

USING VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS TO TEACH GRAMMAR TO B1-LEVEL EFL
LEARNERS IN UZBEKISTAN

Mirzokhidjon Ergashev

Kokand University, The Teacher of World Language Department

mirzohidergashev@045gmail.com

Abstract: This study looks at the effectiveness of using visual aids as part of teaching four grammar topics (concrete/abstract nouns, transitive/intransitive verbs, demonstrative pronouns, independent/dependent clauses) to teenage EFL students at B1 level in Uzbekistan. The study is based on the research of Folse (2009) regarding principles of grammar instruction and multimodal learning. It also looks at the impact that graphics created with Canva would have on enhancing the understanding of predominantly visual learners. This paper presents an overview of the learners, the reasons for using graphic designs, as well as an analysis of how graphics support inductive grammar instruction. The findings suggest that graphics can provide scaffolding for teenagers' (mid-teen) understanding of grammar and help to alleviate cognitive load and increase engagement. There are also suggestions for how to implement these ideas in the classroom setting.

Key words: visual representations, teenager, grammar instruction, Canva, visual learners, inductive grammar instruction.

1. Introduction

In Uzbekistan, grammar is a significant aspect of EFL learning, as the majority of secondary education students anticipate working as English teachers in the future. These students have a relatively solid understanding of English; however, abstract grammatical constructs which require differentiating form, function and meaning are more challenging for these students, because they have not gained the necessary syntactic awareness. Students do not generally learn grammar, therefore, through deductive methods of instruction, and thus lack the knowledge required for a robust understanding.

Recent research has shown that incorporating visual imagery can assist students in understanding grammatical structures by decreasing the cognitive load of learning, establishing patterns, and permitting an inductive approach to learning (Folse, 2009). The manuscript being submitted describes the design and teaching purpose of the four visual grammar teaching tools created for tenth grade B1 students at a school in Kokand, Uzbekistan.

2. Research Purpose and Questions

The main aim of this study is to investigate how teacher-prepared visual representations can help with grammar learning among teenage EFL students.

- How can visual representations be designed to effectively support grammar instruction for B1-level EFL learners?

- What pedagogical advantages do visual tools provide for teenage learners with predominantly visual learning styles?
- To what extent do visuals support an inductive approach to grammar instruction in this context?

3. Description of Learners

The participants in this project are a group of 14 teenage learners enrolled in the 7-8th grade at a local public school in Uzbekistan. The class consists of **10 female** and **4 male** students, all between **13 and 14 years old**. This group is designated as a “language-specialized” cohort, meaning they receive extended hours of English instruction compared to other students in the school. Their learning context, educational backgrounds, and cognitive characteristics make them a suitable population for examining the use of visual representations in grammar instruction.

In terms of **linguistic proficiency**, the students are working at approximately a **B1 (pre-intermediate) level** according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Having completed A1 and A2 levels in Grades 5 and 6, they have already developed foundational grammatical structures and can produce simple, compound, and some complex sentences. Although their linguistic repertoire is still developing, they demonstrate reasonable control over general vocabulary, with an estimated lexical range of **2500 - 2700 words**. While this constitutes a good amount mental lexicon (Warren, 2013), many of these words are high-frequency items rather than academic or technical vocabulary.

The students’ **learning styles** are predominantly **visual**, with several learners showing **auditory preferences**. This aligns with the broader literature on teenage cognition, which suggests that teenagers often benefit from multimodal input, such as visual diagrams, color coding, and structured charts (Mayer, 2009). Because of this, visual grammar representations are especially suitable for this group. Many students express that learning grammar inductively—through examples, patterns, and visuals—helps them retain concepts more effectively than rule memorization alone.

The learners’ previous schooling experiences were largely shaped by **deductive, teacher-centered instruction**, where grammar rules were explicitly presented and then practiced through written exercises. Although this approach has given them a general structural foundation, it has also created dependence on rule explanation rather than discovery or application. Therefore, this year the expected shift toward **more inductive, student-centered learning** requires learners to adapt to a different mode of engagement. Visual tools can support this transition by bridging the gap between rule explanation and student-led understanding.

In addition, the group displays strong motivation for English learning. Many aspire to enter language-related professions—most commonly teaching, translation, or international studies. Because of these long-term goals, they understand the necessity of mastering grammar and syntax. They also recognize that English proficiency is a key social and professional asset in Uzbekistan, where multilingual competence is increasingly valued.

Classroom observations reveal that these learners respond positively to **presentations, infographics, charts, and color-coded materials**. When visuals are used, students are more engaged, ask more questions, and demonstrate higher levels of comprehension during formative assessments. However, without support tools such as visuals or examples, they sometimes struggle to differentiate between similar grammatical concepts—particularly abstract vs. concrete nouns, transitive vs. intransitive verbs, and clause types. This reinforces the need for structured visual scaffolding, consistent modeling, and guided practice.

