Improving narrative writing in ESL Classroom using picture series

Mejorando la escritura narrativa en ESL Classroom usando imágenes seriales

Fetylyana Nor Pazilah*
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia - Malaysia
fetylyananor@gmail.com
Harwati Hashim**
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia - Malaysia
harwati@ukm.edu.my
Melor Md Yunus*
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia - Malaysia
melor@ukm.edu.my
Karmila Rafiqah M. Rafiq*
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia - Malaysia
karmilarafiqah@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

21st century learning creates a huge wave as more visual aids were added as teaching materials and one of it would be using picture series. This study was conducted to investigate the effectiveness of picture series on narrative writing. A total of 30 form one students from a secondary school were chosen as the participants. Pre-test and post-test were given to the students in order to accumulate the results. The results showed improvement in students' writing after the treatments were conducted. Picture series enhanced students' thinking and language skills. Picture series also helped students in developing a better storyline. Picture series can be manipulated suited to the conditions in the classrooms. Hence, this study shows the importance of using visual aids, such as picture series, manage to improve students' narrative writing skill. This study implied to all teachers as a suggested teaching material. Future studies can look into the students' perceptions of using picture series in an ESL classroom.

Keywords: Picture series, visual aids, narrative writing, creative thinking, Process Approach, motivation.

RESUMEN

El aprendizaje del siglo XXI crea una gran ola a medida que se agregan más ayudas visuales como materiales de enseñanza y una de ellas sería usar series de imágenes. Este estudio se realizó para investigar la efectividad de las series de imágenes en la escritura narrativa. Un total de 30 estudiantes de una escuela secundaria fueron elegidos como participantes. Se les dio a los estudiantes una prueba previa y una prueba posterior para acumular los resultados. Los resultados mostraron una mejora en la escritura de los estudiantes después de realizar los tratamientos. La serie de imágenes mejoró las habilidades de pensamiento y lenguaje de los estudiantes La serie de imágenes también ayudó a los estudiantes a desarrollar una mejor historia. Las series de imágenes se pueden manipular según las condiciones de las aulas. Por lo tanto, este estudio muestra la importancia de utilizar ayudas visuales, como series de imágenes, para mejorar la habilidad de escritura narrativa de los estudiantes. Este estudio implicó a todos los maestros como material didáctico sugerido. Los estudios futuros pueden analizar las percepciones de los estudiantes sobre el uso de series de imágenes en un aula de ESL.

Palabras clave: Serie de imágenes, ayudas visuales, escritura narrativa, pensamiento creativo, Enfoque de proceso, motivación.

1.   INTRODUCTION

As we are entering into the 21st century world, having excellent English language skills is vital to all regardless of age, gender or race. English is used as a medium for communication, to further one's studies, travel, work and knowledge with people of diverse background (Singh, Tan, Abdullah, Othman, Mostafa 2017). The acquisition of English skills particularly in writing has gained tremendous prominence not only as an academic skill, but also for business purposes as well as culture globalization. It has also became an important skill that contributes to career (Alharbi, 2017).

Writing is a significant skill for language construction. However, it is considered as a difficult skill, particularly in English and students may face many challenges in writing (Farreed, Ashraf & Bilal, 2016). Thus, to master the skill is crucial, aligning with the demands that the government has set, particularly for students' narrative writing, as it is a requirement in Malaysian exams. Narrative is the main element of comprehension and expression of our experience over time which can be found in daily human interaction (Gutierrez, Puello, Galvis 2015). According to Abbott (2002) "narrative is present in our lives almost from the moment we begin putting words together" (p. 1).

Picture series as part of visual aids is one of the teaching materials that a teacher can use to teach English language classrooms. Pictures as stated by Raimes (1983, as cited by Gutierrez, Puello & Galvis, 2015) provide a mutual experience for students in the classroom, which leads to a variety of language activities. Using the old-fashioned way of teaching using whiteboard can be uninteresting for the students. Students may find it dull and they will have a hard time to maintain concentration in class. One of the ways that is considered effective in teaching writing is by using instructional media. If instructional media is implemented, students would be more engaged in learning. Wening, Cahyono, Iragiliati (2017) stated that there are many types of instructional media which include chalkboards, handouts, slides to the newer version such as videos and television. Hence, this will become the teachers' responsibilities to be able to grab the students' attention in class using visual aids such as picture series. Besides that, students nowadays are in need of imagination and original ideas to make sure that they will be able to write a good essay. Hence, this study shows the importance of using visual aids such as picture series manage to improve students' narrative writing skill.

Implementing Process Approach to Teach Narrative Writing.

