

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PICTURE SERIES MEDIA FOR IMPROVING NARRATIVE WRITING SKILLS IN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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Abstract

Narrative writing is an important component of language learning because it requires students to generate ideas, organize events, develop characters, build conflict, use appropriate vocabulary, and construct coherent sentences. However, many junior high school students still experience difficulties in developing storylines, sequencing events, elaborating details, and maintaining coherence in English narrative texts. This study aims to examine the effectiveness of picture series media in improving students' narrative writing skills and to explore students' learning experiences during picture-based writing instruction. The study employed a mixed-method design using a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group approach supported by classroom observations, student interviews, reflective journals, and document analysis. The participants were 72 Grade VIII students divided into an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group learned narrative writing through picture series media, while the control group received conventional writing instruction. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, paired-sample t-tests, independent-sample t-tests, normalized gain scores, and effect size analysis. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The findings showed that picture series media significantly improved students' narrative writing skills, particularly in content development, organization, vocabulary use, and coherence. The study concludes that picture series media can effectively support narrative writing when visual prompts are integrated with explicit instruction, guided questioning, collaborative drafting, and revision activities.

Keywords: picture series; narrative writing; visual media; writing skills; EFL

A. Introduction

Writing is a complex language skill because it requires students to transform ideas into organized, meaningful, and linguistically accurate texts. In English as a foreign language classrooms, writing is often considered one of the most difficult skills because students must control multiple components simultaneously, including content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, mechanics, genre structure, and audience awareness. Among different writing genres, narrative writing has a significant role because it enables students to express experiences, construct stories, develop imagination, and organize events in a coherent sequence (Silva, 1993; Kern, 2000; Hyland, 2003).

Narrative writing requires students to create or retell events through a structured storyline. A good narrative text generally contains orientation, complication, sequence of events, resolution, and sometimes reorientation or moral reflection. Students need to introduce characters and settings, develop conflict, present events logically, and conclude the story meaningfully. They also need to use temporal conjunctions, action verbs, descriptive details, past tense forms, and coherent paragraphing. These requirements make narrative writing both creative and cognitively demanding (Derewianka, 2003; Hyland, 2004; Nation, 2009).

In many junior high school classrooms, students still experience serious difficulties in narrative writing. They often struggle to begin a story, generate ideas, sequence events, develop conflict, elaborate characters, and write a clear resolution. Some students produce short texts with limited detail because they do not know what to write. Others have ideas but fail to arrange them coherently. These problems indicate that narrative writing instruction should provide stronger scaffolding before students are asked to write independently (Kellogg, 2008; Kormos, 2012).

Conventional writing instruction often begins with teacher explanation, vocabulary lists, generic structure, and individual writing tasks. While these activities are useful, they may not be sufficient for students who have difficulty visualizing story events. Students need concrete prompts that stimulate imagination, support idea generation, and help them organize narrative sequence. One instructional medium that can address this need is picture series media.

Picture series media refers to a sequence of related pictures arranged to represent events, actions, or situations in chronological order. In narrative writing instruction, picture series can function as visual prompts that guide students in constructing storylines. Each picture provides information about characters, setting, action,

problem, and possible resolution. The sequence helps students understand how events are connected. Therefore, picture series can reduce students' difficulty in generating ideas and organizing narratives.

The use of picture series is theoretically supported by visual literacy and dual coding theory. Visual literacy emphasizes the ability to interpret, analyze, and produce meaning from visual information (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Dual coding theory explains that information can be processed through verbal and nonverbal systems; when students receive both visual and verbal input, they have richer cognitive support for memory, comprehension, and expression (Clark & Paivio, 1991). In narrative writing, visual prompts can activate imagination and provide concrete references for language production.

Clark and Paivio (1991) argue that verbal and visual information are processed through separate but interconnected channels, so that material encoded in both forms is recalled more reliably than material encoded in one. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) add that images carry their own grammar of representation, which means that a sequence of pictures supplies not only content but also an implicit organisational structure. Kern (2000) and Ravid and Tolchinsky (2002) situate this within a broader account of literacy development in which learners gradually gain control over the linguistic resources needed to express increasingly complex meanings. From a cognitive standpoint, Kellogg (2008) shows that writing development depends on reducing the working-memory cost of idea generation so that attention can be directed to language, which is precisely the function a well-sequenced picture set performs.

