



The Use of Picture Series in Improving Students Descriptive Writing Skills in The Eight Grade of SMP Swasta Pengharapan Medan

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate whether the use of Picture Series can improve students' ability in writing descriptive texts in the eighth grade of SMP Swasta Pengharapan Medan. Although writing descriptive text is one of the essential English skills, many students experience difficulties in generating ideas, organizing paragraphs, using appropriate vocabulary, and applying correct grammar. To address these problems, Picture Series is used as visual media to stimulate students' imagination. This study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design conducted in two cycles, consisting of planning, action, observation, and reflection. The participants consisted of one class of 30 eighth-grade students at SMP Swasta Pengharapan Medan. Data were collected through writing tests (pre-test and post-test), observation, interviews, questionnaires, and documentation. Students' writing was assessed based on five aspects namely content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. The data were analysed using mean scores and percentage techniques to determine the improvement in students' writing achievement. Quantitative data were analysed using mean scores and percentages, while qualitative data were analysed descriptively to support the interpretation of the findings. The findings indicate that the Picture Series can significantly enhance students' descriptive writing ability, increase learning motivation, encourage active classroom participation, and provide a more engaging and meaningful learning experience. Therefore, picture series is one of the solution particularly in teaching descriptive texts. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that picture series are an effective instructional medium for improving students' descriptive writing skills.

Keywords: Picture Series, Writing Skill, Descriptive Text, Junior High School Students



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1. Introduction

English has become an international language that plays a significant role in communication, education, science, technology, and global collaboration. In Indonesia, English is taught as a compulsory subject because it helps students develop their academic knowledge and communication skills. The primary objective of English language learning is to enable students to communicate effectively through the mastery of four fundamental language skills. Among these skills, writing is considered one of the most difficult because students must be able to express ideas clearly while applying appropriate grammar, vocabulary, and text organization (Ramadhanty et al, 2021).

Writing is not merely the ability to produce grammatically correct sentences but also the ability to communicate ideas logically, coherently, and meaningfully. Students are expected to generate ideas, organize information systematically, select appropriate vocabulary, apply grammatical rules accurately, and produce cohesive paragraphs that are easily understood by readers. These multidimensional demands make writing one of the most complex language skills to master. Consequently, many Indonesian EFL learners may experience various difficulties in writing, including problems with expressing ideas, organizing information, vocabulary use, grammar, and coherence (Bulqiyah et al., 2021; Nugraheni, 2023). These difficulties indicate that writing instruction requires appropriate learning support to help students develop their ideas and communicate them effectively in written form.

One of the writing competencies that junior high school students are required to master is descriptive writing. Descriptive text aims to describe a particular person, place, object, or animal by presenting its characteristics clearly and systematically so that readers can visualize the object being described. Besides improving students' writing ability, descriptive writing also develops vocabulary mastery, grammatical accuracy, observation skills, and creativity. Nevertheless, classroom practices indicate that many students still experience difficulties in composing descriptive texts because they have limited vocabulary, produced grammatically inaccurate sentences, and found it difficult to organize ideas into coherent paragraphs. Research conducted by Ramadhanty et al. (2021) demonstrated that Indonesian junior high school students often encounter difficulties in developing descriptive texts because they struggle to generate ideas and organize information effectively, highlighting the need for more supportive instructional media. Similar findings were reported by Mukramah et al. (2023), who found that visual prompts significantly supported students in formulating and organizing ideas when writing descriptive texts compared with conventional text prompts.

Based on preliminary observations conducted at SMP Swasta Pengharapan Medan, the eighth-grade students still have difficulties in producing descriptive texts. Most students struggle to develop ideas, use appropriate vocabulary, and arrange sentences into well-organized paragraphs. In addition, the teaching strategy applied in the classroom is still relatively conventional, causing students to become passive during the learning process. Therefore, teachers need to apply more interesting and student-centered learning methods to improve students' writing ability.

One learning medium that can help students develop ideas is picture series. Picture series provides sequential visual images that help students organize their thoughts before writing. By observing a series of pictures, students can more easily generate ideas, arrange information logically, and produce more meaningful descriptive texts. A review of previous studies also indicated that picture series can support writing development across different text types, including descriptive writing (Erniwati et al., 2022). Deviga and Arum Ardhani (2021) reported that the use of picture series could support students in developing ideas during writing activities, while Clarita et al. (2023) found that the use of digital picture series improved students' writing performance.

Although previous studies have reported positive findings regarding the use of picture series in writing instruction, further investigation is still needed in the context of descriptive writing in the junior high school level. Previous research has examined picture series for general writing development or other text types, while studies focusing specifically on the use of picture series to improve descriptive writing among Indonesian junior high school students remain limited.

Based on the explanation above, this study aims to investigate whether the implementation of Picture Series can improve students' ability in writing descriptive texts in the eighth grade of SMP Swasta Pengharapan Medan. It is expected that this study will provide an effective teaching strategy to improve students' writing skills, especially in developing ideas, organizing paragraphs, and using appropriate vocabulary and grammar.