There are a lot research done to find the most effective writing strategy as they realize the importance of having high proficiency in writing (Yunus, Hashim, Sulaiman, Sulaiman, Richmond, Jarail & Royal, 2018). A very common alternative in teaching writing would be through Process Approach (Gutierrez, Puello, Galvis 2015). The approach centralized in order to teach narrative writing using picture series is known as the process approach. According to Gangal (2011) as cited by Singh, Singh, Singh, Mostafa and Mohtar (2017) 'writing is a skill that people use to express themselves emotionally and creatively' (p.2). Hence making sure that the reader understands the storyline is crucial. The most effective way to teach writing is through process approach (Sun & Feng, 2009). This approach implements a proper progress in writing and steps by steps which includes pre-writing, writing, revising and editing, (Sun & Feng, 2009). According to Gutierrez et al (2015), process approach is the most suitable method that can be used to teach narrative writing. Process approach concentrates on the steps involved in creating a piece of a proper writing (Sun and Feng 2009). By using this approach, students will gradually learn how to create texts by mastering cognitive writing strategies like pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing their own written work, (Gutierrez, Puello, Galvis, 2015) 'Process approach is also an approach that focuses on how a text is written and not the end product', (Nordin, 2017, p.2). Hence, process approach is an undeniably suitable approach to be used in teaching narrative writing. Hence, to make sure that the students can comprehend the skills, teachers should be able to teach them using the most fitting way possible. A study conducted by Gutierreez, Puello and Galvis (2015) showed that the students showed tremendous improvement with process approach being implemented in classroom. The students also showed improvement with process approach implemented. The study also showed that using picture series was able to improve the students' overall language particularly in writing. The students were also able to develop creativity and imagination through picture series.

Integrating Picture Series in an ESL Classroom

Visual aids has helped so many students in visualizing their work especially in writing. As stated by Godden, (2017), visual aids and arts can be expressed through writing. In this study, the importance of using picture series as a teaching material is crucial. Picture series is a group of pictures that are connected succession of similar or related things which are usually arranged in order. According to Apsari (2017), picture series is a type of media which belongs to picture category. Picture series is a kind of media which belongs to picture category (Madut & Yunus, 2017). In addition, Wright (1989) suggests the pictures series are pictures, which show some actions or events in chronological order. It is also one of the ways used to teach writing as it can develop the students' imagination and improve their quality in writing (Gutierrez, Puello & Galvis, 2015). According to Lindstromberg (2004) as cited by Apsari (2017) pictures series is known to be the great platform to teach the students writing skills. It can develop the students' creative thinking and be more imaginative in writing. Picture series as it contains picture, allows students to create ideas based on the pictures that they observe. Students would usually complain about not having ideas to write. Through picture series, students will be able to develop their visual memory. According to Binder, Hirokowa, & Windhorst, (2009) as cited by Sarica and Usluel (2016), visual memory is the ability to recall images, memory, scenes, word or other information presented visually. Hence, with the implementation of picture series, students will be able to gain ideas and narrate their stories based on the pictures.

Development of Thinking and Language Skills

The curriculum is evolving as the century is also evolving. 21st-century learning are adapting more critical and exciting learning sessions for the students. However, to match with the ever changing globalization, teachers are often face with a number of problems when conducting writing lessons (Rajendran, 1999). One of the mutual hitches is implementing higher order thinking skills questions when teaching writing (Singh et.al, 2018). Effective and efficient learning materials

should be developed, implemented, and continuously improved. Research should understand and recognize the effectiveness of those innovative tools and the implication to the education field (Madut & Yunus, 2017). One of the innovative tools that can be used in a teaching and learning session would be picture series. The role of visual aids is said to be highly engaging in the educational structure and to develop language skills (Halwani, 2017). Researchers found that picture series help the students enhance their cognitive process particularly in noticing logical connections between events and the story. In writing, students should be able to focus on how to generate ideas and how to organize them coherently (Apsari, 2017). Innovative materials such as picture series are created for native learners of a language and it is used in the classroom to help learners to perform well in learning the language. Using innovative material can also help students in acquiring effective language competency of the target language (Madut & Yunus, 2016). Using picture through various methods is also highly efficient in enhancing vocabulary among students (Lesniewska & Pichette, 2014). Lesniewska and Pichette (2014) continues by stating that pictures or any other visual aids will be able to improve the students' vocabulary acquisition as they are required to describe the nouns in the pictures. Grammar is not an easy element in learning English particularly in writing. Grammar learning is compulsory to ensure higher proficiency among ESL learners (Mart, 2013) and grammar learning should be fun (Hashim, M. Rafiq & Yunus, 2019). Picture series will be able to provide authentic and fun learning experience.

