

Using Picture Series to Improve Students' Narrative Reading Comprehension at SMK GKPI 2

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Abstract

Reading comprehension is a crucial skill in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, particularly for students at the secondary school level. However, many students still experience difficulties in understanding narrative texts due to limited vocabulary, low motivation, and monotonous teaching media. This study aims to improve students' reading comprehension of narrative texts through the use of Picture Series as an instructional medium. The research employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) with a quantitative approach and was conducted with tenth-grade students of a vocational high school. The research was implemented in two cycles, each consisting of planning, action, observation, and reflection stages. The data were collected through reading comprehension tests and classroom observations. The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to determine the mean score and the percentage of students achieving the Minimum Mastery Criteria (KKM ≥ 75). The results showed that students' reading comprehension improved significantly. In Cycle I, the mean score was 53 with only 6.67% of students achieving the KKM. After improvements were made in Cycle II through more systematic use of Picture Series, the mean score increased to 82, and 83.33% of students achieved the KKM. These findings indicate that Picture Series effectively support students in understanding narrative text structures and sequences of events. Therefore, Picture Series can be recommended as an effective instructional medium for teaching reading comprehension of narrative texts.

Keywords: Reading Comprehension, Picture Series, Narrative Text, CAR.

Abstrak: Membaca pemahaman merupakan keterampilan penting dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing (EFL), khususnya pada jenjang sekolah menengah. Namun, banyak siswa masih mengalami kesulitan dalam memahami teks naratif akibat keterbatasan kosakata, rendahnya motivasi belajar, dan penggunaan media pembelajaran yang monoton. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan kemampuan membaca pemahaman siswa terhadap teks naratif melalui penggunaan Picture Series sebagai media pembelajaran. Penelitian ini menggunakan Penelitian Tindakan Kelas (PTK) dengan pendekatan kuantitatif dan dilaksanakan pada siswa kelas X sekolah menengah kejuruan. Penelitian dilakukan dalam dua siklus yang masing-masing terdiri dari tahap perencanaan, pelaksanaan tindakan, observasi, dan refleksi. Data penelitian diperoleh melalui tes membaca pemahaman dan observasi kelas. Data kuantitatif dianalisis menggunakan statistik deskriptif untuk mengetahui nilai rata-rata dan persentase ketuntasan belajar siswa berdasarkan Kriteria Ketuntasan Minimal (KKM ≥ 75). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya peningkatan kemampuan membaca



pemahaman siswa. Pada Siklus I, nilai rata-rata siswa sebesar 53 dengan persentase ketuntasan 6,67%. Setelah dilakukan perbaikan pembelajaran pada Siklus II melalui penggunaan Picture Series secara lebih sistematis, nilai rata-rata meningkat menjadi 82 dengan persentase ketuntasan sebesar 83,33%. Hasil ini menunjukkan bahwa Picture Series efektif dalam membantu siswa memahami struktur dan alur teks naratif. Oleh karena itu, Picture Series direkomendasikan sebagai media pembelajaran yang efektif dalam pengajaran membaca teks naratif.

Kata kunci: Membaca Pemahaman; Picture Series; Teks Naratif; PTK.

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is a fundamental skill in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) because it enables learners to construct meaning, interpret information, and gain knowledge from written texts. According to (Grabe and Stoller 2019), reading comprehension is a process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language. Similarly, Grabe and Stoller (2013) state that reading comprehension involves complex cognitive processes, including word recognition, syntactic parsing, semantic processing, and discourse-level understanding. These processes are essential for students to achieve academic success, particularly in EFL contexts where exposure to English is largely limited to written materials (Crompton and Burke 2023).

In the Indonesian secondary school curriculum, narrative text is one of the compulsory text genres taught to students. Narrative texts aim to entertain readers by presenting a sequence of events involving characters, settings, problems, and resolutions (Latifah and Hasanah 2024). (Pasaribu, Harida, and Sinaga 2023) explains that understanding narrative texts requires students to recognize text structure, follow chronological events, and interpret moral values conveyed in the story. Therefore, students are expected not only to understand explicit information but also to infer implicit meanings within the text.

However, many EFL students still experience difficulties in comprehending narrative texts. Several experts point out that limited vocabulary is one of the main factors affecting reading comprehension. (Ratnasari, Mayasari, and Wijaya 2018) emphasizes that vocabulary knowledge is a strong predictor of reading comprehension; without sufficient vocabulary, students struggle to understand even simple texts. In addition, (Ge et al. 2026) argues that reading comprehension in a foreign language is influenced by learners' background knowledge and familiarity with text structures. Other factors such as low motivation and lack of effective reading strategies also contribute to students' poor reading performance (Nikulina et al. 2024).

