

## IMPROVING STUDENT' ABILITY IN WRITING DESCRIPTIVE TEXT THROUGH PICTURE SERIES-AIDED LEARNING STRATEGY

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**Abstract :** *This Classroom Action Research is to improve the students' ability to write a descriptive text through the use of picture series-aided learning strategy. A class of the seventh grade students of SMP Muhammadiyah 27 Paciran Lamongan were used as the subject of the study. The required data were collected through the use of a questionnaire, an observation checklist, and a scoring rubric. The data from the questionnaire indicated that the majority of students had a positive attitude toward the use of picture-series to learn descriptive text writing. Moreover, it is found from the observation data that the students participated actively in the learning process. Finally, the study also proved that the strategy improved the students' writings with an average score increasing from 56.86 (0-100 scale) prior to the teaching learning process to 77.87 at the end treatment.*

**Key words :** *Writing, Descriptive Text, Picture Series-Aided Learning Strategy.*

**Abstrak :** *Penelitian Tindakan Kelas ini adalah untuk meningkatkan kemampuan siswa dalam menulis teks deskriptif melalui penggunaan strategi pembelajaran gambar berseri. Siswa kelas tujuh SMP Muhammadiyah 27 Paciran Lamongan digunakan sebagai subjek penelitian. Data yang diperlukan dikumpulkan melalui penggunaan kuesioner, daftar observasi, dan rubrik penilaian. Data dari kuesioner menunjukkan bahwa mayoritas siswa memiliki sikap positif terhadap penggunaan gambar berseri untuk belajar menulis teks deskriptif. Selain itu, ditemukan dari data pengamatan bahwa siswa berpartisipasi aktif dalam proses pembelajaran. Akhirnya, penelitian ini juga membuktikan bahwa strategi meningkatkan tulisan siswa dengan skor rata-rata meningkat dari 56,86 (skala 0-100) sebelum proses belajar mengajar menjadi 77,87 pada akhir laporan.*

**Kata kunci :** *Menulis, Teks Deskriptif, Strategi Pembelajaran Gambar Berseri.*

### INTRODUCTION

Among the four language skills taught in school, writing is the most difficult skill to learn. It needs specialized skills that include the ability to tell the writer's opinions or thought clearly and efficiently. These abilities can be achieved only if a learners some techniques of writing such as how to get ideas on what se/he will write, how to express them into sequence of sentences,

how to organize them chronologically and coherently, and how to review and then to revise them until the writing is well-built (Ratnasari, 2004).

The complexity increases in foreign language writing tasks as EFL students must write in English. Silva in Brown (2007) found that the L2 writers did less planning, were less fluent (Used fewer words), less accurate (Made more errors), and less effective in stating goals and

material that did L1 writers. They differed also in the use of appropriate grammatical and rhetorical conventions and lexical variety. Their lack of exposure to the language obviously becomes the main reason of these obstacles.

Considering the complexities and hindrances the students encounter, learning writing is the most avoided subject among other skill subjects in English. In fact, learning writing has been proved to give advantages to the students in the terms of enhancing their language learning strategies as what currently has become a great concern of many experts in the movement of combining reading-writing instructions. The experts propose that by interconnecting reading and writing students will develop a great deal in their literacy skills. Some researches, as reported by Major English Language Arts Professional Organization (Yale, 2010), have found that when students read extensively, they become better writers.

At the same time, as Yale (2010) says, practices in writing help students build their reading skills, in the sense that practicing in the process of writing their own texts helps them analyze the pieces that they read. As a result, they can apply their knowledge about the to use particular language (Words choice, combining words into logical and grammatical sentence structure, appropriate register, etc) to better understand a professional author's construction of texts. It will also help students strengthen their vocabulary mastery and language use which can also be applied in speaking.

It is teachers' duty to help their students cope with their obstacles in the learning process. This study is one of the efforts the researcher made to solve the

problem of learning writing found in her teaching experience. From her every day observation of her students, in general the major problem the students encounter other than language barrier is ideas generation. She finds that it is difficult for the students to accomplish their writing tasks.

