



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Students' Perspective about the Usage of Photovoice Method in the Classroom: A Case Study of Ho Chi Minh City Open University in Vietnam

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: May 13, 2024	<p>The formation of social sciences in general, and sociology in particular, often includes foundational courses such as Introduction to Sociology as part of its curriculum. Many of these courses traditionally place the teacher at the center of teaching, with learners acting as passive recipients of knowledge. This approach limits learners' initiative in seeking knowledge and expressing their own perspectives on social issues, thus excluding them from the knowledge production process. This contradicts modern educational principles that emphasize learner participation in the educational process. Therefore, adopting a constructivist perspective of teaching necessitates the use of new teaching methods, with the Photovoice method being one of the essential tools due to its emphasis on participatory learning. Participatory learning involves students actively engaging with and redefining the knowledge presented in the classroom, rather than passively receiving it. This paper describes our experience using the Photovoice method in the Introduction to Sociology course at Ho Chi Minh City Open University, Vietnam, during the first semester of the 2023-2024 school year. Additionally, the paper presents survey results reflecting students' opinions on the Photovoice method after completing the course. The survey data indicates that Photovoice is an effective pedagogical tool.</p>
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### INTRODUCTION

As stated in the Communist Party of Vietnam's 2013 Resolution No. 23-NQ/TW, the development of education involves raising people's awareness, training manpower, and cultivating the gifted. The goal is to transform education from simply providing knowledge to fostering comprehensive development of learners, including their personal qualities. This aligns with the objective of Ho Chi Minh City Open University, which aims to prepare students for success in modern society. To achieve these educational goals, effective teaching techniques that focus on students' abilities and initiative are crucial. Fortunately, the INCREASE Project has introduced new teaching tools that support the development of learner capacity.

The INCREASE Project, which stands for Innovative Capacity building by participative and Reflective teacher training for Academia, Society, and Enterprises, is co-funded by the Erasmus+ Program of the European Union. While the project consists of various components, the most significant are two teaching modules: Module 1 (Phenomenological perspectives on teaching and learning) and Module 5 (Participatory approaches to organizational cultures). Through these modules, the Photovoice method has been introduced to enhance the learning experience for students.

### **Photovoice method overview**

The Photovoice method was created by Wang and Burris in the early 1990s, where people can identify, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique (Wang and Burris, 1997). Originally, the Photovoice method is a participatory action research methodology that was first applied in the field of public health research. However, this method is currently used in a variety of fields, including psychology, community research, and education. According to its founders (Wang and Burris, 1997), the Photovoice method aims to accomplish three things:

- To enable people to record and reflect their community's strengths and concerns;
- To promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important community issues through large and small group discussions of photographs;
- To reach policymakers.

Wang concisely outlined the following steps for conducting a photovoice study:

1. Select and recruit a target audience of policy makers or community leaders.
2. Recruit a group of Photovoice participants.
3. Introduce the Photovoice methodology to participants and facilitate a group discussion.
4. Obtain informed consent.
5. Pose an initial theme for taking pictures.
6. Distribute cameras to participants and review how to use them.
7. Provide time for participants to take pictures.
8. Meet to discuss photographs.
9. Plan with participants a format to share photographs and stories with policy makers or community leaders. (Wang, 1999).

To date, the Photovoice method has been used significantly in education. Some notable examples include the following: Chio & Fandt (2007) implemented the Photovoice method in a cultural diversity class and found that it fostered greater engagement between students and the subject matter while supporting the co-creation of knowledge. Schell et al. (2009) also used Photovoice in an Advanced Methodology class, and they found that Photovoice is a successful tool for conducting research, teaching students to think critically, and introducing students to a new medium to create knowledge. Bonnycastle & Bonnycastle (2015) used Photovoice to enhance the teaching of an undergraduate social work research course. According to these authors, Photovoice was the key research tool to increase knowledge and understanding of the community's issues. Gutierrez & Wolff (2017) integrated Photovoice into a health sciences core course and demonstrated that Photovoice can be used as a pedagogical tool to extend student learning about health disparities beyond the classroom into the community. Visual methods like Photovoice also allow students to engage in deeper learning (Dmello & Kras, 2021). Therefore, this method is ideal for social sciences courses.

### **Application Photovoice method: Role of INCREASE Project**

INCREASE Project experts introduced the Photovoice method, an extremely intriguing teaching approach, to lecturers of Thai Nguyen University and Ho Chi Minh City Open University in September 2022. Immediately thereafter, the author began using this method in the teaching, primarily with the Introduction to Sociology course at Ho Chi Minh City Open University. In this course, students were asked to take photographs that would represent a research interest or a lived experience based on their own social life. To date, the author have applied this method for two semesters. The steps to using the Photovoice method in the classroom are as follows:

- Introduce the Photovoice methodology to the students during the first week of class.
- Divide the class into groups, with each group consisting of 4 to 5 students.
- The student groups will introduce their research topics during the second week of class.
- Groups of students will take pictures in the field from week 3 to week 7.
- The student groups will present their photographs and stories to the class during week 8. The entire class will discuss them together.