Based on preliminary observation conducted at a vocational high school, tenth-grade students showed low achievement in reading comprehension, particularly in narrative texts. Many students had difficulty identifying main ideas, understanding the sequence of events, and interpreting moral values. Reading activities were mostly conducted using conventional

methods, such as reading texts and answering comprehension questions, which resulted in passive learning and low student engagement.

Experts suggest that the use of visual media can help overcome students' reading difficulties (Sousa and Cardoso 2025). According to Paivio's Dual Coding Theory (2001), information presented through both verbal and visual channels is more easily processed and retained by learners. In line with this theory, states that visual media can attract students' attention and make learning more effective. Previous studies also indicate that picture-based media (Lubbiya and Liansari 2026), such as picture series, picture stories (Purwati, Dyah Lyesmaya, and Iis Nurasih 2020), and picture books (Ratnasari and Zubaidah 2019), are effective in improving students' reading comprehension of narrative texts because they help students visualize story events and understand text structure more clearly (Eitel and Scheiter 2015).

Picture Series consist of a sequence of related images that represent events in a story. These images guide students in understanding the flow of the narrative and support them in constructing meaning from the text. Therefore, this study focuses on improving students' reading comprehension of narrative texts through the use of Picture Series as an instructional medium. By integrating Picture Series into reading instruction, it is expected that students' comprehension and motivation in learning narrative texts will improve.

METHOD

This study employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) as the research design. Classroom Action Research was chosen because it aims to improve teaching and learning processes through systematic actions conducted in the classroom. This research was carried out systematically through cyclical stages to address students' problems in reading comprehension of narrative texts (Verrawati, Wuryandani, and Sugiarsih 2022).

The participants of this study were 30 tenth-grade students of a vocational high school in Indonesia during the academic year 2023/2024. The class was selected as the research sample based on preliminary observation which showed that the understanding narrative texts. The Minimum Mastery Criteria (Kriteria Ketuntasan Minimal/KKM) for reading comprehension at the school was 75.

This research was conducted in two cycles. Each cycle consisted of four systematic stages, namely planning, action, observation, and reflection. In the planning stage, the researcher prepared lesson plans, narrative texts, Picture Series as instructional media, observation sheets, and reading comprehension tests. In the action stage, the teaching and learning process was implemented by using Picture Series to support students' comprehension of narrative texts. The researcher guided students to observe the sequence of pictures, predict story events, and answer comprehension questions based on the narrative text.

During the observation stage, students' activities and responses during the learning process were observed and recorded using observation sheets. The observation focused on students' participation, attention, and engagement during reading activities. In the reflection stage, the researcher analyzed the results of the observation and students' reading test scores to identify

weaknesses in the implementation of the action. The findings from Cycle I were used as the basis for improving the teaching strategy in Cycle II.

The primary data of this study were obtained from students' reading comprehension test scores, while the secondary data were collected through classroom observation sheets. The reading comprehension tests consisted of multiple-choice and short-answer questions related to narrative texts, covering indicators such as identifying main ideas, understanding the sequence of events, recognizing characters and settings, and interpreting moral values. The test was administered at the end of each cycle.

The data analysis was conducted using descriptive quantitative techniques. Students' scores were calculated to obtain the mean score and the percentage of students who achieved the Minimum Mastery Criteria (KKM \geq 75). The improvement of students' reading comprehension was determined by comparing the results of Cycle I and Cycle II.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Cycle I

In the early stages of Cycle I, the learning process began by identifying the primary obstacles students faced in comprehending narrative texts. Although visual media were introduced, the instructional design remained experimental and had not yet fully integrated the systematic steps of the Picture Series technique. The researcher attempted to bridge the gap between text and visuals, but the transition from observing images to understanding text structure appeared rigid and fragmented.

During the implementation phase of Cycle I, student interaction with the visual media tended to be passive. Students were primarily fixated on the aesthetic of the images without being able to connect the visual sequence to the underlying plot of the narrative text. While the teacher provided general explanations, students' attention was frequently distracted due to instructions that lacked precision and specificity in utilizing the media.

Based on classroom observations, cognitive hurdles emerged when students were required to identify main ideas. The majority of students struggled with cognitive inference; they recognized objects within the images but failed to translate those visual sequences into the chronological order of the narrative. Consequently, their comprehension remained at a literal level, failing to reach a deeper, inferential understanding of the material (Ningsih, Winarni, and Rukayah 2025).