2. Method

This study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design to improve students' ability in writing descriptive texts through Picture Series. Classroom Action Research was chosen because it allows the researcher to identify classroom problems, implement appropriate actions, observe the learning process, and evaluate the effectiveness of the instructional strategy. The research was conducted in two cycles, and each cycle consisted of four stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection. A two-cycle CAR design has also been applied in recent Indonesian EFL research to evaluate the effectiveness of instructional interventions through systematic observation and comparison of learning outcomes (Pratolo et al., 2025).

The research was conducted at SMP Swasta Pengharapan Medan during the 2026 academic year. The participants were one class of eighth-grade students consisting of 30 students, selected using a simple random sampling technique from the eighth-grade population. The instruments used in this study consisted of a writing

test, observation sheet, interview guide, questionnaire, and documentation. The use of multiple instruments was intended to obtain both evidence of changes in students' writing performance and information concerning students' participation and responses during the implementation of Picture Series. Previous CAR studies in Indonesian EFL contexts have similarly employed multiple instruments, including tests, observations, interviews, field notes, and documentation, to capture both learning outcomes and classroom processes (Sari et al., 2021; Marlaini, 2021). The pre-test was administered before the implementation of Picture Series to measure students' initial writing ability, while the post-test was conducted after each cycle to identify students' improvement in writing descriptive texts. Observation sheets were used to record students' participation and classroom activities during the implementation of the learning process. Interviews and questionnaires were conducted to obtain students' responses toward the use of Picture Series and Task-Based Language Teaching, while documentation was collected to support the research findings.

The research procedure consisted of two cycles, and each cycle included four stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection. This procedure follows the basic cyclical principle of Classroom Action Research, in which the results obtained from one cycle are used to determine improvements in the following cycle (Sari et al., 2021). In the planning stage, the researcher identified students' writing difficulties, prepared the lesson plans, selected and prepared the Picture Series, developed learning materials, prepared research instruments, and established the assessment criteria. In the action stage, the researcher implemented the planned instructional activities using Picture Series. Students were presented with sequential pictures and guided to observe the pictures, identify characteristics and relevant details, generate vocabulary, organize their ideas, and develop the information into descriptive texts. The use of sequential visual stimuli can support students' writing development and helping learners formulate and organize ideas (Mukramah et al., 2023; Wahono & Afifah, 2022). In the observation stage, the researcher observed students' participation, engagement, interaction, difficulties, and responses throughout the learning activities. In the reflection stage, the researcher reviewed the results obtained from the action and observation stages. Students' writing scores, classroom participation, responses, and learning difficulties were analysed to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the implementation. The findings from the first cycle were then used to revise and improve the instructional activities in the second cycle.

Students' writing ability was assessed using five aspects of writing adapted from Jacobs et al. (1981) namely content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. Setyowati et al. (2020) investigated the use of the Jacobs ESL Composition Profile for assessing EFL students' writing in Indonesia and found acceptable inter-rater consistency and reliability. The same assessment criteria were applied to the students' pre-test and post-test scores and analyzed by calculating the mean score and the percentage of students who achieved the minimum mastery criterion. Qualitative data obtained from observations, interviews, questionnaires, and documentation were analyzed descriptively to explain students' participation and responses during the implementation of Picture Series.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results

The data in this study were collected using five research instruments namely a writing test, observation, documentation, interview, and questionnaire. These instruments were used to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data regarding the implementation of Picture Series. The results of the study showed an improvement in the students' descriptive writing performance after the implementation of picture series. The improvement was identified by comparing the students' writing performance before and after the instructional treatment. The students' writing was assessed based on five aspects, namely content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics.

The results showed an improvement in students' descriptive writing performance after the implementation of Picture Series. The improvement was identified by comparing students' writing performance before and after the implementation of the instructional strategy. Students' writing was assessed based on five components: content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. These components were used consistently to assess students' writing performance in both the pre-test and post-test.

Before the implementation of picture series, the students obtained a mean score of 77.83 in the pre-test. Although the mean score was relatively satisfactory, several students still experienced difficulties in developing their ideas into a complete descriptive text. Their writing contained limited supporting details, repetitive vocabulary, grammatical errors, and problems with organizing sentences into a coherent text. These problems indicated that students needed additional visual support to help them generate and organize ideas during the writing process.

After the implementation of picture series, the students' mean score increased to 85.17 in the post-test. The difference between the pre-test and post-test scores was 7.34 points, representing an improvement of approximately 9.43%. This increase indicates that students demonstrated better performance in descriptive writing after being taught through picture series.

