



Exploring Vocational High School Students' Perceptions of Picture Series in Learning Descriptive Texts

Educalingua,
Vol. 3 No. 2, 2025, pp. 152-164
DOI [10.26877/educalingua.v3i2.2587](https://doi.org/10.26877/educalingua.v3i2.2587)

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Received August 19, 2025
Revised November 30, 2025
Accepted November 30, 2025

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ABSTRACT

The ability to write descriptive texts in English remains a challenge for many EFL learners, particularly at the secondary vocational level, where students often struggle with generating ideas, organizing content, and using accurate vocabulary. Visual media such as picture series can serve as effective learning aids by stimulating imagination, guiding idea development, and making writing tasks more engaging. This study explores students' perceptions of using picture series to support descriptive text writing in an eleventh-grade vocational high school in Kudus, Indonesia. Employing a descriptive qualitative design, the study collected data through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with 30 students. The findings reveal that the majority of students perceive picture series as helpful in clarifying the stages of writing, expanding vocabulary, and reducing difficulties in composing descriptive texts. Students also reported that picture series enhanced their motivation and made writing activities more enjoyable. However, some challenges were noted, including dependence on visual aids and limited opportunities to develop writing autonomy. Overall, the study concludes that picture series are perceived positively as an instructional medium, with potential to foster

students' writing skills when used strategically in classroom practice. The results suggest that EFL teachers should integrate picture-based tasks with guided writing activities to balance support and independence in learning.

Keywords: Students' Perception, Picture Series, Descriptive Text, EFL Learners, Vocational High School

Introduction

Writing is a fundamental skill in English language learning, as it requires learners to integrate linguistic knowledge, critical thinking, and creativity. Among the four skills, writing is often considered the most complex to master because it involves generating ideas, organizing them coherently, and using appropriate grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics (Ubaid et al., 2023). For EFL learners in Indonesia, writing becomes particularly challenging due to limited exposure to authentic English input and insufficient practice opportunities in classroom contexts (Jubhari et al., 2022).

One genre emphasized in the Indonesian senior and vocational high school curriculum is descriptive text. Descriptive writing requires students to portray objects, people, or places with clarity and detail, often demanding strong vocabulary mastery and logical organization. However, many students struggle to compose descriptive texts, finding it difficult to elaborate ideas and express them in English. This challenge often leads to unmotivated learners and writing outcomes that fall below curriculum expectations.

To address such challenges, teachers frequently incorporate media and instructional aids to scaffold learning. One promising medium is the use of visual materials, particularly picture series, which present sequential images to stimulate imagination, guide narrative flow, and support vocabulary acquisition. Picture series have been widely recognized as effective tools for assisting students in organizing their thoughts and improving the quality of their written texts (Pramilaga et al., 2023; Wahono & Afifah, 2022)). By providing visual cues, picture series reduce the cognitive burden of idea generation, enabling learners to focus more on language accuracy and fluency.

Beyond its pedagogical role, the integration of picture series also influences students' affective responses toward writing. Media that is engaging and relatable can increase students' motivation, reduce anxiety, and make writing activities more enjoyable (Brown, 2001). This is particularly important in vocational high schools, where students often prioritize practical or technical skills over academic tasks such as writing in English. In such contexts, making writing activities more meaningful and accessible through media is crucial to sustaining student interest.

While several studies have examined the effectiveness of picture series in improving writing performance (Ar, 2024; Gayatri & Gaffar, 2023), fewer have investigated students' perceptions of this medium. Perception plays an essential role in determining the success of instructional strategies, as positive perceptions are closely linked to students' engagement and learning outcomes (Amerstorfer & Freiin Von Münster-Kistner, 2021). Understanding

students' perspectives on picture series use can therefore provide valuable insights into how teachers might optimize their classroom practices.

This study aims to explore vocational high school students' perceptions of using picture series in learning to write descriptive texts. Specifically, it seeks to identify how students perceive the benefits, challenges, and overall contribution of picture series to their writing development. By investigating students' perceptions, the study contributes not only to the literature on media in EFL writing instruction but also to the practical design of writing lessons in vocational education.

