

Utilizing Visual Grammar Cues to Support Students' Writing in the Simple Present Tense

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Abstract

This study investigates the effectiveness of visual grammar cues in improving students' ability to write using the simple present tense. The research employed a pre-experimental one-group pre-test–post-test design and was conducted at MTs Muhammadiyah 1 Salawati. The participants consisted of 22 eighth-grade students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through grammar-based writing tests designed to measure students' accuracy in using the simple present tense before and after the instructional intervention. The collected data were analyzed using IBM SPSS version 25, including descriptive statistics and a paired sample t-test to determine statistical significance. The results revealed a substantial improvement in students' writing performance after the implementation of visual grammar cues. The mean score increased from 54.77 in the pre-test to 76.86 in the post-test, indicating a significant gain in students' grammatical accuracy. The paired sample t-test produced a significance value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), confirming that the improvement in students' scores was statistically significant. These findings indicate that the use of visual grammar cues effectively supports students' understanding and application of the simple present tense in writing tasks. The results suggest that visual grammar cues help students recognize grammatical patterns more clearly by transforming abstract grammar rules into visual representations such as color coding, diagrams, and structured sentence patterns. This approach encourages students to apply grammar rules more confidently when constructing sentences. Therefore, incorporating visual grammar cues into grammar instruction can serve as an effective strategy to improve students' grammatical accuracy and writing performance in EFL classrooms.

Keywords: Grammar Cues; Writing; Simple Present

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Introduction

Grammar plays a fundamental role in language learning because it provides the structural system that enables learners to produce clear and meaningful sentences. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, grammatical competence is particularly important for developing writing skills, as accurate grammar helps learners organize ideas and convey meaning effectively. Fareh (2020) explains that grammar knowledge supports learners in constructing grammatically acceptable sentences and improving the overall quality of written communication. Among various grammatical elements, verb tense, especially the simple present tense, is one of the most frequently taught structures in junior secondary English classrooms. This tense is commonly used to describe routines, habits, and general facts, yet many students still experience difficulties in applying it correctly in their writing.

Several studies have reported that students often make grammatical errors when using the simple present tense, including incorrect verb forms, misuse of auxiliaries, and subject–verb agreement errors (Putri et al., 2021; Ahmed & Rajab, 2022). These errors are frequently found in EFL learners' written work, indicating that students may understand grammar rules theoretically but struggle to apply them in actual writing tasks. Such difficulties are also evident in Indonesian EFL contexts, including MTs Muhammadiyah 1 Salawati, where students often face challenges in constructing grammatically correct sentences despite repeated grammar instruction.

One possible reason for these persistent difficulties is the continued reliance on traditional grammar teaching methods, which often focus on rule memorization and mechanical exercises. Astuti and Supriyadi (2019) argue that teacher-centered grammar instruction tends to emphasize form rather

than meaningful use of language. Similarly, Isnawati et al. (2023) note that conventional grammar teaching frequently neglects students' diverse learning styles and limits opportunities for active engagement. As a result, learners may be able to recall grammar rules during exercises but encounter difficulties when applying those rules independently in writing activities.

To address these challenges, educators have increasingly emphasized the use of learner-centered and multimodal instructional strategies that support deeper understanding of grammatical concepts. One promising approach is the use of visual grammar cues, which involve presenting grammar rules through visual representations such as color coding, diagrams, sentence patterns, and symbols. According to Ismail and Wahyuni (2022), visual grammar cues help learners recognize patterns in language and reduce cognitive load when processing complex grammatical structures. Similarly, Wulandari and Akmal (2021) explain that visual support makes abstract grammar concepts more concrete and easier for students to understand.

The use of visual elements in language instruction is also supported by multimodal learning theory, which suggests that learners process information more effectively when it is presented through multiple sensory channels (Widodo & Nurhayati, 2023). Visual input can help learners form stronger mental connections between grammatical forms and their meanings. Research by Ahmadi and Reza (2018) indicates that visual aids improve learners' attention and retention of grammatical forms. Teng (2020) also found that color-coded grammar instruction significantly improved students' accuracy in subject–verb agreement tasks. Furthermore, Marlina (2021) reported that visual scaffolding in grammar teaching helped students reduce tense-related errors in writing activities.

