

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF USING PICTURE SERIES ON STUDENTS' WRITING SKILL IN RECOUNT TEXT

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ABSTRACT

Writing is one of the most challenging skills for EFL students, particularly in producing recount texts that are well organized and linguistically accurate. Many senior high school students still face difficulties in generating ideas, organizing events chronologically, and using appropriate language features in their writing. However, most previous studies have been conducted in junior high school contexts, while research examining the effectiveness of picture series in senior high school settings remains limited. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of using picture series on students' writing skill in recount text at the senior high school level. This study employed a quantitative one-group pretest–posttest design involving 23 tenth-grade students of SMA Kampus Nommensen Pematangsiantar. The data were collected through writing tests administered before and after the treatment and analyzed using descriptive statistics and a paired-sample t-test. The results showed that students' mean writing score improved significantly from 55.43 in the pre-test to 73.48 in the post-test. Beyond demonstrating effectiveness, the findings suggest that picture series support key cognitive processes in writing, particularly idea generation and chronological organization. This indicates that picture series function not only as instructional media, but also as pedagogical support that helps learners transform visual input into coherent written recount texts in EFL contexts.

Introduction

Writing is one of the essential skills in English as a foreign language (EFL) because it allows students to express their thoughts, experiences, and ideas in written form. Harmer (2004) states that writing is a productive skill that requires a process of generating, organizing, and expressing ideas in a clear and accurate way. However, writing is often considered a challenging skill since it requires the integration of several language components such as vocabulary, grammar, organization, and mechanics (Brown, 2001).

Writing in an EFL context is not only a linguistic activity but also a cognitive process that requires learners to plan, organize, and express ideas systematically. For senior high school students, writing tasks demand higher levels of abstract thinking and language accuracy compared to lower levels of education. At this stage, students are expected to produce longer and more coherent texts while maintaining grammatical correctness and appropriate vocabulary use. However, many students still struggle due to limited exposure to effective instructional support that bridges ideas and language forms.

Visual-based learning media have been widely recognized as effective tools in reducing students' cognitive load during the writing process. According to the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (Mayer, 2009), learners process information through two interconnected channels, namely verbal and visual representations. Learning becomes more effective when these channels are integrated, allowing learners to construct meaning more efficiently. In the context of writing instruction, picture series provide visual input that supports verbal processing by helping learners generate ideas, organize information chronologically, and reduce cognitive load during the writing process. Therefore, picture series can be viewed as a form of cognitive scaffolding that facilitates the transformation of visual information into structured written language. This theoretical perspective serves as the conceptual framework of the present study in examining how picture series support students' writing performance in recount texts. In writing instruction, picture series function as scaffolding tools that guide learners in sequencing events, generating ideas, and maintaining text coherence. By providing concrete visual references, picture series help students transform abstract ideas into structured written texts. Therefore, integrating picture series into writing instruction is pedagogically relevant, particularly in senior high school contexts where students require greater support to meet higher academic writing demands.

In the Indonesian high school curriculum, students are expected to master various types of written texts, including recount texts. A recount text aims to retell past events in chronological order using the simple past tense and temporal connectors, such as *then*, *after that*, and *finally* (Anderson & Anderson, 2011). Although students are taught the structure and language features of recount texts, many of them still encounter difficulties. They often struggle to generate ideas, organize events logically, and use correct grammar and vocabulary in their writing.

To address these challenges, teachers are encouraged to use appropriate instructional media. One of the media that has been found beneficial in supporting students' writing is picture series. Picture series refers to a set of sequential images that illustrate events and help students develop ideas before writing. According to Wright (2008), picture series can stimulate students' imagination, guide idea organization, and support vocabulary recall. Picture series are visual media that support students in writing recount texts because they present a sequence of events or stories in a logical and coherent order (Wening, 2016). Picture series are considered effective instructional media for students, particularly in developing writing skills, because they offer clearer visual representations of ideas and information.

