

Improving Students' Speaking Ability Through Picture Series: A Classroom Action Research at MTs Darul Ulum Budi Agung Medan

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – The objective of this study was to boost the English-speaking proficiency of eighth-grade students at MTs Darul Ulum Budi Agung Medan by using picture series as visual teaching tools. Numerous students struggled with speaking due to insufficient self-assurance, restricted word knowledge, and a shortage of stimulating materials. The investigation examined whether picture series could help students achieve better fluency and precision when conveying procedural instructions.

Method – The research employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) following the model by Kemmis and McTaggart, carried out over two cycles that included stages of planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. A total of 35 students took part, with information gathered via initial tests, final assessments, classroom monitoring, and discussions. The evaluation of speaking skills encompassed aspects such as grammar, vocabulary, understanding, fluency, and pronunciation.

Findings – The outcomes demonstrated a notable advancement in the students' speaking capabilities. The average score rose from 52.80 in the initial test to 71.31, and further to 78.40 and 79.20 in the subsequent assessments, reflecting a 50% increase in overall competence. Participants exhibited increased self-confidence, smoother delivery, and greater precision in articulating thoughts via sequenced images, with clear enhancements across all evaluated areas.

Research Implications – These results highlight the importance of visual tools in promoting effective interaction and meaningful language production. In practical terms, the study provides educators with an effective approach to enrich speaking exercises in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting. Subsequent investigations might investigate the use of digital versions of image-based instruction and their effects on additional language abilities.

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Introduction

Speaking refers to one of the essential skills in learning English, as it allows students to express their thoughts, feelings, and opinions verbally. Speaking can be regarded as a skill that involves clearly articulating well-formed words to convey thoughts, emotions, and feelings. According to (Putri, 2023) it represents a mode of oral communication utilized to express ideas, sentiments, and opinions to others.

Speaking ability refers to a person's skill in expressing ideas or information clearly and logically while using proper speaking conventions such as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension (Lestari & Sholichah, 2022). This skills are acknowledged as crucial competencies that students must develop in their pursuit of knowledge (Rahmat et al., 2021). This competency is understood as communicative skills. With optimal speaking skills, students gain a clear understanding of how to articulate their thoughts and experience the advantages of learning, thereby making the educational process more meaningful (Asnita & Khair, 2020).

Nevertheless, many junior high school students, particularly at the MTs (Madrasah Tsanawiyah) level, still struggle with speaking. According to (Wulandari* et al., 2023) this problem also often occurs during the learning process, this results in students having reduced motivation and diminished interest in studying English. They often feel shy, lack confidence, and have limited opportunities to practice using English in class and afraid of making mistakes (Nurhaliza et al., 2024). The problem is worsened by the insufficient use of engaging visual media, which makes speaking activities less interesting and interactive. Consequently, students tend to remain passive and rely heavily on their teachers rather than communicating independently.

To address these challenges, teachers need creative methods that can motivate students to speak and help them organize their ideas more easily. And Teachers can leverage media as an effective resource to encourage and energize students in their efforts to achieve proficiency in English. In educational contexts, media acts as a channel for communication, delivering content that supports students in improving instructional effectiveness (Syafrizal et al., 2020). In essence, instructional media are essential to the process of learning and teaching by enabling teachers to facilitate students' comprehension of lessons more effectively.

According to Asyar (2011:42), as cited in (Rasman, 2021), the incorporation of media into educational activities and processes offers advantages such as enhancing students' comprehension of the subject matter and presenting them with diverse choices that match their individual qualities or needs. Thus, (Al Arif, 2020) explains that in the context of teaching and learning, media refer to all elements that facilitate the educational process. One promising alternative is the use of picture series, a visual medium consisting of sequential images that depict events or actions. The use of pictures involves activities

that encourage students to develop their numerous ideas into well-structured outlines. This should be preceded by an opportunity for students to select topics aligned with their interests, knowledge, and experiences. Additionally, pictures can inspire students to express their ideas freely (Yasin et al., 2024). One of the pictures is a picture series.

