



Enhancing Descriptive Writing Skills Through Textless Comics: A Study of Senior High School Students in Aceh Tengah

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Keyword:

Effect,
Writing,
Textless Comic

Abstract

*Writing is a challenging skill across all languages, including first, second, and foreign languages. At MAN 1 Aceh Tengah, many students in class XI struggle to express their ideas in writing. They often cite English as difficult and express a lack of interest and innovation in descriptive writing. To address this issue, the researcher implemented textless comics as a medium to enhance students' descriptive text writing skills. The study aimed to assess the impact of textless comic media on improving these skills among grade XI students. Utilizing a quantitative research method, the researcher compared two groups: an experimental group and a control group. The population consisted of 201 students, with class XIA1 (33 students) serving as the control group and class XIA2 (21 students) as the experimental group. The application of the textless comic technique proved effective, as evidenced by the post-test scores. The experimental group outperformed the control group, indicating a significant improvement in writing skills. Hypothesis testing using the *t*-test revealed that the *t*-count (5.2) exceeded the *t*-table (2.7), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis*

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DOI:

and acceptance of the alternative hypothesis at a 5% significance level. Textless comics positively influence students' descriptive writing skills, encouraging them to engage with and analyze text independently. The researcher recommends using textless comics as an alternative teaching method, particularly for writing instruction.

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing is a fundamental yet challenging skill, requiring mastery of ideas, organization, and language mechanics (Hosima & Hague, 2007). Writing constitutes a complex cognitive skill requiring mastery of multiple linguistic and discursive components. As Nunan (1993) observes, "writing is the most difficult skill in both first and second languages" (p. 35), due to its multifaceted demands. Effective written production necessitates simultaneous attention to content development, grammatical accuracy, organizational structure, lexical precision, and syntactical coherence (Hogue & Oshima, 2007). This cognitive complexity explains why writing serves as both (1) a medium for self-expression and (2) a structured means of information organization (Indriastuti, 2019). The pedagogical challenges are compounded by the need to integrate these interdependent elements systematically, particularly in foreign language contexts where learners lack natural exposure (Santoso, 2019).

The aforementioned writing challenges manifest distinctly at MAN 1 Aceh Tengah, where students encounter both compositional difficulties and psychological barriers to writing proficiency. Indriastuti (2019) identifies these psychological obstacles as encompassing motivational deficits, affective factors, and diminished self-efficacy (p. 2). This problematic situation is exacerbated by the foreign language context in Indonesia, where English lacks authentic communicative contexts in daily life (Fathurahmi, 2019, p. 13). Richards (2015) corroborates this observation, noting that foreign language learning environments inherently present unique pedagogical challenges due to learners' limited natural exposure to the target language beyond formal classroom settings (p. 47). Within this English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, writing competence assumes particular significance as it serves dual functions: as a fundamental learning objective and as a reliable metric of linguistic proficiency. Hyland (2016) emphasizes that writing mastery necessarily involves five critical components: lexical knowledge, grammatical accuracy, content development, mechanical conventions, and pragmatic language use (p. 89). The comprehensive nature of writing thus renders it an effective indicator of overall language acquisition and metalinguistic awareness.



Field observations conducted during the Teaching Practice Program (PPL) at MAN 1 Aceh Tengah's Grade XI classes revealed several interrelated writing challenges. Students demonstrated limited capacity for ideational expression, exhibited low engagement with writing tasks, perceived English as particularly difficult, and showed deficient creative motivation in written exercises. These findings align with previous research on EFL writing difficulties in similar educational contexts. As a potential pedagogical intervention, textless comics emerge as a theoretically-grounded solution due to their multimodal nature and cognitive affordances. Hillman (2018) defines these visual texts as "narrative sequences relying primarily on visual elements with minimal verbal components" (p. 112), while Cohn (2020) documents their effectiveness in scaffolding linguistic production through sequenced visual prompts (p. 76). The visual scaffolding provided by comics offers multiple pedagogical advantages, including enhanced student engagement through familiar visual media, reduced linguistic barriers for developing writers, and improved narrative sequencing skills. Krashen's (2014) research supports this intervention approach, demonstrating that visual narratives effectively lower the affective filter in second language writing contexts (p. 203). McCloud (2021) further elucidates how the visual-verbal interplay in comics fosters metalinguistic awareness and facilitates language learning (p. 134).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Writing constitutes a fundamental skill in foreign language acquisition, representing the culmination of linguistic development after listening, speaking, and reading (Stainthorp & Flynn, 2006, p. 1). As a cognitive process, writing involves transforming ideas into written form through structured stages of planning, drafting, and revising (Raymond, 1980, p. 2). Dietsch (2006) emphasizes that effective writing requires five key elements: purpose, audience, topic, opportunity, and authorial voice (p. 4).