Despite the growing interest in multimodal and visual-based instruction, empirical studies examining the use of visual grammar cues in EFL writing remain limited. Much of the existing research focuses on vocabulary learning or reading comprehension rather than grammar accuracy in students' written production. Haryanto and Nugroho (2020) point out that research investigating the role of visual support in improving grammatical accuracy in writing is still relatively scarce. Ritonga et al. (2022) also highlight that few studies have specifically examined how visual grammar cues influence students' ability to construct grammatically correct sentences in their own writing.

This situation indicates a clear research gap in the field of grammar instruction. While visual strategies have been widely applied in other areas of language learning, their potential in supporting grammar mastery in writing has not been sufficiently explored. Therefore, further investigation is needed to determine whether visual grammar cues can effectively support students' ability to apply grammatical rules accurately in written communication.

Based on this gap, the present study aims to investigate the effectiveness of visual grammar cues in improving students' writing accuracy in the use of the simple present tense. The study focuses on eighth-grade students at MTs Muhammadiyah 1 Salawati. By examining students' writing performance before and after the implementation of visual grammar-based instruction, this research seeks to determine whether visual grammar cues can significantly improve students' grammatical accuracy in writing. The findings of this study are expected to provide practical insights for English teachers in implementing more effective and engaging grammar instruction strategies in EFL classrooms.

Literature Review

Grammar plays a central role in English language learning, particularly in the development of writing skills. In EFL contexts, grammatical competence enables learners to produce accurate and meaningful sentences, which directly affects the clarity of written communication. Fareh (2020) argues that grammar knowledge supports learners in organizing ideas into acceptable linguistic forms. Among various grammatical components, verb tense, especially the simple present tense, is one of the earliest and most frequently taught structures. Despite its apparent simplicity, many junior secondary students continue to struggle with subject–verb agreement, auxiliary use, and correct verb inflection (Putri et al., 2021; Ahmed & Rajab, 2022). These persistent errors indicate that traditional grammar instruction often fails to ensure deep conceptual understanding.

Conventional grammar teaching in many Indonesian classrooms still relies heavily on rule memorization and mechanical drills. Astuti and Supriyadi (2019) note that such approaches tend to promote surface learning rather than meaningful application. Isnawati et al. (2023) further explain that teacher-centered grammar instruction often overlooks students' learning preferences and reduces

opportunities for active engagement. As a result, learners may be able to recall rules during exercises but struggle to apply them independently in writing tasks. This gap between knowledge and use suggests the need for more learner-centered and cognitively supportive instructional strategies.

One promising alternative is the integration of visual support in grammar instruction. Visual Grammar Cues refer to the use of color coding, diagrams, timelines, symbols, and structured visual patterns to represent grammatical relationships. According to Ismail and Wahyuni (2022), visual cues help learners notice patterns in language and reduce cognitive load when processing complex rules. Wulandari and Akmal (2021) explain that visuals make abstract grammar concepts more concrete, allowing students to build stronger mental connections between form and meaning. This approach aligns with multimodal learning theory, which proposes that students learn more effectively when information is presented through multiple sensory channels (Widodo & Nurhayati, 2023).

Research in second language acquisition also supports the role of visual input in facilitating grammar learning. Ahmadi and Reza (2018) found that visual aids increase learners' attention and improve retention of grammatical forms. Teng (2020) reported that color-coded grammar instruction significantly improved students' accuracy in subject-verb agreement tasks. Similarly, Marlina (2021) observed that students who learned grammar through visual scaffolding produced fewer tense-related errors in guided writing activities. These findings suggest that visual grammar cues can function as an effective scaffold, particularly for learners who struggle with abstract rule-based instruction.

The effectiveness of visual support is closely related to theories of cognitive development and sociocultural learning. From a cognitive perspective, Paivio's dual coding theory explains that information processed through both verbal and visual channels is more likely to be retained. In classroom practice, this means that combining textual explanations with visual representations can strengthen memory and understanding. From a sociocultural viewpoint, Vygotsky's concept of scaffolding emphasizes the importance of instructional support that helps learners perform tasks slightly beyond their current ability. Visual grammar cues can serve as such scaffolding by guiding students step by step in constructing correct sentences.