A sequence of images forms a picture series, capturing key moments and weaving them into an integrated, unified narrative. These series are designed to enhance students' imaginative abilities. Specifically, they ignite students' curiosity and enthusiasm, provide insight into the language's environment, and serve as a specific anchor or prompt. The manner in which picture series operate is similar to comic strips. Readers can readily identify the story's plot through the images and the provided descriptions (Haryanto & Melinda, 2022). Picture series can attract students' attention, provide visual support for understanding, and encourage them to speak more confidently. According to Ahmad Suryadi (2020), visual media, including images and illustrations, serve an important function in education. These tools can enhance comprehension, such as by explaining structural elements and organizational details, and they help improve memory retention. Furthermore, visuals are capable of boosting students' engagement and bridging the gap between academic content and everyday experiences. To achieve their full potential, visuals must be incorporated into a relevant setting, and students need to actively interact with them to promote effective information processing.

As previously noted, picture series serve as one effective approach to addressing challenges in teaching writing. A picture functions as a visual representation that can depict people, places, or objects in a two-dimensional format. In the realm of English language education, a diverse range of pictures is utilized types are employed, among which picture series are included. Specifically, a picture series consists of a sequence of images focused on a single theme, designed to convey a narrative or a progression of events (Nur et al., 2021).

Previous studies have also highlighted the potential of picture series in improving students' language skills. For instance, (Ardi et al., 2023) reported that picture sequences improved students' storytelling performance and vocabulary retention. Although prior studies applied picture series for writing and storytelling, few explored their impact on procedural text-based speaking. This gap indicates a need to examine how picture series can support students in describing and explaining steps or processes orally, which are essential skills in procedural communication.

Consequently, this research seeks to examine the effectiveness of employing picture series to enhance the speaking ability of MTs students, especially in their delivery of procedural texts. It is hypothesized that employing picture series can boost students' fluency, self-assurance, and involvement in speaking exercises.

Methods

According to Choiriyah (2021), Classroom Action Research refers to studies carried out in a classroom environment, with direct involvement in the learning process to gain insights into ongoing events, while simultaneously contributing to enhancements and modifications. In the realm of education, action research involves classroom interventions conducted by teachers to enhance and reflect upon their teaching practices (San Martin et al., 2020).

This study adopts collaborative Classroom Action Research (CAR) as its methodology. As described by (Nurhasanah et al., 2020) CAR represents a type of action research intended to improve the quality of teaching practices in the classroom. It highlights the instructional processes that occur within the classroom environment. This method aims to build students' skills by employing both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques.

This research utilized Classroom Action Research (CAR) to enhance students' speaking abilities by incorporating picture series. The design followed the model of (Kemmis et al., 2014), which consists of four systematic stages: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting conducted in two cycles. Each cycle aimed to identify existing problems, implement improvement strategies, and evaluate the outcomes for continuous enhancement in both the teaching and learning processes. The structure of this cyclical model is presented in the following diagram:

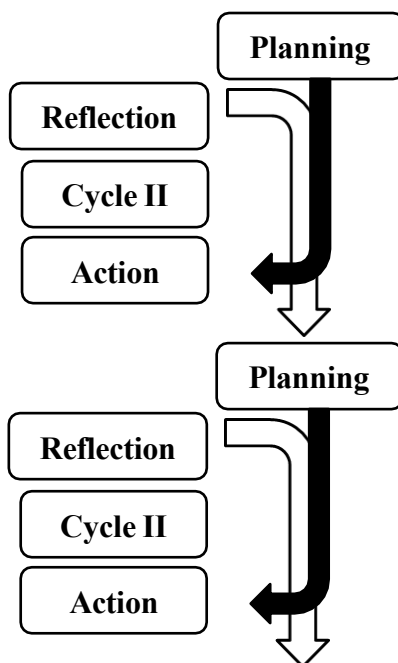


Figure 1. Classroom Action Research Model Adapted from (Kemmis et al., 2014)

The study was carried out at MTs Darul Ulum Budi Agung in Medan during the 2024/2025 academic year, engaging 35 students from the eighth grade (specifically class

VIII-2) in the second semester. The activities were implemented across eight classroom sessions. In the research, the investigator served as the instructor, delivering lessons that utilized a sequence of images based on procedural texts, while the English teacher acted as the observer (or co-teacher). This observer helped oversee the students' conduct, participation, and interactions throughout the learning activities. Moreover, the observer acted as the secondary assessor for speaking evaluations to maintain fairness and accuracy in the grading process.

