

# ESL PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF VISUAL AIDS IN SUPPORTING VOCABULARY LEARNING AMONG PUPILS

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## Abstract

*Vocabulary development plays a vital role in second language acquisition and the use of visual aids has been recognised as an effective approach to enhance pupils' understanding and retention of new words. This study aims to explore the perspectives of ESL pre-service teachers on using visual aids to improve vocabulary learning among pupils. A quantitative research design was employed, involving 100 ESL pre-service teachers from the Institute of Teacher Education selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through a questionnaire distributed via Google Form and analysed using SPSS. The findings revealed that the majority of participants held positive perceptions toward the use of visual aids, highlighting their benefits in increasing pupils' engagement, motivation and comprehension. The results also answered the research questions by indicating that most ESL pre-service teachers viewed visual aids as an effective tool for vocabulary learning but encountered several challenges such as time constraints in preparation, lack of materials and insufficient training. Based on these findings, the study recommends that teacher education institutions provide more practical workshops, digital resources and continuous support to strengthen ESL pre-service teachers' ability to design and apply visual aids effectively.*

**Keywords:** visual aids, vocabulary learning, pre-service teachers, effectiveness

## Abstrak

*Perkembangan perbendaharaan kata memainkan peranan penting dalam pembelajaran bahasa kedua dan penggunaan alat bantu visual telah diakui sebagai pendekatan yang berkesan untuk meningkatkan pemahaman dan pengekalan perkataan baharu murid. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk meneroka perspektif guru pelatih Bahasa Inggeris tentang penggunaan alat bantu visual untuk meningkatkan pembelajaran kosa kata dalam kalangan murid. Reka bentuk penyelidikan kuantitatif telah digunakan, melibatkan 100 guru pelatih Bahasa Inggeris dari Institut Pendidikan Guru yang dipilih melalui persampelan bertujuan. Data dikumpul melalui soal selidik yang diedarkan melalui platform Google Form dan dianalisis*

*menggunakan SPSS. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa majoriti peserta mempunyai persepsi positif terhadap penggunaan alat bantu visual seperti memberikan faedah dalam meningkatkan penglibatan, motivasi dan kefahaman murid. Dapatan juga menjawab persoalan kajian dengan menunjukkan bahawa kebanyakan guru pelatih Bahasa Inggeris melihat alat bantu visual sebagai alat yang berkesan untuk pembelajaran kosa kata. Namun, terdapat beberapa cabaran seperti kekangan masa dalam penyediaan, kekurangan bahan dan latihan yang tidak mencukupi. Berdasarkan dapatan ini, kajian mengesyorkan agar Institusi Pendidikan Guru menyediakan lebih banyak bengkel praktikal, sumber digital dan sokongan berterusan untuk mengukuhkan keupayaan guru pelatih untuk mereka bentuk dan menggunakan alat bantuan visual dengan berkesan.*

**Kata kunci:** bantuan visual, pembelajaran kosa kata, guru pelatih, keberkesanan

## INTRODUCTION

Effective language teaching depends on teachers' understanding of pupils' needs and the use of meaningful and engaging materials (Elhamdi & Hezam, 2020). Vocabulary plays a crucial role in supporting pupils' listening, speaking, reading and writing skills, yet low-proficiency pupils often struggle to learn new words without appropriate support (Dao Ra, 2022). Therefore, it is important for English teachers to foster pupils' learning interests and teach them meaningfully by using various teaching styles in vocabulary learning. Visual aids are tools that help teachers and pupils to make the lesson easier to understand. Visual aids are used in the classroom to clarify complicated concepts and increase pupils' interest with their studies (Yotta, 2023). This study aims to explore the perspectives of ESL pre-service teachers on using visual aids to improve vocabulary learning among pupils. Teaching vocabulary may be challenging especially to low-proficiency pupils, as traditional teaching strategies often fail to engage pupils. Many of them struggle to retain new words due to limited exposure to engaging teaching strategies (Sherab, 2023). Visual aids have been recognised as effective tools that provide contextual support, helping pupils associate words with images and real-world scenarios. The majority of existing research focused on how well visual aids help pupils to learn vocabulary. However, the challenges ESL pre-service teachers face in implementing visual aids in vocabulary learning, have remained underexplored. This gap in the literature also left teachers with insufficient support or approaches to deal with it. Examining the challenges that ESL pre-service teachers encounter while producing visual aids was crucial given the importance they play in raising pupils' engagement. By filling this research gap, ESL pre-service teachers gained knowledge about the challenges that prevent effective teaching methods. This gap may cause ESL pre-service teachers to lack confidence and creativity when they are trying to implement visual aids in vocabulary lessons. Therefore, this research focused on gathering

the valuable insights from the ESL pre-service teachers' perceptions on the implementation of visual aids in vocabulary learning.