Beyond mere graphic representation (Byrne, 1988, p. 1), writing serves as both a linguistic and cognitive exercise. Crimmon (1984) notes its dual role as a means of self-expression and knowledge acquisition (p. 124), while Webster's Dictionary (2003) defines it technically as the physical act of producing written symbols (p. 241).

Academic writing presents particular challenges, requiring mastery of grammar, content organization, and mechanical conventions (Oshima & Hogue, 2007, p. 15; Sembiring, 2012, p. 1). As Myers (2005) observes, L2 writing demands significant revision time due to its cognitive complexity (p. 1). This aligns with Lado's

developmental perspective, which views writing proficiency as progressively acquired through conscious rule application and practice.

2.1 Descriptive Text

Descriptive text represents a fundamental genre of writing that serves to create vivid verbal representations of people, places, objects, or abstract concepts. The term itself originates from the verb "to describe," which etymologically refers to the act of depicting or portraying something through words. This textual form aims to transform observations and perceptions into written language that enables readers to visualize the described subject matter clearly (Anderson & Anderson, 2003).

According to Dalman (2015), descriptive writing functions as an expository technique that expands readers' knowledge and experiences by presenting the essential characteristics of the subject. This genre allows writers to communicate their observations, impressions, and emotional responses, effectively bridging the gap between perception and verbal expression. As Sadhono (2017) explains, descriptive texts synthesize objective observations with subjective interpretations, combining factual details with the author's personal perspective.

The fundamental purpose of descriptive writing lies in its ability to generate precise mental images. Hegarthy (2018) emphasizes how this genre provides detailed information that helps readers form accurate representations of the described subject. Knapp and Watkins (2005) further elaborate on the dual nature of description, noting its capacity to present subjects either objectively or subjectively, depending on the writer's purpose and perspective.

Effective descriptive writing employs specific linguistic strategies to achieve its representational goals. Writers typically utilize precise nominal groups, rich adjectival modification, and spatial/sensory language to create vivid portrayals. The genre also frequently incorporates figurative language and aspectual verb forms to enhance the descriptive quality. Tomlinson (2014) likens this process to "verbal cinematography," where words function like camera lenses to focus the reader's attention on specific details.

In composition pedagogy, descriptive writing serves as a foundational skill that develops students' observational abilities and linguistic precision. It requires careful attention to detail selection, organizational structure, and stylistic choices to effectively communicate both concrete and abstract concepts. The genre's versatility allows it to serve various communicative purposes across academic, professional, and creative contexts.

2.2. Types of Descriptive Text



Dalman (2015) explains the various types description includes two types, namely:

- a. Place Description
Place plays a very important role important in every event. All stories always have the background of the place, the course of an event will be more interesting if it is related to the place where this happened.
The goal is to provide a clear and stunning image to the reader so that the reader can feel the experience as if they were in that situation.
- b. Person Description
There are several ways to describe or Describe the character's attacks, namely:
 - 1) Physical depiction.
For example, "She is an old woman who has curly hair that is starting to turn gray, brown eyes, a sharp nose, white skin, and has a mole on her right cheek."
 - 2) Depiction of a character's actions.
This is very important for creating a clear picture of the character. This depiction can be shown in terms of the actions and habits carried out by a character in the description.
 - 3) Describe the circumstances surrounding the character.
This is done so that readers can understand the characters better and make them more interesting and detailed. Because explaining the circumstances around the character can have an influence on the narrative.
 - 4) Depiction of the character's feelings and thoughts.
This is a very important part because the depiction of the character's feelings and thoughts is used to show how he thinks what the character feels

2.3. Definition of Comic

Comics represent a significant medium within print culture, serving both entertainment and educational purposes (Edmunds, 2015). McCloud (1993) defines comics as sequential art combining visual narratives with textual elements, typically presented in panel formats (p. 9). Originally popularized in 1934, this medium has evolved from being perceived as mere entertainment to being recognized as legitimate artistic and literary expression (Brocka, 2010, p. 45).

