



VISUAL LITERACY IN ESP CLASSROOM: INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING PASSIVE VOICE TO AGRICULTURAL STUDENTS

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Abstract

This study probes the integration of visual literacy strategies in teaching passive voice to agricultural students within an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) framework at one of the faculties of Agriculture in Malang. While visual literacy has been widely recognized in language education, its application for grammatical instruction in specialized contexts remains underexplored. This study explored how agricultural students collaborated to visualize agricultural processes using passive voice structures. Students were given short texts describing agricultural processes and tasked with creating visual representations of these processes, then presenting them using passive voice constructions. Through a qualitative analysis of student outputs and interactions, three major themes emerged: (1) contextualizing grammar through visualization, (2) collaborative meaning-making activities, and (3) student-centered language production. Students demonstrated passive voice usage when describing sequential agricultural processes through their visualizations. Collaborative visual creation activities facilitated deeper engagement with both content and language structures. Furthermore, student presentations revealed authentic language production by explaining agricultural procedures using their own passive voice constructions. This study suggests implications for integrating visual literacy techniques into instructional strategies for specific academic purposes to foster active learners.

Keywords: *visual literacy; instructional strategies; ESP; passive voice*

INTRODUCTION

It is undeniable that students today are exposed to a visually rich environment where a constant stream of information is at their fingertips. However, research by Prameswari et al. (2024) reports that student literacy in Indonesia is lower compared to other countries, such as Malaysia, and serves as a reminder for education policymakers to improve teaching quality and strategies, including visual literacy. That condition prompts the need for education to evolve accordingly, and it is especially true in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) contexts, where students often work with diagrams, processes, and other visual materials related to their field. In ESP classrooms, visuals are meaningful objects for analysis, interpretation, and communication. Therefore, visual literacy has become an important instructional strategy in language teaching. Visual literacy combines the cognitive abilities to understand visual messages, express ideas visually, and think critically about visual messages (Kulamikhina et al., 2021). Developing visual literacy can help students better understand content in their discipline and engage more deeply in language learning tasks or experiences (Kędra & Źakevičiūtė, 2019; Romero & Bobkina, 2025)

Recent studies on language education emphasize the benefits of integrating visual modes into teaching. For example, Faridha et al. (2023) developed teaching materials based on Digital Visual Literacy to improve student's speaking skills. Furthermore, a study by Sutrisno et al. (2024) indicates that visual literacy builds an environment that encourages student engagement, critical thinking, and communication skills in English language learning contexts. Qadha and Al-Wasy (2022) also found that visual grammar tools helped EFL learners understand a difficult structure (English participial adjectives) better than traditional methods. These insights suggest that visual elements can make grammar instruction more effective by placing language in a multimodal context.

Within ESP pedagogy, a long-standing principle is that language learning should be learner-centered and relevant to specific domains. ESP students (such as those in agriculture) often need to master particular genres and linguistic features (like technical descriptions or reports) common in their field. One such feature is the passive voice, which is frequently used to describe processes and results in scientific and agricultural writing. For example, in agriculture classes, students may read texts using the passive voice when writing about farming processes and methods. Mastering passive constructions is therefore crucial for agriculture students to effectively communicate procedures (e.g., fertilizing soil or crop cultivation steps) where the focus is on the process or result rather than the actor or the doer.

The teaching of passive voice presents a persistent challenge in EFL instruction. As noted by researchers, many students struggle to grasp both the form and appropriate usage contexts of passive constructions (Zaenap, 2019). However, traditional grammar teaching often presents passive voice in decontextualized sentences or abstract rules, leading to limited retention and misuse. Recent research highlights the need for context-based and active learning approaches for grammar. Eragamreddy's (2024) review of passive voice teaching methods found that thematic context is crucial for learners to understand *when* and *how* to use passive appropriately. The review found that different teaching methods, like task-based and cooperative learning, and visual aids like flashcards and storytelling, can improve how well students learn. It was emphasized that teaching students to understand the passive voice is prominent and should not be taught as an isolated form.

Despite these emerging insights, there remains a practical gap in how ESP instructors can integrate visual literacy into grammar lessons in a systematic, student-centered way. Many ESP courses still rely heavily on textual materials and explicit grammar explanations, which can result in teacher-centered classrooms and passive learning. Simpson (2024) claims that classes without visual aids tend to be repetitive and disengaging. Students are less likely to participate, and lessons become dominated by the teacher. On the other hand, making grammar lessons visual can make them more student-centered. It can be done by making grammar lessons more interesting and putting grammar in a relevant setting. Visual aids help bridge language learning with the subject matter of each discipline. They make grammar points easier to understand and remember. Kress et al. (2016) note that pictures, videos, and other visuals can serve as prompts for analysis and discussion rather than mere illustrations. By presenting grammar through images related to students' fields, instructors can benefit from learners' existing knowledge and visual thinking abilities.