This study drew attention to challenges that ESL pre-service teachers encounter when using visual aids in vocabulary learning, these could include limited access to resources, time constraints in lesson planning or lack confidence in using technology (Ashikuzzaman, 2024). Moreover, this research can be the guidelines for ESL pre-service teachers to equip themselves with the skills and confidence to effectively use visual aids that lead to more engaging and effective vocabulary instruction. ESL pre-service teachers can improve their teaching methods and gain more competence in the classroom by learning about the typical challenges and useful strategies associated with the use of visual aids. Through improved teaching strategies, it benefits pupils by offering more interesting and successful vocabulary learning opportunities and increasing their level of language proficiency (Irnawati & Rahmah, 2021).

This study highlights the challenges faced by ESL pre-service teachers, including limited resources, time constraints and low confidence in using technology (Ashikuzzaman, 2024). The findings may guide ESL pre-service teachers in developing the skills needed to use visual aids effectively, leading to more engaging and meaningful vocabulary instruction. Ultimately, the insights gained benefit not only ESL teachers but also primary pupils, as improved teaching strategies support better vocabulary learning and higher language proficiency (Irnawati & Rahmah, 2021).

The present study aims:

- i. to analyse ESL pre-service teachers' perceptions on the effectiveness of visual aids in teaching vocabulary.
- ii. to explore how ESL pre-service teachers implement visual aids to accommodate pupil's vocabulary.
- iii. to identify challenges faced by ESL pre-service teachers in implementing visual aids in the classroom.

The following are the research questions:

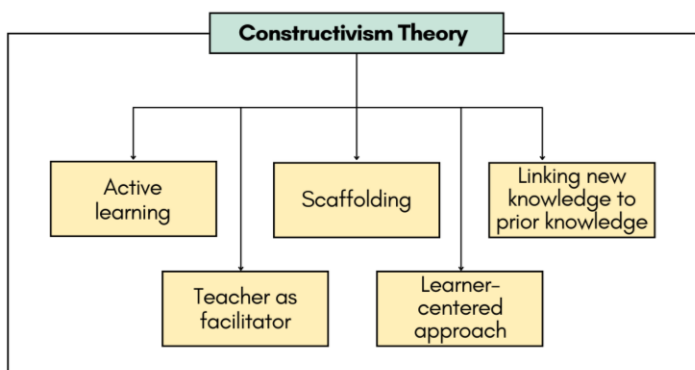
- i. What are ESL pre-service teachers' perceptions on the effectiveness of visual aids in teaching vocabulary learning?
- ii. How do ESL pre-service teachers implement visual aids in enhancing pupil's vocabulary?
- iii. What challenges do ESL pre-service teachers face when implementing visual aids in the classroom?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Visual aids have been recognised as crucial materials, especially in language learning. This literature review considered existing studies on the use of visual aids in vocabulary learning with focus on teachers' experience, perception and challenges.

**Figure 1**

*Theoretical Framework*



This study highlights the Constructivism Theory of Piaget (1970) and Vygotsky (1978). It suggests that learners build new knowledge by connecting experiences to what they already know (Cherry, 2020). Teachers act as facilitators and the use of visual aids supports this role effectively by helping pupils work toward task mastery within a personalised learning environment (John, 2022). Visual aids provide meaningful contexts that help learners relate unfamiliar vocabulary to familiar concepts while offering scaffolding through peer or teacher support (Alharthi, 2020). By presenting learning in contextual and interactive ways, visual aids encourage active participation and help pupils integrate new vocabulary with prior knowledge. Thus, this theory forms the foundation of the study, supporting the idea that visual aids enhance vocabulary acquisition.

Visual aids have been widely shown to enhance pupils' vocabulary learning. They help children retain information by offering clear visual representations of words and meanings (Dorela, 2020). Similarly, Ijaz (2024) noted that visual aids strengthen vocabulary, clarify key concepts and support higher-order thinking aligned with Bloom's taxonomy. Ghaumi's study also reported that visual aids create a stronger psychological impact than audio aids because images are easily stored in memory. Labrozzi and Villegas (2020) further highlighted that visual enhancements boost short-term vocabulary recall. Jelena (2024) emphasised that tools promoting active participation and personalised learning can help teachers better monitor pupils' progress.

## METHODOLOGY

This study used a quantitative method which was a survey approach to examine ESL pre-service teachers' perceptions on how visual aids could help pupils acquire vocabulary. The target population of this research was 100 ESL pre-service teachers at the ITE. Purposive sampling technique was applied whereby participants who have undergone their first practicum, specifically in language teaching, were included.