Structurally, comics employ arranged panels (usually 3-4 per row) containing integrated visuals and text, read left-to-right in Western traditions (McCloud, 1993, p. 24). Their unique combination of visual and verbal elements makes them particularly effective for instructional purposes, as noted by Brocka (2010): "The dynamic interplay of images and text in comics creates cohesive narratives that engage learners effectively" (p. 47).

There are two categories of comics, namely comic books and comic strips. Comic books are series of pictures and narrative dialogues that are printed in books. A comic strip is a series of pictures and narrative dialogues that are printed periodically every week or monthly in the newspaper and internet; it usually consists of 1 to 6 pages.

Textless comics can be included in both of the two categories of comics. There are some definitions of textless comics from experts. Hillman states textless comic is a pure comic or picture series that contains very minimal text. It means, that textless comic uses more illustration and less text to deliver stories or ideas. Moreover, textless comics, as its name, are usually available without text at all. Having no text does not make a textless comic unclear. The illustration can represent the story. Therefore, using textless comics in learning a language will help the students learn how to interpret images by using their own style of writing and diction.

Textless comics, characterized by their minimal verbal content, represent a unique medium that communicates narratives entirely through visual sequences. As Hillman (2018) explains, these "pure" comics rely exclusively on imagery to convey meaning, making them particularly valuable in educational settings. Their wordless nature offers distinct advantages for language instruction, especially in writing classrooms where they serve as effective visual prompts.

Research demonstrates that textless comics facilitate learning through multiple cognitive pathways. By eliminating linguistic distractions, they allow students to focus more intently on narrative elements and plot development (Cohn, 2013). The absence of text requires learners to interpret visual cues, thereby stimulating creative thinking and enhancing observational skills (McCloud, 1993). This process of visual decoding naturally leads to improved narrative construction abilities as students translate images into verbal expressions.

The universal accessibility of textless comics makes them particularly valuable in diverse classrooms. Without language barriers, these visual narratives can be equally engaging for students from different linguistic backgrounds (Krashen, 2004). Their application ranges from developing basic descriptive skills to fostering complex storytelling abilities, as learners must articulate the visual content in their own words.

In practice, textless comics help students develop crucial writing competencies. They provide clear frameworks for plot sequencing, character development, and descriptive language use (Indriastuti, 2019). The medium's prevalence across formats - from comic strips to picture books - demonstrates its versatility in creating emotional resonance and narrative engagement (Yang, 2008). By engaging both visual and linguistic cognitive processes, textless comics offer a multimodal approach to writing instruction that accommodates diverse learning styles while maintaining rigorous academic standards.



3. METHODS

This study employs a quantitative research method to systematically investigate the phenomenon under examination. As emphasized by Darmawan (2016), quantitative research utilizes numerical data that can be precisely measured and statistically analyzed, enabling researchers to present findings through objective metrics, graphs, and statistical representations (p. 45). This methodological approach provides several key advantages, including the capacity to obtain measurable and generalizable results that offer a comprehensive understanding of the research subject.

The quantitative paradigm allows for rigorous examination through various research designs, including descriptive studies, correlational analyses, quasi-experimental approaches, and true experimental designs (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). By employing statistical tools and techniques, this method facilitates the identification of patterns, relationships, and trends within the collected data, thereby enhancing the reliability and validity of the research outcomes (Babbie, 2020). The numerical nature of the data collection and analysis process ensures that results can be replicated and verified, contributing to the scientific rigor of the study.

The sampling technique that researchers use is purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is very suitable when researchers want to focus on groups or individuals who have certain characteristics that are relevant to the research question. This technique allows collecting data from the most informative respondents and can provide in-depth insights.

By using purposive sampling, researchers can focus more on quality information, not just the quantity of data from large samples that may be less relevant. The consideration of selecting subjects in classes XIA1 and XIA2 is because these students have received and studied material about descriptive text in class X.

The population of this study is class XI MAN 1 Aceh Tengah which amounted to 201 students and the sample in this study was XIA1 and XIA2 which amounted to 54 students. There are two classes in this study, namely the control class XIA1 of 33 students and the experimental class XIA2 of 21 students. The object of this research is the application of textless comic

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The pre-test results of 21 students obtained a score of 1398 according to the table above. The pre-test scores ranged from 55 to 80, with 80 being the highest score. As a result, the post-test results of 21 students scored 1634. The best post-test score was 85, and the lowest post-test score was 65. The treatment was successful when students

performed better on the pre-test after the application of the method used. The table 1 below shows students' scores of experimental class.

