

ENHANCING STUDENTS' WRITING SKILLS THROUGH THE USE OF PICTURE SERIES

Nurmalawati^{1*}, Ibnu Hajar², Andriani³

^{1,2,3} Universitas Bumi Persada, Lhokseumawe

Email: Nurmalawati07051964@gmail.com^{1*}, ibnuhajar116@gmail.com², ar23031990@gmail.com³

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Abstract

Writing plays a significant role in teaching and learning the English language, yet it is often regarded as a challenging skill to master. To produce a well-written piece, certain criteria must be met, including content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. Instructional media can be a valuable tool for teachers in facilitating writing instruction. This article explores the use of picture series as an instructional medium to enhance students' writing skills. Picture series are particularly effective because they are engaging and visually represent the chronological sequence of a text. The article reviews relevant theories, regulations, research, and practical applications in teaching writing. It also offers examples of different instructional media, emphasizes the benefits of using picture series to improve writing abilities, and provides a step-by-step guide on implementing picture series in the classroom. The goal of this article is to serve as a resource for teaching writing with picture series and to offer recommendations for future research and practice.

Keywords: *picture series, improve, writing ability.*

INTRODUCTION

Writing, alongside listening, speaking, and reading, is one of the essential language skills in English language teaching and learning. It serves as a vital tool for students to acquire a second language, particularly English. Writing enables learners to express and communicate their ideas in a written form, facilitating interaction with others. Additionally, written English allows students to convey messages to readers across different locations and time periods (Brown, 2007; Harmer, 2004). Written words have the unique ability to endure for years, sometimes even centuries or millennia.

The significance of writing extends to various aspects of daily life. As Nunan (1991) points out, written language fulfills multiple functions, such as providing instructions, sharing information, and offering entertainment. Examples include public signs, product labels, manuals, magazines, books, and film subtitles. The demand for English in written communication has grown considerably in recent years. Despite its importance, writing is often regarded as the most challenging of the four language skills. This difficulty stems from its complex and recursive process (Hamp-Lyons & Heasley, 1987, cited in Nunan, 1991; Harmer, 2004; Richards & Renandya, 2002). Writing is not a linear activity; it requires writers to plan, draft, and edit, as well as revisit and revise their work multiple times before producing a final version. Furthermore, a well-written piece must meet specific criteria, including organization, content, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics (Brown, 2004).

Consistent with the notion that writing is challenging, Pertiwi (2016) highlights that students often face difficulties in writing. Many consider it the hardest skill to master in learning English. Common issues include poor organization, unstructured content, incorrect grammar, inappropriate word choice, and mechanical errors such as spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. Teaching writing, therefore, is no simple task, especially when students' English proficiency is still developing. Consequently, it requires careful attention and dedication from English teachers. Given the challenges in teaching writing, English teachers must carefully consider the key components and characteristics of effective instruction to ensure a successful teaching-learning process. These components include objectives, strategies, environment, and instructional media (Smaldino, Lowther, & Russell, 2009). Each of these elements can present

challenges for teachers when teaching writing. Among them, instructional media is the primary focus of this article. This article aims to explore the role of picture series as an instructional medium in enhancing students' writing skills. To achieve this goal, it begins by discussing relevant theories, regulations, research, and practical applications in teaching writing. It then provides examples of various instructional media used in writing instruction and emphasizes the benefits of using picture series to improve students' writing abilities. Finally, the article outlines a step-by-step procedure for teaching writing with picture series and offers recommendations for future practice and research

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teaching Writing: Theory and Regulation

As previously mentioned, writing is a complex process, which is why it is often considered the last language skill to be mastered. In the field of teaching writing, there are several perspectives on what writing entails. Writing can be viewed as a product, a process, or a social activity. These perspectives significantly influence how teachers approach writing instruction.

First, writing is seen as a productive skill. It is labeled as such because it involves the creation of written texts. Harmer (2004) supports this view, stating that writing is an activity that generates ideas or opinions in written form. The primary focus here is on the final written product that students produce. Writing is also regarded as a process. Students must go through several stages to produce a well-crafted text. Brown (2000) describes the process of composing written text as involving thinking, drafting, and revising. Initially, students need to brainstorm and select a topic or theme. Next, they generate ideas by creating a draft, and finally, they organize and revise their work to produce the final version. Harmer (2004) emphasizes that writing should be taught as a cyclical process, including planning, drafting, editing, and producing a final version. This process is not linear but recursive, requiring repeated refinement.