The "SHOWeD" technique will be used to guide the discussion, with each student providing a response to each image:

- What do you See here?
- What is really Happening here?
- How does this relate to Our lives?
- Why does this situation, concern, or strength exist?
- What can we Do about it? (Dowhaniuk et al., 2021)

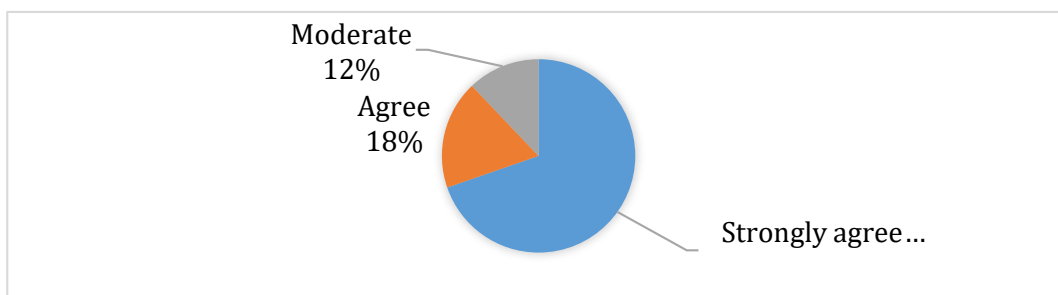
### STUDENT'S EVALUATION OF THE PHOTOVOICE METHOD

After implementing a specific teaching method, it is important to gather feedback from students to understand their thoughts on it. To achieve this, I designed a survey to collect feedback from students who completed the Introduction to Sociology course this semester (from October to December 2023). Thirty-three first-year social work students participated in the survey. The evaluation form consisted of five questions, and the results are as follows:

The first question: Did you first learn about Photovoice method in your Introduction to Sociology course?

Regarding this question, the majority of students have selected to agree or strongly agree. Specifically, 23 (69,7%) students chose to strongly agree and 6 (18,2%) students chose to agree as showed in figure 1.

**Figure 1: Did you first learn about Photovoice method in your Introduction to Sociology course?**

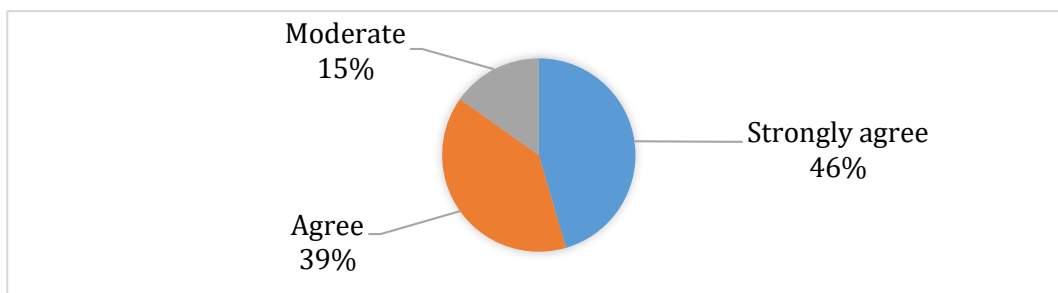


**Source: Author's survey, December 2023.**

The second question: In general, the Photovoice method is suitable for Introduction to Sociology course?

The results showed that several students posted positive reflections to the Photovoice method. Of the 33 students, 15 (45,5%) students classified as strongly agree, 13 (39,4%) chose to agree and 5 (15,2%) chose moderate, and none of the students chose to disagree and strongly disagree. The results presented in figure 2.

