

**Effect of Tests with Pictures and Non-Picture Strips on EFL Senior High School Students'  
Writing Performance**

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of pictorial materials on enhancing the English writing performance of Iranian secondary students. The subjects selected randomly were 40 male students studying in pre-university secondary schools. For the research purpose, the researcher designed two different types of pictures- strips and non-strips. He, then, divided the participants into two main groups as high and low achievers and then each group into two subgroups, each with 10 students and tested the materials with them. For the data analysis, the statistical procedure –ANOVA- was run to compare the performances of these four groups. The results of the study showed that the pictorial materials especially the strips pictures had positive effects on the student's performance and developed the students' abilities in writing English paragraphs. Moreover, it was revealed that the students who used the program were motivated and their performance was influenced positively. Meanwhile, it was found that using picture series improved the students' quality of writing and developed an area of interest to be creative and encouraged in writing processes. Peer learning and developing learners' hand writing are another advantages of writing via pictorial materials in this research.

**Keywords:** Pictorial Materials; Pictorial Paragraph-Based Writing; Writing Performance; Pictures Strips; Non-Picture Strips; Developing Writing

**1. Introduction**

Writing is one of the most difficult skills for students to acquire and to learn. It is the last skill in language learning and teaching in which most teachers and instructors should take care of. Unfortunately, in most educational settings, writing skill is usually presented and taught as the first skill for teaching. Traditionally, language teachers considered writing the first skill for language learning and tended to teach their students how to write without making them prepared enough for the task and before teaching them the other three skills, namely, listening, speaking, and reading.

Writing in the foreign language assumes a very important place in learning a language as a means of communication. It is considered an important skill because it helps learners develop their thinking by allowing them to revisit their thoughts. In this regard, Brown (1987) believes that the communicative approach considers writing a conscious activity that requires mental effort in order to produce something meaningful and communicative.

Therefore, it is evidently true that writing abilities poses a number of problems to the students, as it is a difficult skill to master. It is believed that writing skill demands a great deal of skills and conventions such writing readiness and grammatical rules for the students to become proficient and effective writers and learners of a native or foreign language. Teachers face great challenges to teach this complicated skill to students. Often, students find writing skill confusing and difficult to master and to understand in a language like English.

Meanwhile, writing is one of the English or any other language skill playing an important role, either in formal communication or informal communication. It is also an instrument for self-expression. It seems that writing is the most difficult skill for foreign language learners to master. The difficulty lies not only in generating and organizing ideas, but

also in translating these ideas into readable text. Not only beginners but also advanced language learners do face problems when they write. They often find it difficult to put their ideas on paper because they have not acquired the necessary tools to write. They are too worried to start writing and do not know how to develop their ideas in written form.

Since, students are weak in the writing skill, and need to enhance their writing performance; they face difficulty in composing written material while they are required to produce good ideas which are arranged logically using active vocabulary items and structures including discourse markers. This difficulty lies on how to produce meaningful sentences which comprise coherent text. In this path, the teachers' role in teaching how to write a language is naturally evident and significant. Since a teacher tries to teach and to evaluate his/her learners' writing development and performance, s/he should be armed with essential writing skills including reinforcement, language development, learning style. Most important of all, a teacher should consider the fact that writing is a skill in its own right.

English teacher must be more creative in choosing materials and techniques to make the writing class more interesting, exciting and enjoyable to solve the problems mentioned above. This can be done by choosing the appropriate materials and techniques that students like based on their level of mastery and their background knowledge. Teachers should make efforts in making their class more interesting with various methods, techniques, materials and instruments in order to stimulate language learning skills effectively.

Accordingly, (Harmer, J. 2015) mentions that there are many reasons for getting students to write, both in and outside class. Mostly, writing gives them more 'thinking time' than spontaneous speaking. This allows them more opportunity for language processing-that is thinking about the language- whether they are involved in studying or activating the necessary tools in their mind.

The assessment of writing ability has recently received much attention from educators, legislators, and measurement experts, especially because, on the whole, students, now, in all disciplines and at all educational levels seem to be less proficient compared with students five or ten years ago.

