

## Improving students' writing achievement using *Visual Thinking* strategy for junior high school students

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to find out: 1) whether there is statistically significant difference of students' writing skill in describing people between the pretest and the posttest in the implementation of visual thinking strategy, 2) which aspect improved the most after the implementation of visual thinking strategy. This research was quantitative research. The subjects of the research were 30 students at the first grade of SMPN 1 Rawajitu Timur. The writing test was administered as the instrument of the research. The data were analyzed by using Paired Sample T-test in which the significance level was determined by  $p < 0.05$ . The result of the research showed that the value of significant level was  $0.00 < 0.05$ . It means that there was an improvement in students' writing ability of descriptive text after the implementation of visual thinking strategy and the aspect of writing that improved the most after the implementation of visual thinking strategy was grammar. Moreover, the mean score of posttests (70.5) was higher than the pretest (56.7) with the gain was 13.8. Overall, regarding to the results above, it can be stated that visual thinking strategy is effective to improve students' writing skill in describing people.

**Keywords:** *visual thinking strategy, writing, describing people*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Writing in junior high schools is one of the four English skills the students have to learn. Teaching writing English in Indonesian junior high schools is not an easy task. In academic purposes, the students require not only able to speak but also to write in English. To get excellent achievement in writing, they had to master the five aspects such as; content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics.

Moreover, based on the observation at SMPN 1 Rawajitu Timur, the researcher found out that the students' writing skill was still low, because of the lack of students' competence in writing sentences especially in grammar and mechanics, and the low use of visual sources. They had boring activities in the English class. The teacher used textbook-based technique when teaching English. She rarely used other media to support his teaching and focused only on what the students might have in the UN (*Ujian Nasional*).

Another problem that appears in writing was in term of content and vocabulary. The students had limited sources to learn vocabulary and expand their ideas. Instead, the teacher was the only source. They also lacked self-confidence and motivation. They tended to be passive and merely listened to the teacher. The teacher controlled most of the activities and used minimum media to support the teaching of writing. Based on this reason, the researcher applied the use of visual media to engage the students' attention and motivation during teaching writing. To conclude, the use of visual media such as: pictures and videos as the source in order to improve the students' writing ability.

In line with this reason, as cited from Krcevic and Skeldar (2015), "Today's students live in a predominately visual world, exposed to the media, technology, and overabundant of digital stimuli, where the proverb 'A Picture is worth a thousand words' applies more than ever". Moreover, they said that visual tools, such as pictures and videos in any available format, can be used for a wide range of activities, from speaking to writing to enhance students' skills. Thus, support by Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998), they say that children's development of emergent literacy skills begins early in their life. Their reading and writing ability develop as their visual and motor skills develop. From this statement, we can assume that children have visual interests in which parallel with their writing ability.

As a foreign language, English education in Indonesia taught formally since Elementary school. But English learning will be more focused at the Junior High School level. Based on this condition, we can assume that most of the students start their competence in English learning at the seventh grade. It can be concluded that students are demanded to develop communicative competence, especially in writing at Junior High School. As stated early, that writing is an important skill to mastery and children have visual interestin which parallel with writing. Hence, this study uses visual thinking strategy (VTS) which is developed by Abigail Housen. This strategy is a method that uses visual tools for discussion that guide the learners' critical thinking. Furthermore, Housen (2002) created, three core questions that engage VTS, such as: 1) what do you see in the picture? 2) what do you see that makes you say that?, and 3) what more can we find?.

The initial study of VTS by Housen and De'Santis (2009), affirmed the efficiency of using visual thinking strategy in reading and writing. They found that the majority of the students who participated in VTS have comprehension skills in reading and express the concept in writing easily. Moreover, writing is more about the process rather than just a product. The use of media in the process of teaching writing will be helpful in determining the product of writing. During the process of writing, students should be stimulated and motivated using appropriate media. The use of VTS in students' writing activity is helpful to stimulate and motivate them. It is believed that the use of VTS in the students' writing class will give a positive contribution to their writingskill.

The findings of several studies which have been conducted to investigate the impact of VTS through visual media in classrooms indicate their powerful role in the teaching and the learning process. According to Rafik-Galea (2005), her analysis revealed that the students improved tremendously after VTS treatments. Moreover, she added, the students could see and plan how to organize their writing in terms of tenses, expressions, and appropriate language. Studies have also reported some advantages to the implementation of VTS with visual media into foreign language classes. For instance, VTS helps in reorganizing students' thought and expand students' content in writing Eun (2018); increase the students' motivation to learn the language Krcelic and Skeldar (2015); can improve students' grammar aspect in writing Kartika (2013) Widodo (2012); and fosters stronger thinking and allows for vocabulary development and expansion of communication abilities Hazem (2018).