This study addresses the above gap by exploring visual literacy strategies for teaching the English passive voice to agriculture majors in an ESP classroom. It situates grammar instruction within the context of agricultural processes through student-generated visuals and collaborative activities. While scholars have advocated the integration of multimodal literacy in ESP course design and demonstrated the value of visuals for vocabulary and reading in EFL, fewer studies have detailed how visual approaches can enhance grammar acquisition in specific professional domains. By focusing on an authentic ESP context (agricultural students) and a challenging grammar area (passive voice), this paper aims to demonstrate the effectiveness of visual literacy-oriented instruction in teaching passive voice contextually.

METHOD

Context and Participants

The study was conducted in an ESP classroom within the Faculty of Agriculture at one of the public universities in Malang. Participants were undergraduate agriculture students in the second semester since the English course was offered in the second semester. The instructor-researcher integrated visual literacy techniques into the lessons on passive voice. It was implemented at the eleventh and twelfth meetings before the end of the semester, which aligned with the course outline. The students had heterogeneous levels of English proficiency and were learning English with a focus on agricultural science content. The course's goal was to improve students' ability to communicate about agriculture in English, including using appropriate grammar in technical descriptions.

Instructional Design

The core instructional intervention focused on integrating visual literacy strategies into grammar teaching, specifically the English passive voice. The activity sequence was designed to connect content familiarity (agricultural processes) with targeted grammar practice through a student-centered, visual, and collaborative approach. The procedure followed three structured phases:

1. **Reading and Comprehension (Input Phase)**
Students were first provided with short descriptive texts (written in active voice) detailing agricultural processes such as *planting*, *fertilizing crops*, and *harvesting vegetables*. Each text consisted of five simple active sentences. These texts served as both linguistic input and content context. They reflected real-world agricultural procedures with simple sentence structures and sequential logic.
2. **Collaborative Visualization (Processing Phase)**
Students were assigned to work in groups of 4–5, and each group member was tasked with creating manual visual representations of each process in the assigned agricultural text. Each group was free to design their illustration using sketches, arrows, labels, stick person, or comic-strip style steps. It follows the idea that "simple drawings can make learning more effective" in illustrating concepts. However, the students were not allowed to write any word as a clue. They had to draw something that represented the sentence. For example, if the sentence said "early in the morning," the students might draw the sun, which shows that it happens in the morning. The drawing process fostered negotiation of meaning and

facilitated collaborative decision-making on visually representing key steps. These visuals would later function as scaffolds for language output.

3. Language Production and Presentation (Output Phase)

After completing the visuals, students were required to retell the process orally in front of the class, using their self-produced pictures and applying the passive voice correctly. The retelling emphasized accuracy, clarity, and appropriate use of passive constructions to describe the depicted process steps. For example, for the rice planting process, students might say: *“The land is prepared. Then, the soil is watered. The seedlings are planted in straight rows...”* This output phase provided opportunities for authentic language use based on meaningful input and shared visual context.

Throughout the activity cycle, the instructor guided the groups with feedback, answered questions, and facilitated reflection sessions post-presentation.

Data Collection

This classroom-based study adopted a qualitative descriptive design, incorporating triangulated data sources to investigate how students engaged with visual literacy strategies in passive voice learning.

First, student-produced artifacts were collected, including the hand-drawn agricultural process the groups created and their written descriptions (sentences and short paragraphs in passive voice explaining the process depicted). These artifacts provided evidence of how well students applied passive voice in context and how creatively they used visuals to convey meaning.

Second, the students delivered group presentations using their visuals, essentially narrating the process in English to the class. These presentations were audio-recorded, yielding interactional data on students’ spoken use of passive voice and any negotiation of meaning that occurred. During presentations, the instructor took observational notes on student engagement, use of language, and non-verbal responses to the visual aids.

Third, interactional data were captured (with consent) during the group discussions and work phases as students collaborated on their visual projects. These captures and observations shed light on collaborative meaning-making – for instance, how students decided on phrasing, corrected each other, or referenced the visuals while formulating sentences.

Throughout the study, the instructor also kept a reflective journal documenting notable incidents (such as a student’s moment of insight or a recurring error pattern) to enrich the qualitative data.