There are different kinds of test forms to evaluate students' abilities and performance including writing abilities. Regarding testing learners' abilities in mastering or non-mastering specific language abilities, and performances, tests of writing ability are not exceptional ones. Language teachers usually use different types of test formats such as essay test, compositions test, fill in blanks test, close-ended and open-ended tests to evaluate their students' writing performance and abilities. Therefore, this study was conducted to examine the effect of pictures-pictures strips and non-pictures strips- on students' writing performance among junior high students. In other words, we wanted to test and evaluate students' writing performance, development through testing two kinds of material-picture strips and non-picture strips. More specifically, an attempt was made to see the effect of test formats on enhancing students' scores.

## **2. Literature Review**

A good piece of writing requires different types of language knowledge including good knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, coherence, and cohesion, punctuation, etc on the part of the writer. Unfortunately, in the past, we, as language learners, experienced that most teachers gave students only the title of writing a composition without preparing them in advance and without teaching them the required skills they needed to master. They expected them to be good writers

unprepared. This was neither logical nor applicable and even not touchable and digestible for language learners. For decades and for many teachers, having students write compositions just through giving the title/topic was the only way to evaluate and to test their students' wringing performance.

Nowadays, however, different types of testing writing abilities are available. Two examples are having students "complete uncompleted two-lines introduction to a text", and having them "look at whole story pictures to describe a scene" through writing.

Reviewing some studies on the literature of picture or storyline pictures on writing a composition, we should mention Baso (2008) who conducted a research under the title "Writing Ability through Story Pictures at SMPN 6 Makassar (Classroom Action Research)". She found that the use of story pictures improves the students' ability in learning English writing. She also found that the use of story picture technique was interesting for the students. So she motivated their subjects to write paragraphs. Her findings showed that story pictures enhanced the students' interest in studying English. It seems that when students are tested on writing paragraphs based on the provided pictures materials, their score would increase compared to the time when they take the non-picture writing test.

Mason et al. (2006) showed that, as early as second grade, the writing performance and knowledge of young struggling writers can be improved substantially when teachers teach them generally and genre-specific strategies for planning in connection with the knowledge and self-regulatory procedures needed to use these strategies effectively.

Carter et al. (1998) explained the role of pictures in enhancing the students' ability to create creative stories by saying that absence of words helps the reader create his own story by the picture he sees rather than the words he reads. As a result, it is likely that there is an evident need for using wordless picture books in order to provide students with a suitable environment to produce original creative writings. Seemingly, pictorial materials, although hard to prepare and needing a lot of time and money to produce, are useful realia to provide natural conditions for writing test takers to write better. They look at pictures and after creating simple texts in early stages they are finally able to produce more comprehensive paragraphs. Pictures help students to improve their creativity in composing new ideas in comprehensive texts and contexts and naturally. It is assumed that pictures affect writing development positively and improves students' performance in writing. They enhance their creative thinking and can create a brainstorming-flow of ideas- a situation which results in their good writing performance.

Henry (2003) explained the role of wordless picture books in stimulating students' creativity by saying that the creativity stimulated by wordless picture books encouraged older students to look more closely at story details. Students consider all story elements to understand how to organize a text and develop a story. Henry found that students who used wordless picture books were able to build their reading and writing skills and strategies to ultimately produce a unique book.

Pictorial stories help students develop their sense of story, demonstrate an understanding of sequence, practice oral or written storytelling skills and expand their cognitive abilities. Al-Shra'ah (2010) mentioned that one important way of getting students interested in learning English is through the use of various audiovisual aids.

The use of picture series can improve the students' skills in writing. It causes significant improvements in the students' writing in terms of content, organization, language use, vocabulary, and writing mechanics. The students write good descriptive paragraphs. Pictures

contribute greatly to the task. Use of pictures enhances the students' vocabulary in writing performance. This is confirmed and approved by the study of Mansourzadeh (2014). He found that pictures helped students to understand the difficult words more easily by looking at the pictures.

Again in a study done by Wibowo (2013), indicated that the use of pictures enriched the process of vocabulary learning by students. It attracted students' curiosity in learning new vocabulary by utilizing words. It provided visual feedback of the objects and actions portrayed in writing.