Table 1. students' scores of experimental class.

NO.	Students' Initial	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Gained Score
1	FA	63	70	7
2	FP	58	65	7
3	MA	64	69	5
4	NRP	65	75	10
5	LY	55	65	10
6	ATP	70	85	15
7	R	67	79	12
8	PS	65	80	15
9	NE	68	85	17
10	MQB	70	85	15
11	HA	74	80	6
12	MS	75	80	5
13	AFA	60	79	19
14	DT	65	80	15
15	SS	62	79	17
16	HR	59	65	6
17	MP	80	87	7
18	WR	78	85	7
19	SAZ	65	79	14
20	RM	75	84	9
21	BMP	60	78	18
Total		1398	1634	236
Average		66.57	77.80	11.2

The presented table 2 outlines the evaluation criteria for assessing written compositions across five key aspects: Content, Organization, Vocabulary, Language Use, and Mechanics. The scoring rubric categorizes performance into four distinct levels: Excellent to Very Good, Good to Average, Fair to Poor, and Very Poor.

For the students' Achievement, it can be seen in the table 2 below.



Table 2. Students Achievement Level

Criteria	Aspect				
	Content	Organization	Vocabulary	Language Use	Mechanics
Excellent to very good	8	8	5	6	5
Good to average	9	10	11	9	9
Fair to Poor	3	3	4	6	6
Very Poor	1	0	1	0	1

Meanwhile the data from student achievement of control class is showed by the table 3 below.

Table 3. students' scores of control class.

NO.	Students' Initial	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Grained Score
1	AFS	63	75	12
2	AH	60	70	10
3	ARS	54	68	14
4	ARH	50	65	15
5	AN	62	70	8
6	BR	70	80	10
7	DKM	64	75	11
8	HR	54	65	11
9	HR	70	79	9
10	HT	68	75	7
11	JA	54	60	6
12	KK	67	72	5
13	K	65	75	10
14	KPB	70	79	9
15	LF	59	70	11
16	MA	60	79	19
17	N	55	65	10

The pre-test results of 33 students based on the control class data resulted in a score of 2048 points. The pre-test results ranged from a minimum of 50 to a

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maximum of 70-the post-test results of 33 students scored 2407 points. In the post-test, a score of 80 was the highest result, and 60 was the lowest result. After undergoing treatment, students' pre-test scores increased, indicating that the treatment was successful.

Table 4. Students Achievement Level

Criteria	Content	Organization	Vocabulary	Language Use	Mechanics
Excellent to very good	5	9	1	3	3
Good to average	14	17	15	11	19
Fair to Poor	7	7	17	19	11
Very Poor	7	0	0	0	0

The students' ability to write descriptive texts improved from the first meeting to the subsequent meetings, according to quantitative data and observation results. It has been shown that the class works well and students become more active while learning. When the researcher explains the lesson, the students remain focused and pay attention to the researcher. In addition, the students are enthusiastic and interested in learning English. As a result, there has been an increase in research on English teaching, particularly in writing descriptive texts. The findings indicate that researchers have the ability to engage students in the learning process. This enhances students' value. It shows that using comics without text can help students write descriptive texts.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the data collected and examined, the textless comic technique helped teach descriptive text writing. The difference between the experimental class that used the textless comic method and the control class that did not use the textless comic method can be seen from the average gain score of each group.

The average gain score of the control class was lower than the experimental class. The results of hypothesis testing using ttest gained $t_{score} > t_{table}$ (5,2 > 2,7). The significance value of 5% and the degree of freedom of 38 indicated that the null hypothesis (H0) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H1) was accepted. Therefore, it can be concluded that the Textless



Comic technique is effective to be applied in learning to write descriptive texts in grade XI students of MAN 1 Aceh Tengah.

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Citation in APA Style: Zakaria, R, Herwanis, D & Mahbengi, D. (2025). Enhancing Descriptive Writing Skills Through Textless Comics: A Study of Senior High School Students in Aceh Tengah. *J-LATEST: Journal of Language Testing and Studies*, 1(1), 83-97

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