Data Analysis

Given the exploratory and qualitative nature of the research, a thematic analysis was employed to interpret the data. The student outputs (written descriptions on visuals) were reviewed to assess the accuracy and usage of passive voice in the proper context. Presentation and group interaction recordings were coded for recurring patterns or themes related to the teaching approach – e.g. instances where visuals appeared to help clarify meaning, moments of peer collaboration, or demonstrations of student

initiative in language use. Codes were inductively grouped into broader themes aligned with the research focus on visual literacy strategies. After iterative coding and comparison with research notes, three major themes developed: (1) Contextualizing grammar through visualization, (2) Collaborative meaning-making, and (3) Student-centered language production. These themes represent the core findings on how visual literacy-based instruction affected the learning of passive voice in this ESP setting.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study and interprets how visual literacy strategies influenced students' learning of the passive voice within an ESP agricultural classroom. Drawing from qualitative data—including student-created visuals, oral presentations, group discussions, and instructor observations—the results are organized thematically to highlight patterns of student engagement, collaborative interaction, and language development. Each theme is supported by concrete examples and connected to relevant literature to provide pedagogical insights.

Contextualizing Grammar through Visualization

One of the clearest findings was that visualizing subject matter from the students' field helped contextualize the grammar (passive voice) in a meaningful way. Students learned about the passive voice by using it in specific, real-world processes related to their discipline.

For example, one group's hand-drawn picture depicted the process of land preparation, showing images of a farmer and a tractor plowing the soil. The captions they wrote for each step were in passive voice: *"The field is plowed using a tractor to loosen the soil. Before planting, all the weeds are removed from the land. Then, the ground is leveled to improve drainage. Compost is also added to enrich the soil. After finishing, the condition of the land is inspected to ensure it is ready for planting."*

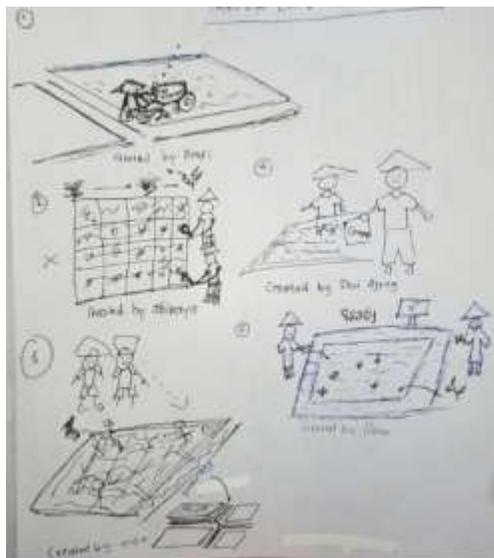


Figure 1. Student's hand-drawn to describe the process of Land Preparation

In those descriptions, the passive constructions naturally align with the focus on processes and results (what is done), which is exactly how such information would be conveyed in an agricultural context. The visuals anchored the language: students could literally focus on the action rather than the doer. As one student remarked during a class discussion, “*I realize we use passive when we want to focus on the action or process, not the person who does it.*” This comment indicates a developing metalinguistic awareness that might not surface from rote exercises alone.

The context-rich practice reflects the idea that using images that require students to produce a particular grammar structure makes it much more memorable than random sentences devoid of context. By tying grammar to familiar content, the learners better understand when and why passive voice is used.

The use of visualization also aided comprehension for students with different learning styles. Some students who struggled to grasp the passive voice from textbook explanations found that seeing the action unfold in a picture or diagram helped them formulate the sentence. For instance, a pair of students was initially confused about how to describe the rice planting step in passive voice. When looking at a drawing of farmers sowing seeds, one student said, “*So... farmers plant the seeds, but if we focus on the seeds... maybe: ‘Seeds are planted in rows?’*”

This peer-thinking-aloud, triggered by the visual, led to an accurate passive construction. It demonstrates how visual cues can prompt the correct grammatical form by shifting focus to the object receiving the action. It also supports prior findings by Yasin and Mohamad (2024) that visual aids can help learners understand the given content more clearly and even influence cognitive processes in language learning. A review of relevant studies by Yan (2025) shows that using task-specific materials can help students learn better in ESP courses. Such materials build contextual relevance and authenticity, which are essential to student engagement and skills transfer in professional contexts. In our case, the visual context influenced the learners' word choices, leading them to use the passive voice because it fit the scene they were describing.