Lastly, writing can be viewed as a social activity. This perspective emphasizes communicative competence, which involves mastering different types of texts (Richards, 2006). Therefore, writing instruction should provide students with opportunities to understand and produce various text types for meaningful communication. This approach is known as the genre-based approach. Agustien et al. (2004) outline the steps of this approach: Building Knowledge of the Field (BKoF), Modeling of the Text (MoT), Joint Construction of the Text (JCoT), and Independent Construction of the Text (ICoT). Teachers play a crucial role in teaching writing. Harmer (2001) identifies three key roles for teachers: motivator, resource, and feedback provider. Teachers must create an environment that encourages idea generation and motivates students to engage in writing activities. Additionally, they should be prepared to provide necessary information and language support. These roles require careful attention and dedication from teachers.

The importance of writing in English language teaching and learning, particularly for Junior High School students, is reflected in the curriculum. In Indonesia, the education system currently implements two curricula: the 2006 School-Based Curriculum and the 2013 Curriculum. According to the 2006 School Based Curriculum for Junior High School, English teaching integrates the four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—to achieve functional literacy (Depdiknas, 2006). Students are expected to comprehend and produce short functional texts, such as announcements, invitations, and advertisements, as well as essays in the form of procedural, descriptive, recount, narrative, and report texts.

Similarly, the 2013 Curriculum states that the goal of teaching English in Junior High School is for students to identify the social function, generic structure, and linguistic features of texts. They are expected to communicate interpersonally, transactionally, and functionally about themselves and their environment in daily life. Additionally, they should be able to produce short spoken and written texts (Kemdikbud, 2016). This highlights the continued importance of writing in English teaching and learning under this curriculum. In both curricula, writing is taught from the first to the last grade

Research and Practice In Teaching Writing

Research on teaching writing, both in Indonesia and internationally, has explored the use of picture series as an instructional tool. Studies by Asrifan (2015); Guierrez, Puello, and Galvis (2015); Krčelić and Matijević (2015); Desitawardhani (2014); Mudassir (2014); Nirmala (2013); Sudaryo (2013); and Hasanah

(2009) have demonstrated that picture series are effective in enhancing students' writing abilities. Many of these studies highlight that, in practice, English teachers often focus heavily on grammatical aspects rather than the overall writing product. This approach typically involves teachers explaining a topic to students, who then listen and are asked to write a short composition within a set time frame without any models or additional guidance. The teacher waits for the students to complete their work without providing further support, making the writing process seem dull and intimidating for students. To address these challenges, researchers such as Desitawardhani (2014), Sudaryo (2013), and Hasanah (2009) conducted action research using picture series to improve students' writing skills. Their findings revealed that picture series are highly effective in enhancing writing abilities. Similarly, Asrifan (2015) and Mudassir (2014) conducted experimental studies using picture series in writing instruction, confirming their effectiveness. International studies by Guitterez et al. (2015), Krčelić and Matijević (2015), and Nirmala (2013) also support these findings, further validating the use of picture series as a valuable tool in teaching writing.

Various Media in Teaching

As previously discussed, instructional media play a significant role in enhancing students' writing abilities. By incorporating media, the teaching-learning process becomes more varied and engaging. Hamalik (1985) defines media as tools, methods, or techniques used to facilitate effective communication and interaction between teachers and students during the learning process. This not only makes the process more dynamic but also increases students' interest and enthusiasm. There are various types of instructional media that can be utilized in teaching and learning. According to Samjaya (2012), media can be categorized into three types: audio (e.g., radio, tape recorder, cassette), visual (e.g., pictures, photographs, drawings), and audiovisual (e.g., videos). Similarly, Harmer (2007) suggests that music, pictures, and films serve as excellent stimuli for writing activities, enabling teachers to design creative writing tasks using these media.