**Figure 2: In general, the Photovoice method is suitable for Introduction to Sociology course?**



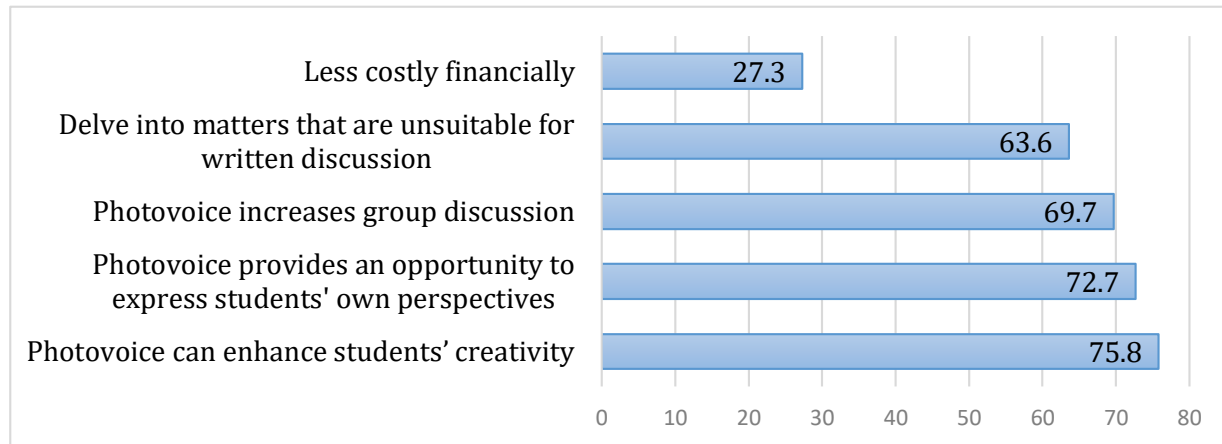
**Source: Author's survey, December 2023.**

The author also asked students whether they would like to apply Photovoice method to other subjects. The results are as follows: 4 (12,1%) chose strogly agree, 9 (27,3%) chose agree, 18 (54,5%)

chose moderate and 2 (6,1%) chose disagree. Thus, it appears that students are less in agreement with this question, possibly because of the difficulties faced during the implementation of this method.

Furthermore, the students were also asked about the advantages of the Photovoice method, and the results are as follows: 25 students (75.8%) chose "Photovoice can enhance students' creativity". Another 24 students stated that Photovoice can provide an opportunity to express their own perspectives. Of those, 23 chose "Photovoice can increase group discussion", 21 students expressed that Photovoice has the ability to explore topics that may not be suitable for written discussions, and 9 students chose "less costly financially method". The findings are shown in Figure 3.

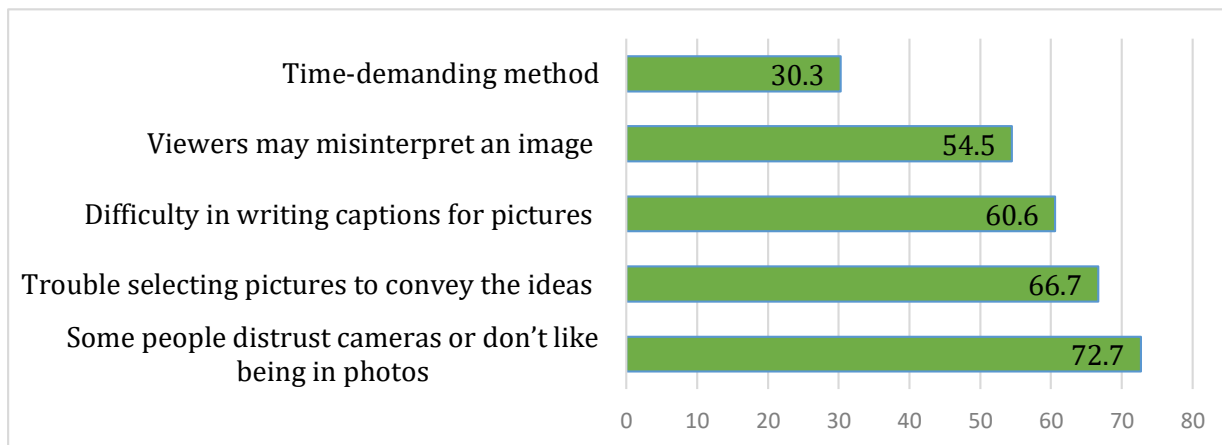
**Figure 3: Benefits of the Photovoice method in learning (multiple choice question) (%)**



**Source: Author's survey, December 2023.**

In addition to discussing the benefits, the author also examined the limitations of the Photovoice method from the students' perspective. The results revealed that the most common difficulty faced by students is that some people distrust cameras or do not enjoy taking or being in photos (72.7%). Following that, students reported struggling with selecting pictures to effectively convey their ideas (66.7%). The third challenge identified was writing captions for the pictures (60.6%). The fourth difficulty of the Photovoice method is that viewers may misinterpret an image (54.5%). These results are presented in Figure 4.

**Figure 4: Difficulties of the Photovoice method (multiple choice question) (%)**



**Source: Author's survey, December 2023.**

## CONCLUSION

Overall, using Photovoice as a teaching method in social sciences courses shows promise for providing students with a multifaceted learning experience. This method also empowers students and fosters creativity, diversity, equity, and inclusion. The application of the Photovoice method in the classroom can build self-awareness and encourage self-reflection by helping students make personal connections with themselves. While applying this method in teaching, the author noticed the comfort and excitement of students. However, given that they are first-year students who are familiar with traditional teaching methods at the secondary school level, they may encounter challenges in applying this method. Nevertheless, if this method is implemented in other subjects in the coming years, the author believes that students will master this method.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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