Table 1. Students' Overall Descriptive Writing Scores

Test	Mean Score	Improvement
Pre-test	77.83	–
Post-test	85.17	7.34
Percentage of improvement	–	9.43%

As presented in Table 1, the students' mean score increased from 77.83 in the pre-test to 85.17 in the post-test. The 7.34-point increase demonstrates an overall improvement in students' descriptive writing performance. The percentage improvement of 9.43% further indicates that the students achieved higher writing scores following the implementation of Picture Series. The improvement was also observed in the five components of writing. The students' performance in each component is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Students' Writing Performance by Component

Writing Component	Pre-test	Post-test	Improvement
Content	78.10	86.20	8.10
Organization	77.50	85.40	7.90
Vocabulary	77.20	84.80	7.60
Grammar	78.30	84.10	5.80
Mechanics	78.05	85.35	7.30
Overall Mean	77.83	85.17	7.34

As shown in Table 2, the largest improvement occurred in content, which increased from 78.10 to 86.20. This was followed by organization, which increased from 77.50 to 85.40. Vocabulary increased from 77.20 to 84.80, while mechanics increased from 78.05 to 85.35. Grammar showed the smallest increase, from 78.30 to 84.10.

The improvement in content indicates that students became better at developing ideas and providing relevant details in their descriptive texts. Before the treatment, some students tended to produce short descriptions with insufficient supporting information. After using picture series, students had a visual stimulus that helped them identify what could be described. They could observe the objects, characteristics, colors, shapes, locations, and other relevant details shown in the pictures and transform these observations into written ideas. The improvement in organization also indicates that students became more capable of arranging their ideas logically. The sequence of pictures provided students with a visual framework for organizing the information they wanted to include in their writing. Consequently, the students were less likely to produce unrelated or randomly arranged sentences.

Vocabulary also improved after the implementation of picture series. The visual information provided contextual clues that helped students identify appropriate words for describing the subject. Students were able to use more specific vocabulary related to physical characteristics, appearance, location, and other descriptive details. Grammar showed the smallest improvement among the five components. This finding is understandable because picture series primarily provide visual support for generating and organizing ideas, whereas grammatical accuracy requires additional linguistic knowledge and practice. Therefore, although students had more ideas to express, some of them still experienced difficulties with subject-verb agreement, verb forms, sentence structure, articles, and prepositions.

The improvement in mechanics suggests that students also became more aware of spelling, punctuation, and capitalization when producing their final texts. However, several errors remained, indicating that visual support alone was not sufficient to eliminate all mechanical problems.

3.2. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that picture series can be an effective visual medium for supporting students' descriptive writing. The increase in the mean score from 77.83 to 85.17 suggests that students performed better after the instructional intervention. The findings are consistent with previous research conducted in Indonesian junior high school contexts.

Ramadhanty, Utomo, and Mayasari (2021) investigated the impact of picture series on Indonesian junior high school EFL learners' descriptive writing using a quasi-experimental design. Their study involved 50 students from a private junior high school in Banten and used pre-test and post-test scores analyzed through a t-test. The experimental group performed better than the control group, indicating a positive impact of picture series on descriptive writing ability. The findings from both contexts indicate that picture series can provide useful support when students are required to develop written descriptions in English.

The present finding is also supported by Muna's (2016) study conducted among eighth-grade students of SMP Negeri 23 Semarang. In that study, the experimental group's mean score increased from 74.94 in the pre-test to 81.00 in the post-test. The statistical analysis produced a t-value of 5.16, which was higher than the critical value of 2.00, leading the researcher to conclude that picture series had a significant influence on students' descriptive writing.

Compared with Muna's findings, the students in the present study also demonstrated an increase in writing performance, although the starting score was already relatively high. This is important because the effectiveness of an instructional technique should not only be evaluated from the final score but also from the extent to which students improve from their initial performance. In the present study, the increase of 7.34 points indicates that picture series provided additional support even when students already possessed a relatively satisfactory level of writing ability. Overall, the results indicate that the use of picture series contributed positively to the descriptive writing performance of eighth-grade students at SMP Swasta Pengharapan Medan. The increase from 77.83 in the pre-test to 85.17 in the post-test was accompanied by improvements in content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. The findings are in line with previous studies conducted in Indonesian junior high schools, which similarly reported positive effects of picture series on students' writing performance.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that the implementation of Picture Series through Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) improved the descriptive writing skills of eighth-grade students at SMP Swasta Pengharapan Medan. The Classroom Action Research involving 30 students was conducted in two cycles through the stages of planning, action, observation, and reflection. The findings showed an improvement in students' writing performance from a mean score of 77.83 in the pre-test to 85.17 in the post-test. Improvements were also observed in the main components of writing, including content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics.

The improvement in students' writing performance indicates that Picture Series provided useful visual support during the writing process. The sequential images help students generate ideas, identify relevant details, and organize information before developing their ideas into descriptive texts. Classroom observations also indicated that students became more actively involved in the writing activities and showed greater willingness to express their ideas. The visual support appeared to make the writing process more concrete and manageable for students who initially experienced difficulties in developing and organizing their ideas.

These findings suggest that Picture Series can be considered a useful instructional medium for supporting descriptive writing instruction at the junior high school level. Its use can help students develop the content and organization of their texts while also supporting vocabulary use, language accuracy, and mechanics. Therefore, English teachers may consider incorporating Picture Series into descriptive writing activities, particularly when students experience difficulties in generating and organizing ideas.

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