From the findings, it can be concluded that there are some reasons for using VTS in teaching writing. First, the use of visual media in VTS is interesting for students. Secondly, it is useful for teaching writing. Third, it can improve writing aspect, such as expand writing ideas, help the students reorganizing their writing, increase students' vocabulary and improve their grammar skills. Related to this, the researcher decided to use VTS to find out whether or not visual thinking can solve the problem. Thus, the researcher is interested to know about the student's ability in descriptive text writing before and after the treatment and to find out aspect of writing mostly improved after being taught by visual thinking strategy with the title "Improving Students' Writing Achievement using Visual Thinking Strategy for Junior High School Students".

## **II. METHODS**

This research is a quantitative research with one group pre-test post-test design. The population of this research was the first grade students of SMPN 1 Rawajitu Timur in academic year of 2018/2019. Then, there were only one class which was consisted of 30 students. Then, the result of students' pre-test and post-test is analyzed by using Paired Sample T-test in SPSS 16.0 to find out whether any significant improvement of students' writing ability of descriptive text. To know the aspect of writing improved the most, the researcher calculates the percentage increase in each aspectmanually.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### Results

To address the research question on students writing achievement, after conducting the research, the researcher gathered the result of pretest and posttest as follows on the next page. The analysis shows that there was a difference of students' writing skill in describing people after being taught by using Visual Thinking Strategy and it answers the first research question.

**Table 1. The Difference of Students' Writing Score in the Pretest and Posttest**

	Pre-test	Post-test	Gain
Visual Thinking Strategy	56.7	70.5	13.8

The result shows from the table 1, the mean score of pretest result is 56.7 while in the posttest is 70.5 and the gain score is 13.8. It means there is significant difference after the implementation of Visual Thinking Strategy.

**Table 2. Paired Sample T-test**

Pair	Pre-test - Post-test	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
1	-	1.458 33E1	10.7856 6	1.96918	18.61076	10.55590	-7.406	29	.000

Table 2 provides evidence that the mean difference of students' writing score in post- test and pre-test is significant since the significant (2-tailed) is 0.00 in which lower than 0.05. It indicates that after the implementation of visual thinking, students' writing ability significantly improved.

**Table 3. Improvement of the Students' Writing Aspects in Descriptive Text**

Aspect of Writing	Pre-test Score (PrS)	Post- test Score (PoS)	Maximum Score (MS)	Aspects Improvement (PoS – PrS)	Improvement (PoS – PrS / PrS) x 100
<b>Content</b>	64	72.5	100	8.5	13.28%
<b>Organization</b>	57	70.7	100	13.7	24.04%
<b>Vocabulary</b>	56.6	72.3	100	15.7	27.74%
<b>Grammar</b>	50.3	65.5	100	18.3	36.38%
<b>Mechanics</b>	50	67.1	100	17.1	34.20%

Table 3 shows that visual thinking strategy improved all aspects of students' writing descriptive text. The aspect of content increases from 64 to 72.5 in which gain is 13.28%. In organization increases from 57 to 70.7 in which gain is 24.04%. In vocabulary increases from 56.6 to 72.3 in which gain is 27.74%. Then, grammar increases from 50.3 to 65.5 in which gain is 36.38%. And mechanics also increases from 50 to 67.1 in which gain is 34.20%. From the table above, the researcher compares the pretest and posttest scores to know the students' score

improvement and what the most improved aspect after the students were taught through mind mapping technique, and for the result, it can be seen that the highest improvement is grammar aspect, in which the posttest score improved to 65.5 from 50.3 in the pretest(36.38%).