The test data revealed concerning results from a statistical standpoint. With a mean score of only 53, a significant gap was evident between the competency standards and the students' actual abilities. The low passing rate of just 6.67% (2 out of 30 students) indicated that the conventional teaching model, even with slight modifications in Cycle I, had failed to effectively stimulate students' literacy skills.

The inability of the remaining 28 students to reach the score of 75 (KKM) reflected a systemic issue in their reading strategies. This failure was not merely a lack of vocabulary knowledge but rather an inability to organize the information received. These results served as a critical indicator for the researcher that a radical revision was needed in how the picture series were managed as a cognitive tool within the classroom.

At the conclusion of Cycle I, the researcher conducted a profound reflection on the process. The primary conclusion was that visual media cannot simply be "shown"; they must be "discussed." There was an urgent need to shift the teacher's role from a mere presenter of images to a dialogic facilitator who guides students in weaving narratives through visuals, which subsequently formed the basis for the Cycle II planning.

Cycle II

Upon entering Cycle II, the researcher performed a total reconstruction of the Picture Series implementation. A more systematic strategy was applied, emphasizing "scaffolding" methods where each image was followed by guiding questions that led students to understand cause-and-effect relationships within the story. Images were no longer isolated elements but functioned as a navigation map for students exploring the narrative text.

This shift in strategy had a direct impact on the classroom climate. Students began to demonstrate higher enthusiasm and engaged in active group discussions. They started learning to predict story content based on the provided visual cues, transforming the reading process from a rote-learning burden into an enjoyable problem-solving activity (Tazeen and Kader 2024).

In Cycle II, students' mastery of the sequence of events improved drastically. With the aid of organized picture series, students were able to more clearly map the orientation, complication, and resolution within the narrative text. This skill became the primary key that facilitated their ability to draw conclusions and understand the moral messages embedded in the readings.

The success of the revised strategy was clearly captured in the final test results of Cycle II. The class mean score surged significantly to 82, an increase of nearly 30 points from the previous cycle. This figure proves that the methodical integration of visual-textual elements was capable of bridging the comprehension barriers previously deemed insurmountable by the students.

Classically, the success rate reached 83.33%, with 25 students successfully surpassing the KKM threshold. The shift from "not mastered" to "mastered" for the majority of students indicates that the learning obstacles identified in Cycle I were effectively addressed. Only 5 students remained below the standard, likely requiring individualized approaches or additional guidance beyond the classical intervention.

As the ultimate result of this Classroom Action Research, the systematic implementation of picture series proved highly effective in improving narrative text reading comprehension. The transformation from Cycle I to Cycle II reaffirms a fundamental principle in education: it is not the medium itself that determines success, but rather how pedagogy and teacher strategy animate that medium within the students' cognitive interactions (Slay and Morton 2020).

Multimodal Analysis of Classroom Action Research

The transformation of students' reading comprehension skills in this study cannot be seen merely as a superficial shift in statistical figures; rather, it must be philosophically interpreted as an effort to deconstruct the "cognitive alienation" that has long shackled foreign language learners in the classroom (Brevik 2019). The primary problem identified in the pre-cycle phase was a

literacy deadlock where narrative texts were perceived by students not as a living story, but as a collection of cold grammatical structures and foreign vocabulary beyond the reach of their imagination. This helplessness created a wall between the text and the reader, where students felt alienated from the meaning they were supposed to construct independently.

The Root of this phenomenon lies in the rigid and dry nature of a purely verbalistic pedagogical approach. Reading instruction that relies solely on text without the aid of visual representation forces the students' brains to work beyond their functional capacity; they must decode the language code while simultaneously building mental imagery without schematic guidance. This imbalance is rooted in the neglect of the fundamental human nature as visual beings. Without a visual bridge, English vocabulary remains an abstract symbol that fails to connect with the cognitive schemas students already possess. This is what caused the mass failure in understanding the sequence of events and the main ideas in the narratives.

The Evidence of this systemic deadlock is clearly displayed in the results of Cycle I. Quantitative data shows that students' collective performance was at a concerning point, with a mean score of only 53. This figure is far below the expected competency threshold. However, what is more concerning is the dominant failure rate, reaching 93.33%, experienced by 28 out of 30 students. Qualitatively, this condition reflects a "paralysis of learner agency," where students were only able to answer questions at a shallow literal level and were heavily dependent on the teacher's explanation. They were trapped in cognitive confusion because they failed to visualize how a narrative conflict develops into a resolution.