Most of them would rather copy from other sources rather than write themselves or have a few words to write whenever they are asked to make composition, or in other words, they are poor of ideas. These difficulties lead them to loose motivation in writing. Evidences from the preliminary study result showed that the major aspects of the students' weakness in their writing were lack of ideas and poor ability to organize them.

It is obvious that the students need something concrete to elicit ideas such as going to the places they will describe, or presenting reality, or displaying photos or pictures. In other words, the students need context. According to Waiter (2004) providing visuals or reality will contextualize instruction in the classroom. Context greatly enhances understanding and student engagement that in turn will help them develop their ideas to enrich their writing.

Meanwhile, Ansley (2007) stated that educational experiences that involve the learner physically and that give concrete examples are retained longer than abstract experiences such as listening to a lecture. Instructional media help add elements of reality-for instance, including pictures or highly involved computer simulations in a lecture. She further states that media can be used to support one or more of the following instructional activities.

First is to gain attention. A picture on the screen, a question on the board, or

music playing when students enter the room all serve to get the students's attention. Second is to recall prerequisites. Media can be used to help students recall what they learned in the last class, so that new material can be attached to end built upon it. Third is to present objectives to the learners. It can be used to hand out or project the day's learning objectives. Fourth is to present new content. Not only can media help make new content more memorable, media can also help deliver new content (A text, movie, or video).

Fifth is to support learning through examples and visual elaboration. One of the biggest advantages of media is to bring the world into the classroom when it is not possible to take the students into the world. Sixth is to elicit student response. The use of media can help present information to students and pose questions to them, getting them involved in answering the questions. Seventh is to provide feedback. Media can be used to provide feedback relating to a test or class exercise. Next is to enhance retention and transfer. Pictures enhance retention. Instructional media help students visualize a lesson and transfer abstract concepts into concrete, easier to remember objects

The last advantage is to assess performance. Media is an excellent way to pose assessment questions for the class to answer, or students can submit mediated presentations as classroom projects.

Meanwhile, Brown, Lewis, and Halclerod (1983) state that the functions of media are : (1). To save time, (2). To stimulate interest, (3). To encourage students' participation, (4). To provide a review, (5). To help students to learn communicate ideas visually, (6). To provide medium for individual or group

reports, and (7). To make a classroom dynamic, relevant, and attractive.

The importance of using pictures as learning media can be seen from the enthusiasm of people to pictures. They will be able to generate students' imagination, as Munadi (2008) says that pictures make people easy to catch ideas or information conveyed in them clearly, more than merely expressed verbally. When the students observe pictures, they will be able to speak more, interact with the pictures and their friends well, make good relationship among paradoxes and build new ideas.

Based on the review of the existing literature on the advantages of using pictures in the teaching of writing, the present study was carried out to investigate how the pictures series-aided learning strategy improve the writing ability of the students.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study is Classroom Action Research with two cycles and four stages in each cycle, namely, planning, implementing observing, and reflecting. In planning the researcher designed the instructional media intended, i.e. the picture series, which were made of some photographs arranged according to the spatial order of the original objects. In this study the researcher focused on the description of the places; therefore, the photographs taken were those which portrayed some parts of an interesting place. In the first cycle, the photos were printed on a banner to be displayed in front of the class (On the wall), but then, they were printed also on papers in the second cycle to be distributed to the students groups. It was done because in the first cycle they found it difficult to see the photos merely from the banner. The object of the photos was Lamongan

Town Square. Then, the steps on how to use them were designed into a lesson plan.

In the implementation stage, the picture series-aided learning strategy was applied in which the writing process that covers prewriting, organizing, drafting, revising, editing, and writing final draft was done within three meetings of 90 minutes each. The first meeting was devoted to prewriting and organizing steps, second meeting to drafting and revising, and the last meeting to editing. The picture series aided learning strategy was applied primarily in prewriting stage in the first meeting. The picture series which in this study used photographs was implemented with some consideration on its attractive nature to evoke students' imagination.

