

## THE EFFECTIVENESS OF USING PICTURES TO IMPROVE ENGLISH WRITING SKILLS

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### ABSTRACT

The Experimental method refers to a method that relies on controlled methods, random assignment and the manipulation of variables to test a hypothesis. In this study, it refers to an innovative method - the picture showing method of the researcher to find out the effectiveness of using pictures in enhancing the writing skills.

**Key words:** *Experimental method, Picture showing method, Improving English Writing Skills, Motivation, Learner Success.*

In this paper, the author will analyze the value of using pictures in assisting students to learn the English writing skills, and demonstrate the connection between active learning theories and the use of the picture showing method in the classroom.

Active learning is a theory of Thorndike [11]. He proposed letting children learn by themselves, rather than receiving instruction from teachers: “The lecture and demonstration methods represent an approach to a limited extreme in which the teacher lets the student find out nothing which he could possibly be told or shown.”

Van Der Werff. J [4] showed that pictures are sources of varied classroom activities in the areas of speaking, listening, grammar, vocabulary, and writing. With pictures the teacher can provide students with more vocabulary on the topic needed to write, inspire imagination in students, enrich and widen students’ knowledge. This enables them to produce ideas that are more interesting, as well as to practice grammar structures effectively.

### Using picture showing method in the classroom

White, RV and Arndt [12] stated that “The more detailed and explicit the materials the less room for the writer to use the imagination. Material that is vague, ambiguous and open to numerous

interpretations provides plenty of room for writers to exercise their creativity and is especially useful for stimulating divergent and original writing with a group”. This does not seem reasonable. Such pictures can confuse easily. On the contrary, pictures should contain relevant details so that students can understand all the events, people, places and other details which stimulate them to take part in writing activities. Teachers should provide situations which make the pictures clear, too. Strong outlines and contrast in tone and color are important in helping to avoid ambiguity.

Vivid, colorful, beautifully designed and carefully chosen pictures always work well in the classroom and make students more eager to write. Also, pictures chosen for writing must be attractive to catch the attention of the students from the beginning since the first impression is very important. “A good beginning makes a good ending”.

Goodman. J [2] stated that pictures really help to reduce preparation time. Sets of pictures can be re-used, especially if teachers can laminate them, and can be used at any level in classes for kids, teenagers, exam classes and adults following general or business courses. When it comes to using pictures in class, the key point is not to limit the students to typical class activities and writing exercises. Students need as much English writing practice as they can get. Pictures help teachers and students enjoy more dynamic lessons while reducing

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teacher preparation. Pictures are all around, in the street, at work, at home and even in leisure time, so why not in the classroom as well? They set the scene or context, and are a key resource.

Learning as a foreign language is difficult and studying the ways to apply it in daily communication is even more complicated. This holds true in Viet Nam where English is taught and studied as a foreign language. The strategies of teaching English in high schools have a great influence on the capacity of the students in further study of English. A person is considered to be literate in a language only if she or he can speak and write it. As a result, both writing and speaking should be considered as equally important skills.

#### **Improving English Writing Skills**

This paper emphasizes writing skills for the reason that writing has occupied a significant area in school curricula for many centuries. In addition, the skill of writing is defined as a means to an end in every process of language learning. Therefore, it is undeniable that writing is a very important skill in learning English. However, even some students who are able to speak fluently still find it difficult to write or express ideas in the simplest way. Furthermore, writing is not only a life-long practice skill but more importantly a productive skill. Therefore, this important skill should be taught gradually, carefully and continuously [6]

The students' progress in learning English is often measured by written examination and, of course, includes writing. Because of the great significance of writing as a skill, teachers should pay more attention in finding suitable and effective methods and techniques for the improvement of teaching writing to high school students.

The important factors in the attitude of both teachers and students are having the right attitude towards writing, how teachers prioritize the skill in their respective fields, whether teachers put the writing skills' role in the right position in their teaching methods, and also how teachers encourage their students to write and practice the skill continuously.

As a teacher of English, the researcher is fully aware of useful techniques in motivating the students to participate in writing activities as much as possible so that their writing skills will improve. Among the techniques, the use of available pictures is recognized as one of the best and the most efficient techniques. With a view to using pictures in the classroom, the researcher would like to find out the impact of using pictures as applied in writing lessons.

#### **Why the Picture-showing method is important**

Using visual aids particularly pictures, can be useful and beneficial to both teachers and students in language teaching and learning.