Collaborative Meaning-Making

The second prominent theme was the high degree of collaborative learning fostered by the visual literacy approach. In traditional grammar lessons, students often work individually on fill-in-the-blanks or transformations, which limits peer interaction. In this study, however, group visual projects turned grammar practice into a social activity. Students had to work together to decide how to represent the process visually and linguistically. This collaboration created a rich environment for meaningmaking, and students negotiated the content of their visuals and the language used to describe them.

Throughout this process, they naturally talked about grammar: e.g., “Should we say ‘the tractor plows the soil’ or ‘the soil is plowed by the tractor?’” Such discussions indicate that students were actively grappling with form and meaning, teaching each other in the process. One transcribed exchange among three students designing a picture on harvesting vegetables illustrates this well:

Student A: (sketching) “*We need to show that the temperature is low.*”

Student B: *“Right. Maybe draw a thermometer that shows the low degree?”*

Student C: *“How to say that... ‘the vegetables is harvested’? Or ‘are harvested?’ ‘Should we write by the workers or not?’”*

Student A: *“Vegetables are harvested... I think it’s okay because we don’t need to say who harvest them.”*

(Group nods and writes the sentence on their paper)

Here, Student A and C together arrive at a correct passive voice sentence, rationalizing that naming the agent (“who”) isn’t necessary. The visual (vegetables are harvested) provided the shared reference for them to discuss and test their sentences. This peer scaffolding resulted in accurate language output and a clearer understanding of the usage rule (implied agent). From a sociocultural learning perspective, such interaction is invaluable. The learners build knowledge collaboratively, each contributing and refining ideas. The visual task gave them a focus for conversation, something that purely verbal grammar exercises often lack.

The researcher noted many instances where a student would gesture to a part of the drawing while suggesting a sentence, essentially using the visual as a common ground to clarify meaning. It reflects the concept of visual thinking strategies (VTS) by Yenawine (2013) in education, which leverages discussion about images to develop language and critical thinking. In a way, the groups were doing a simple version of a visual thinking strategy. They asked each other, “What’s happening here?” and answered using passive constructions.

In language pedagogy, such conditions are ideal for meaningful learning. Eragamreddy’s (2024) thematic review found that cooperative learning and task-based learning were among the successful techniques for teaching grammar, like passive voice. Our classroom experience substantiates this; students in groups clearly learned from one another. Those who were more confident in English often took on explaining grammar points to peers (*“We need past participle here – harvested, not harvest”*). At the same time, students’ knowledge of agriculture ensured that the content made sense. This two-way exchange meant that by the end, everyone better grasped the process and the language describing it.

Student-Centered Language Production

The third theme, closely tied to the previous two, is the clear shift toward student-centered language production observed in our ESP classroom. By integrating visual literacy tasks, the instructional focus moved away from the teacher as the sole source of knowledge toward the students as creators and communicators. In practical terms, this meant that for most of the lesson time, students actively produced language – discussing, writing, and speaking – rather than passively listening to explanations. The passive voice, a grammar point that can easily be taught via teacher lecture (e.g., showing formula “be + past participle”), was instead learned through discovery and use. This approach led to several notable outcomes.

First, students demonstrated that they had a better understanding of the language. Each group’s final ‘artifact’ was a product of their effort, and the sentences describing the process were in their own words. Even though the instructor sometimes provided gentle

guidance and correction when needed. Students remembered them better because they had generated the sentences themselves and could reproduce similar structures later. For instance, two weeks after the activity, a quiz asked students to describe other group pictures in a few passive sentences, and many students were able to do so correctly. It strongly indicates that the learning was transferable and not tied only to one rote memorized example. Such internalization is a hallmark of student-centered learning – students are not just mimicking what the teacher said but drawing on their own mental models and experiences to generate language. This finding supports the broader advocacy for learner-centered instruction in ESP. When students were given the tools (in this case, visual literacy techniques and group collaboration) to construct knowledge, they often exceeded expectations. The research by Ekayati et al. (2022) illustrates how tailored ESP course designs, integrating interactive experiences and student needs, can significantly improve English learning achievements. This approach is in line with the learner-centered model because it focuses on adapting learning materials and strategies to meet the specific needs of learners. In this sense, visual literacy techniques help learners constructively engage with the lesson material.