Previous studies have reported the usefulness of picture-based media and structured writing support. Gutierrez, Puello, and Galvis (2015) found that picture series could enhance narrative writing among ninth-grade English as a foreign language students by supporting organization and content development. Graham and Perin (2007) showed that effective writing instruction for adolescents involves explicit strategies, planning, and support for composing processes. Graham, McKeown, Kiuahara, and Harris (2012) also indicated that writing instruction improves when students receive structured strategies, text structure instruction, and opportunities for guided practice.

However, picture series media still needs careful classroom implementation. If students are simply given pictures and asked to write, the results may remain limited. Teachers need to guide students to observe pictures, identify characters, predict events, develop conflict, use temporal connectors, build vocabulary, and revise their

drafts. Therefore, picture series media should be combined with explicit instruction, guided questioning, collaborative discussion, and writing feedback. This study aims to examine the effectiveness of picture series media in improving students' narrative writing skills. It addresses four questions: (1) Does picture series media significantly improve students' narrative writing skills compared with conventional writing instruction? (2) Which aspects of narrative writing improve after picture series media is implemented? (3) How do students experience narrative writing instruction using picture series media? (4) What challenges emerge during implementation?

B. Method

This study employed a mixed-method research design. The quantitative component used a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group design to examine the effectiveness of picture series media in improving students' narrative writing skills. The qualitative component used classroom observations, student interviews, reflective journals, and document analysis to explore students' learning experiences and implementation challenges. A mixed-method design was selected because the study aimed not only to measure writing improvement but also to understand how picture series media supported students' writing process.

The participants were 72 Grade VIII students from a junior high school. Two intact classes were selected. One class was assigned as the experimental group, consisting of 36 students, while the other class was assigned as the control group, also consisting of 36 students. The two classes had comparable English achievement based on previous semester scores and preliminary writing test results. One English teacher taught both groups to maintain instructional consistency.

The experimental group received narrative writing instruction using picture series media for eight meetings. The picture series used in the intervention consisted of four to six sequential pictures representing a complete narrative situation, including setting, characters, problem, event development, and resolution. The topics included school life, friendship, helping others, unexpected events, environmental care, and moral choices. The pictures were selected based on clarity, age appropriateness, cultural relevance, and potential for narrative development.

The instructional procedure in the experimental group followed six stages. First, students observed the picture series and identified visible details, including characters, setting, actions, and objects. Second, students discussed possible storylines through guided questions.

Third, students arranged vocabulary and expressions related to the pictures, including action verbs, adjectives, time connectors, and emotion words. Fourth, students developed a story outline based on orientation, complication, sequence of events, and resolution. Fifth, students wrote a first draft individually. Sixth, students revised their drafts using a narrative writing checklist and teacher feedback.

The control group received conventional narrative writing instruction. The teacher explained the definition, generic structure, and language features of narrative text. Students read sample narratives, answered comprehension questions, completed vocabulary exercises, and wrote individual narratives based on a topic given by the teacher. The control group received similar writing topics and writing time but did not use picture series media as visual scaffolding.

The main quantitative instrument was a narrative writing test administered as a pretest and posttest. Students were asked to write a narrative text of 250 to 350 words. Students' writing was assessed using an analytic writing rubric covering five components: content development, organization, vocabulary use, language use, and mechanics. The maximum score was 100. Two raters assessed the students' writing. The inter-rater reliability coefficient was 0.86, indicating acceptable reliability.

Qualitative data were collected through eight classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with 14 students, reflective journals, and document analysis. Interview participants were selected purposively to represent students with high, moderate, and low writing gains. Classroom observations focused on student participation, picture observation, idea generation, vocabulary use, drafting behavior, peer discussion, and revision. Reflective journals captured students' perceptions of picture series media, difficulties, motivation, and writing confidence. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, paired-sample t-tests, independent-sample t-tests, normalized gain scores, and Cohen's d effect size. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically.

Instrument quality was verified before the intervention. The analytic rubric was adapted from established narrative writing rubrics and reviewed by two lecturers of English language education, and the content validity index reached 0.89. Disagreements between the two raters greater than three points were resolved through discussion. The two classes were equivalent before the treatment, $F(1, 70) = 0.33$, $p = .567$ for homogeneity of variance and $t(70) = 0.52$, $p = .605$ on the pretest. In the qualitative strand, credibility rested on triangulation of the four data sources, member checking with ten students, and

independent double coding of 30% of the data, which produced a Cohen's kappa of 0.82.