A radical change only occurred when the Picture Series intervention was systematically implemented as an intellectual navigation tool. The success of this intervention was not only recorded in observation notes but was also visually mapped through a dramatic shift in the proportion of student mastery data as follows:

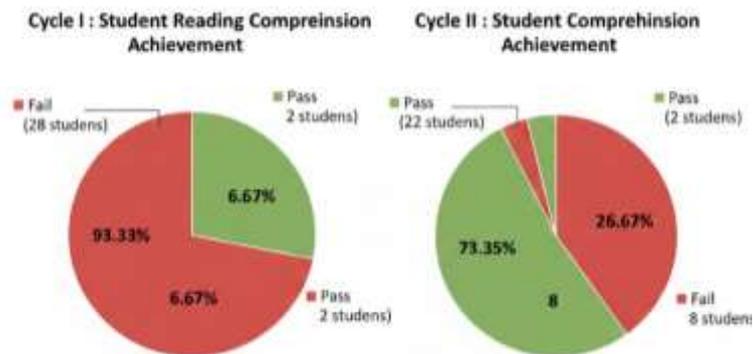


Figure 1. Comparison of Students' Reading Comprehension Mastery in Cycle I and Cycle II.

If we conduct a deep Comparison, it is evident that the surge in the mean score to 82 in Cycle II is not merely a figure on paper, but a form of "democratization of understanding" within the classroom. A massive cognitive migration occurred, where students who were previously at the lowest point—reflected in the increase of the lowest score from 21 to 65—now possess the instruments to perform independent inference toward the text. Through the picture series, students are no longer passive recipients of information, but have transformed into active agencies capable of

reassembling pieces of narrative events into a coherent understanding. The comparison of classroom behavior shows that the tension and literacy anxiety in Cycle I shifted into a passion for exploration in Cycle II, where images functioned as a compass guiding them through the forest of foreign vocabulary.

This dynamic of success is scientifically validated by Allan Paivio's Dual Coding Theory. This theory asserts that the integration between verbal codes (text) and visual codes (images) creates a dual memory path that strengthens the retention and retrieval of information in long-term memory. In the context of this research, Picture Series function as a "cognitive anchor" that stabilizes students' interpretation of complex texts. With sequential visualization, students' cognitive workload becomes more efficient because they no longer need to exhaust mental energy imagining the storyline; instead, they can focus that energy on deeper meaning construction and critical analysis of the story's content. The synergy between the eyes (viewing the image) and the mind (reading the text) creates a much firmer understanding compared to monomodal methods.

Nevertheless, critical reflection from the perspective of the IA Scholar Foundation reminds us that the achievement of 73.35% classical mastery is not the endpoint of a pedagogical struggle. There are still 8 students who have not reached the minimum mastery threshold (KKM), a fact that becomes the Target for further thought and follow-up regarding the importance of "Differentiated Instruction." This phenomenon shows that although visual media is highly effective in mitigating the literacy crisis for the majority, each individual has a different decoding speed and assistance needs. This directs the researcher toward a commitment to not leave a single student behind.

Broadly, this study concludes that the use of Picture Series must be viewed as a fundamental pedagogical necessity, not merely a supplement or entertainment in the classroom. It is a prerequisite for creating an inclusive, democratic, and participatory classroom. By combining the power of visuals and text, the researcher has not only succeeded in improving test scores administratively but has also restored students' confidence in interacting with global literacy (Bursali and Yilmaz 2019). The classroom has transformed from a place filled with confusion and estrangement into a laboratory of passionate thought, where every student has a "voice" to interpret the world through narrative texts. This research confirms that in today's multimodal era, strong literacy can only be built if we are able to respect the diversity of how the human brain processes information—namely, by uniting what is seen with what is read into one whole and empowering truth of understanding.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of this Classroom Action Research, it can be concluded that the use of Picture Series effectively improved students' reading comprehension of narrative texts. The improvement was clearly shown by the increase in students' mean scores and the percentage of students who achieved the Minimum Mastery Criteria (KKM). In Cycle I, students' reading comprehension achievement was still low, while significant improvement was observed in Cycle II after the implementation of Picture Series was revised and applied more systematically.

The findings indicate that Picture Series helped students understand the sequence of events, identify main ideas, and comprehend narrative texts more effectively. The use of visual media encouraged students' active participation and supported them in constructing meaning from the text. Classroom observation results also showed positive changes in students' learning behavior, as students became more engaged and confident during reading activities. Therefore, it can be concluded that Picture Series are an effective instructional medium for teaching reading comprehension of narrative texts in EFL classrooms, particularly at the secondary school level. Teachers are encouraged to use Picture Series as an alternative teaching medium to enhance students' reading comprehension and learning motivation. Future researchers are recommended to conduct further studies by involving different text genres, research designs, or educational levels to obtain broader insights into the effectiveness of picture-based media in English language teaching.

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