

## **The Role of Picture Series in Improving Students' Writing Ability**

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**Abstract:** Writing plays important roles in English language teaching and learning. However, writing is considered as a difficult skill to be learnt. A writing product should fulfill some criteria, in terms of content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics in order to be a good one. Instructional media can help the teachers in teaching writing. This article aims to review the role of picture series, as one of the instructional media, in improving students' writing ability. Picture series are recommended for teaching writing since they are interesting and show the chronological order of a text. This article covers the theory, regulation, research, and practice in teaching writing. It also provides some examples of various media in teaching writing, highlights the role of using picture series in improving students' ability, and shows an example of procedure of how to implement picture series. It is expected that this article could provide a guideline of teaching writing by using picture series and propose some suggestions for future practice and research.

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

Writing, in addition to listening, speaking, and reading, is one of language skills that plays important roles in English language teaching and learning. It helps the students learn a second language, in this case English. The activity to communicate or deliver our ideas in learning English with others can be done through a written form. Moreover, by using written English, students can deliver messages to the readers across places and times (Brown, 2007; Harmer 2004). Written words keep around for some years, sometimes for hundreds or thousands of years.

The importance of writing can be in our daily life. According to Nunan (1991), written language serves a range of functions in everyday life such as for action, information, and entertainment. For example, it can be used in public signs, product labels, manuals, magazines, books, and film subtitles. The need of English in written communication has developed significantly in recent years.

Although writing is very important for written communication, among the four language skills, writing is claimed as the most difficult skill. It is considered as the most difficult skill because of its complex process (Hamp-Lyons & Heasley, 1987, cited in Nunan, 1991; Harmer, 2004; Richards & Renandya, 2002). The process of writing is recursive and the product should fulfill some criteria of a good writing product. The process of writing is not linear. It means that the writers not only should plan, draft, and edit, but also re-plan, re-draft, and re-edit before they produce final version of their writing product. After that, the writing product should fulfill some criteria, such as organization, content, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics (Brown, 2004).

In line with the claim that writing is difficult, Pertiwi (2016) states that students have some difficulties in writing. They said that writing is the most difficult skill in learning English. Those difficulties are poor organization, unstructured content, incorrect grammar, word choice, and mechanics, such as spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. So, teaching writing is not an easy matter, especially when the students' English competence is not well developed. Thus, it demands the care and attention of English teachers.

Regarding the difficulties, English teachers should pay attention to components and characteristics of teaching in order to make the teaching-learning process conducted well. Those components are objectives, strategies, environment and instructional media (Smaldino, Lowther & Russel, 2009). All of them may become the problems for teachers in teaching writing. Among these, instructional media become the main focus of attention in this article.

This article aims to review the role of picture series, as one of instructional media, in improving students' writing ability. To achieve this aim, it begins with the presentation of the theory, regulation, research, and practice in teaching writing. Hereafter, it gives some examples of various media in teaching writing and highlights the role of using picture series in improving students' ability. Finally, this article proposes a procedure of how to teach writing using picture series and offers some suggestions for future practice and research.

### TEACHING WRITING: THEORY AND REGULATION

As mentioned before, writing is a complex process. That is why, writing is frequently accepted as the last language skill to be mastered. In the teaching writing area, there are some views about writing itself. Writing can be seen as product, process, or social activity. These views may influence the teachers' practice in teaching writing.

First, writing is viewed as a productive skill. It is considered as a productive skill because its activity refers to the production of written texts. In line with this statement, Harmer (2004) states that writing is an activity that creates ideas or opinion in written form. The most important thing from this view is the students' product of writing.

Writing is also viewed as a process. The students need some processes to produce a good written text. Brown (2000) states the process of composing written text as the result of thinking, drafting, and revising. Firstly, students have to think of the topic or theme that they are going to write. Next, they can generate the ideas by making a draft for their writing and finally students can organize and make the revision for the final product. According to Harmer (2004), writing should be taught through cyclical process, namely planning, drafting, editing, and final version. The process of writing is not linear, but rather recursive.