Research Questions:

1. What are students' perceptions of using picture series in learning to write descriptive texts?
2. What benefits and challenges do students identify when using picture series to support their descriptive writing?

Writing in EFL Contexts

Writing in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) involves more than just linguistic accuracy; it requires students to engage in a recursive process of planning, drafting, revising, and editing ((Khadka, 2021). Unlike speaking, which is often spontaneous, writing demands sustained attention and careful organization of ideas. In Indonesia, writing is a core component of the English curriculum at the secondary level, where students are expected to master different text genres, including narrative, recount, descriptive, and argumentative texts (Stavans & Zadunaisky-Ehrlich, 2023). However, research consistently reports that Indonesian students face considerable difficulties in producing coherent and accurate written work, largely due to limited vocabulary, weak grammar mastery, and lack of practice (Suwandi & Wardhani, 2021; Ubaid et al., 2023).

These challenges are compounded by the traditional teaching methods often employed in classrooms, which may focus heavily on rote memorization and grammar rules rather than fostering creative expression and critical thinking. As a result, students may become discouraged and develop a negative attitude towards writing, viewing it as a chore rather than an opportunity for self-expression. To address these issues, teachers should implement diverse instructional strategies that encourage engagement and provide meaningful feedback. By integrating peer reviews and collaborative writing exercises, students can learn from one another and gain confidence in their writing abilities. Furthermore, incorporating technology and multimedia resources can make writing tasks more relevant and enjoyable, ultimately improving students' skills and motivating them to practice more. A holistic approach to writing instruction will not only enhance students' competencies but also help them appreciate the value of writing in their personal and academic lives.

Descriptive Text in the Curriculum

Descriptive text is one of the fundamental genres taught at vocational high schools. Its purpose is to provide a vivid description of a person, place, or object so that the reader can visualize it clearly. According to Yugafiati & Laila (2023), descriptive texts typically include

identification and description stages. For learners, mastering descriptive writing helps build foundational skills in vocabulary expansion, sentence construction, and paragraph organization. However, writing descriptive texts poses challenges: students may run out of ideas, repeat limited vocabulary, or structure their writing incoherently. Thus, instructional scaffolding is needed to support learners in overcoming these obstacles.

Picture Series as a Learning Aid

A picture series consists of a set of images arranged sequentially to depict a story or process. Syamsudin et al. (2025) highlights that picture series help students link ideas logically, making it easier to structure paragraphs. Additionally, they reduce the abstractness of writing tasks, especially for learners who struggle to start writing without prompts. Empirical studies confirm these advantages. For instance, Marbun et al. (2024) found that picture series significantly improved students' ability to generate ideas and compose coherent texts. Similarly, Romadlona & Khofshoh (2023) reported that picture series motivated students and enhanced their vocabulary use in descriptive writing.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to investigate students' perceptions of using picture series in learning descriptive text writing. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it enables the researcher to capture students' views, experiences, and interpretations in detail rather than focusing solely on numerical outcomes (Creswell et al., 2007). The research was aimed not at testing hypotheses but at exploring how students respond to and evaluate the use of visual media in their writing activities.

The choice of a descriptive design aligns with the study's objectives: to describe students' perceptions of the instructional medium and to uncover the benefits and challenges they experience. Through this design, the researcher could present rich and contextualized accounts of students' voices, offering insights that can inform both pedagogical practices and future research.

Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at a private vocational high school in Kudus, Central Java, Indonesia. The school was chosen purposively because English is a compulsory subject for all students, yet many learners demonstrate low motivation and limited proficiency in writing. The eleventh grade was selected because at this level, students are expected to have acquired foundational knowledge of descriptive text writing as mandated by the 2013 Curriculum.

A total of 30 students from class XI participated in the study. The participants were selected through purposive sampling, ensuring that they represented a typical group of vocational high school learners with varied levels of English proficiency. Prior to data collection, the researcher sought permission from the school administration and informed consent from the students, emphasizing that participation was voluntary and confidential.