Second, the student-centered approach changed the instructor's role to a facilitator. During the project, the teacher spent far more time circulating, observing, and prompting with questions (Who or what is the focus of that step?"; "What kind of picture can you draw as a clue to represent the word or sentence?") than delivering content. This step allowed the students' voices to dominate the classroom discourse, indicating that students had more practice time with the target structure. The quality of their output also improved as the project went on. Early in the first session, some groups made many errors (e.g., "is mixing with water" instead of "is mixed with water"). However, by the time they were preparing their presentations, they had self-corrected most of these errors, often by comparing with other groups or double-checking with the instructor or reference materials. In this context, comparing oneself with peers can induce deeper engagement with the material and drive a personal commitment to accuracy and mastery (Nicol, 2020). When the instructors let students take the lead in their own learning, it helped them pay attention to their own progress and make corrections. It also denotes key behaviors for improving accuracy. Moreover, Fenwtaye (2022) conveys that self-regulated learners actively seek help when necessary, implying they do not navigate the learning process in isolation.

Third, the visual literacy strategy particularly encouraged speaking and presentation skills in addition to writing. In ESP for agriculture, students not only need to write reports but also potentially present processes or research findings. The act of presenting their visual projects in class functioned as a rehearsal for real-world communication. This exercise was student-centered in that each group showed their picture product and explained the process in passive voice narration. The teacher's interjections were minimal, mainly to praise or to gently correct any major mistake for the whole class's benefit. From a language teaching perspective, this is a multi-skill activity: reading (from notes or visuals), speaking, and writing were all involved, centered on student action. It exemplifies an integrated skills approach, which is often advocated in ESP to mirror authentic communication. Visual literacy served as the glue for this integration, allowing even hesitant speakers to have a prompt (the hand-drawn picture) to lean on. One shy student who rarely spoke in prior lessons confidently described his group's entire

process on land preparation, perhaps because he had the visual support and had practiced within his group. This improved confidence and performance aligns with the finding by Qadha and Al-Wasy (2022) that using visual tools can enhance learners' overall grammar performance, likely because it makes the learning experience richer and contextual.

In summary, the visual literacy-infused approach transformed the passive voice lessons into a platform for student-centered language production. Students played different roles, like authors, artists, and presenters. They actively used the target grammar in context. This instructional strategy not only taught them the passive voice with ampler comprehension but also cultivated skills like teamwork, creativity, and public speaking. The classroom dynamic shifted to a more constructivist model, consistent with modern ESP pedagogy that values learner agency and situated practice. The success seen through these three themes provides strong evidence that visual literacy strategies can effectively enhance grammar instruction in an ESP context, making learning more engaging and aligned with students' professional communication needs.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate the effectiveness of integrating visual literacy strategies into teaching the English passive voice in an agricultural ESP classroom. The findings, discussed through the three themes above, provide a compelling answer to the research aim: visual literacy-based instruction significantly enhanced the learning experience and outcomes for passive voice compared to traditional methods. By contextualizing grammar in relevant scenarios, students understood passive voice usage better (knowing when and why to use it, not just how). The visual approach made the complex grammar tangible and memorable, as manifested in the student's ability to recall and apply the passive in new contexts. The collaborative and student-centered visual tasks led to higher engagement, more communication practice, and greater confidence among learners. In a nutshell, visual literacy instructional strategies can catalyze active learning. It connected the language form with its meaning and use in the student's field of study.

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Building on the findings of this study, the researcher offers practical recommendations for ESP instructors and proposes areas for further research.

Firstly, ESP teachers should routinely incorporate relevant visual aids (diagrams, flow charts, process photos) when teaching grammar points. For instance, when introducing the passive voice in a technical context, use a flowchart of a process from the students' field and have learners describe it in passive sentences. Studies have shown that images help learners retain information better and remain engaged.

Secondly, encourage students to produce their own visual representations of concepts or processes as part of language practice. The activity could be as simple as drawing a sequence of steps on paper or designing a digital infographic. It becomes more impressive and personalized when students are encouraged to unlock their artistic potential and produce their own scenario structures. Such pedagogical initiatives facilitate collaborative and creative grammar exercises, thus transitioning the paradigm of

grammar instruction from teacher explanations to student output. In our experience, this technique improved passive voice usage and fostered teamwork and communication skills.

Last but not least, while this study provided valuable insights, Future studies could replicate a visual literacy approach in other ESP domains (engineering, medicine, business, etc.) and with other grammar targets (tenses, conditionals, etc.). Comparative studies could determine if certain grammar items benefit more from visual-contextual teaching than others. For example, would visual storytelling similarly aid learning of complex tenses or modal verbs in an ESP setting? The hope is that more ESP practitioners will experiment with these strategies and share outcomes, contributing to a more multi-modal, student-centered paradigm in language education.

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