C. Finding and Discussion

1. Finding

Students' Narrative Writing Performance before and after the Intervention

The findings are presented in four parts. The first part reports students' narrative writing scores before and after the intervention. The second part explains improvement across writing components. The third part presents students' experiences during picture-series-based writing instruction. The fourth part describes implementation challenges.

The pretest results showed that the experimental and control groups had comparable initial narrative writing skills. The experimental group obtained a mean score of 58.72 with a standard deviation of 7.36, while the control group obtained a mean score of 58.19 with a standard deviation of 7.21. The independent-sample t-test showed no significant difference between the two groups before the intervention, $t(70) = 0.31$, $p = .758$. This indicates that both groups had similar initial writing ability.

After eight meetings, the posttest results showed a clear difference between the groups. The experimental group obtained a mean score of 80.36 with a standard deviation of 6.42, while the control group obtained a mean score of 68.47 with a standard deviation of 7.05. The independent-sample t-test showed a significant difference between the groups, $t(70) = 7.49$, $p < .001$. The effect size was Cohen's $d = 1.76$, indicating a large effect.

Table 1 Narrative Writing Scores of Experimental and Control Groups

Group	Test	N	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Experimental	Pretest	36	58.72	7.36	Moderate
Experimental	Posttest	36	80.36	6.42	High
Control	Pretest	36	58.19	7.21	Moderate
Control	Posttest	36	68.47	7.05	Moderate to high

Source: Processed from students' narrative writing test data.

The paired-sample t-test showed that the experimental group improved significantly from pretest to posttest, $t(35) = 17.06$, $p < .001$. The control group also improved significantly, $t(35) = 8.14$, $p < .001$, but the improvement was smaller. The experimental group achieved a mean gain of 21.64, while the control group achieved a mean gain of 10.28. The normalized gain score of the experimental group was 0.52, categorized as moderate, while the control group obtained a normalized gain of 0.25, categorized as low to moderate.

Table 2 Gain Scores and Statistical Comparison

Indicator	Experimental Group	Control Group	Statistical Result
Mean gain	21.64	10.28	Experimental group higher
Normalized gain	0.52	0.25	Moderate vs. low-to-moderate
Posttest comparison	80.36	68.47	$t(70) = 7.49$; $p < .001$
Effect size	-	-	Cohen's $d = 1.76$; large effect

Source: Processed from pretest and posttest data.

These findings indicate that picture series media produced stronger improvement in students' narrative writing skills than conventional instruction. The improvement suggests that visual sequencing helped students generate ideas, organize events, and write more coherent narratives.

Improvement across Narrative Writing Components

The analytic writing rubric measured five components: content development, organization, vocabulary use, language use, and mechanics. The experimental group improved across all components. The strongest improvement occurred in content development and organization, followed by vocabulary use, language use, and mechanics.

Table 3 Narrative Writing Component Scores in the Experimental Group

Component	Maximum Score	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	Gain	Interpretation
Content development	25	14.63	20.18	5.55	Strong improvement
Organization	20	11.28	16.12	4.84	Strong improvement

Vocabulary use	20	11.74	15.93	4.19	Strong improvement
Language use	25	14.17	19.08	4.91	Strong improvement
Mechanics	10	6.90	9.05	2.15	Moderate improvement

Source: Processed from analytic writing rubric data.

The improvement in content development was visible in students' ability to elaborate story details. Before the intervention, many students wrote very short stories with limited description. After using picture series, students added more details about characters, setting, actions, problems, and emotional responses. The visual prompts helped students identify what could be included in the story.

Students' Experiences during Picture-Series-Based Writing

Qualitative findings showed that students experienced picture series media as helpful, interesting, and confidence-building. Five major themes emerged: idea generation, story sequencing, vocabulary activation, writing confidence, and visual engagement.

Table 4 Qualitative Themes on Picture-Series-Based Narrative Writing

Theme	Evidence from Learning Practice	Pedagogical Meaning
Idea generation	Students used pictures to identify characters, setting, actions, and problems	Pictures reduced difficulty in starting a story
Story sequencing	Students arranged events based on visual order	Visual sequence supported coherence
Vocabulary activation	Students created word banks from visual details	Pictures helped students select relevant words
Writing confidence	Students felt more prepared before drafting	Visual scaffolding reduced writing anxiety
Visual engagement	Students showed interest in interpreting picture events	Media increased attention and participation

Source: Synthesized from observations, interviews, journals, and writing documents.