Instruments

To obtain comprehensive data, the study employed two instruments: a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire was adapted from previous studies on students' perceptions of instructional media, drawing on the work of Chichox & Omer Hamad Zrary (2022). It comprised both closed-ended and open-ended questions to gather comprehensive feedback. The closed-ended questions utilized a Likert-scale format, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," and addressed various aspects such as the clarity and usefulness of picture series, their impact on motivation, their influence on vocabulary acquisition, and the perceived ease of organizing ideas. Additionally, the open-ended questions provided students with the opportunity to elaborate on their opinions, challenges, and suggestions regarding the use of picture series. This mixed-methods approach aimed to capture a nuanced understanding of how students interact with the instructional media.

Moreover, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten students chosen from the larger group to capture a diverse range of perspectives. The interview questions explored their experiences in greater depth, particularly how picture series supported or hindered their writing process, their feelings regarding motivation or dependence on these resources, and comparisons with other instructional methods. To ensure clarity and comfort for the participants, the interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, allowing students to express themselves more freely. Following the interviews, the responses were translated into English for analysis. This method provided valuable qualitative insights into the students' perceptions and experiences, enriching the overall understanding of the effectiveness of picture series in writing instruction.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was carried out in three meticulously planned stages to ensure a comprehensive understanding of students' experiences with picture series in writing instruction. In the first stage, the preparation phase involved a collaborative effort between the researcher and the English teacher to design engaging writing tasks that effectively incorporated picture series as instructional media. A sequence of descriptive writing lessons was implemented, where students were guided through a structured

process of observing the picture series, brainstorming associated vocabulary, and drafting descriptive paragraphs. This hands-on approach aimed to enhance students' creative thinking and writing skills.

The second stage consisted of administering the questionnaire immediately after the lessons. Under the researcher's supervision, students completed the questionnaire in class, which took about 30 minutes. This duration was carefully chosen to allow students sufficient time to reflect on their learning experiences, ensuring that their responses would be thoughtful and informed. The questionnaire aimed to capture a broad range of perceptions regarding the clarity and effectiveness of the picture series, as well as other aspects of the writing process.

Lastly, in the third stage, ten students were purposefully selected for semi-structured interviews to gain deeper insights into their experiences. Each interview, lasting between 15 to 20 minutes, was recorded with the participants' consent to facilitate accurate transcription and analysis. The interview questions probed their feelings about how the picture series supported or hindered their writing process, their levels of motivation, and how they compared this method to other instructional strategies. This multi-faceted approach to data collection allowed for a rich, nuanced understanding of the impact of picture series on students' writing development.

Data Analysis

The data analysis followed a thematic approach, combining descriptive statistics with qualitative coding. The quantitative analysis of the questionnaires involved tabulating responses from the Likert-scale items and conducting a descriptive analysis to identify trends in students' perceptions. This process included calculating the percentage of students who agreed or strongly agreed with various statements related to aspects such as motivation and idea generation. By compiling this data, the analysis aimed to provide a clear overview of the general perceptions held by students regarding the effectiveness of picture series as an instructional tool. This approach allowed researchers to quantify students' attitudes and gain insights into specific areas of strength or concern, helping to inform future instructional strategies.

Meanwhile, the qualitative analysis of open-ended responses and interview transcripts involved a systematic thematic coding process, following the framework established by Braun & Clarke (2025). Meaningful segments of text from students' written responses and interview transcripts were assigned initial codes, such as "helpful for vocabulary," "easier idea organization," "motivating," and "too dependent." These initial codes were subsequently organized into broader categories, distinguishing between benefits such as clarity, engagement, and support in writing – and challenges, including

overreliance and lack of autonomy. Through this categorization, thematic patterns emerged, enabling the researcher to offer nuanced interpretations of students' perceptions regarding the use of picture series in writing instruction. This qualitative analysis provided valuable insights into both the positive impacts and potential drawbacks of utilizing picture series, enriching the overall understanding of their effectiveness in the classroom.