Previous studies show that picture series can positively influence students' writing performance. For example, Fitria (2020) reported that picture series helped students develop coherent recount texts because the images guided them in arranging events. Similarly, Nurul Aini & Egita Ratih (2021) found that students' writing skills significantly improved after being taught using picture series.

However, most previous studies were conducted in junior high school contexts, while research on the effectiveness of picture series in senior high school settings is still limited. Furthermore, few studies have examined whether picture series significantly improve students' overall writing achievement through measurable pre-test and post-test results.

Therefore, this study aims to determine the effectiveness of using picture series on students' writing skill in recount text at SMA Kampus Nommensen Pematangsiantar. Specifically, the study compares students' writing scores before and after being taught using picture series to identify whether there is a significant improvement. The findings of this research are expected to provide useful insights for English teachers in selecting effective and practical media to support the teaching of writing.

Method

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a one-group pretest–posttest design, which is appropriate for examining instructional effectiveness in a classroom-based context. While this design provides empirical evidence of score improvement following the intervention, it does not aim to establish causal claims beyond the observed instructional setting. The analysis focused on overall writing performance, encompassing idea generation, organization, and language use, rather than isolating individual components. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted as indicative of instructional effectiveness rather than definitive causal explanations of learning mechanisms. According to Creswell (2014), quantitative research involves collecting numerical data to measure the effect of a treatment. In this design, one class of students was given a pretest to measure their initial writing skill, followed by a treatment using picture series, and finally a posttest to assess improvement. This design was chosen because it allows the researcher to measure the difference in students' writing achievement before and after using picture series in teaching recount text.

2.2. Participants

The participants of this research were 23 students of class X-1 at SMA Kampus Nommensen Pematangsiantar during the first semester of the 2025 academic year. The class was chosen purposively because the students had relatively similar English proficiency levels and had learned about recount texts previously. All students participated in both the pretest and posttest.

2.3. Instrument

The instrument used in this research was a writing test, consisting of a pretest and posttest.

- In the pretest, students were asked to write a recount text about their personal experience (about 100–150 words).
- In the posttest, students were asked to write a recount text based on a picture series presented by the researcher.

Students' writings were evaluated using an analytic scoring rubric adapted from Jacobs et al. (1981) which assessed five aspects of writing performance:

No	Aspect	Description	Weight
1	Content	Relevance and completeness of ideas	30%
2	Organization	Logical sequencing and coherence	20%
3	Vocabulary	Accuracy and variety of words	20%
4	Language Use	Grammar and sentence structure	25%
5	Mechanics	Spelling, punctuation, capitalization	5%

The total score for each student was converted to a 100-point scale.

The analytic scoring rubric was selected because it allows a detailed assessment of students' writing performance across multiple aspects rather than relying on a single holistic score. This approach provides more objective and comprehensive evaluation results, as each component of writing skill is measured independently. Jacobs et al. (1981) emphasize that analytic scoring enhances reliability in writing assessment by minimizing rater bias and clearly defining evaluation criteria. By applying this rubric consistently in both the pretest and posttest, the researcher ensured that any observed improvement in students' writing scores reflected actual development in specific writing components rather than subjective judgment.

2.4. Procedure

The research consisted of two meetings during regular English class hours.

a. Pretest

Before the treatment, students were asked to write a recount text about their personal experience within 40 minutes. Their writing served as the baseline to measure their initial ability.

b. Treatment

During the treatment, the researcher used picture series as the medium of instruction.

- The researcher explained the structure of recount text (orientation, events, reorientation).
- Students observed a set of pictures arranged in chronological order.
- They discussed the sequence of events, identified key vocabulary, and outlined the story.
- The researcher guided students in constructing sentences based on the picture series. This activity aimed to help students generate and organize ideas before writing.