Observation data showed that students became more active during prewriting activities. When the teacher displayed picture series, students discussed what happened in each picture, predicted possible

conflict, and suggested alternative endings. This discussion helped students prepare before writing. Students who usually struggled to begin writing could use the pictures as starting points.

Student interviews revealed that picture series made writing easier because students did not need to imagine everything from zero. They could observe the pictures and develop ideas from them. Some students stated that pictures helped them remember the sequence of events while writing. Reflective journals showed that students found the activity more enjoyable than writing from a single topic sentence. However, some students also reported difficulty when they wanted to create a story that was different from the picture sequence. This indicates that picture series can support writing but may also limit creativity if used too rigidly.

Implementation Challenges

Despite positive outcomes, several challenges emerged. The first challenge was overdependence on pictures. Some students described each picture literally without adding imagination, emotion, or narrative elaboration. The second challenge was limited vocabulary. Students could identify visual events but sometimes lacked English words to describe them. The third challenge was variation in interpretation. Students sometimes interpreted picture events differently. The fourth challenge was grammar control. Students often struggled with past tense forms when describing events.

Table 5 Implementation Challenges and Teacher Responses

Challenge	Classroom Evidence	Teacher Response
Literal description	Students described pictures without elaboration	Used guiding questions for feelings, motives, and details
Limited vocabulary	Students lacked words to describe actions and emotions	Provided word banks and sentence models
Varied interpretation	Students created different storylines from the same pictures	Encouraged creativity while checking coherence
Grammar difficulty	Students made errors in past tense and sentence structure	Provided focused feedback during revision
Overreliance on sequence	Some students followed pictures too rigidly	Allowed alternative endings and creative expansion

Source: Synthesized from classroom observations and teacher notes.

2. Discussion

The findings show that picture series media significantly improved students' narrative writing skills. The experimental group achieved higher posttest scores and greater gain than the control group. This indicates that picture series media can function as effective visual scaffolding for narrative writing. The result supports previous research showing that picture series can enhance students' ability to write narrative texts by helping them generate ideas, organize events, and develop content (Gutierrez, Puello, & Galvis, 2015).

The strongest improvements occurred in content development and organization. This is understandable because picture series provides concrete visual information and chronological order. Students could observe characters, settings, actions, and conflicts. They could also follow the sequence of pictures to organize the story. In narrative writing, content and organization are closely related because students need both ideas and structure. Picture series supported both aspects simultaneously.

The improvement in organization is particularly important. Many students struggle to arrange narrative events coherently. Picture series helped students understand beginning, middle, and ending. It also helped them use temporal connectors more appropriately. This supports the argument that visual sequencing can reduce cognitive load during writing because students do not have to create and organize all events independently at the same time (Kellogg, 2008; Ravid & Tolchinsky, 2002).

Language use improved because students practiced converting visual events into sentences. However, grammar remained a challenge, especially in past tense use. This indicates that visual media alone is not enough to improve grammatical accuracy. Teachers need to provide explicit grammar support, sentence modeling, and revision feedback. Picture series supports idea generation and organization, but language accuracy still requires focused instruction (Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Storch, 2005).

The qualitative findings explain why picture series media was effective. Students reported that pictures helped them start writing, remember event sequences, and feel more confident. This supports process writing pedagogy because picture series strengthened the prewriting stage. Students were better prepared before drafting. They did not begin with a blank page; they began with visual information that could be interpreted and developed (Badger & White, 2000; Graham & Harris, 2018).

However, the study also shows that picture series media must be used critically. One challenge was literal description. Some students simply described each picture without developing a story. This means that teachers should not assume pictures automatically produce narrative quality. Students need guiding questions that push them to infer motives, emotions, conflict, dialogue, and consequences. Such questions encourage narrative elaboration and prevent visual prompts from becoming mechanical description (Hyland, 2003; Yasuda, 2011).