This research applied the study adopted a mixed-methods approach using a convergent parallel design, where quantitative and qualitative data were gathered simultaneously and then combined to provide a thorough understanding of learning enhancements. Quantitative data were obtained through speaking tests, consisting of one pre-test (before the intervention) and two post-tests (after each cycle). These tests were used to assess students' progress using a speaking assessment rubric comprising five components: grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and comprehension. Qualitative data was gathered through classroom observations, interviews, and documentation. Observation sheets were used to record students' motivation, participation, and classroom interaction, while both the teacher and selected students were interviewed to gain deeper insights into their learning experiences. Documentation such as photos, lesson plans, and test results.

Qualitative data from observations and interviews were analyzed descriptively, focusing on students' behavioral changes, engagement, and responses during each learning cycle. The results from both data types were integrated using a convergent parallel approach, meaning that quantitative results (test scores) and qualitative findings (observations and interviews) were compared and were analyzed collectively to offer a thorough insight into the effectiveness of picture series in enhancing students' speaking ability. Therefore, the technique of data analysis can be understood as a method used to examine and interpret data with the purpose of transforming it into meaningful information, allowing the characteristics and nature of the data to be clearly identified and understood (Nasreen & Afzal, 2020).

Students' total scores were converted into percentage values using the following formula:

Table 1. Rubric Speaking Test

Aspects	Criteria Descriptions	Score Range
Grammar	Accuracy and appropriateness of grammatical structure.	1-5
Vocabulary	Range and appropriateness of word choice.	1-5
Pronunciation	Clarity and correctness of pronunciation.	1-5

Fluency	Smoothness and flow of speech without undue hesitation.	1-5
Comprehension	Ability to understand and respond appropriately.	1-5

These assessments used a rubric that evaluated grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and comprehension on a scale from 1 to 5, with 5 indicating the highest proficiency and 1 the lowest.

The Formula: $\frac{\text{Total of Score for Each Category}}{\text{Number of Score}} \times 20$

The results were then interpreted according to the classification below:

$$X = \frac{\sum x}{N}$$

Where:

X = The mean of the students score

$\sum x$ = The total score

N = The number of the students

This formula is used to find the average performance of all students in the speaking test. By calculating the mean score, the researcher can measure the overall progress or improvement of the class as a whole after the learning treatment.

Result

This research was designed as Classroom Action Research (CAR), inferential statistical tests were not applied. The main purpose of this study was to enhance the teaching and learning process, not to produce generalizable findings. Consequently, the data analysis relied on descriptive quantitative methods, focusing on comparisons of mean scores, standard deviations, and gain scores across the two research cycles.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Students' Speaking Test Results

Test Type	Total Score	Mean Score
Pre-Test	1848	52.80
Post-test 1	2496	71.31
Post-Test 2	2772	79.20

Based on the table above, during the Pre-Test phase, the cumulative score for all students reached 1848, yielding an average score of 52.80. This outcome suggests that the students' baseline proficiency in the assessed skill—such as speaking, writing, or another linguistic element—was comparatively modest. A substantial number of students scored under 60, with some attaining notably low marks like 20 and 36. This reflects that,

prior to any intervention or targeted instructional approach, the students' grasp of the subject matter remained constrained.

Following the application of the learning intervention in Post-Test 1, a marked enhancement became evident. The overall score rose to 2496, with an average of 71.31. This equates to an average gain of 18.51 points from the Pre-Test figures. Such progress indicates that the implemented instructional strategy or measure started to yield beneficial effects on student capabilities. The majority of those who had previously scored below 60 began to advance, reaching levels between 68 and 80.

Moreover, in Post-Test 2, student achievements demonstrated further substantial gains. The total score climbed to 2772, with an average of 79.20. This signifies a 7.89-point increase over Post-Test 1 and a 26.40-point rise from the Pre-Test. Nearly every students exhibited advancement, with numerous individuals attaining scores exceeding 80.

Based on these outcomes, it is evident that student performance improved steadily and progressively across each assessment stage. This pattern confirms the efficacy of the adopted instructional strategy in bolstering learning results. The shift in average scores from 52.80 in the Pre-Test to 79.20 in Post-Test 2 highlights a notable growth in students' comprehension and mastery of the material. In summary, these observations reveal that the implemented teaching method or intervention effectively elevated student performance and contributed positively to their skill enhancement.