During the treatment phase, students actively participated in guided discussions and collaborative learning activities. The researcher encouraged students to describe each picture verbally before writing, allowing them to practice vocabulary usage and sentence construction orally. Although students actively participated in guided discussions and collaborative activities during the treatment, this study relied solely on quantitative data to measure learning outcomes. Qualitative evidence such

as classroom observations, field notes, or student reflections was not systematically collected to examine students' cognitive and pedagogical writing processes. Therefore, the present study is positioned as outcome-oriented, focusing on measurable improvement in writing performance rather than providing an in-depth analysis of how picture series support the writing process. Future studies incorporating qualitative data are expected to offer richer insights into the instructional mechanisms underlying the observed improvement. This step helped students clarify ideas and reduce anxiety before composing written texts. The teacher's role was primarily as a facilitator who guided students in identifying key events, appropriate verbs, and temporal connectors. This interactive process supported students' transition from visual interpretation to written expression and enhanced their overall engagement in the writing lesson.

c. Posttest

After the treatment, students were asked to write a recount text based on the same or a similar picture series. The time allocation was 40 minutes, and their works were assessed using the same rubric scoring

2.5. Data Analysis

The data obtained from the pretest and posttest were analyzed quantitatively to determine the effectiveness of using picture series on students' writing skill in recount text. A paired-sample t-test was conducted using SPSS software to examine whether the use of picture series resulted in a statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores. According to Pallant (2020), a paired-sample t-test is suitable for comparing two related scores from the same group before and after a treatment.

In addition, descriptive statistics such as the mean, minimum, maximum, and standard deviation were calculated to present the students' writing performance before and after the treatment. These analyses were used to show the degree of effectiveness of picture series across the assessed writing components, including content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics.

Results and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine whether picture series could improve students' writing skill in recount text. The findings are presented clearly and objectively to demonstrate the effectiveness of the intervention.

Descriptive statistics showed an increase in students' writing performance after the treatment. The mean pre-test score was 55.43 (SD = 13.05), while the mean post-test score increased to 73.48 (SD = 6.98). This yielded an average gain score of 18.04 (SD = 9.74), indicating substantial improvement among the students. Table 1 summarizes the complete pre-test, post-test, and gain scores for all participants, reinforcing the observable increase in writing achievement.

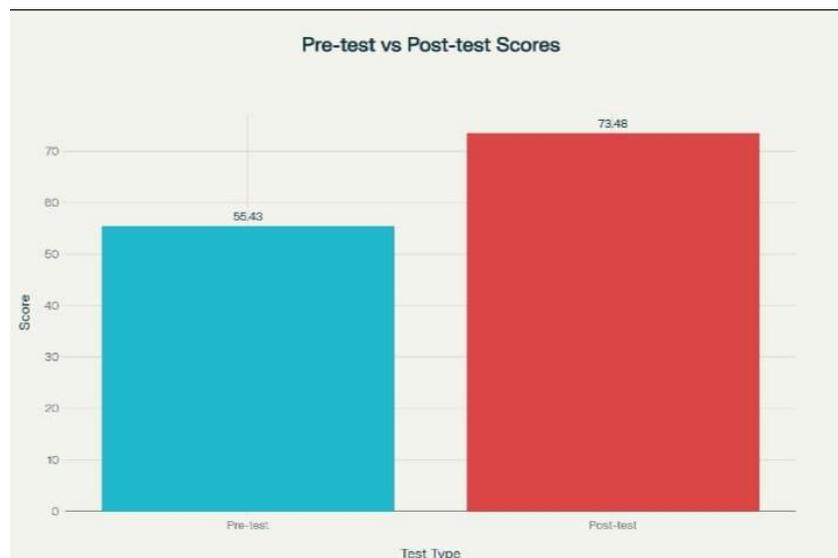
Table 1. Students' Pre-Test, Post-Test, and Gain Scores