Authentic Learning Experience

It is crucial for teachers to make sure that the students have an authentic learning experience. The concept of authentic is no longer a new term. It was already being used during the middle ages (Burden & Kearney, 2016). According to Burden and Kearney (2016), only in recent years has interest in authentic learning and using cognitive apprenticeships. Authenticity by definition means 'new' or 'not a copy' (Burden & Kearney, 2016). When it comes to learning, authentic learning can be in association with mobile devices or technology (Burden & Kearney, 2016). Picture series can be used in multiple ways. Teachers often would collaborate the usage of visual aids with technology. Teachers would use visual aids in teaching writing to make it interesting and enjoyable and so it is becoming popular nowadays among language teachers. It attracts the learners' attention immediately. It motivates them to pay more attention in the class and they can relate their learning with real life (Çakir, 2006). The use of visual aids seems to benefit both the teachers and learners. The use of visual aids enables language learning to be interesting and classroom becomes lively (Macwan, 2015). The implementation of ICT in language learning also provide learners with a brand-new learning experience that contains rich digital, textual graphic, and other interactive features (Muehleisen, 1997 as cited by Sahin and Secer, 2016). In a research by Henry and Simpson (2001) stated the significance of books and the value of pictures in ESL learning. Picture books in social studies, language arts, reading, and science can be very useful. Using innovative materials such as picture series can also benefits in which it can bridge the gap between teachers and students (Madut & Yunus, 2017).

Source of Motivation

In learning a language, learners need to be well motivated. In other words, a person's attentiveness in learning English is part of a complex relationship (Roberts & Banegar, 2018). Visual aids play an important role in learning a language (Halwani, 2017). As stated by Wright (1990) as cited in Gutierrez et al (2015), pictures can definitely contribute to students' interest and motivation. Picture series have proven to help students in developing a sense of interest in language learning. Visual aids can help to boost up their motivation in ESL classroom. This study also implemented ICT in the utilization in picture series in teaching and learning session According to Yunus, Nordin, Salehi, Sun, & Embi (2013), there has been a growing interest in using computers and the internet to improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning session in all level both in educational and non-educational settings. Students are much more interested to learn if there is ICT involved. Aligning with 21st century learning, the usage of ICT is much encouraged in an ESL classroom. According to Ien, Yunus and Embi (2017), there are many students who find writing in English is difficult. Hence, an extreme measure should be taken into consideration in making sure that the students can comprehend all language skills especially writing skill. As stated by Harwati (2018), with the implementation of technology, the process of teaching and learning is no longer limited to the classroom. Teachers can have a virtual teacher's assistant to help them in making sure that the millennial can understand better. "Using innovation in teaching and learning is helpful in providing adequate information as well as knowledge" (Madut & Yunus, 2016, p.1). The pictures lead the students to focus directly on words. Apsari (2017) stated that the use of picture series gives 'positive effects such as motivation, enthusiasm, understanding about ideas generation, independence in constructing sentences, high sentence production and cooperative learning' (Apsari, 2017, p.51). Hence, this study shows the importance of using visual aids such as picture series manage to improve students' narrative writing skill.

2. METHODOLOGY

The method used for this study was pre-test and post-test. Pre-test was conducted on the second week of teaching and learning session, and post-test was conducted on the 12 weeks of teaching and learning session. The study was conducted for 14 weeks of school. The target participants were 30 secondary school students of age 13. The instruments used were picture series, flash cards, PowerPoint slides, and story books.

For this study, pictures acted as a tool to teach narrative writing. A series of pictures that connects and relates to each other used as a platform to teach narrative writing. The students used the pictures to get the rough ideas on narrative writing and narrate their own writing. Other than that, flash cards were used to teach narrative writing in order for the students to get the rough ideas and how the composition of the story should be. In the flash cards, there were plot of the stories but the students had to elaborate more by using their own ideas and opinions.

Next, is using PowerPoint slides. The use of technology was also centralized in a form of Power Point whereby the

series of pictures were displayed through the slides. Other than that, process approach was also taught using Power Point slides. This to ensure that the students can be exposed to 21st century learning. Last but not least would be using story books. Using story books can be a great platform to teach the students narrative writing. They can be more imaginative by looking at the picture in the story books and have their own opinions on how to narrate their story according to their own way of telling the story.

Students were given a test during the third week. They had to write a narrative essay about 'how I met my best friend'. The essay should not be more than 150 words. This test is to identify their proficiency level and their way of writing. This should help the teacher to identify the weakness of the students and their strengths. The instruments were distributed a week after the pre-test was done. Post-test was conducted after all the instruments were used. For post-test, students were given another test for narrative writing. The title was 'the most memorable holiday/trip with my family/friends'. This essay should not be more than 150 words. This was to identify whether the students improved and whether the treatments worked. The post-test was conducted in the final week after all the treatments had been done. The data were calculated using frequency count.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The result below shows great improvement between pre-test and post-test.

