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The Impact of Picture on the Reading Comprehension of Fourth Grade Elementary School Students

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Abstrak

Kemampuan memahami teks bacaan bahasa Inggris merupakan keterampilan penting bagi siswa sekolah dasar. Namun, keterbatasan kosakata, rendahnya motivasi belajar, dan kurangnya penggunaan media pembelajaran yang menarik masih menjadi kendala dalam pengembangan kemampuan tersebut. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan pemahaman membaca bahasa Inggris siswa kelas IV SDN 1 Jurang Jaler melalui penggunaan media gambar. Penelitian menggunakan metode Penelitian Tindakan Kelas (PTK) dengan model Kemmis dan McTaggart yang dilaksanakan dalam dua siklus, meliputi perencanaan, tindakan, observasi, dan refleksi. Subjek penelitian terdiri atas 16 siswa pada tahun ajaran 2024/2025. Data dikumpulkan melalui tes pemahaman membaca, observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan statistik deskriptif dan analisis tematik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan peningkatan nilai rata-rata pemahaman membaca dari 44,0 pada tes awal menjadi 60,0 pada siklus I dan 76,0 pada siklus II. Sebanyak 14 siswa (87,5%) berhasil mencapai Kriteria Ketuntasan Minimal (KKM) pada akhir siklus II. Temuan kualitatif juga menunjukkan peningkatan motivasi, partisipasi, dan kepercayaan diri siswa selama pembelajaran. Penggunaan buku cerita bergambar dan gambar berseri membantu siswa mengidentifikasi gagasan utama, memahami informasi terperinci, serta mengenali makna kosakata berdasarkan konteks bacaan. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa penggunaan media gambar dapat meningkatkan pemahaman membaca bahasa Inggris sekaligus

menciptakan proses pembelajaran yang lebih interaktif dan menarik bagi siswa sekolah dasar.
Kata kunci: media gambar; pemahaman membaca; bahasa Inggris; siswa sekolah dasar; penelitian tindakan kelas.

Abstract

Reading comprehension is an essential skill for elementary school students learning English. However, limited vocabulary, low learning motivation, and insufficient use of engaging instructional media remain significant challenges in developing this skill. This study aimed to improve English reading comprehension among fourth-grade students at SDN 1 Jurang Jaler through the implementation of picture-based learning media. The study employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) based on Kemmis and McTaggart's model, conducted in two cycles involving planning, action, observation, and reflection. Sixteen fourth-grade students participated during the 2024/2025 academic year. Data were collected through reading comprehension tests, classroom observations, interviews, and documentation, and analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The findings revealed a progressive improvement in students' mean reading comprehension scores, increasing from 44.0 in the pre-test to 60.0 in Cycle I and 76.0 in Cycle II. By the end of Cycle II, 14 students (87.5%) had achieved the Minimum Mastery Criteria (KKM). Qualitative findings also indicated improvements in students' motivation, classroom participation, and learning confidence. The integration of picture storybooks and picture sequences helped students identify main ideas, recognize specific information, and understand vocabulary within reading contexts. The study concluded that picture-based learning media effectively improved students' English reading comprehension while promoting a more interactive and engaging learning environment in elementary education.
Keywords: picture-based media; reading comprehension; English language learning; elementary school students; classroom action research.

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is an essential skill in English language learning, particularly for elementary school students who are developing their ability to understand written information and construct meaning from texts. Reading involves

more than recognizing words and sentences; it requires learners to identify main ideas, understand supporting details, interpret vocabulary in context, and connect information with their existing knowledge. Developing these abilities at an early stage is important because reading comprehension supports vocabulary acquisition, language development, and academic achievement. However, learning to read English as a foreign language remains challenging for many young learners, especially those with limited vocabulary knowledge, insufficient motivation, and inadequate exposure to engaging reading materials. Suryantini et al. (2023) reported that fourth-grade students frequently experienced difficulties understanding reading texts because of limited vocabulary mastery, low learning motivation, and insufficient access to appropriate reading resources. Similar challenges were identified at SDN 1 Jurang Jaler, where preliminary observations conducted during the Community Service Program (KKN) revealed that fourth-grade students demonstrated limited interest in English reading activities, relatively low comprehension scores, and passive participation during classroom instruction. These difficulties were further associated with conventional teaching practices that relied heavily on verbal explanations and written materials without sufficient visual support. Consequently, there was a need to introduce more engaging instructional strategies that could help students understand English texts while encouraging their active participation in the learning process.