Table 3. Students Speaking Score Comparison of Pre-Test and Post-Test

Type of Tests	N	Total Score	Mean	SD	Gain Score	Category
Pre-Test	35	1848	52,80	5.8	-	Poor
Post-Test 1	35	2496	71,31	5.0	+18.51	Average
Post-Test 2	35	2772	79,20	4.6	+7.89	Good

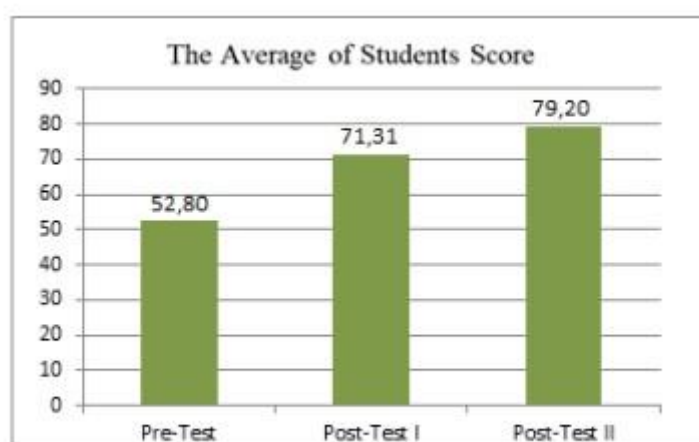


Figure 1. The Diagrams Speaking Test Students

This research collected data through a speaking test conducted with 35 students in eighth-grade class VIII-2. The results revealed a marked improvement in students' speaking abilities following the use of the picture series technique. This advancement was assessed based on five crucial elements of speaking proficiency: grammar, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, and pronunciation. Students demonstrated advancement in each of these areas. Specifically, enhancements in grammar and vocabulary were evident in their ability to construct sentences more accurately and employ wider range of words. Meanwhile, improvements in comprehension and fluency stemmed from students' increased capacity to express ideas more smoothly, while pronunciation advanced through greater clarity and precision in articulation. Overall, the picture series method proved beneficial for boosting students' speaking skills by offering visual aids that assisted them in organizing their thoughts and producing language more effectively.

Based on the five evaluated aspects of speaking skills, students exhibited considerable progress following the introduction of the picture series method. In the area of grammar, many participants initially had trouble building proper sentence structures. Nevertheless, through engagement with image-based speaking exercises, they progressively acquired the ability to create grammatically accurate sentences. By the second post-test, their application of tenses and sentence forms had grown more precise, marking an advancement from a poor to a good standard of grammatical proficiency.

As for vocabulary, students initially struggled to choose appropriate terms for describing the visuals. The ongoing practice of associating words with images in the picture series tasks aided them in broadening their word stock. As a result, they transitioned from possessing a limited vocabulary to employing diverse and fitting word choices in their utterances.

Concerning comprehension, early assessments showed that students frequently misinterpreted the context of conversations and directions. Repeated involvement in activities featuring sequenced pictures enabled them to better grasp and articulate ideas. Their understanding advanced from fair to good, demonstrating their enhanced ability to adhere to instructions and communicate thoughts more efficiently.

In terms of fluency, students' initial speaking efforts were characterized by numerous pauses and uncertainty. The organized visual prompts from the picture series helped them structure their thoughts and recount narratives more effortlessly. Gradually, their delivery became more fluid and instinctive, shifting from disjointed speech to seamless and uninterrupted speech.

Lastly, pronunciation also underwent marked improvement. At the outset, many students incorrectly articulated even basic and familiar words. With regular practice, instructor feedback, and exposure to audio models, their articulation grew clearer and

more precise. This development signified a move from common mistakes to largely correct pronunciation.

In summary, the results suggest that employing picture series not only elevated the students' general speaking competence but also had a positive and measurable impact on each speaking component—grammar, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, and pronunciation—in a thorough manner.