Furthermore, to enhance the validity of the study, the researcher employed triangulation by cross-referencing data from both questionnaires and interviews. This approach ensured that the findings were not reliant on a single data source, but rather reflected consistent patterns observed across different methodologies. In addition to triangulation, several strategies were implemented to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. Member checking involved selected participants reviewing summaries of their interviews to verify the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations. Peer debriefing was another strategy, where the researcher consulted with a colleague to review the coding process and theme development, providing an external perspective on the analysis. Additionally, a thick description of the context including details about the school, participants, and classroom activities was provided to enable readers to assess the transferability of the findings to other educational settings. Together, these strategies contributed to the credibility and reliability of the study's conclusions.

Findings

This section presents the results of the study, organized into two main parts: (1) quantitative findings from the questionnaire, and (2) qualitative insights from interviews. The integration of these data sources provides a comprehensive picture of students' perceptions toward the use of picture series in writing descriptive texts.

Questionnaire Findings

The questionnaire results indicate that the majority of students perceived picture series positively in relation to their writing activities. Table 1 summarizes students' responses to selected items.

Table 1. Summary of Students' Perceptions Toward Picture Series (n = 30)

Aspect of Perception	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
Picture series help me generate ideas	40.0	46.7	10.0	3.3	0.0
Picture series improve my vocabulary	33.3	50.0	10.0	6.7	0.0
Picture series make writing more enjoyable	43.3	40.0	13.3	3.3	0.0

Aspect of Perception	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
Picture series make writing easier to plan	36.7	43.3	13.3	6.7	0.0
I rely too much on picture series	13.3	26.7	36.7	16.7	6.7

As seen in Table 1, most students either agreed or strongly agreed that picture series facilitated idea generation (86.7%), vocabulary expansion (83.3%), and enjoyment in writing (83.3%). A smaller percentage of students expressed concern about dependence on visual aids (40%), suggesting that while picture series are helpful, they may also reduce opportunities for students to practice writing independently.

Interview Findings

The interviews provided deeper insights into how students experienced the use of picture series. Three dominant themes emerged: (a) support in idea generation and organization, (b) increased motivation and enjoyment, and (c) challenges related to reliance and autonomy. Many students reported that picture series helped them think of what to write and structure their descriptive texts logically. For example, one student commented:

"When I see the pictures, I can imagine the story and it is easier to write. Without the pictures, sometimes I don't know what to say." (Student 4)

Looking at the pictures gives me a clear picture of what to write about. It's like having a roadmap, guiding me through my thoughts" (Student 7)

This observation underscores the role of visual stimuli in enhancing students' confidence and facilitating the creative writing process. The combination of imagery and writing appears to encourage deeper engagement, allowing students to express their ideas more effectively. Consequently, the use of picture series not only enriches the writing experience but also promotes a more structured approach to composition. This suggests that picture series served as scaffolding tools, guiding students to produce more coherent and detailed descriptions.

Furthermore, the interview also revealed that picture series has increased the students' motivation and enjoyment in writing. Students highlighted that picture series made the writing process less stressful and more engaging.

"Using the pictures makes writing fun! I feel less anxious when I can see what I'm supposed to write about. It actually inspires me to be creative" (Student 3).

"Writing becomes fun when there are pictures. It feels like playing a game, not only studying." (Student 11)

This sentiment was echoed by others who noted that the incorporation of picture series transformed writing assignments into enjoyable activities rather than daunting tasks. Overall, the feedback suggests that picture series not only enhance creativity but also foster a more positive attitude toward writing among students.

Despite the benefits, some students acknowledged that relying on picture series might limit their ability to generate ideas independently.

"Sometimes I wonder if I could come up with good ideas on my own without the pictures. They make it too easy, and I worry I won't know how to write without them" (Student 10).

"If there is no picture, I feel blank. I need the picture to help me." (Student 18)

Such insights highlight the potential downside of over-reliance on picture series, suggesting that while they are helpful, students may benefit from developing their independent idea-generation skills. This indicates a potential drawback, as students may develop dependence on visual prompts rather than cultivating their own creativity.

