 1998, p. 127

¹³ Muhammad Mahmoud Al-Hila, previous reference, p. 130

Axis Three: The Role of the Image in Developing Linguistic and Cultural Competence

First: The Image as a Stimulus for Linguistic Expression

The educational image is considered an effective tool for enhancing learners' linguistic competence. It is not limited to being a visual means of explanation, but rather acts as a stimulus for expression, strengthens memory, and develops artistic and creative skills. Images link linguistic content with visual understanding, making the learning process more enjoyable and effective. It is as follows:¹⁴

1-Strengthening memorization and enhancing linguistic achievement:

Researcher Abdel Latif Hanna confirms that when the learner observes the image accompanying the audio explanation or the text, its effect on memory is stronger than relying on written material alone, and this memory lasts for a longer period. Therefore, the use of colored images in school textbooks helps in memorizing linguistic material and retrieving it when needed, making it a fundamental educational means in enhancing linguistic achievement.

This feature shows that educational images strengthen the learner's visual and linguistic memory, making information more firmly established in the mind, which contributes to improving academic performance.

2-Developing learners' artistic taste:

Educational images contribute to refining the learner's artistic taste and discovering talents, as contemplating images and expressing them through drawing or coloring leads to unleashing creativity and developing imagination, Mohamed Al-Sayed Ali points out that images are among the most capable means of stimulating creative expression and developing children's artistic abilities from an early age.

Educational images do not only help in understanding lessons, but also function as a tool for developing aesthetic sense and creative abilities, thus enhancing learners' overall skills.

3-One of the most important aids to teaching:

The educational image acts as a link between the teacher and the learner, as it provides multiple ways to explain the material, saves time and effort, and presents information in various forms and methods that facilitate the learning process.

Educational images increase the effectiveness of the lesson and enable the teacher to deliver information more quickly and clearly, making learning more interactive.

4-Eliminating individual differences among learners:

Educational images allow the presentation of content in the same way to all learners at the same time, which reduces individual differences among them, Viewing the same image and interacting with it in a similar way helps unify the level of understanding and enhance the linguistic repertoire of each student, which contributes to achieving educational objectives equally.

This feature makes images a fair tool in education, as they provide all learners with an equal opportunity to understand and express the lesson, and enhance the sense of participation and equality in the classroom.

Second: The Image and the Development of Imagination and Creativity

- The image constitutes a unique form of representation; it allows the individual to retain and control the information selected or extracted from its environment, It is a model of mental representation whose characteristic is preserving information in a way that allows the greatest degree of structural similarity to the things we perceive with our senses.
- The restriction of textbook authors to a limited number of lines often affects covering the subject from some aspects. Here lies the importance of the image in explaining and expressing all parts of the

¹⁴ Abdel Latif Hanna, The Effectiveness of Colored Images in Developing Children's Linguistic Skills: First-Year Primary Education Textbook as a Model, Journal of Social Studies and Research, University of Martyr Hamma Lakhdar, El Oued, Algeria, 2015, pp. 207–208

subject, creating a complete and non-deficient understanding of it. The use of images may also address individual differences faced by the teacher, as each learner possesses a linguistic repertoire and communicative competence different from others. For example, each of them may express it without the text imposing limits that some learners may be unable to understand or perceive.

- The educational image is a source of expressive functions, which is what the teaching and learning of the Arabic language needs today. The learner uses the language he needs to employ in situations similar to his reality without being exposed to redundancy from the linguistic text.
- The educational image constitutes the reference upon which the learner's mind relies, especially at this stage where he is unable to make a direct and rapid connection between the uttered and the perceived. The image helps him in this, spares him that effort, and trains him to develop the faculty of imagination. The learner can also build his linguistic lexicon easily based on the images accompanying the text, where vocabulary and its meanings become firmly established and can be retrieved easily when needed.¹⁵

Third: The Role of the Learner in Interpreting the Image

- The image helps the learner connect the signifier with its meaning, thus the learner reconnects his reality and perceptions and revives them through that image.
- It helps the learner reach the intended and correct expression by considering his prior knowledge and his own view of things, the world, and the environment in which he lives. It presents it objectively and neutrally without the intervention of the writer's subjectivity, which may influence the written text through certain backgrounds.
- The image forms a source for the learner's knowledge of the world around him and of new terms. He constantly questions the novelties carried by the image within it, and may recognize certain things and their functions by creating a relationship between them and known elements. Thus, "he transforms it into a linguistic system that we correct and evaluate through correctness and error, thereby achieving the effectiveness of the image in the pupil's book to become a central part of acquiring linguistic skill."
- The image creates for the learner an unlimited space for expression. The learner may take a large part of it to be of his expression without any embarrassment. Therefore, the image is a vast and fertile field that allows him to activate his imagination and create his own world, as he interacts with it spontaneously without limits that may restrict his freedom of expression.
- The educational image develops multiple and accessible competences that the learner can acquire and excel in, such as description, narration, critique, and others.
- The image facilitates the process of perception and the abundant production of ideas. Thus, Aristotle states: thinking is impossible without images.
- Training in understanding linguistic texts, consolidating them, and storing them after transforming them into images in his imagination.
- Images stimulate the learner's interest, especially if they stem from his needs and express his desires. Whether static or moving images, models, or others, they present various knowledge through which the learner can satisfy his inclinations and expand his awareness.
- The image helps the learner become more prepared and willing to learn and more receptive to cognitive material. This is observed when presenting static or moving images (video), where the learner's enthusiasm and love for the subject increase more than reading written text, and his interaction doubles, which increases his level of comprehension.
- The image pushes the learner to involve all senses in learning and comprehension, sharpening his mind toward thinking, interpretation, and analysis. This enables him to reception (understanding the image) and production (expression), which are the two poles of communicative competence.
- The image helps overcome individual differences among learners (which constitute a major obstacle in teaching and learning) through the diversification of learning methods, as each learner has a specific

