

**The Impact of a Visual Approach Used in the Teaching of Grammar When  
Embedded into Writing Instruction: A Study on the Writing  
Development of Chinese First Year University Students  
in a British University in China**

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## **Abstract**

Born into a visual culture, today's generation of learners generally prefer a visually-rich multimodal learning environment. Tapping into the potential of visuals in language pedagogy, this study was aimed at discovering the impact of a visual presentation of grammatical concepts related to sentence structure on student writing. The study used a mixed methods design to analyse the impact of the visual approach first by statistically measuring sentence variety and syntactic complexity of student pre and post intervention texts and then using interviews to explain the nature of the impact of visuals on student conceptual understanding and its effect on their writing development. Statistical findings reveal that the experimental groups of Chinese students who were taught grammatical concepts in the context of writing instruction using a visual approach outperformed the students in the control groups who were given similar lessons in the context of writing instruction but using traditional printed hand-outs. Qualitative findings suggest that the visuals seems to have increased these students' conceptual understanding of grammatical items that were taught, and this resulted in more sophisticated and syntactically complex texts after the intervention. The study supports the theory of contextualized teaching of grammar and proposes the use of external visuals that lead to internal visualization based on the cognitive theory of multimodal learning. In so doing, it extends the use of visual learning to grammar pedagogy. However, the findings also suggest that the visual approach would not work effectively in cultures that promote rote learning and decontextualized exercises in grammar with the sole aim of passing the exams. A shift in attitude towards grammar pedagogy in China is deemed necessary.

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## List of Acronyms/Abbreviations

ANCOVA	Analysis of Covariance
BERA	British Educational Research Association
CAF	Complexity, Accuracy, Fluency
CALL	Computer Assisted Language Learning
CEE	College Entrance Examination
CELE	Centre for English Language Education (at UNNC)
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
DCT	Dual Code Theory
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ESAP	English for Specific Academic Purposes
ESL	English as a Second Language
L1	First or native language
L2	Second Language
NVivo	(qualitative data analysis software package)
qual.	Qualitative
QUAN	Quantitative
RQ	Research Question
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
UNNC	University of Nottingham, Ningbo, China
VFA	Visual Formative Assessment
VIE	Visual Input Enhancement