No	Students' Initial	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Gain
1	A.S.	40	65	25
2	A.H.	50	70	20
3	A.P.	60	70	10
4	B.S.	50	75	25
5	C.T.	60	75	15
6	C.S.	60	70	10
7	D.A.	75	90	15
8	G.T.	65	70	5
9	J.P.	60	75	15
10	J.T.	40	65	25
11	J.H.	65	85	20
12	J.N.	70	80	10
13	L.P.	60	70	10
14	M.T.	20	60	40
15	M.S.	40	70	30
16	M.B.	50	85	35
17	M.P.	50	75	25
18	P.S.	60	75	15
19	P.M.	60	70	10
20	P.G.	75	80	5
21	R.M.	65	75	10
22	S.T.	60	70	10
23	Y.S.	40	70	30
Mean		55.43	73.48	18.04

To determine whether this improvement was statistically significant, a paired-sample t-test was conducted. The result showed a significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores, $t(22) = 8.88$, $p < .001$, indicating that the use of picture series had a strong and meaningful effect on students' writing performance. This statistical evidence confirms that the improvement was not due to chance.

A visual representation of the data (Figure 1) illustrates the comparison between the mean pre-test and post-test scores. The post-test bar rises noticeably higher than the pre-test bar, visually supporting the numerical findings that students performed better after the intervention.

Figure 1. Comparison of Mean Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores



In addition to the main findings, secondary observations revealed variation in individual improvements. The highest gain was 40 points (Student M.T.), while the lowest gain was 5 points (Students G.T. and P.G.). The variation in individual gain scores suggests that the impact of picture series may differ across students. Students who demonstrated lower improvement may have entered the intervention with lower initial writing proficiency, limited vocabulary knowledge, or reduced motivation toward writing tasks. In addition, differences in learning preferences may have influenced how effectively students benefited from visual support, as some learners may require more explicit guidance or additional practice beyond visual stimuli alone.

These variations highlight the importance of differentiated instruction in writing classrooms. While picture series provide effective support for many learners, teachers may need to combine visual media with supplementary strategies, such as targeted vocabulary instruction or individualized feedback, to accommodate students who show slower progress. Considering individual differences can help maximize the instructional potential of picture series and ensure more inclusive learning outcomes. Despite these variations, every student showed positive improvement, which demonstrates the consistent effectiveness of picture series across the entire class.

Overall, the combination of descriptive statistics, inferential results, and consistent gain patterns demonstrates that picture series effectively enhanced students' ability to write recount texts. The data clearly show that students became more capable of generating ideas, organizing events

chronologically, and applying appropriate vocabulary and grammar after being taught with picture series.

The findings of this study indicate that picture series had a significant positive impact on students' writing skill in recount text. Students' mean score increased from **55.43** in the pre-test to **73.48** in the post-test, with an average gain of **18.04 points**. The paired-sample t-test further confirmed that the improvement was statistically significant, $t(22) = 8.88, p < .001$, showing that the intervention effectively enhanced students' writing performance.

Further analysis of students' writing performance revealed improvement across all assessed writing aspects, particularly in content and organization. The use of picture series significantly supported students in developing relevant ideas and arranging events in a logical chronological order. Visual sequences enabled students to understand the flow of events more clearly, which resulted in more coherent recount texts. This finding suggests that picture series effectively function as organizational scaffolds that help learners structure their writing.

In terms of vocabulary and language use, students demonstrated better word choice and improved grammatical accuracy in the posttest. Although grammar improvement was not the primary focus of the intervention, the visual context provided by picture series helped students select appropriate verbs and expressions related to the depicted events. This indirect improvement indicates that visual media not only support idea generation but also facilitate contextual language learning. Mechanics showed relatively smaller improvement compared to other aspects; however, this is expected because punctuation and spelling accuracy typically require longer instructional periods to develop.

The consistent improvement across different writing components indicates that picture series accommodate diverse learning styles, particularly benefiting visual learners. This aligns with Wright's (2008) assertion that pictures enhance language learning by making abstract concepts more concrete. The findings confirm that picture series serve as effective instructional tools that promote students' writing development holistically rather than improving only a single writing aspect.

The improvement can be explained by the visual and sequential support provided by picture series. The images helped students recall events more easily, arrange ideas in chronological order, and organize their writing more logically. By reducing difficulties in idea generation and structuring, picture series allowed students to focus more on language use, vocabulary, and coherence. The consistent gains across all students also suggest that this method effectively accommodates different learning styles, particularly visual learners, making the writing process more accessible and engaging.