Visual media, in particular, are considered highly effective for learning, as students primarily process information through sight, followed by hearing, and to a lesser extent, through smell, touch, and taste (Chee & Wong, 2003). Pictures, as a form of visual media, are especially useful for teaching writing. There are numerous types of pictures that can be used to support writing instruction, including single images, picture series, diagrams, tables, maps, and charts (Raimes, 1983).

The use of pictures in the teaching-learning process aims to make instruction more effective and engaging, thereby improving students' writing skills. Wright (1989) emphasizes that pictures significantly contribute to both the content and process of language learning. They can motivate students, provide objective descriptions, cue responses to questions, and offer valuable information. Pictures also help establish the context in which language is used. Raimes (1983) adds that pictures are a valuable resource for writing teachers, as they create shared experiences in the classroom, encourage the use of common language forms, offer a variety of tasks, and capture students' interest.

Harmer (2004) suggests several ways to use pictures as a medium for teaching writing, such as describing pictures, writing postcards, and creating story tasks. Pictures bring real-world contexts into the classroom in a vivid and concrete manner. Teachers can source pictures from various places, including books, newspapers, magazines, the internet, or photographs. These pictures can take the form of flashcards, large wall pictures, cue cards, photographs, or illustrations (Harmer, 2001). Some teachers also use projected slides, overhead projector images, or computer-generated visuals. Additionally, teachers can draw pictures on the board to aid explanations and language activities.

To ensure that picture-based activities are effective, teachers should consider several factors. Wright (1989) outlines these considerations: (1) the media should be easy to prepare; (2) it should be easy to organize in the classroom; (3) it should be interesting for both students and teachers; (4) it should be meaningful and authentic; and (5) the activity should generate enough language use to justify its inclusion in the lesson. By adhering to these guidelines, teachers can maximize the benefits of using pictures in writing instruction.

The Role of Picture Series in Teaching Writing

Pictures are two-dimensional visual representations of people, places, or objects, which can be painted, drawn, colored, or black and white. Yunus (1981) categorizes pictures into three types: composite pictures, picture series, and individual pictures. He defines picture series as a sequence of interconnected pictures that depict a series of events or tell a story. Picture series are particularly useful for helping students write texts that require chronological order, such as procedural, recount, and narrative texts. Wright (1989) explains that picture series illustrate actions or events in a logical sequence, making them an effective stimulus for learning activities. When used as a teaching tool for writing, picture series assist students in generating ideas, determining themes, and organizing information. The pictures should be simple and clear to avoid confusion. Teachers can further support students by providing guided questions to help them construct a sequence of sentences (Brown, 2004). There are various examples of picture series that can be used in the classroom to teach writing, especially for genres that rely on chronological order, such as procedural, recount, and narrative texts. For instance, a picture series for narrative text is illustrated in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Picture Series of Narrative Text (*Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, 2016)

The picture series above depicts the story of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, which is a narrative text. Through these pictures, students can be guided to understand the story by analyzing its generic structure, including the orientation (Picture 1), complication (Pictures 2-6), and resolution (Picture 7). By examining each picture, students can identify the participants, setting, problems, and resolution of the story. Ultimately, this process helps students write the story of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*.

There are various alternatives for picture series that can be used in the classroom. These can be either colored or black and white, and they can be drawn by teachers or sourced from textbooks, magazines, newspapers, photographs, or other media. The number of pictures in a series can vary, but a sequence of three to six pictures is often sufficient to provide a suitable stimulus for writing (Brown, 2004). Teachers can adapt the picture series based on their classroom needs, depending on the complexity and generic structure of the text being taught.

Using picture series offers several advantages. First, sequential pictures help students generate ideas about what to write. Many students struggle with where to begin, and picture series provide a clear visual stimulus, showing which events come first and how they unfold. Second, picture series capture students' attention and actively engage them in the writing process. Finally, picture series are an effective tool for expanding students' vocabulary. They serve as a medium for introducing new English words, which can ultimately enhance students' writing abilities.