In the organization stage the teacher asked the students to select their ideas which they thought appropriate to go into their composition based on the topic of the description. In the second meeting the students were asked to develop their outlines into rough draft. Then, after they finished making their draft, the teacher guided them to revise their rough draft. The last stage was editing that was carried out in the third meeting. The editing included the language aspects of the writing that mainly was in the term of spelling, punctuation, vocabulary, and grammar. When the students had finished their editing, they had to submit their works to have the teacher's feedback.

This Classroom Action Research was conducted at SMP Muhammadiyah 27 Paciran Lamongan. The subjects of this study were students of class VII. The class consists of 28 students, 13 males and 15 females. The data were collected by means of two research instruments : First is observation checklist which

assessed the students' learning behaviour. This check list was filled in by a collaborator who observed the students' activities during the learning process. Second is a scoring rubrick which was adapted from Harris' scoring rubric (1969) and Brown's analytic scoring (2004). The students' writings were rated in terms of their content, organization, and language by two scorers. An analysis of the inter scorer reliability of the data resulted in indices: .93, .78, and .90 for content, organization, and language respectively.

## **FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

### **Finding from Cycle 1**

In this cycle the students were asked to write a descriptive text with the topic about the facilities in the town square. The researcher displayed the banner containing the picture series on the wall in front of the class. The teacher explained the purpose of displaying the banner. She, then, divided the students into small groups of four in order to help the students share ideas or help each other to observe the pictures. Observing the pictures was done in the prewriting stage. In this stage the researcher guided the students to give key words and to elicit ideas.

From the observation sheet it was found that almost all the students paid attention to the teacher's explanation and instruction. However, in the prewriting stage in which the students were expected to actively observe the pictures on the banner, they were still reluctant to do that. It seemed that unclear vision due on the distance between the banner and their desks made them difficult to generate ideas.

Therefore, some of them spent much time to speak to their friends about something else instead of doing their

task. As a result, in the term of assignment completion the students took more time to complete the task since they still produced the rough draft in Indonesia. The translation process from Indonesian to English caused the drafting and revision stages required extra time than the allotted one.

Furthermore, after analyzing and evaluating the students' writing results, it was found that the average score of twenty eight students in 0-100 scale was

56.9. This fact showed that the students' writings were far from satisfying because it could not gain the minimum level of passing grade (75) for English subject as it was suggested by the curriculum of SMP Muhammadiyah 27 Paciran Lamongan . The students' scores range from 37 to 89. Only eight or 32% students were able to achieve the success. The students' score in the first cycle can be seen in table 1 below.

**Table. 1 The Students' Score in the First Cycle**

Category	Number of Students	Score of the Students	Percentage
Very Good (88-100)	1	89	4%
Good (75-87)	7	75-85	25%
Fair (64-74)	5	65-73	18%
Poor (49-63)	9	51-59	32%
Very Poor (34-48)	6	37-53	21%

Reflecting the learning process and the students' achievement, the researcher concluded that the picture series-aided learning strategy in this cycle had not succeeded to improve the students' achievement in writing.

### **Finding from Cycle 2**

In this cycle, the picture series were not only printed on the banner but also on the papers distributed to the small groups. It was expected that the papers helped the students see more clearly to observe the pictures. Still with the same topic, Lamongan Town Square, the teachers guided them to elicit ideas in the pre-writing stage.

The teacher told the students that they had freedom to select a place for the starting point to begin writing. They began to observe the pictures displayed in front of the class and if they were not sure or could not see clearly, they looked up the paper version.

It was found that the use of picture series promotes the students' positive behaviours toward the learning process. It is supported by the observation checklist data showing that the students' degree of seriousness is considered high according to the criteria stated in the description of the instrument. It is found the almost all the students' paid attention to the teacher's explanation and instruction. Almost all of them paid attention to observe the pictures seriously.