Discussion

The research results provide a thorough understanding of the significance of learning media in improving English speaking skills, which are essential for mastering a foreign language. They serve as a key foundation for educational policies that encourage the use of learning media as an effective tool to enhance English language proficiency and to develop a curriculum that is more flexible, responsive to technological advancements, and conducive to students' success in oral English skills (Suryadi et al., 2024). And, the results of this research demonstrated a substantial enhancement in students' speaking proficiency following the implementation of the picture series technique. This progress was apparent across all evaluated the essential elements of speaking proficiency include grammar, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, and pronunciation. These outcomes suggest that visual tools like picture series can encourage students to participate more actively as speakers and engage more deeply in classroom activities.

From a theoretical standpoint, these results align with (Merrill Swain (1985) Communicative-Competence-Some-Roles-of-Comprehensible-Input-and-Comprehensible-Output-in-Its-Development, n.d.) Output Hypothesis which posits that active language production helps learners identify and correct their errors while refining their sentence construction. As students described the pictures, they engaged in repeated speaking practice, leading to improved grammatical precision. Additionally, the findings corroborate (Long, 1996), which highlights the role of interaction in language acquisition. Through activities such as discussions and storytelling with pictures, students shared ideas, assisted one another, and engaged in authentic communication.

The effectiveness of the picture series technique can be attributed to its impact across cognitive, affective, and social dimensions. Cognitively, it stimulates the dual coding process (Clark & Paivio, 1991), integrating visual and verbal elements to enhance memory retention and conceptual organization. Affectively, visual aids help alleviate students' anxiety and boost their motivation by providing contextual support that makes speaking tasks more approachable and less daunting. Socially, picture-based storytelling fosters collaboration and interaction, enabling students to co-construct meaning and assist each other in communicative language use.

These results are consistent with prior research in the field. For instance, (Ardi et al., 2023) noted gains in vocabulary and storytelling abilities. Likewise, (Suryadi et al., 2020) highlighted how visual media improve comprehension and involvement in English lessons. This study builds on those insights by illustrating the strong applicability of picture series to speaking instruction focused on procedural texts, a less commonly examined area. Unlike narrative or descriptive texts, procedural texts demand clear sequencing and imperative language, both of which were effectively facilitated by the sequential nature of the images employed here.

A key advantage of this research is the notable advancements observed over just two cycles of classroom action research, underscoring the method's efficiency and ease of adoption by teachers, particularly in settings with limited English exposure.

In summary, this study affirms that picture series represent a compelling and practical approach to improving students' speaking skills. Speaking skills are widely recognized as challenging for young learners to master. Through the implementation of this strategy, the author observed notable differences in students' behavior when they described objects using pictures. As a result, they were able to speak confidently before the class and actively attempted to express themselves, driven by their engagement with the images (Muhammad Asikin, 2023). It aligns with contemporary trends in English education in Indonesia, which prioritize student-centered methods and visual aids for better comprehension. For future investigations, it is recommended that scholars examine the application of picture series in other language areas, such as writing and listening, or create digital adaptations to support independent learning in blended educational contexts.

Conclusion

This research's results affirmed that incorporating picture series significantly enhanced students' speaking skills, particularly in presenting procedural texts. Participants exhibited clear advancements across all five evaluated areas: grammar, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, and pronunciation. The structured visuals in picture series assisted them in arranging their ideas with greater clarity, expressing their thoughts more assuredly, and participating more enthusiastically in classroom interactions. These outcomes indicate that visual aids can act as a valuable support mechanism to boost language output among middle school learners.

The educational significance of this investigation lies in its practical implications for English instruction at the MTs level. By weaving picture series into speaking activities, educators can not only elevate students' enthusiasm but also foster a more dynamic and encouraging learning environment. Instructors might utilize this tool to lead students through progressive speaking exercises, promote teamwork among classmates, and lessen nervousness during verbal tasks. For learners, the approach builds self-assurance,

aids in retrieving vocabulary, and enhances fluency by linking language to relevant visual elements.

Moving forward, it is advisable for subsequent studies to investigate the use of picture series in additional language competencies, such as writing and listening, or to design digital versions adapted for hybrid learning environments. Further exploration could also assess its efficacy with various text types and across different grade levels to develop a more comprehensive teaching framework. In essence, this study underscores the value of picture series as an interactive and multifaceted technique that advances communicative language education in Indonesian settings.

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