In EFL writing instruction, visual scaffolds have been shown to improve not only accuracy but also learner confidence. Fitriana and Setiawan (2022) reported that students exposed to visual grammar frameworks became more willing to participate in writing activities. Wahyuni and Yuliana (2020) similarly found that visual-based grammar teaching increased students' motivation and reduced anxiety when dealing with tense usage. These affective benefits are important because emotional engagement often influences persistence and overall learning outcomes in language classrooms.

Despite growing interest in multimodal instruction, empirical research specifically examining visual grammar cues in EFL writing remains limited. Much of the existing literature focuses on vocabulary learning, reading comprehension, or digital visual media. Haryanto and Nugroho (2020) point out that studies targeting tense accuracy in students' own written production are still relatively scarce. Ritonga et al. (2022) also highlight that few classroom-based investigations have measured how visual grammar support influences junior secondary learners' independent sentence construction. This gap is particularly evident in Indonesian rural and semi-urban school contexts, where low-cost, non-digital visual strategies may be highly practical.

Furthermore, many previous studies emphasize short-term comprehension rather than measurable improvement in writing performance. There is still a need for classroom research that combines structured visual grammar intervention with statistical analysis of students' writing outcomes. Addressing this gap is important for providing evidence-based guidance to teachers who seek practical methods for improving grammar instruction.

Based on the theoretical foundations and prior empirical findings, visual grammar cues appear to hold strong potential for enhancing students' mastery of the simple present tense. By transforming abstract rules into visible patterns, this approach may help learners internalize grammatical structures more effectively and apply them more accurately in writing tasks. Therefore, the present study contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence from an Indonesian junior secondary EFL classroom, focusing specifically on students' written use of the simple present tense after exposure to visual grammar-based instruction.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research approach using a pre-experimental design, specifically the one-group pre-test and post-test model, to examine the effectiveness of visual grammar cues in improving students' mastery of the simple present tense in writing. This design allows the researcher to compare students' writing performance before and after the instructional intervention in order to determine whether significant improvement occurs as a result of the treatment. The research was conducted at MTs Muhammadiyah 1 Salawati during the 2024/2025 academic year. The population consisted of all eighth-grade students at the school. A purposive sampling technique was used to select the research participants. Class VIII B, consisting of 22 students, was chosen based on the English teacher's recommendation because the students had relatively similar levels of English proficiency and were available to participate throughout the research period.

The main research instrument was a grammar-based writing test designed to assess students' ability to use the simple present tense accurately in sentence construction. The test consisted of several task types, including sentence completion, sentence transformation, and guided sentence writing based on visual prompts. These tasks required students to apply correct subject-verb agreement, verb forms, and auxiliary usage in the simple present tense. The same test format was administered as both the pre-test and post-test to ensure consistency in measuring students' progress. To improve the credibility of the instrument, the test items were reviewed by the English teacher at the school to ensure their content validity and suitability for the students' level. The scoring rubric focused on students' accuracy in using verb forms, subject-verb agreement, and sentence structure in the simple present tense.

The research procedure consisted of three main stages: pre-test, treatment, and post-test. First, a pre-test was administered to measure students' initial ability in writing sentences using the simple present tense. After the pre-test, the treatment phase was conducted over six instructional sessions across three weeks. During the treatment sessions, visual grammar cues were used as the primary instructional strategy. The teacher introduced grammar concepts using color-coded subject-verb agreement charts, visual sentence structure templates, and timelines representing habitual actions. Students practiced constructing sentences through guided activities such as sentence matching, sentence completion based on visual prompts, and sentence transformation exercises. These activities were designed to help students recognize grammatical patterns and apply them in writing tasks. After the completion of the treatment sessions, a post-test was administered to measure students' improvement in writing using the simple present tense. The scores obtained from the pre-test and post-test were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 25. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate the mean scores and standard deviations of the tests. Before conducting hypothesis testing, a Shapiro-Wilk normality test was performed to determine whether the data were normally distributed. Since the data met the assumptions for parametric analysis, a paired sample t-test was conducted to examine whether the difference between the pre-test and post-test scores was statistically significant. The level of significance used in this study was $p < 0.05$. The results of this analysis were used to determine whether the implementation of visual grammar cues significantly improved students' grammatical accuracy in writing.