Comparison with Previous Studies

The wider writing-instruction literature supports structured support of this kind. Graham and Perin (2007) and Graham, McKeown, Kiuahara, and Harris (2012) found in two large meta-analyses that explicit strategy instruction and staged writing procedures produce the largest effects on student writing, and Graham and Harris (2018) describe the design principles behind such staged approaches. Genre-based pedagogy makes the same argument from a linguistic perspective. Hyland (2003, 2004), Derewianka (2003), and Yasuda (2011) show that making the stages and language features of a text type visible improves both genre awareness and writing quality, while Badger and White (2000) propose combining process and genre approaches so that students receive both procedural and structural support. Silva (1993), Cumming (2001), and Manchon (2011) remind us that second language writing differs from first language writing in the resources it demands, and Kormos (2012) shows that individual differences in language proficiency mediate how much learners benefit from any given form of support.

Feedback and collaboration influence outcomes as well. Ferris and Roberts (2001) found that less explicit error feedback can be as effective as detailed correction, and Storch (2005) showed that collaborative writing yields texts of higher grammatical accuracy and complexity than individual writing. More recent multimodal research extends the argument to digital settings: Li and Akoto (2021) review the growth of digital multimodal composing, Pham (2022) reports positive learner perceptions of multimodal authoring tools, Xu (2023) records measurable writing gains from multimodal composing among Chinese EFL learners, and Nation (2009) and Tomlinson (2012) stress that any such material must be designed with clear language-learning goals rather than adopted for its novelty.

Theoretical and Pedagogical Implications

Theoretically, the findings are consistent with the claim that visual and verbal information are processed through connected but distinct

channels, so that a well-sequenced visual stimulus reduces the cognitive cost of content generation and releases attention for language encoding. The pattern of component gains supports this reading: content development and organisation, which depend most directly on having a clear event structure to work from, improved most, whereas mechanics improved least because it does not benefit from visual support. The findings also connect visual literacy with genre pedagogy, since the picture series functioned not merely as a prompt but as an external representation of the generic stages of a narrative text.

Pedagogically, three implications follow. First, picture series should be embedded in a staged writing cycle that includes modelling, joint construction, and independent writing, rather than being handed to students as a stand-alone prompt. Second, teachers should design questions that push students beyond literal description towards inference about characters' motives and feelings, since literal description was the most common weakness observed. Third, the last picture in a series can be left open so that students must supply a resolution themselves, which preserves the organisational benefit of the sequence while protecting space for imagination.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, it involved 72 students in two intact classes at one junior high school, so the findings should be replicated in other settings before wider claims are made. Second, the intervention covered eight meetings, and no delayed posttest was administered, so the durability of the gains is unknown. Third, the narrative texts were written in a classroom setting with a time limit, which may have constrained the length and elaboration of the texts. Fourth, the study used printed picture series only and did not compare them with digital or animated visual media. Future research could include a delayed posttest to examine retention, compare printed picture series with digital multimodal resources, examine how open-ended versus fully specified picture sequences affect creativity, and investigate whether the benefits observed for narrative writing transfer to other text types such as recount or descriptive writing.

D. Conclusion

This study examined the effectiveness of picture series media in improving students' narrative writing skills. The findings showed that students taught through picture series media achieved significantly higher writing improvement than students taught through conventional instruction. The experimental group improved from a

pretest mean score of 58.72 to a posttest mean score of 80.36, while the control group improved from 58.19 to 68.47. The posttest comparison showed a significant difference, $t(70) = 7.49$, $p < .001$, with a large effect size, Cohen's $d = 1.76$. Improvement occurred across content development, organization, vocabulary use, language use, and mechanics, with the strongest gains in content and organization. Qualitative findings revealed that picture series media supported narrative writing through idea generation, story sequencing, vocabulary activation, writing confidence, and visual engagement. However, implementation challenges included literal description, limited vocabulary, varied interpretation, grammar difficulty, and overreliance on visual sequence. The study concludes that picture series media can effectively improve narrative writing when used as structured visual scaffolding within a process-based writing cycle. Future studies should examine digital picture series, student creativity, long-term writing retention, and the use of picture series across different writing genres.

Declaration of AI-Assisted Technologies

In preparing this manuscript, the authors used AI-assisted tools only to improve English language quality, grammar, readability, sentence clarity, and academic expression. The AI tools were not used to generate research data, conduct data analysis, produce findings, or draw conclusions. All conceptual arguments, data interpretation, methodological decisions, and scholarly conclusions remain the full responsibility of the authors. The authors carefully reviewed, edited, and verified all AI-assisted outputs to ensure the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the final manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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