The questionnaire items were adapted and adopted from Swyny (2023), Rommel (2023) and Selvam (2024), with modifications made to suit the context of the present study. The questionnaire was divided into four sections which were Section A: Demographics, Section B: Perceptions on the Effectiveness of Visual Aids, Section C: Implementation of Visual Aids in the Lesson and Section D: Challenges of Using Visual Aids in the Lesson. The survey was distributed to the respondents using Google Form because it is efficient in data collection and analysis. Respondents were allowed to mark one of the scales based on their opinion.

The questionnaire was designed based on a review of relevant literature and was validated by an expert in the field of education to ensure its content validity. Feedback and responses from the expert were used to refine the instrument and ensure it accurately measures the intended constructs. A pilot study with 30 ESL pre-service teachers was conducted to test the reliability of the questionnaire by using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) software. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient obtained was 0.886, which is considered good, indicating high internal consistency among the items in the questionnaire.

The data collected from the survey was analysed using descriptive statistics to summarise the data. The average scores for Likert-scale items was analysed by using SPSS to determine participants' overall perceptions and experiences in using visual aids. The results were presented using tables, charts and descriptive narratives.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

**Table 1**  
*Perceptions on the Effectiveness of Visual Aids*

Items	Mean	SD
I have observed positive pupils responses when using visual aids	4.80	0.40
Visual aids help pupils retain vocabulary better	4.81	0.40
Digital visual aids (e.g., PowerPoint, videos) are more effective than traditional ones (e.g., flashcards, posters)	4.46	0.76
Visual aids make vocabulary lessons more engaging for pupils	4.81	0.41
Lessons taught with visual aids can make the classroom atmosphere more interesting	4.73	0.49
Pupils rely too much on visual aids instead of independent learning	4.02	1.09
Visual aids can help me create activities more easily	4.76	0.43
Visual aids effectively facilitate me to present the teaching material	4.81	0.40
Visual aids effectively facilitate me to achieve my teaching and learning objectives	4.79	0.43
Visual aids enhance my teaching effectiveness	4.80	0.43
Pupils are more motivated to learn vocabulary when visual aids are used	4.81	0.40
Visual aids simplify complex vocabulary concepts	4.77	0.42
Visual aids can enhance pupil's attention in the lessons	4.80	0.40
The use of visual aids improves pupil's participation in lessons	4.84	0.37
Pupils are excited to learn with visual aids	4.79	0.43

The findings show that ESL pre-service teachers hold highly positive perceptions toward the use of visual aids. The highest mean was recorded for the item stating that visual aids improve pupils' participation ( $M = 4.84$ ), reflecting strong agreement that visual aids boost engagement and motivation in vocabulary lessons. These results align with Ijaz's (2024) assertion that visual representation enhances vocabulary retention and clarifies concepts. The lowest mean appeared for the statement on pupils'

overreliance on visual aids ( $M = 4.02$ ), indicating some awareness of potential drawbacks, consistent with Kitti's (2023) concern about reduced learner autonomy. Overall, ESL pre-service teachers view visual aids as effective tools that enhance participation, simplify complex vocabulary and improve teaching effectiveness.

**Table 2**  
*Implementation of Visual Aids in the Lesson*

Items	Mean	SD
I adapt visual aids according to the pupils' language proficiency level	4.67	0.47
I refer to online teaching platforms for visual aid ideas before class	4.69	0.55
I try to anticipate possible challenges when using visual aids in vocabulary teaching	4.62	0.55
I evaluate the suitability of visual aids after each lesson for future use	4.68	0.53
I incorporate digital tools as visual aids in my lessons	4.67	0.47
I vary the types of visual aids I use based on the topic or theme	4.64	0.60
I use visual aids to introduce, reinforce, and revise vocabulary	4.73	0.47
I use visual aids to encourage pupils to guess word meanings in context	4.78	0.42
I use visual aids as part of vocabulary assessment activities	4.69	0.49
I engage pupils in group work activities using visual aids	4.72	0.51
I scaffold vocabulary tasks with the help of visual aids	4.73	0.45
I use visual aids to provide context for abstract or difficult vocabulary	4.72	0.47
I provide visual cues to support vocabulary writing tasks	4.72	0.51
I use flashcards for vocabulary revision at the beginning or end of lessons	4.71	0.57
I provide sentence-building activities using pictures	4.65	0.64

The implementation of visual aids showed consistently high mean scores. The highest mean was recorded for using visual aids to help pupils guess word meanings in context ( $M = 4.78$ ), highlighting that ESL pre-service teachers rely heavily on visuals to promote contextual understanding which supported by Jelena (2024), who emphasises that visual aids encourage active participation and foster independent learning. The lowest mean was found for anticipating possible challenges when using visual aids ( $M = 4.62$ ), suggesting that while implementation is strong, reflective evaluation and challenge-anticipation are slightly less emphasised. Nonetheless, the findings indicate that pre-service teachers are developing effective and adaptable practices, aligning with Ashikuzzaman's (2024) view that meaningful use of teaching aids depends on teachers' ability to adjust and evaluate their resources for continuous improvement. Overall, ESL pre-service teachers demonstrate readiness and pedagogical awareness in integrating visual aids to support vocabulary learning.