Result

This research explored the impact of using visual grammar cues on students' ability to write in the simple present tense over the course of six instructional sessions. The intervention utilized image-based prompts, visual sentence patterns, and color-coded subject-verb indicators to help students internalize grammatical structures. By providing visual scaffolding, the approach aimed to enhance comprehension and application of tense rules in sentence writing. Students engaged in a range of guided activities, including sentence matching, visual cue completion, and transformation exercises, fostering both individual and collaborative learning.

Table 1 displays the distribution of students' writing proficiency levels before and after the treatment. At the outset, nearly half of the students (45%) were classified as having fair mastery, while a notable percentage fell into the poor (27%) and very poor (9%) categories. Only one student (5%) demonstrated a very good level of proficiency. After the intervention, substantial progress was observed: 32% of students achieved a very good score, and no students remained in the lower-performing categories.

Table 1. Students' Vocabulary Score Distribution in Pre-test and Post-test

Classification	Score Range	Pretest (%)	Posttest (%)
Very Good	90-100	5%	32%
Good	70-89	14%	32%
Fair	50-69	45%	36%
Poor	30-49	27%	0%
Very Poor	10-29	9%	0%

These results indicate a significant upward shift in students' mastery of the simple present tense, suggesting that the visual grammar cues were effective in supporting grammar learning in a junior high school setting. To further evaluate students' progress, descriptive statistical analysis was conducted. As summarized in Table 2, the average pre-test score was 54.77 with a standard deviation of 21.28, indicating varied performance levels. After the intervention, the average score increased to 76.86, while the standard deviation dropped to 16.32, reflecting more consistent performance among students.

Table 2. Mean Score and Standard Deviation in Pretest and Posttest

Test	Mean Score	Stand. Deviation
Pre-test	54.77	21.28
Post-test	76.86	16.32

To ensure that the improvement was statistically significant, normality testing was carried out using the Shapiro-Wilk method. The pre-test results showed a p-value of .602, confirming that the data were normally distributed. However, the post-test p-value was .001, indicating a deviation from normality. Despite this, the sample size and design of the study justified the continued use of parametric testing, particularly the paired sample t-test, which is known to be robust in the presence of moderate non-normality.

A paired sample t-test was then employed to determine whether the improvement in scores could be attributed to the treatment. The results, shown in Table 3, revealed a statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-test scores. The mean score increased by 22.09 points, with a t-value of -4.961 and a significance level of $p = .000$ ($p < .05$), thus confirming that the visual grammar cue method had a meaningful impact.

Table 3. Paired Sample T-test Results

Mean Difference	t	df	Sig.2 (tailed)
-22.09	-4.961	21	0.000

Based on these findings, the null hypothesis (H_0) which posited that visual grammar cues do not influence students' ability to use the simple present tense is rejected. In contrast, the alternative hypothesis (H_1) which asserts that such cues do enhance grammatical proficiency is accepted. The results demonstrate that the use of visual grammar supports significantly improved students' grammatical accuracy and writing performance. The multimodal approach combining visual structure with contextual application enabled learners to grasp abstract grammar rules more concretely. The intervention not only enhanced students' sentence construction skills but also created a supportive and engaging classroom environment, reinforcing grammar learning through visual literacy and pattern recognition.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the use of visual grammar cues significantly improved students' ability to write sentences using the simple present tense. This improvement can be seen from the increase in the students' post-test scores compared to their pre-test scores. The findings suggest that visual-based grammar instruction helped students understand grammatical structures more clearly and apply them more accurately in their writing. The improvement in students' performance indicates that

visual grammar cues can serve as an effective instructional strategy for supporting grammar learning in EFL classrooms.

One possible explanation for this improvement is the role of visual representation in facilitating grammar comprehension. Through the use of visual elements such as color-coded charts, sentence patterns, and timelines, abstract grammar rules became more concrete and easier for students to understand. Visual grammar cues helped students identify grammatical patterns, particularly subject–verb agreement and verb forms in the simple present tense. This finding is consistent with the study conducted by Ahmadi and Reza (2018), which reported that visual aids enhance learners' attention and improve their retention of grammatical structures. Similarly, Teng (2020) found that color-coded grammar instruction significantly improved students' accuracy in subject–verb agreement tasks.