In another study, Mansourzadeh (2016), which focused on the effect of "YouTube videos" and pictures on students' writing development reported that using pictures in teaching writing was more effective for students' writing performance than using "YouTube videos". The author's findings indicated the effectiveness of the authentic materials on students' writing ability. Based on the findings, using authentic materials resulted in students' higher grades and performance. It was supported the study and supposed by indicating that using pictures can develop students' behavior in writing well. So, in this study, regarding all the mentioned data, the following research questions had been addressed and formulated to find rational responses and evidence:

- 1- Does administrating tests with picture-strips have any significant effect on EFL learners' overall writing performance in terms of scores?
- 2- Does administrating tests with non-picture strips affect EFL learners' writing scores and performance?

### **3. Method**

#### *3.1. Participants*

To accomplish the objectives of this study, which was to investigate the role of tests with pictures and non-picture strips on EFL senior high school students' writing performance and even scores, 40 high and low students - studying in high school- were randomly selected from 60 students, each in 20. Then, picture and non-pictures materials were provided in advance. In addition, the group divided into two subgroups each with 10 students considered as high and low achievers in writing based on their teachers' viewpoints and their score in the first semester of study. Then, the provided materials were given separately to each of the group.

#### *3.2. Materials*

The materials included pictorial materials- pictures strips (No.1) and non-pictures strips (N0.2). The two pictures were selected and copied in fine facet hard copy in order to help the subjects to be motivated and created at least a comprehensive paragraph (a short story) based on the events of both types of the pictures.

1: Picture strips



2: Non-picture strips



### 3.3. Data collection procedure

The present study had been done in a high school where the subjects were studying in the last grade (pre-university level 4) in Shoush city located in Khuzestan province, Iran. The subjects were informed that the researcher wanted to do a research to evaluate their writing level based on two forms of writing materials, namely, strip-pictures and non-strip pictures. Two classes namely, 1 & 2, were selected randomly among four classes in the same school. In each class, 20 students were selected and divided into two groups( A, B, C, and D) -high and low achievers- each in 10 subjects based on their English teachers' viewpoints and their previous grade in the first semester. The materials were prepared in advance in color hard copies (pictures No:1&2). The materials were distributed for the two groups-high and low achievers- in each class. The strips pictures were given to class 1 and the non-strips ones to class 2 to check the effects of these two types of pictures on students' grade and writing development during course study. The two classes were in the same school with the same environment so as to control the unexpected external factors such as noise, light and so on. After collecting the materials, they were given to two raters in order to increase the validity and reliability of the given grades to participants. The papers were graded from 0 to 10 for each student.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

Two inter-raters were asked to rate the papers anonymously to control/decrease somehow the raters' bias. The raters, who had been teaching English for many years in different types of schools in the city, were their English teacher and the other English teacher teaching in another remote high school. The papers were graded from 1 to 10 for each student in each group. So, there were four groups considered as high -achievers and low -achievers.

Then, because of having four different learner groups, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used/run to compare the four groups to find the effect of the pictures on students' performance ( Mackey et al, 2005).

#### 4. Results/Findings & Discussion

To give comprehensive results and to find the effects of pictures on students' writing ability, two different types of pictures- non-picture strips and picture strips- were provided and given to two different groups of learners. The results of each group were shown in table 1.

Table 1

NO. OF PARTICIPANTS	Group 1 Picture strips		Group 2 Non-picture strips	
	HIGH ACHIE.A	LOW ACHIE. B	HIGH ACHIE.C	LOW ACHIE.D
1	9	4	6	2
2	8	5	5	3
3	5	8	6	4
4	8	3	7	3
5	9	5	8	6
6	5	5	5	7
7	6	6	4	5
8	8	3	4	3
9	7	5	5	2
10	6	6	7	3
SUM:10	71	50	57	38

As the Table 2 shows, one way of analysis of variance was used in order to compare the four groups with one another to find the effect of the different picture strips on student's performance (Table 2).