These findings are consistent with previous studies that examined the use of visual media in teaching recount writing. Sari (2017) found that picture series significantly improved students' recount writing ability by helping them understand the sequence of events and construct clearer narratives. Similarly, Wulandari (2019) reported that picture sequences enhanced students' writing achievement in recount text by providing visual scaffolding that supported idea development and sentence expansion. Both studies support the conclusion that picture-based media serve as effective instructional tools for improving students' recount writing performance. However, unlike many previous studies conducted at the junior high school level, the present study provides empirical evidence from a senior high school EFL context, where students are required to demonstrate more advanced writing skills. By

employing a pretest–posttest design with measurable gain scores, this study contributes outcome-based evidence that validates the effectiveness of picture series at a higher educational level, thereby extending existing findings to a different learner profile and instructional context. The findings also offer important pedagogical implications. Picture series can be incorporated into classroom practice as an effective scaffold to support students in brainstorming, outlining, and drafting recount texts. Teachers may find picture series useful for reducing students’ writing anxiety and increasing motivation, especially for those who struggle with generating ideas independently. For curriculum designers, these results highlight the value of integrating visual learning resources into writing instruction to support cognitive processing and improve learning outcomes.

Despite the positive findings, this study has certain limitations. The sample size was relatively small and limited to one class, which may affect the generalizability of the results. The absence of a control group also restricts the ability to attribute the improvement solely to the use of picture series. Furthermore, writing performance was assessed based on two tests only, which may not fully represent students’ broader writing development. The rubric-based scoring, although systematic, still carries an element of subjectivity.

Future research should involve larger and more diverse samples to validate the effectiveness of picture series across different contexts. Including a control group would provide stronger evidence of the intervention’s impact. Researchers may also explore digital or interactive picture-based tools to determine whether enhanced visual media can yield even better results. Additionally, using qualitative methods such as interviews or observations would help capture students’ experiences and provide deeper insights into how picture series support the writing process.

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of using picture series in improving students’ writing skill in recount text. The findings demonstrated that picture series contributed significantly to students’ writing achievement, as indicated by an increase in the mean score from 55.43 in the pre-test to 73.48 in the post-test, with a statistically significant difference confirmed by a paired-sample t-test ($t(22) = 8.88, p < .001$). These results suggest that picture series supported students in generating ideas more easily, organizing events coherently, and producing more structured recount texts.

Beyond confirming instructional effectiveness, this study contributes to a broader understanding of EFL writing instruction by highlighting the role of visual support in facilitating the cognitive demands of writing. The findings indicate that improvement in students’ writing performance is influenced not only by linguistic competence, but also by how instructional media assist learners in planning and organizing ideas. In this sense, picture series function as pedagogical support that bridges visual input and written output, particularly in recount writing tasks that require clear chronological structure.

Although the study demonstrates positive outcomes, its scope is limited by the small sample size and the absence of a control group. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted as outcome-based evidence rather than definitive explanations of learning processes. Future research is encouraged to employ larger samples, comparative designs, and qualitative data sources to explore more deeply

how picture series support students' writing development over time. Overall, this study suggests that picture series offer a practical and cognitively supportive approach to enhancing recount writing instruction in EFL classrooms.

Overall, this study concludes that picture series is an effective and practical medium for improving students' recount writing skills and can be valuable for teachers seeking engaging and supportive instructional strategies.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings of this study suggest that English teachers should consider incorporating picture series as a regular component of writing instruction. Picture series can be used not only for recount texts but also for other text types that require logical sequencing, such as narrative and procedural texts. Integrating visual media into writing lessons may also increase students' motivation and reduce writing anxiety, creating a more supportive learning environment. Therefore, picture series are not merely supplementary materials but valuable instructional resources that enhance the effectiveness of writing pedagogy in EFL classrooms.

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