Overall, this group of learners represents a motivated and developmentally appropriate population for the integration of visual materials in grammar instruction. Their proficiency level, cognitive profile, learning preferences, and educational context collectively support the pedagogical value of designing visually rich grammar materials tailored to their needs.

4. Literature Review

Grammar instruction continues to be a central component of English language teaching, particularly in contexts where learners are preparing for academic or professional pathways. In EFL settings such as Uzbekistan, grammar often serves as the foundation upon which learners develop broader communicative competence (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). This literature review examines theoretical perspectives and empirical findings related to (1) visual representations in language instruction, (2) grammar pedagogy for teenage learners, and (3) cognitive principles that support visual learning.

Visual Representations in Language Teaching. Visual tools play an increasingly significant role in contemporary language education. Paivio's **Dual Coding Theory** (2007) provides a key theoretical foundation, arguing that information processed through both verbal and visual channels strengthens memory, retrieval, and understanding. Mayer (2009) further develops this idea through **Multimedia Learning Theory**, which posits that learners grasp concepts more effectively when visuals and text complement each other rather than duplicate information.

In grammar instruction specifically, visual representations—such as diagrams, charts, infographics, timelines, and color-coded structures—can reduce cognitive load by breaking down complex linguistic features into manageable units (Sweller, Ayres, & Kalyuga, 2011). For example, visually contrasting independent and dependent clauses or illustrating subject–verb–object patterns helps learners form mental models of sentence structure. Such scaffolding is especially beneficial for learners who struggle with abstract grammatical concepts.

Folse (2009) emphasizes that grammar teaching should focus on clarity, relevance, and high-frequency patterns. Visual materials support these principles by providing concrete illustrations of rules and guiding learners toward noticing patterns, an essential process in grammar acquisition.

Grammar Instruction for EFL Teenagers. Teenage EFL learners have unique cognitive and linguistic needs. Lightbown and Spada (2013) argue that learners at this age benefit from explicit grammar instruction combined with meaningful practice, as they are cognitively developed enough to understand rules but still require structured guidance. Harmer (2015) similarly notes

that teenagers respond well to visually engaging materials, which can sustain attention and enhance motivation.

In contexts like Uzbekistan, where English classes frequently rely on teacher-centered instruction, visuals can serve as a bridge to facilitate more **inductive** and **student-centered** grammar learning. Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) highlight that shifting from deductive rule teaching to inductive discovery develops deeper grammatical awareness and supports long-term retention. Visual representations help learners infer meaning and structure by presenting patterns in accessible formats.

Furthermore, the lexical limitations of B1-level learners make visuals particularly useful. Nation (2013) and Schmitt (2010) emphasize that vocabulary knowledge significantly impacts learners' ability to process grammatical structures. When unfamiliar words hinder comprehension, visual cues can compensate by anchoring meaning, reducing confusion, and allowing learners to focus on the grammatical point.

Cognitive Load, Working Memory, and Grammar Learning. Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller et al., 2011) suggests that learners have limited working memory capacity, especially when dealing with new or complex information. Grammar topics such as transitive vs. intransitive verbs or independent vs. dependent clauses require simultaneous attention to form, meaning, and function—without support, this can overwhelm working memory.

Visual representations address this issue by:

- segmenting information into meaningful chunks
- reducing unnecessary verbal explanation
- highlighting key contrasts (e.g., “concrete vs. abstract nouns”)
- allowing learners to make connections through spatial reasoning

This aligns with Mayer's (2009) principles of coherence and signaling, which state that learners benefit from visuals that emphasize essential elements and remove extraneous information.

Visuals and Inductive Grammar Learning. Research on inductive grammar instruction shows that learners acquire structures more effectively when they discover patterns through guided tasks rather than simply memorizing rules (Nunan, 2015). Visual materials are a powerful tool for this process because they make patterns more visible, enabling learners to notice grammatical forms and relationships—key processes in second language acquisition (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011).

Folse (2009) argues that grammar instruction must be practical and immediately applicable. Visuals support this approach by:

- presenting clear examples
- showing correct and incorrect forms side-by-side
- offering real-world contexts in simplified form
- encouraging students to analyze rather than passively receive information

This approach moves learners from **rule dependency** toward **pattern awareness**, which is essential for B1 teenage learners transitioning to more advanced grammatical structures.

5. Methodology

This paper uses **materials design analysis** rather than empirical classroom experimentation. The method includes:

1. Designing four visual teaching tools via Canva.
2. Applying Folse's (2009) grammar-teaching framework.
3. Aligning visuals with the needs of B1-level teenage learners.
4. Conducting a pedagogical analysis of how each visual supports grammar learning.

Although this is a design-based study, the methodology could easily be expanded into empirical research (e.g., pre-test/post-test, learner interviews, classroom observations).