At last, writing can be viewed as a social activity. This view sees communicative competence as involving the mastery of different text types (Richards, 2006). Therefore, the teaching of writing should be able to create opportunities for students to understand and write various kinds of text for the sake of purposeful communication. It is known as genre-based approach. Agustien et al. (2004) provides the steps of this approach. Those steps are *Building Knowledge of the Field (BKoF)*, *Modeling of the Text (MoT)*, *Joint Construction of the Text (JCoT)*, and *Independent Construction of the Text (ICoT)*.

Teachers have an important role in teaching writing. Harmer (2001) points out three roles of teacher in teaching writing, namely: motivator, resource, and feedback provider. Teachers should create the right conditions for generating ideas and persuade them to get involved in writing activity. Additionally, teachers should be ready to supply information and language where necessary. Those roles demand special care of the teachers in teaching writing.

The importance role of writing in English language teaching and learning, especially for Junior High School, can be seen in the curriculum. Nowadays, the education system in Indonesia implements two curricula. They are 2006 School Based Curriculum and 2013 Curriculum. According to 2006 School Based Curriculum for Junior High School, it is stated that the teaching of English involves the four language skills, namely: listening, speaking, reading, and writing which are taught in an integrated manner to achieve functional literacy level (Depdiknas, 2006). The students should able to comprehend and produce not only short functional texts, such as announcement, invitation, and advertisement; but also essays in the

form of procedure, descriptive, recount, narrative, and report texts.

In addition, based on 2013 Curriculum, it is stated that the objective of teaching English for Junior High School is that the students should be able to identify social function, generic structure, and linguistic feature of the text. They are expected to communicate interpersonally, transactionally, and functionally about their selves and their environment in their daily life. They should be able to produce short spoken and written text, too (Kemdikbud, 2016). It means that writing still has important role in English teaching and learning in this curriculum. In both of the curricula, writing is taught from the first until the last grade.

## **RESEARCH AND PRACTICE IN TEACHING WRITING**

There are some research in teaching writing related to the use of picture series, both in Indonesia and abroad. They are, for example: Asrifan (2015); Guitterez, Puello, and Galvis (2015); Krčelić, & Matijević (2015); Desitawardhani (2014); Mudassir (2014); Nirmala (2013); Sudaryo, (2013); and Hasanah (2009). They have revealed in their study that picture series are beneficial to improve students' writing ability.

Most of them said that in the practice of teaching writing, English teachers usually focus on the grammatical aspect and not so much on the product of writing. This means that some English teachers only occasionally practice the teaching of writing, starting by only explaining the topic to the students are going to write about while the students listen the explanations. Then the students are asked to write a short composition in certain time allotted without using any model. The teacher waits for the students' product without giving additional guidance. Finally, the students submit their work to the teacher. It makes the teaching writing look so boring and intimidating.

To solve the problem in teaching writing, Desitawardhani (2014), Sudaryo (2013) and Hasanah (2009) conducted action research by using picture series to improve students' writing ability. From their study, it is revealed that picture series are useful to improve students writing ability. In line with them, Asrifan (2015) and Mudassir (2014) conducted experimental research by using picture series in teaching writing. They showed that picture series are effective in teaching writing. Additionally, in the other countries, Guitterez et al. (2015); Krčelić and Matijević (2015); and Nirmala (2013) also did the same research and confirmed the effectiveness of using picture series.

## **VARIOUS MEDIA IN TEACHING**

As mentioned above, instructional media are components of teaching which have great influence in improving students' writing ability. Due to media, the writing teaching-learning process will have more variation and will be exciting. Hamalik (1985) defines media as any tools, methods, and techniques used to make the communication and interaction between teacher and students more effective in the teaching-learning process. In addition, students will be more interested and enthusiastic in joining the teaching-learning process.

There are many kinds of instructional media that can be used in teaching and learning process. According to Samjaya (2012), there are three types of media, namely audio (radio, tape recorder, cassette), visual (picture, photograph, drawing), and audiovisual (video). In line with him, Harmer (2007) proposes music, pictures, and films as excellent stimuli for writing. Teachers can create some writing activities by using those media.

Visual media considered as the most effective way in learning since students learn most through the sense of sight, then through the sense of hearing, and the remainder via the senses of smell, touch, and taste (Chee & Wong, 2003). Pictures as the visual media are very useful

for teaching writing. There are a lot of choice of pictures that can be used as aid in teaching writing, such as one picture, picture series, diagrams, tables, maps, and charts (Raimes, 1983).