One instructional approach that may address these challenges is the integration of picture-based media into English reading activities. Pictures provide meaningful visual representations that help learners connect unfamiliar vocabulary, sentences, and textual information with recognizable objects, situations, and events. Through illustrations, picture storybooks, and picture sequences, students can develop a clearer understanding of reading materials while becoming more interested in the learning process. The educational value of combining verbal and visual information can be explained through Dual Coding Theory, which proposes that information can be represented through interconnected verbal and nonverbal systems. When appropriately integrated, visual representations may support

students in processing, understanding, and remembering textual information. In the context of English reading instruction, picture-based activities can provide contextual clues, facilitate vocabulary recognition, and help learners identify important information within texts. Yusnita et al. (2020) reported that sequencing pictures supported students' literal and interpretative reading comprehension, while Al-Barakat and Alali (2024) highlighted the benefits of picture-based learning activities for elementary students' reading comprehension. Similarly, Claudia (2021) emphasized that visual media could increase students' interest and support their understanding of reading materials. These findings suggest that integrating pictures into reading instruction offers a promising approach to addressing comprehension difficulties among young English language learners.

Previous studies have provided further evidence of the potential benefits of picture-based instructional media in different educational contexts. Yuliani (2019) emphasized that picture books could facilitate vocabulary learning and help elementary school students understand story content more effectively. Kilapong et al. (2022) reported that picture sequences supported students' comprehension of descriptive texts, while Alqy & Zuhriyah (2022) found that picture-series activities helped learners identify main ideas and summarize reading passages. Furthermore, Mundhiyanti (2023) reported improvements in students' reading comprehension and motivation through the use of picture series, and Moreno Arenas and Delgado Guerrero (2024) highlighted the contribution of visual aids to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) reading comprehension. Although these studies indicate the instructional potential of visual media, their findings were obtained from different learner populations, reading materials, and classroom conditions. Therefore, further classroom-based investigation was needed to understand how picture storybooks and picture sequences could support the development of literal reading comprehension among fourth-grade elementary school students, particularly in a learning environment where limited vocabulary, low motivation, and conventional instructional practices presented considerable challenges. The present study addressed this contextual need by focusing on students' ability to identify main ideas,

recognize specific information, and understand vocabulary meanings explicitly presented in English reading texts at SDN 1 Jurang Jaler.

Based on these considerations, the present study, entitled The Impact of Pictures on the Reading Comprehension of Fourth-Grade Elementary School Students, investigated the use of picture-based media to improve English reading comprehension among fourth-grade students at SDN 1 Jurang Jaler during the 2024/2025 academic year. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following research question: How do pictures facilitate fourth-grade students' understanding of English reading texts? The investigation focused on literal comprehension, including identifying main ideas, locating detailed information, and understanding vocabulary in context, through the integration of picture storybooks and picture sequences into classroom reading activities. By employing Classroom Action Research (CAR), the study examined students' reading comprehension development and classroom engagement during the implementation of picture-based instruction. The findings were expected to contribute to the existing literature on visual media in elementary EFL education and provide practical insights for teachers seeking accessible, engaging, and contextually appropriate strategies to support young learners' reading comprehension. Furthermore, the study aimed to offer a classroom-based perspective on how the integration of visual and verbal information could facilitate meaningful reading experiences and encourage greater student participation in English language learning.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) to investigate the use of picture media in improving fourth-grade students' English reading comprehension. The research followed the cyclical action research model consisting of four interconnected stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection. The study was conducted in two cycles, allowing the researcher and classroom teacher to evaluate the implementation of picture-based reading activities and improve instructional practices based on the findings of each cycle. This collaborative and reflective

approach is consistent with the principles of educational action research described by Mertler (2020). The instructional intervention incorporated picture storybooks and picture series to support students' literal reading comprehension, particularly their ability to identify main ideas, recognize specific information, and understand vocabulary in context.