### **Discussion**

The result of this research showed that there was a significant improvement of the students' writing ability after being taught using Visual Thinking Strategy. It was taken from hypothesis testing. The result of paired sample t-test showed that significant level was 0.00 and it was lower than alpha level ( $0.00 < 0.05$ ). It means that the  $H_1$  was accepted and  $H_0$  was rejected. The improvement of the students' writing ability can be seen from the comparison between the students' pretest score and posttest score. The result of the mean score of the pretest was 56.7 and the posttest was 70.5. The increase of the means score was about 13.8. It means that there was significant improvement of the students' writing ability of descriptive text after being taught using visual thinking strategy. This finding confirmed the previous study conducted by Rafik-Galea (2005), there is tremendously improvements of students writing ability after the implementation of VTS. Moreover, she add, the students could see and plan how to organize their writing in terms of tenses, expressions, and appropriate language

Another research conducted by Eun (2018) about the use of visual thinking and picture book in narrative writing, the result indicated that the VTS implementation helps the student generate their ideas into written form. The data proves the students develop or gain their ideas from the picture they have seen. It occurred because the students were guided by visual thinking strategy questions. This led to the improvement of the students' ability with VTS in discussion. From the statement it can be assumed that the improvement in students' writing is the result of repetitive treatment by VTS questions within the interesting topic discussion.

Moreover Putriani (2016) and Fitriani (2009) research show the improvement of students writing after treatment using visual media. By seeing the picture, they gain their critical thinking and curiosity, since the teacher asked provoking questions towards them, the students intentionally looked for new vocabulary. It indicates that the students learn new vocabularies intentionally because they can see into the picture. They figured the details and collected the information from the source.

Hence to answer the second research question, which was the most improved aspect in writing after the implementation of VTS towards junior high school students, the researcher finds out grammar is the most improved aspect with the gain 18.3 from 50.3 to 65.5. The gain happened because of the implementation of VTS in the classroom. By the teacher guide and the visual source, it eased the students especially with low ability to construct the sentences in the simple present form. Therefore, providing the students not only the basic form of sentences but also the model to be imitated indeed helps the students to learn grammar better. This statement in line with Kartika (2013) and Widodo (2012) research about improving students writing skills with VTS and visual media, the media helps the students attained the greater score in grammar. Furthermore, it supports the idea of several studies from Yenawine and Miller (2014), Eun (2018) and Hazem (2018) VTS and visual aids help in increasing the grammar score of the students as they learn how to use certain words and to produce sentences correctly. The students tend to use more complex sentence after the treatments. Moreover, VTS is useful because it is flexible enough to apply in multidiscipline area of studies.

As Housen (2002) constructed the aesthetic stage of learning into 5 stages. During the third stages, the teacher or instructor had to reinforce students by rephrase students' answer in correct grammar. Hazem (2018) in his research said, while, the instructor paraphrases each response, it fosters stronger thinking and allows for grammar reinforcement, and expansion of communication abilities. This result could happen when the instructor taught the learner implicitly through paraphrasing their ideas. Moreover, she added, teaching the English language and its grammar implicitly is more effective than teaching it explicitly through the use of VT contexts. This helps in acquiring the application of grammar rules without wasting effort

and time on recalling the rule, which leads to speaking and writing improvement and writing fluency.

From the explanation above, it can be concluded that Visual Thinking Strategy (VTS) can significantly improve the student's writing ability of descriptive text and can improve all aspects of writing. In which, the aspects of writing which improved the most was grammar.

#### **IV. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

##### **Conclusions**

This research has shown the implementation of VTS within visual media for teaching writing had given a positive effect on the students' writing ability in describing people. Based on the result presented before, it can be proved that there is a significant improvement in the students' writing ability in terms of content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. The final score shows the improvement from 56.7 to 70.5. Moreover, the implementation of VTS towards students' writing achievement showed a positive result in improving students' grammar aspect in writing. Since the highest gain is grammar score, it can be said that grammar is better to be learned by using visual media with Visual Thinking Strategy.

##### **Suggestions**

The researcher would like to recommend some suggestions to English teacher to apply visual thinking strategy (VTS) to improve students' writing descriptive text. Besides, it is necessary to use various visual media in VTS so that the teachers could explore the media into some useful activities that can help the students improve their writing ability. The English teachers also need to provide other learning sources besides the coursebook to give more knowledge to the students in learning English. It is necessary to find the proper visual media which are suitable with the core competencies, basic competencies, and the students' proficiency level. Second, the researchers should be more creative in using various media and designing other activities so that the students have more opportunities to learn in an interesting way.

It is also suggested that future researchers can also investigate the implementation of Visual Thinking into different language skill, such as speaking, reading, and listening. Moreover, this research's treatments only delivered twice during the implementation of VTS. As seen from the students' result, the mean score still considered low, because of the limitation of treatments. The researcher suggests to further researcher to multiply the durations or the treatment to get more satisfying results of the students' improvement.

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