6. Visual Tools Designed for Grammar Instruction

6.1 Concrete and Abstract Nouns

The visual presents:

- definitions
- color-coded categories
- example words and sentences
- common student errors

This supports learners who struggle with distinguishing physical objects from intangible concepts.

Concrete and Abstract Nouns
PRESENTER: Mr. Ergashev

Today's Focus

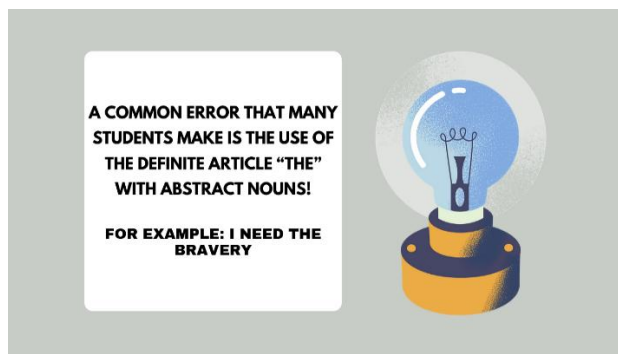
- Difference of the two types of nouns
- Example sentences
- Common errors

Examples: Concrete or Abstract?

A BREAD PHONE TABLE BOOK KEY WALLET DOG CUP	B BRAVERY LOVE ANXIETY CARE DEATH FRIENDSHIP CHILDHOOD PEACE
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Difference between Concrete and Abstract nouns

CONCRETE NOUN	ABSTRACT NOUN
A concrete noun is a type of noun that can be perceived with 5 human senses {see, hear, smell, taste, feel (physical touch)}	An abstract noun names emotions, ideas, or quality, but cannot be perceived with 5 senses



6.2 Transitive and Intransitive Verbs

The visual includes:

- simple definition chart
- example verbs separated into two columns
- object placement patterns
- common errors (e.g., forgetting an object after a transitive verb)

This reduces the linguistic load and supports noticing of verb-object patterns.

TRANSITIVE AND INTRANSITIVE VERBS
Presenter: Mr Ergashev

WHAT IS TRANSITIVE?
Transitive verbs must have an object for their action. For example, *love* is a transitive verb because we must put an object after it. We can't say *I love* itself. We have to say what we love. *I love reading.*
I don't love talking.

WHAT IS INTRANSITIVE?
Intransitive verbs can never have an object for their action. For example, *smile* is intransitive as we don't put an object after it. *George smiled.*

EXAMPLES FOR TRANSITIVE VERBS

play	show
read	watch
buy	ride
eat	teach
give	feed
make	hug
send	push



6.3 Demonstrative Pronouns

The visual presents:

- near vs. far distinctions
- singular vs. plural differences
- classroom examples (e.g., pointing to objects)

This topic is high-frequency and supports communicative accuracy.



6.4 Independent and Dependent Clauses

The visual includes:

- clear definition boxes
- linking words (because, although, when)
- color-coded clause examples

This aids learners who need to understand sentence structure to progress toward complex writing.

Independent and dependent clauses
with teacher
Mirzohid Ergashev

Independent clause is a clause that contains subject and verb, forming a complete thought.
For example: I get good marks from maths

Dependent clause is a clause that cannot stand alone as a sentence. It does not carry a complete idea.
For example: When I was a child, I used to dream of becoming an astronaut.
Here, underlined clause cannot form a complete thought.

Dependent clauses usually include subordinating conjunctions, such as because, as, when, while, although, etc. Clauses with these conjunctions are dependent on independent clauses.

Clauses in red depend on clauses in green!
I played football with my friends yesterday **because it was Sunday.**
I don't eat ice-cream **when I have a cold.**

7. Findings and Peculiarities

7.1 Effectiveness of Visuals

Analysis suggests that visuals:

- make abstract grammar more concrete
- support inductive learning by guiding students to notice patterns
- are appropriate for B1-level learners with visual learning preferences
- increase motivation and engagement
- help students differentiate similar grammar items (e.g., this/that, concrete/abstract)

7.2 Alignment with Folse (2009)

The visuals support Folse's key principles by:

- emphasizing clarity
- minimizing unnecessary terminology
- providing meaningful examples

7.3 Classroom Implementation

Visuals can be used to:

- introduce new grammar inductively
- guide pair discussions
- support controlled and freer practice
- aid review of difficult topics
- support formative assessment tasks

8. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that well-designed visual representations can significantly enhance grammar instruction for teenage B1-level EFL learners in Uzbekistan. The visuals created for four grammar topics align with learners' needs, Folse's instructional principles, and the broader literature on visual learning. While this paper analyzes the design and pedagogical potential of the visuals, future research could include classroom-based data collection to measure their actual impact on learning outcomes.

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