The use of pictures as visual media in the teaching learning process is intended to make teaching learning more effective and sufficient so that the students' writing ability can be improved. Wright (1989) states that pictures make a particularly powerful contribution to both the content and the process of language learning. He also suggests that picture can often be used to promote productive skill like writing. He adds that pictures can motivate the students, can be described in an objective way, can cue responses to questions, and can provide information. Pictures also contribute to the context in which the language is being used. Additionally, Raimes (1983) states that writing teachers can find valuable resource from pictures since they provide a shared experience in the classroom, a need for common language forms to use in the classroom, a variety of tasks, and a focus of interest for students.

Harmer (2004) proposes some ways to have pictures as media to teach writing. They are describing pictures, writing postcards, story tasks and so on. Pictures bring the outside world into the classroom in a vividly concrete way. Teachers can get the pictures whether drawn, taken from books, newspaper and magazines, internet, or photographs. Pictures can be in the form of flashcards, large wall pictures, cue cards, photographs, or illustration (Harmer, 2001). Some teachers also use projected slides, images from an overhead projector, or projected computer images. Teachers also draw pictures on the board to help with explanation and language work.

Additionally, teachers should follow some considerations in using picture in order to make their classroom activity efficient in achieving its purpose. Wright (1989) mentions those considerations, namely: (1) it should be easy to prepare; (2) it should be easy to organize in the classroom; (3) it should be interesting to the students and the teachers; (4) it should be meaningful and authentic; and (5) the activity must give rise to a sufficient amount of language in order to justify its conclusion in the language lesson.

### **THE ROLE OF PICTURE SERIES IN TEACHING WRITING**

Pictures are two-dimensional visual representation or person, place, or things. They can be painted or drawn, colored or black and white. Yunus (1981) classifies pictures into three types such as composite picture, picture series and individual picture. He describes picture series as numbers of linked pictures which form series of sequences in order tell a sequence of events or a story. The use of picture series can help the students to write types of text that require sequences like procedure, recount, and narrative. Wright (1989) argues that picture series are pictures which show some actions or events in a chronological order. It can be used as one of the stimulus in the learning activity to the students. When picture series are used as media of teaching writing, it can help the students in generate the idea in terms of deciding the theme and the information they want to write. The pictures must be simple and unambiguous. The teachers can help the students by providing some guided questions in order to stimulate a sequence of sentences (Brown, 2004).

There are some examples of picture series that can be used in the classroom to teach writing. Those picture series are applicable to teach some genre which need chronological order, such as procedure, recount, and narrative text. One example of them, picture series of narrative text, is shown in Figure 1.



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

The above picture series tell about the story of "Goldilocks and the Three Bears". It is a narrative text. From these picture series, the students can be guided to learn the story through its generic structure in terms of orientation (picture 1), complication (picture 2-6), and resolution (picture 7). The students can recognize the participants and place of the story, the problems happened, and the end of the story by analyzing the pictures one by one. The final result is that the students can write the story of "Goldilocks and the Three Bears".

There are some alternative of picture series that can be used in the classroom. These picture series can be colored or black and white. They can be drawn by the teachers or adopted from textbooks, magazines, newspapers, photographs, and the other media. The number of pictures can be in one series can be varied. A sequence of three to six pictures can provide a suitable stimulus for written production (Brown, 2004). Teachers can modify the picture series based on their needs in the classroom. It depends on the complexity of the text. For instance, it depends on the generic structure of the text.

There are some advantages of the use of picture series. The first advantage is that sequential pictures help the students to generate ideas about what they are going to write. Most of the students are confused about what they will write first. Picture series provide stimulus for written production. Those pictures give information of which event comes first and which one comes next. Meanwhile, the second one is that picture series can draw students' attention out to be involved in writing process. At last, picture series can increase students' vocabulary. Pictures series are suitable media to introduce new English vocabulary to the students. Hopefully, it will improve students' writing ability.

### **PROCEDURE OF USING PICTURE SERIES IN TEACHING WRITING**

There are some procedure in implementing picture series to teach writing. It depends on the teachers' strategy in conducting writing teaching-learning process. One of the them is by implementing Genre-Based Approach. This approach is chosen since this approach views writing as a social activity (Badger & White, 2000). It is also relevant with our curricula which are developed on the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). It requires the language competence in which the students should recognize the purpose of the text, generic structure, and language feature of the text. There is habit formation in this technique (building knowledge, modeling, construction and self-construction).