Research Participants

The study was conducted at SDN 1 Jurang Jaler, Central Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, during the second semester of the 2024/2025 academic year. The participants consisted of 16 fourth-grade students, approximately 9–10 years old. The class was selected purposively because preliminary observations indicated difficulties in English reading comprehension, limited vocabulary knowledge, and low engagement during reading activities. All students in the selected class participated in the intervention. Purposive selection was appropriate because the research focused on addressing a specific instructional problem within an existing classroom rather than generalizing findings to a larger population (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through reading comprehension tests, classroom observations, interviews, and documentation. A pre-test was administered before the intervention to determine students' initial reading comprehension abilities, while post-tests were conducted at the end of each cycle to assess their progress. The tests focused on literal comprehension, including identifying main ideas, locating specific details, and understanding vocabulary in context. Observation sheets were used to record students' participation, motivation, and responses during picture-based reading activities. Structured interviews with selected students and the classroom teacher provided additional information about their experiences and perceptions. Supporting documents, including classroom photographs, students' assignments, and lesson plans, were also collected. Using multiple sources of evidence supported a more comprehensive interpretation of the classroom learning process (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data were analyzed using quantitative descriptive statistics and qualitative thematic analysis. Quantitative data obtained from the pre-test and two post-tests were analyzed by calculating mean scores, the percentage of students meeting the Minimum Mastery Criteria (KKM), and score improvements across the research cycles. These results were compared to evaluate changes in students' reading comprehension following the implementation of picture media. Meanwhile, qualitative data from observation sheets, interviews, and documentation were examined to identify recurring patterns related to student engagement, motivation, classroom participation, and learning difficulties. Thematic analysis was used to organize and interpret these patterns, consistent with the approach discussed by Braun and Clarke (2022). The quantitative and qualitative findings were then considered together to provide a more comprehensive understanding of students' learning progress and the instructional changes observed throughout the two cycles.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The study investigated the use of picture media to improve English reading comprehension among 16 fourth-grade students at SDN 1 Jurang Jaler during the 2024/2025 academic year. The research employed Classroom Action Research (CAR), conducted in two cycles involving planning, implementation, observation, and reflection. Picture storybooks and picture series were integrated into reading activities to support students' literal comprehension, particularly their ability to identify main ideas, recognize specific information, and understand vocabulary in context. The findings were obtained from reading comprehension tests, classroom observations, field notes, student and teacher interviews, and documentation.

The quantitative findings demonstrated a consistent improvement in students' reading comprehension across the three assessment stages. Before the intervention, students experienced considerable difficulty understanding English reading passages, particularly when identifying important information and interpreting unfamiliar vocabulary. The pre-test results indicated that none of the 16 students achieved the Minimum Mastery Criteria (KKM) of 70. Following the implementation

of picture-based instruction in Cycle I, students' reading scores improved, although most remained below the required standard. Further improvements were observed in Cycle II after the instructional activities were revised to include more collaborative discussions, picture-sequencing exercises, guided comprehension activities, and group presentations.

Table 1. Students' Reading Comprehension Achievement Across Research Stages

Assessment stage	Mean score	Students achieving KKM	Mastery percentage
Pre-test	44.0	0	0%
Post-test I	60.0	1	6.25%
Post-test II	76.0	14	87.50%

The mean score increased by 16 points from the pre-test to Post-test I and by another 16 points from Post-test I to Post-test II, representing an overall improvement of 32 points, or approximately 72.7% relative to the initial mean. The proportion of students meeting the mastery criterion increased from 0% to 87.5%. These findings indicate substantial progress in students' reading comprehension during the implementation of picture-based instruction.

The qualitative findings supported the overall pattern of improvement in students' reading achievement. During the initial observation, students generally demonstrated limited interest in reading English texts, low confidence, and passive participation. In Cycle I, picture-based activities attracted students' attention and encouraged them to observe illustrations, discuss story content, and connect visual information with written texts. Nevertheless, some students remained hesitant to participate, and classroom discussions were dominated by a relatively small number of learners.

In Cycle II, classroom observations indicated more active participation, stronger collaboration, and greater confidence. Students became increasingly willing to ask questions, explain the content of pictures, identify relevant information, and present their understanding in front of classmates. Interviews with selected students also indicated that illustrations helped them understand unfamiliar words, follow story

events, and feel more comfortable participating in reading activities. The classroom teacher similarly improvements in students' attention, willingness to respond, and overall classroom interaction. Isgaf et al. (2024), emphasizes the relevance of interactive learning strategies for examining students' engagement in reading lessons. Classroom observations indicated that students became more attentive and confident when visual materials were accompanied by collaborative activities.

These findings suggest that the integration of picture media was associated not only with improved reading comprehension scores but also with more positive learning behaviors. The combination of visual support, collaborative activities, and teacher guidance appeared particularly useful in helping students engage with English texts that they had previously found difficult.

Discussion

Picture Media and the Improvement of Reading Comprehension

The findings indicated that picture-based instruction was associated with considerable improvements in students' literal reading comprehension. The increase in the mean score from 44.0 in the pre-test to 76.0 in Post-test II suggests that students developed a better understanding of English reading passages after participating in visually supported learning activities. Pictures provided contextual information that helped learners recognize the main ideas, identify supporting details, and interpret unfamiliar vocabulary. This finding is consistent with Yusnita et al. (2020), who stated that sequencing pictures supported students' reading comprehension, and Al-Barakat and Alali (2024), whose study highlighted the contribution of picture-based activities to elementary students' comprehension development.