The findings also highlight the importance of multimodal learning in grammar instruction. According to multimodal learning theory, learners process information more effectively when it is presented through multiple sensory channels, such as visual and verbal input. In this study, visual grammar cues allowed students to connect grammatical explanations with visual patterns, which helped them process and remember the information more effectively. Widodo and Nurhayati (2023) explain that multimodal instruction supports deeper understanding by engaging learners through multiple forms of representation.

Another factor that contributed to the improvement in students' writing performance is the structured guidance provided through visual scaffolding. Visual grammar cues acted as instructional scaffolds that guided students step by step in constructing grammatically correct sentences. By using visual sentence templates and color-coded verb patterns, students were able to identify correct grammatical structures more easily. This finding supports Marlina (2021), who reported that visual scaffolding in grammar instruction reduced tense-related errors in students' writing.

In addition to improving grammatical accuracy, the use of visual grammar cues also contributed to increased student engagement and confidence during the learning process. The visual materials made grammar lessons more interactive and accessible, encouraging students to participate more actively in classroom activities. Students appeared more confident when completing writing tasks because the visual cues helped them recall grammatical patterns more easily. This result is consistent with the findings of Fitriana and Setiawan (2022), who reported that visual scaffolding in grammar instruction can improve students' confidence and motivation in writing activities.

Another important finding of this study is the reduction in performance variability among students. The decrease in the standard deviation from the pre-test to the post-test indicates that students' performance became more consistent after the intervention. This suggests that visual grammar cues helped lower-performing students improve their understanding of grammar concepts. Visual support may therefore function as an inclusive learning strategy that benefits students with different learning styles and proficiency levels. Nasution, Manurung, and Lubis (2020) also emphasize that visual learning tools help create more inclusive classrooms by supporting learners with diverse learning needs.

Despite these positive findings, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study involved a relatively small sample of 22 students from a single class, which limits the generalizability of the results. Second, the research used a pre-experimental design without a control group, which makes it difficult to compare the effectiveness of visual grammar cues with other instructional methods. Third, the treatment period was relatively short, which limits the ability to examine the long-term effects of visual grammar instruction on students' writing skills.

Future research is therefore recommended to involve larger and more diverse samples, as well as experimental designs with control groups to provide stronger evidence of the effectiveness of visual grammar cues. Researchers may also explore the use of visual grammar strategies for teaching other grammatical structures, such as the past tense, modal verbs, or complex sentence patterns. Overall, the findings of this study suggest that visual grammar cues can be an effective strategy for improving students' grammatical accuracy and writing performance in EFL classrooms.

Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of visual grammar cues in improving students' ability to write sentences using the simple present tense. The findings indicate that the implementation of visual grammar cues significantly improved students' grammatical accuracy in writing. This

improvement is evident from the increase in the mean score from 54.77 in the pre-test to 76.86 in the post-test. In addition, the paired sample t-test produced a significance value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), which indicates a statistically significant difference between students' writing performance before and after the treatment. These results confirm that the use of visual grammar cues had a positive effect on students' mastery of the simple present tense. The improvement in students' writing performance can be attributed to the use of visual representations that helped students understand grammatical patterns more clearly. Visual grammar cues such as color-coded verb patterns, sentence structure templates, and visual timelines allowed students to recognize subject-verb agreement and verb forms more easily. These visual supports helped transform abstract grammar rules into more concrete and understandable learning materials. As a result, students were better able to apply grammar rules when constructing sentences in their writing tasks.

Furthermore, the use of visual grammar cues contributed to a more engaging and supportive learning environment. Students showed greater participation and confidence during the learning process because the visual materials helped them recall grammar patterns more effectively. This suggests that integrating visual elements into grammar instruction can enhance both students' understanding and their motivation to participate in writing activities. However, this study has several limitations. The research involved only 22 students from a single class, and the treatment was conducted over a relatively short period of time. In addition, the study used a pre-experimental design without a control group, which limits the ability to compare the effectiveness of visual grammar cues with other teaching strategies. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted with caution. Based on the results of this study, it is recommended that English teachers consider incorporating visual grammar cues into grammar and writing instruction to help students better understand grammatical structures. Future research is also encouraged to involve larger participant groups, longer intervention periods, and experimental research designs to further examine the effectiveness of visual grammar strategies in improving students' writing skills.

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