The study also found that students were enthusiastic to do the writing task. Generally speaking, their degree of enthusiasm was considered high. It is noted that almost all the students actively observed pictures to elicit ideas, trying to understand the instruction by using some learning aids, asking the teachers or their friends whenever they did not understand. Almost all the students used some aids (Dictionaries, text books, work-sheet, etc.) to accomplish their task.

Talking about the students' participation, it can be stated that the students were active enough to do their writing task. The observation data shows that more than a half class participated in asking questions and giving ideas. There are many students who participated in

taking initiative to do the task, in generating ideas and in finding vocabularies needed to do the task. Many of them were actively involved in group discussion. Table 2. Presents the whole data from the observation checklist.

**Table. 2 The Students' Behaviors in Learning Process**

LEARNING PROCESS	MEETING 1			MEETING 2			MEETING 3		
	H	M	L	H	M	L	H	M	L
The seriousness of the students during learning process :							v		
Giving attention to the teacher's explanation and instruction.	v			v			v		
Giving comments or questions about the explanation and instruction.	v			v			v		
Giving attention to the pictures, observing seriously.	v								
The enthusiasm of the students to do the tasks.									
Trying to understand the instruction by using some learning aids (Dictionary, text book, etc), and asking the teacher or their friends whenever they do not understand.	v			v			v		
Taking notes on whatever they think important.	v			v			v		
Using some aids to accomplish their task.	v			v			v		
Actively observing pictures to elicit ideas.	v			v			v		
<b>STUDENTS' PARTICIPATION</b>									
The students' participation in asking questions and giving ideas.	v			v			v		
The students' participation in group working									
LEARNING PROCESS	MEETING 1			MEETING 2			MEETING 3		
	H	M	L	H	M	L	H	M	L
Taking initiative to do the task.	v			v			v		
Helping their friends to understand the instruction.		v			v			v	
Helping their friends to generate ideas and to find vocabularies needed to do the task.	v			v			v		
Actively involved in group discussion.	v			v			v		

Note : H = High; M = Medium; L = Low

The meaningful achievement is also shown by the improvement of the students' writing ability in which the students' average score increases significantly from 56.86 prior to the study into 77.87 after the treatment in cycle 2 (21 increase points) that is spread out among three scored aspects, they are

content with 10.43 increase points, organization with 5.28 increase points, and language aspect with 5.29 increase points.

The facts show us that the study in this cycle was able to reach the criteria of success in which 23 Or 82% students were able to achieve the passing grade,

even beyond the grade as shown by table 3. Meanwhile, the increase of the students' score is summarized in table 4.

**Table. 3 The Students' Score in the Second Cycle**

Category	Number of Students	Score of the Students	Percentage
Very Good (88-100)	10	89	36%
Good (75-87)	13	75-87	46%
Fair (64-74)	5	69-73	18%
Poor (49-63)	0	-	0%
Very Poor (34-48)	0	-	0%

**Table. 4 The Increase of the Students' Writing Ability**

Category	Writing Aspects			
	Content	Language	Organization	Organization
Cycle 1	20.86	11.79	24.21	56.86
Cycle 2	31.29	17.07	29.50	77.87
Increase Point	10.43	5.28	5.29	21.01

## CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the use of picture series succeeded in promoting the students' positive attitude toward learning process. This study proves that the presence of the picture series as an interesting reality has increased the students' attention and seriousness do writing task. The pictures also enhanced the students' participation and interaction during learning activities. This study also proves the efficacy of using picture series aided learning strategy to improve the students' ability in writing descriptive text. Their average scores increase from 56.86 in the first cycle into 77.87 in the second cycle (21.01 increase points).

On the basis of the result of the study, it is suggested that teachers use picture series to enrich ideas, to promote the students' attention, to help them focus to the learning process, and to enhance participation. Moreover, as the present study does not take into consideration such a variable as learner learning style (Visual, auditory, or tactile), it is recommended that future researchers measure the effect of students' learning styles on the effectiveness of picture

series aided learning strategy using a more sophisticated design such as an experimental design.

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