¹⁵ Abdel Azim Abdel Salam Al-Farjani, *Technology of Producing Educational Materials*, Dar Al-Tiba'a for Publishing and Distribution, Cairo, 2000, p. 165

intelligence different from others. Through this diversity, all learners can be motivated to learn, satisfy their needs, and achieve the targeted competences.

- The image is an easy source for reception and interpretation for all learners, as it does not require reading. Its reception often does not require words or expressions at all. Thus, we can say that we are dealing with a new language—the language of images rather than the language of texts. This imposes new rules in reading, understanding, and constructing meaning. Perhaps the most important feature of this language is its clarity, understood by all without exception, despite the deep and subtle meanings it may carry that language may fail to express or convert into written symbols in a few lines.¹⁶

Conclusion

The results of this study confirm that the educational image is a central and effective tool in developing the teaching and learning process, especially in the field of language teaching and cultural transmission *المحور*. It is not merely a means of clarifying information or attracting attention, but rather a link between visual, linguistic, and cultural knowledge, enabling learners to build a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of concepts and educational content. It has been shown that educational images clearly contribute to enhancing understanding and comprehension by linking information to the learner's reality and mental representations, which helps in retaining information in memory for longer periods compared to written texts alone. They also contribute to developing artistic taste and creative imagination, as they provide space free expression and open horizons for unleashing creative abilities and developing critical thinking, thereby enhancing the learner's ability for linguistic expression and precise formulation of vocabulary.

The study also showed that integrating images with educational texts provides a complementarity between visual and linguistic perception and enhances learners' communicative competence, Image and text together convey meaning clearly and provide rich and comprehensive content through which the learner can understand multiple concepts and apply them practically. Through the systematic use of images, individual differences among learners can be overcome, as images present the same information to all students at the same time and in an equal manner, increasing opportunities for active participation and reducing disparities in academic achievement. Educational images also stimulate learners' interest and push them to interact with the material more dynamically, whether the images are static, moving, or three-dimensional, which enhances their desire to learn and doubles their comprehension.

The study further emphasizes the significant role of modern technology in supporting educational images, as digital media and interactive videos provide innovative and engaging ways to present information, allowing the delivery of linguistic and cultural knowledge and skills in diverse environments. This contributes to enhancing self-directed and interactive learning and opens wide horizons for communication among learners from different cultural backgrounds. The analysis shows that designing educational images should follow precise steps, including defining general and specific educational objectives, analyzing the characteristics of the target group in terms of cognitive, linguistic, social, and psychological abilities, selecting appropriate educational content, producing the tool, testing it on a sample of learners, then developing it and evaluating its impact in achieving the desired educational objectives.

Based on these results, the study recommends the necessity of systematically integrating educational images into all curricula, especially in language and culture teaching, while employing modern digital media to enhance the educational experience and motivate learners, It also recommends training teachers to design and use educational images in innovative and effective ways, taking into account learners' diverse characteristics and cultural and social diversity, and encouraging them to interact with

¹⁶ Douglas Brown, *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*, trans. Abduh Al-Rajhi and Ali Ali Ahmed Shaaban, Dar Al-Nahda Al-Arabiya, Beirut, Lebanon, 1994, p. 256

and interpret images independently to enhance their critical and creative thinking skills, It is also necessary to periodically evaluate the impact of educational images to determine their effectiveness in developing linguistic and cultural skills, and to improve the tools used according to evaluation results to ensure improved educational performance, Thus, it can be confirmed that the educational image represents a fundamental element in modern education, combining visual, linguistic, and cultural dimensions, contributing to the development of learners' cognitive, expressive, and creative skills, helping to overcome individual obstacles and educational disparities, and providing the learner with an opportunity to interact with content actively and dynamically. This makes learning a comprehensive and effective experience and confirms that the strategic and well-planned use of educational images is an indispensable educational necessity to ensure sustainable learning and the development of learners' linguistic and cultural competences.

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