Here is an example of procedure of how to implement picture series in teaching writing a recount text through Genre-Based Approach.

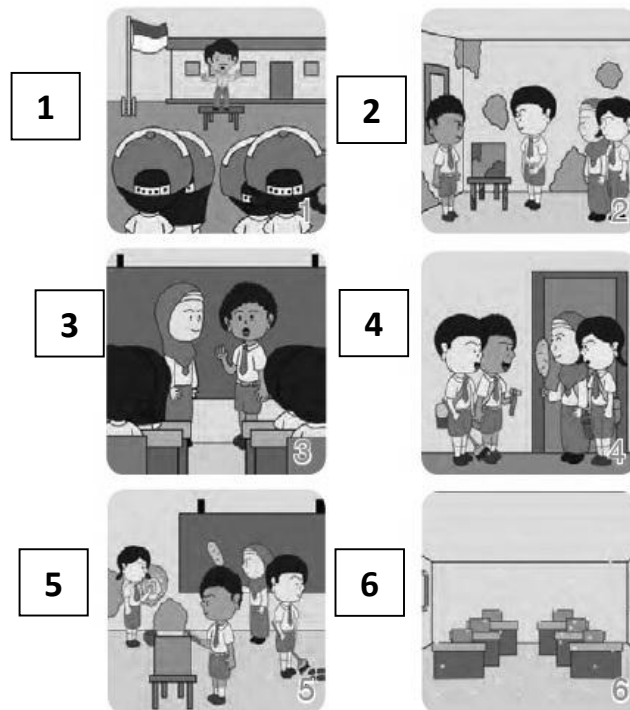


Figure 2. Picture Series of Recount Text (Kemdikbud, 2014)

The first step is Building Knowledge of the Field (BKoF). In this stage, the teacher tries to activate students' prior knowledge of the text by doing brainstorming. Here, teacher asks some questions based on the topic which related to the text. Furthermore, teacher gives series of picture and asks some questions based on it. For example by asking about the characters and setting of the text based on the pictures. These six picture tell the students' experience when they won the First Prize of the Classroom Competition. These pictures explain the orientation, series of events, and orientation of the text.

The second step is Modeling of the Text (MoT). In this stage, teacher tries to develop students' understanding of the text by giving an example of intended text. Here, teacher guides the students to analyze the text structure by using scaffold or guided questions based on the picture series. He/ she also helps the students in identifying the language features used in the text and in finding new or difficult vocabulary.

Joint Construction of the Text (JCoT) is the next step. In this third stage, teacher tries to develop students' writing skill to write a text in pairs or in groups. The teacher distributes a set of pictures to each group and ask them to write a text based on those pictures. During the process, the teacher giving feedback to the students writing.

The last stage is Independent Construction of the Text (ICoT). The fourth stage leads students to have independent activities. They are asked to write a text that is being studied independently. Here, teacher tries to develop students' writing skill to produce the text individually without collaborating with their pairs or groups.

It is possible for teachers to implement the other method or strategy in teaching writing by using picture series. Teachers can implement it through the other method such as product approach, process approach, or even scientific approach. In scientific approach, in particular, picture series can be presented in early stage, too, namely observing and questioning steps. Teachers can provides exposure by using picture series in generating students' ideas. Then the

activities will be continued with collecting information, associating, and communicating.

## CONCLUSIONS

Writing plays important roles in English language teaching and learning. However, it is claimed as the most difficult skill to be mastered. This difficulty is caused by the complexity of writing process. Moreover, the product of writing should have good organization, sufficient content, correct grammar, various vocabulary, and appropriate mechanics. In order to solve this complexity, teachers should provide appropriate instructional media. Picture series as one of instructional media is beneficial to improve students' writing ability. Picture series are chosen since they are interesting and contain chronological order in sequence that ease the students to generate and organize their ideas in written form. Therefore, teachers are suggested to be more creative in choosing and creating interesting media in order to success the teaching of writing. They are expected to conduct research to explore more about the use of picture series in improving students' writing ability.

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