The improvement was particularly noticeable following the instructional revisions introduced in Cycle II. These revisions included structured group discussions, picture sequencing, story summarization, and additional teacher guidance. Consequently, the improvement cannot be attributed exclusively to the presence of pictures, because changes in classroom interaction and instructional support also contributed to the learning process. The positive changes in students'

participation and motivation can also be interpreted in relation to cooperative learning. Imran and Sandiarsa (2018) investigated the Teammates Consult strategy and significant effects on students' motivation and reading performance in narrative texts. Their findings suggest that structured peer interaction can support students' engagement with reading activities. Nevertheless, the findings suggest that integrating visual materials with meaningful reading activities offers a useful instructional approach for elementary EFL learners. This interpretation is consistent with the studies of Mundhiyanti (2023) and Moreno Arenas and Delgado Guerrero (2024), which identified positive relationships between visual learning materials and reading comprehension. The improvement in students' reading comprehension can be understood in relation to the importance of structured instructional strategies in English language teaching. Terasne et al. (2018) investigated the implementation of the Listen–Read–Discuss (LRD) strategy through classroom action research and improvements in students' reading comprehension across successive instructional cycles.

Visual Support and Cognitive Processing

The findings can also be interpreted through Dual Coding Theory, which explains how verbal and visual representations can support the processing and retrieval of information. In this study, students encountered written texts alongside relevant illustrations, enabling them to connect linguistic information with concrete visual representations. This combination appeared to facilitate their understanding of story events, vocabulary, and explicitly stated information. Students' ability to describe pictures before reading and relate them to the text afterward suggests that visual materials provided meaningful contextual support.

This interpretation is also compatible with multimedia learning principles, which emphasize the importance of coordinating words and pictures in instructional materials. Mayer and Fiorella (2021) explain how appropriately designed multimedia instruction can support learning by helping students select, organize, and integrate relevant information. In the present study, the use of picture storybooks and picture series provided opportunities for students to develop connections between the

written content and its visual context. However, the research did not directly measure cognitive processing or memory retention; therefore, the theoretical explanation should be understood as an interpretation of the observed learning improvements rather than direct evidence of the underlying cognitive mechanisms.

The Contribution of Picture Media to Students' Motivation and Participation

In addition to improvements in comprehension scores, the findings revealed positive changes in students' motivation, confidence, and classroom participation. Students who initially appeared passive became more willing to participate in discussions, answer questions, and retell stories. Interview responses indicated that pictures made reading activities more enjoyable and helped students overcome difficulties in understanding unfamiliar English words. These findings support Claudia (2021) and Efendi (2021), whose studies, associated visual media with improved student interest and reading engagement.

The increased participation observed in Cycle II also suggests that the instructional benefits of picture media were strengthened through collaborative learning. Students were encouraged to exchange ideas, explain visual information, and construct meaning through group interaction. Such activities may have reduced the difficulties associated with limited vocabulary and encouraged students to engage more actively with the reading materials. Therefore, picture media appeared to function not merely as an instructional aid but also as a stimulus for meaningful classroom communication.

Implications for English Language Teaching

The findings have practical implications for teaching English reading comprehension at the elementary school level. Teachers may benefit from selecting age-appropriate pictures that correspond closely to the reading content and integrating them into activities such as predicting story events, identifying main ideas, discussing vocabulary, sequencing pictures, and retelling stories. The findings also suggest that visual materials should be accompanied by structured teacher guidance and opportunities for student interaction. The findings are further

supported by Rahman et al. (2024), who developed a culturally responsive reading module for junior high school students using a constructivist learning perspective.

Within the context of SDN 1 Jurang Jaler, picture-based instruction provided a practical response to students' initial difficulties with reading comprehension and classroom participation. However, the findings should be interpreted within the limitations of the study, particularly its small sample of 16 students, its classroom action research design, and the absence of a comparison group. Future studies could investigate the effectiveness of picture media using larger samples, comparison groups, and assessments of inferential and critical comprehension.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the use of picture media, particularly picture storybooks and picture series, improves the English reading comprehension of fourth-grade students at SDN 1 Jurang Jaler. Picture media facilitate students' understanding of English texts by providing visual context that helps them identify main ideas, recognize specific information, and understand vocabulary meaning. The students' average reading comprehension scores increase from 44.0 in the pre-test to 60.0 in Cycle I and 76.0 in Cycle II, with 87.5% of students achieving the Minimum Mastery Criteria (KKM) by the end of the intervention. Classroom observations and interviews also indicate improvements in students' motivation, participation, and confidence during reading activities. These findings suggest that integrating pictures with written texts supports literal comprehension and creates a more engaging learning environment. Therefore, picture-based instruction serves as an effective teaching strategy for improving English reading comprehension among the students participating in this study.

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