**Table 3**  
*Challenges of Using Visual Aids in the Lesson*

Items	Mean	SD
The cost of preparing visual aids affects their usage	3.85	1.20
Training and support for pre-service teachers in using visual aids are insufficient	4.03	0.92
Some pupils may be distracted by visual aids rather than focusing on learning	4.33	0.78
The preparation of visual aids is time-consuming	4.57	0.74
Large class sizes make it difficult to use visual aids effectively for all pupils	4.32	0.74
Over-reliance on visual aids may reduce pupils' ability to learn without them	4.47	0.69
In case digital devices are insufficient or having technical problems, digital visual aids cannot be used	4.37	0.71
Limited resources make it difficult for me to implement visual aids effectively	4.16	0.87
Finding age-appropriate and engaging visual aids is challenging	3.31	1..37
I face problem which is lack of creativity to design effective visual aids	4.40	0.79
Visual aids may not align well with the syllabus or learning objectives	4.23	0.85

I feel unsure about when to appropriately use visual aids	3.37	1.41
I struggle to integrate visual aids smoothly into the lesson	3.76	1.26
I feel pressure to create visually impressive materials rather than focusing on content	4.48	0.87
Noise or distractions in the classroom may reduce the effectiveness of visual aids	4.44	0.71

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ESL pre-service teachers indicate varying levels of concern in terms of challenges in using visual aids. The highest mean was recorded for “The preparation of visual aids is time-consuming” (M = 4.57), which supports Ghulam et al. (2020), who found that teachers often struggle to balance lesson planning with the effort required to develop effective visual materials. This shows that time and effort required for preparing materials is the most significant challenge faced by ESL pre-service teachers. In contrast, the lowest mean was reported for “Finding age-appropriate and engaging visual aids is challenging” (M = 3.31), suggesting that this issue is viewed as less problematic compared to other challenges. Technical limitations, insufficient resources and limited training were noted as additional issues, consistent with previous studies highlighting the need for stronger institutional support. Overall, the results suggest that effective use of visual aids depends on sufficient preparation time, access to resources and proper training to maximise their benefits in vocabulary learning.

## **IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATION**

The findings suggest that ESL pre-service teachers hold positive perceptions of visual aids, indicating strong practical and theoretical implications. Practically, the results emphasise the need for teacher training programmes to equip future teachers with efficient strategies for designing and implementing visual aids, especially since heavy workloads and time constraints remain major challenges. The findings also highlight the necessity of institutional support to ensure consistent and meaningful use of visuals, reflecting Lhendup’s research in (2023) which emphasises on resource availability in improving vocabulary learning. Theoretically, the results reinforce constructivist principles by showing that visual aids help learners link new vocabulary to prior knowledge, make abstract ideas more concrete and support scaffolding for deeper understanding. Overall, these implications demonstrate that integrating visual aids not only enhances learner engagement and comprehension but also strengthens the practical relevance of Constructivism in the Malaysian ESL classroom.

For future research, alternative theoretical perspectives, broader samples, and different research designs should be considered. While this study was grounded in Constructivism, future studies may adopt Dual Coding Theory (Paivio, 1971) to better explain how the combination of verbal and visual information enhances vocabulary retention, particularly in ESL contexts. In terms of sampling, expanding the participant group to include in-service teachers and pupils would provide more comprehensive insights into the perceptions and actual implementation of visual aids across different teaching contexts and levels of experience. Additionally, employing a mixed-methods research design that integrates surveys, interviews, and classroom observations could offer deeper understanding of how visual aids are applied in practice, the strategies teachers use, and the challenges they encounter, thereby enriching findings beyond self-reported data.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the present study reinforces the effectiveness of using visual aids in teaching vocabulary learning to ESL primary pupils. Continuous support, adequate training and improved access to resources are essential to help ESL pre-service teachers use visual aids effectively in future classroom practice. This study sought to determine the ESL pre-service teachers' perceptions of visual aids in supporting vocabulary learning among pupils. The results indicate that visual aids are highly valued for making learning more engaging and effective, particularly for pupils who struggle with abstract word meanings. However, challenges such as limited time for preparation and lack of support highlight the need for teacher training programs to provide better guidance on using visuals efficiently.

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