Table 2

Descriptive statistics of the ANOVA for the two groups (Descriptive statics)

Groups 1 & 2		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Low Ach.	Pic. Strips(B)	10	5.0000	1.49071	3.00	8.00
	Non-p.strips(D)	10	3.8000	1.68655	2.00	7.00
High Ach.	Pic.strips(A)	10	7.1000	1.52388	5.00	9.00
	Non-p.strips(C)	10	5.7000	1.33749	4.00	8.00

As it was seen in table (2), the four groups were compared separately to find the effect of each picture(s) on each group of the students. To compare the two groups (B &D), we saw that

in group B- low -achieve learners (picture strips)- and group D – non- picture strips, the number of participants was 10 and the means of each group were 5 and 3, respectively. To compare these two groups with each other, we understood from the points of means that their means were completely different (5&3). Therefore, the picture strips had positive effects on students' scores and performance, even on low -achievers.

Besides these, in comparison the other two groups (A & C), we saw that the same thing was happened. It meant that the number was the same, but the means of the two groups with the two different materials-picture strips and non-pictures one- were different (7&5). We concluded that picture strips for both groups - high and low -achievers- had positive effects. Meanwhile, the participants in these two groups could write a comprehensive and meaningful paragraph based on the series of pictures.

*Table 3*  
*Analysis of one way variance (ANOVA)*

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
<b>Low Ach.</b>	<b>Between Groups</b>	7.200	1	7.200	2.842	.109
	<b>Within Groups</b>	45.600	18	2.533		
	<b>Total</b>	52.800	19			
<b>High Ach.</b>	<b>Between Groups</b>	9.800	1	9.800	4.768	.042
	<b>Within Groups</b>	37.000	18	2.056		
	<b>Total</b>	46.800	19			

In comparison the four groups with one another and looking at the above data- table(3)- we indicated that the F test was calculated for poor(low achiever) students in two groups of continuous and non-continuous images (pictures) had no significant effect on student writing ability (F = 2.84, P = 0.10) an error level of 0.05. The meaningless analysis of variance indicated that there was no difference between any of the groups of continuous and non-continuous pictures on the ability to write poor (low achiever) students.

But, for the F test calculated for high achiever students in two groups of continuous and non-continuous images(pictures) was significant on the ability of students to write (F = 4.76 and P = 0.04) at the error level of 0.05. The significance of variance analysis determined that there was a difference between the groups of continuous and non-continuous images (pictures) on the ability to write strong (high achiever) students. The average performance of writing students of strong students in the group of continuous images tests (10/7) was higher than that of the strong students of the non-integrated (strips) images test group (5.70). That was, tests of picture strips had more effective effects on high achiever students than non-strip picture tests on their writing ability.

All in all, the tables (1, 2, 3), show that the strip pictures had positive effects both on high and low -achiever students.

The findings, we have shown and investigated theoretically and practically, indicated that our teachers' and even students' reflections and attitudes towards the main role of the pictures (images) in the writing development and performance among language learners were positive. As it was shown and indicated, pictures whether strips or no-strips, had a positive effect in comparison with giving a topic to learners and wanted them to write comprehensively and meaningfully as it was, unfortunately, used and applied in traditional methods of teaching how to write and to compose.

To answer the research questions, an ANOVA was run on the four groups of language learners to explore whether any of the groups improved significantly after applying pictures. So, to answer the first research question, we claimed that providing students with picture-strips and wanting them to write meaningfully had a positive effect on their writing performance in terms of scores. If we looked at table 2 carefully, we could see that students' mean and scores in pictures strips were more than the other groups (non-picture strips). That is, providing learners with pictures strips helped them to follow the main idea(s) of the story in the pictures and caused them to flow their ideas meaningfully to write some comprehensive sentences and used some related connectors to relate the ideas with each other. Looking at the continuous series of pictures, the participants could create a meaningful story to help readers (teachers) understand what happened in the story.

So, based on the above information and took a glance at the tables, we concluded that picture-strips had significant effects on EFL learner's overall writing performance in terms of scores and development.