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that students generally perceive picture series positively, especially in relation to generating ideas, enriching vocabulary, and making writing activities enjoyable. However, a noteworthy concern is the risk of overreliance, which suggests the need for teachers to balance the use of visual aids with strategies that foster independent writing.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that students perceive the use of picture series positively in enhancing their ability to write descriptive texts. The majority of participants reported that picture series facilitated idea generation, improved vocabulary, and made writing activities more engaging. These results align with the broader literature on the role of visual media in language learning, particularly in supporting EFL learners who often face difficulties in generating content and structuring their writing.

Picture Series as Scaffolding Tools

One of the key findings was that picture series supported students in generating and organizing ideas. This is consistent with Mohammed's (2024) view that visual aids act as powerful stimuli in language classrooms, offering learners concrete reference points for abstract thinking. Similarly, Struzik (2025) emphasizes that pictures provide context, making it easier for learners to construct meaning. In the current study, students acknowledged that picture series helped them move from a “blank page” to a structured description, demonstrating how visuals can serve as scaffolding tools in the writing process.

Motivation and Affective Engagement

Another important result is that students perceived picture series as motivating and enjoyable. This finding resonates with Chiu et al. (2023) Self-Determination Theory, which highlights the role of interest and intrinsic motivation in learning. Previous research by Sahiti & Stamp (2022) and Ulviani (2025) also found that visual media not only improved students' writing performance but also increased their enthusiasm for participating in class activities. In this study, students' statements such as “writing feels like a game” illustrate how picture series can reduce writing anxiety and transform classroom writing tasks into enjoyable experiences.

Vocabulary Development through Visual Stimuli

The results also showed that picture series contributed to vocabulary improvement. This supports Webb et al. (2023) claim that input enhancement—such as exposure to meaningful contexts—helps learners acquire vocabulary more effectively. By associating words with images, students were able to recall and apply new vocabulary more confidently in their writing. Similar findings were reported by Yugafiati & Laila (2023), who observed that picture-based instruction enriched learners' lexical resources in narrative and descriptive tasks.

Challenges of Dependence on Visual Aids

Despite these benefits, some students admitted relying heavily on picture series and struggling when visuals were absent. This echoes findings by Toth (2023), who noted that excessive dependence on media may hinder learners' ability to develop independent writing strategies. In the present study, while 86.7% of students agreed that picture series made writing easier, 40% acknowledged their reliance on visuals. This suggests that while picture series are effective as learning aids, teachers should gradually reduce scaffolding and encourage independent idea generation to foster long-term writing competence.

Pedagogical Implications

The implications of this study are twofold. First, picture series should be integrated into EFL writing instruction as an effective medium for stimulating ideas, enriching vocabulary, and increasing learner motivation. However, their use should be balanced with activities that encourage autonomy, such as free writing or brainstorming without visual support. Second, teachers can combine picture-based tasks with process-based writing approaches (Jubhari et al., 2022; Veigasle, 2024), where visuals serve as an initial stimulus but are followed by drafting, revising, and independent practice. This would help learners transfer the skills gained from scaffolded tasks to more autonomous writing situations.

This study applied a qualitative method to explore students' perceptions toward the use of picture series in learning descriptive text. The data were primarily collected through interviews and supported by classroom observations and students' writing samples. The aim was to gain a deeper understanding of students' personal experiences, feelings, and reflections during the learning process using visual media..

Conclusion

This study investigated students' perceptions of using picture series in writing descriptive texts among eleventh-grade vocational high school students. The findings show that most students view picture series as beneficial for generating ideas, enriching vocabulary, and making writing activities more enjoyable. The visual prompts provided scaffolding that helped students organize their thoughts and reduced the difficulty often associated with starting a writing task. In addition, the use of picture series increased motivation and created a more engaging classroom atmosphere.

However, the study also revealed a potential drawback: some students expressed reliance on picture series and struggled to write without them. This indicates that while picture series are effective instructional tools, they should not replace opportunities for independent writing development.

Overall, the results suggest that picture series can serve as valuable teaching aids in EFL classrooms, particularly for learners who face challenges in idea generation and vocabulary use. Nevertheless, their use must be carefully balanced with strategies that foster learner autonomy.

Acknowledgements

Indicate sources of funding or help received in carrying out the study and preparing the manuscript, if any, before the references. (Optional)

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