The primary benefit is that the use of pictures speeds up the lesson. It brightens up the classroom and makes the classroom more dynamic through more varied activities, thus making the environment more conducive for learning. Classrooms are not always as lively and interesting as teachers want them to be. Given this, the use of pictures is a good way of energizing the classroom. It makes the classroom more attractive by creating various activities, and serves as a new focus of interest and a source of new lessons taught in a more interesting manner. And with that the students are expected to become more eager for knowledge resulting in a faster pace of the lesson. [10].

Secondly, pictures help students to learn language by means of the real and living applications. In fact, pictures alone can provide the contexts which would not otherwise be available to the students unless one pays more attention to the classroom discussion. Discussion inside the classroom and visual aids, such as pictures, can make the explanation of certain contexts and concepts easier [5].

Thirdly, pictures can help students develop the four language skills at the same time. Pictures as W.R Lee and Cophen. H stated [9] not only “stimulate learners to speak the language as well as to read and write it” but also stimulate them to listen more. In other words, pictures encourage students to make active use of the language they are learning.

Fourthly, “pictures enrich the classroom by bringing topics from the outside world which are made real and immediate”[1]. A foreign language is believed to be best learned by learning about the daily lives and cultures of those who speak it as a home language. Pictures can create an active learning atmosphere. The main importance of writing is that it helps students to learn. Writing new words and structures helps students to remember them; and as writing is done more slowly and carefully than speaking, written practice helps to focus students’ attention on what they are learning. Thus, writing to learn.

“It is asserted that students show more positive behaviors in schools where they feel the sense of belonging and support. Moreover, they are more successful when they are engaged in instructional activities designed in tandem with their own lives and cultures.” [7]

Based on “English methodology”[8], there are some important guiding principles to keep in mind while teaching writing. These strategies inform the production of sentence - level, paragraph - level and essay - level texts; classroom activities should be set up so that students are unconsciously practicing one particular writing skill; the learner’s knowledge, interests and feelings are important and need to be encouraged and built upon; learners should be free from authority, prescription, overt correctness and, according to some in the humanistic movement, free from the imposition of language models; the teacher should create a context in which the learner’s expression is encouraged and respected.

Le Van Su also pointed out that a foreign language is never really learned until a person can use it to communicate his ideas. Communication implies proficiency in both oral (speaking and listening) and written skills (reading and writing). Agreeing on the main goal of this approach, John & John [5] stated that “if communication in English is to be perceived by the learners as the main goal of the course, English should be used for real communication in the classroom.”

## Conclusion

Pictures contribute much to English language teaching. They are especially valuable for writing activities. However, careful consideration should be given to choosing relevant and appropriate pictures that present all the points required to make the use of pictures in writing activities a successful endeavor.

The use of pictures to develop the writing skills of students is very stimulating and encourages more students in their writing activities. With this premise, the use of pictures should be incorporated every now and then to the lesson presentation in all classroom settings especially in learning writing in the English language. Using relevant pictures on the wall of every classroom setting would enhance students' imagination and facilitate their learning.

The preparation of modules for the effective utilization of pictures in classroom discussion is also encouraged. The modules, based on their level of application, would have their own impact and students would learn and improve their writing skills through the ideas and concepts given in the modules.

A more extensive study on the effectiveness of using pictures to improve the other English language skills is also proposed, as well as a follow-up study of the same nature to be conducted in the presentation of lessons using pictures.

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### TÓM TẮT

## HIỆU QUẢ CỦA PHƯƠNG PHÁP DÙNG TRANH TRONG VIỆC NÂNG CAO KỸ NĂNG VIẾT TIẾNG ANH

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Phương pháp dùng tranh được xem như là một trong những phương pháp hiệu quả trong dạy và học ngoại ngữ, nhất là trong kỹ năng nói và kỹ năng viết tiếng Anh. Phương pháp này đã được ứng dụng phổ biến trên thế giới, qua các cuộc khảo sát nghiên cứu đều cho thấy kết quả thành công rất cao. Đối với Việt Nam, việc học và dạy theo phương pháp truyền thống vẫn còn tồn tại thì việc đưa phương pháp mới này vào sẽ góp phần nâng cao tính độc lập, tự chủ và tính sáng tạo của người học.

**Từ khóa:** *Phương pháp thực nghiệm, Phương pháp sử dụng tranh, nâng cao khả năng viết tiếng Anh, động lực, thành công của người học.*

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