Table 1 Pre-test and Post-test result

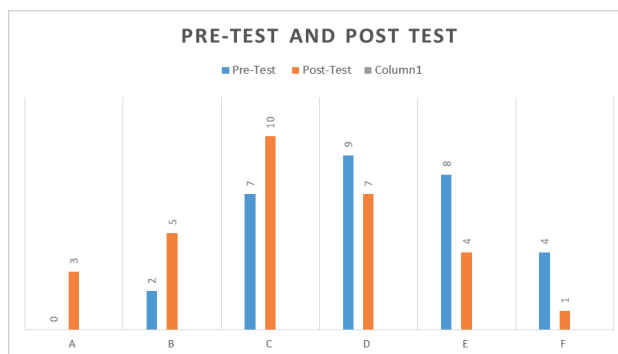| Grades	Range of grades %	No of students	
		Pre-test	Post -test
A	80-100	0	3
B	65-79	2	5
C	50-64	8	10
D	40-49	10	9
E	0-39	10	3
TOTAL		30	30

Figure 1 Pre-test and post-test differences

Table 1 and Figure 1 show the difference between pre-test and post-test. Students showed tremendous improvement after the instruments were conducted. Students showed consistency in their writing especially in paragraphing. The used of adjectives to describe their objects increased in their writing. This shows how students were adapting to the implementation of picture series in an ESL classroom. However, there was one student who failed for the post-test even after the instruments were being conducted. The student was a low proficiency student and need more time and help in English language especially in writing. Nevertheless, in terms of paragraphing, the learner showed incredible improvement.

The findings of this study depict that picture series is one of the most effective ways to teach narrative writing. Through using picture series, students will be able to develop their visual memory. As stated by Binder, Hirokowa, & Windhorst, (2009) as cited by Sarica and Usluel (2016), visual memory is the ability to recall images and using their imagination to deliver full description in writing. Narrative writing requires a lot of imagination and creativity in writing to ensure full delivery to the reader. Hence, picture series provide such elements towards learners. Picture series can be used in so many ways. Either in a Power Point slides form or comics strips. Not only that, the maximum usage of media aligning with the 21st century learning is also much centralized in teaching and learning session. Students were much more interested if media was used as a platform to teach. According to Yunus et.al (2013), students are much more interested to learn if there is ICT involved. The usage of media can be a great way to attract the students' attention. The study also showed that using picture series was able to improve the students' overall language particularly in writing. The students were also able to develop creativity and imagination through picture series.

Picture series may not be as modern as other new techniques, but it is a method that can be renewed and modernized according to the students' needs and proficiency levels. It is a very versatile method to be used in teaching as it can be varied according to the students' proficiency levels (Gutierrez, Puello & Galvis, 2015). In this study, the approach used was also well proven of its effectiveness. A study Gutierreez, Puello and Galvis (2015) proved that the students showed tremendous improvement with process approach being implemented in classroom. The students also showed improvement with process approach implemented. As according to Sun and Feng (2009), the most effective way to teach writing is through process approach. The writer needs to be writing in the most realistic and authentic way possible which includes pre-writing, writing, revising and editing, (Sun & Feng, 2009). As this research was conducted, students

showed remarkable improvement in paragraphing their essay after process approach was introduced. This proves that the students are in need of an approach that can be used to ensure that their writing can be organized and systematic. According to Gangal (2011, as cited by Charanjit et al., 2017) writing is a skill that people use to express themselves emotionally and creatively. Thus, students should be able to write with proper paragraphing in making sure that the reader would understand and acknowledge the storyline. The students showed not only a much more imaginative writing but also an organized essay was written. Students also showed a great improvement in the usage of new vocabulary. Picture series allow the students to develop and enhance vocabulary among students (Lesniewska & Pichette, 2014).

4. CONCLUSION

To conclude, picture series is a great platform to teach English writing. Picture series is a versatile method that can be used to align with the 21st-century learning. It can be modernized and can be used in a very traditional way depending on the students' preference and the school environment. This study also succeeded in promoting a more enjoyable way of learning for the students. The presence of pictures attracts the students' attention and allow them to be more creative in their writing. Picture series improved the students' participation in class and they are more interactive than before. They are also more open towards a new way of learning and accepting that there are ways to learn and having fun at the same time. The materials used are also among the contributing factors toward the students' participation. The more creative the media is, the more the students wants to participate in their essays and in classroom activities. The classroom environment was also more positive as the students develop a sense of enjoyment in participating in the activities conducted. Hence, picture series is crucial to learn narrative writing. This study implied to all teachers as a suggested teaching material. Future studies can look into the students' perceptions of using picture series in an ESL classroom.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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