Procedure of Using Picture Series in Teaching Writing

There are several procedures for using picture series to teach writing, depending on the teacher's strategy in conducting the teaching-learning process. One effective approach is the Genre-Based Approach. This approach is particularly suitable because it treats writing as a social activity (Badger &

White, 2000) and aligns with curricula based on the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). This method emphasizes the development of language competence, requiring students to understand the purpose, generic structure, and linguistic features of a text. The approach involves a structured process of habit formation, which includes building knowledge, modeling, joint construction, and independent construction. Here is an example of procedure of how to implement picture series in teaching writing a recount text through Genre-Based Approach.

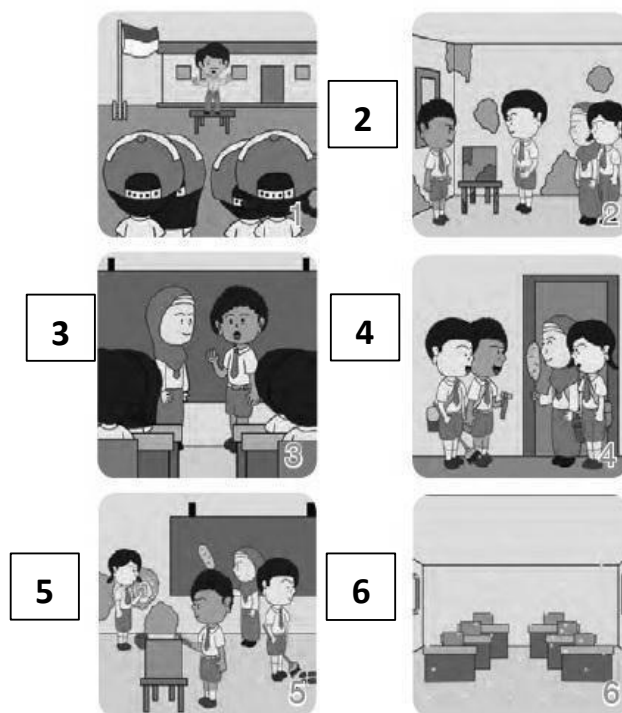


Figure 2. Picture Series of Recount Text (Kemdikbud, 2014)

The first step is **Building Knowledge of the Field (BKoF)**. In this stage, the teacher activates students' prior knowledge of the text through brainstorming. The teacher asks questions related to the topic and introduces a series of pictures, prompting students to discuss elements such as characters and settings based on the visuals. For example, the pictures might depict a student's experience of winning the First Prize in a Classroom Competition, illustrating the orientation, series of events, and resolution of the text.

The second step is **Modeling of the Text (MoT)**. Here, the teacher develops students' understanding of the text by providing an example. The teacher guides students in analyzing the text structure using scaffolded or guided questions based on the picture series. Additionally, the teacher helps students identify language features and unfamiliar or challenging vocabulary in the text.

The third step is **Joint Construction of the Text (JCoT)**. In this stage, the teacher encourages students to work in pairs or groups to write a text. The teacher distributes a set of pictures to each group and asks them to create a text based on the visuals. Throughout the process, the teacher provides feedback on the students' writing.

The final step is **Independent Construction of the Text (ICoT)**. In this stage, students work independently to write a text on their own. The teacher focuses on developing students' ability to produce the text individually without collaboration.

Teachers can also implement other methods or strategies for teaching writing using picture series, such as the product approach, process approach, or scientific approach. In the scientific approach, for instance, picture series can be introduced in the early stages, such as during the observing and questioning steps. Teachers can use picture series to generate students' ideas, followed by activities like collecting information, associating, and communicating.

CONCLUSIONS

Writing holds significant importance in the teaching and learning of the English language. However, it is often regarded as the most challenging skill to master. This challenge stems from the intricate nature of the writing process. Additionally, a well-written piece requires proper organization, rich content, grammatical accuracy, diverse vocabulary, and correct mechanics. To address these complexities, teachers should utilize suitable instructional tools. Picture series, as one such tool, can effectively enhance students' writing skills. Picture series are particularly useful because they are engaging and present events in a chronological sequence, helping students generate and structure their ideas more easily in written form. As a result, teachers are encouraged to be more innovative in selecting and designing engaging media to ensure successful writing instruction. They are also urged to conduct further research to explore the potential of picture series in improving students' writing abilities.

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