The second research question focused on the role of the administrating tests with non-picture strips in learners' writing score and performance. The results of the analysis revealed somehow an advantage for the production of some related sentences to the story of the pictures. But, in comparison with picture strips, it showed that administrating tests with such pictures (non-strips) in some cases could affect students' performance to some extent. In the analysis of the students' papers (non-picture strips) by the two raters, the researcher noticed that the students' papers were written in some short, no-logical sentences with some related sentences. Besides, the participants didn't understand the main ideas of the story and they wrote whatever came in their mind without looking to the pictures. Although in these types of the pictures, the learners could create some new sentences based on their imagination of what would happen and what would be at the end of the story, they wrote some unrelated sentences which resulted in their low performance and scores. The raters claimed and even approved that the students' performance, from the points of related sentences in the paragraph, was in ungrammatical connections and difficult to correct. So, we concluded that administrating test with non-picture strips could not affect the students' writing scores and performance as it was supposed to be.

### **5. Conclusions, Implications, and Limitations**

The results of this qualitative and mainly quantitative study revealed that teachers and even learners generally hold positive attitudes towards using pictures to write a paragraph comprehensively.

We observed that there was a general agreement among participants and even teachers about the main effects of pictorial materials and they wholly revealed a type of deep belief in the roles of these materials to expand their writing ability and even their scores. The students warmly agreed that writing based on pictorial aids was the most suitable method for developing

and expanding a language to be used as communication in their daily life. Practically and theoretically, the teachers accepted this method as a method of encouraging and assessing their students wholeheartedly because the resulted paragraph was compiled and written in a logical order and in a meaningful way.

The produced text (paragraph) was produced and considered as an original text since the pictorial materials was a good and helpful material to encourage students to create and to put their creation and imagination on paper. This claim was in line with Wibowo (2013) who found using pictures could enrich vocabulary learning and it attracted the students' curiosity in learning new vocabulary by utilizing words on papers.

It is a good suggestion for language teachers to use pictures instead of topics to help learners to develop students' grades and performance since pictures were considered as one of the authentic material to aid students to write and perform in a comprehensive way and to be good writers. This statement was in line with Mansourzadeh (2016) who reported that using pictures in teaching writing was better than using YouTube videos to help the students in writing performance because of the effectiveness of the authentic materials on students writing ability which resulted in developing their grades and performance.

Using strip or non-strip pictures could help language learners and writers to expand their ideas in a logical mood. It motivated writers and learners to create a reasonable text with a large number of connectors (conjunctions) and variety of sentences within a paragraph.

In terms of implications, this study suggested that language teachers emphasize the development of the learners' communicative competence by using the language in their daily life by using authentic materials like pictures. Also, this study showed, in order to learn/teach a new language in educational settings, the teachers should be familiar with the role of pictures strips and how to find or to make and to bring them to class. Meanwhile, language teachers should know the principles and rules to apply the pictures in language teaching processes to help the learners learn a new language warmly and actively.

The results of this study could be used by EFL teachers and teacher's centers that were being trained in language centers to be fresh English teachers in the future. Moreover, the results could be used as main sources for those who want to know the effects of the pictorial teaching aids on language teachers and learners.

The findings of this research could also be used by curriculum and syllabus designers and policymakers to examine teachers' and even students' views about the role of pictures in an educational program because the teachers were responsible for embodiment principles and techniques in the language classroom.

Meanwhile, the insights of this study could be used as the main source for those who wanted to investigate more deeply into the effects of pictorial materials and wanted to know more exactly about the attitudes of other English teachers about this effect. Therefore, it is vital to survey the perceptions and expectations of teachers to change the negative perceptions of teachers by providing more opportunity for teachers to participate in workshops about the advantages of strip pictures in helping learners to enhance their writing performance in terms of grades and scores.

Like any other researches, this type of research has some limitations to be carried out in comprehensive ways. The students, sometimes, based on their educational programs, were not available and it took some days to connect with them in order to gather them in unique classes to assemble some data about their attitudes. Besides, we tried to make an observation while the

students were involving in the writing process. Attending to the class needed permission from the school managers which it took more times. Sometimes, students' attitudes towards learning English, while observing the class, were very obscure because of the teachers' attitudes towards writing process, the lack of facilities at schools to create an enjoyable setting to make the teaching and learning methodology more attractive.

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