Enhancing 7th-Grade Students' Short Story Writing through Intercultural Learning and Visual Media

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Abstract

Writing short stories in English has been one of the difficult challenges at MTs Tarbiatul Islamiah. This research aims to improve short story writing skills in English by using visual media to enhance students' abilities to write short stories in English. This study employs a quantitative research method with a quasi-experimental design of the Non-equivalent Control Group type. In this study, there are two groups that are not randomly selected. Both groups were given a pretest to determine their initial condition. The experimental group was provided with visual media, while the control group was not given visual media. Data collection techniques included observation and short story writing test sheets. The assessment of short story writing skills focused on vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, and writing mechanics. The collected data will be analyzed. The results of the study indicate that writing short stories in English using visual media in the 7th grade at MTs Tarbiatul Islamiah inspires students to write short stories and helps them develop and express their ideas more fluently and coherently.

Keywords: English language skills, visual media, writing short stories

1. Introduction

Writing is a vital skill that strengthens students' proficiency, particularly in English. In today's globalized world, writing is not only necessary for academic success but also a valuable asset in professional and intercultural communication (Espinoza-Celi & Pintado, 2020). Writing short

stories, in particular, encourages creativity and risk-taking (Takacs, 2020), fosters emotional expression (Stein, 2023), and strengthens grammar, vocabulary, and style (Burroway et al., 2019). Despite its benefits, many Indonesian students struggle with short story writing due to traditional instructional methods that focus solely on grammar and structure. This results in limited vocabulary use, a lack of idea development, and fear of making mistakes (Appleman, 2023). The limited use of creative teaching tools further contributes to students' lack of motivation (Draha, 2020; Taridi, 2022). Furthermore, in multicultural contexts like Indonesia, students' cultural backgrounds influence their interpretation and production of texts. Integrating intercultural learning into writing instruction allows students to express their identities more authentically and enhances critical thinking (Butković & Vidović, 2021; Amalia et al., 2021). Embedding visual media into instruction can also support creativity, clarify abstract ideas, and foster deeper engagement (Chicho & Zrary, 2022; Pramilaga et al., 2023; Husna, 2022). Studies also show that visual and multimedia-based learning enhances vocabulary retention, lowers writing anxiety, and improves organization (Katemba, 2022; Sembiring, 2022; Rohaniyah & Mari, 2022). Mind-mapping and picture-based tools are especially effective in helping students scaffold their narratives (Arief & Wiratman, 2023; Winurati et al., 2022).

Writing is one of skills in English that include all the knowledge and abilities related to expressing ideas through the written words (Muthoharoh, 2021). Moreover, writing is an activity usually undertaken to strengthen students' proficiency, especially in English writing. Globally, writing skills are not just a necessity but can also become a valuable asset in various fields (Espinoza-Celi & Pintado, 2020) both academically and professionally. In an era of increasingly dominant cross-cultural communication, enhancing English writing can open doors to even broader opportunities. Typically, when students are asked to create short stories in English, they often feel confused and struggle with what to write, leading to frequent errors in writing. Carey (2012) says writing short stories helps him take new risks, likening the process to building a shed – a small, self-contained project one can take pride in. It is an art conveyed in the form of brief narratives which aims to develop characters, conflicts, and themes within limited space (Takacs, 2020). In addition, it often employs narrative techniques such as using climaxes, contrasts, and surprises to maintain reader interest and evoke strong emotions briefly and concisely (Stein, 2023). Additionally, through writing short stories, writers can improve their English language skills, including grammar, vocabulary, and writing style (Burroway et al., 2019). By mastering the skill of short story writing and understanding its significance, writers can create engaging, meaningful, and memorable works in English.

It is also supported by the result of preliminary study conducted by researchers in the seventh grade at MTs Tarbiatul Islamiah. It was found that the practicing of writing traditional instruction is still existed, especially in the short stories writing material. The teacher focused on grammar, structure, and coherence. As a result, students are confused about expressing their ideas because of their lack of vocabulary mastery in English. This triggers students' statements that they are confused about where to start writing. Some students have ideas but feel uninspired, while others are afraid of making mistakes in a foreign language. There is a noticeable lack of attention from students in Indonesian language lessons on short story writing, and one of the causes is that students cannot string words together in writing, especially in short story writing. The lessons rely too much on theory, there is a lack of teaching materials or media, which makes students less motivated and uninterested in writing short stories (Appleman, 2023). If this continues, learning to write short stories in English will be less appealing for students.

In Indonesia, students come from various backgrounds making their learning and text interpretation affected by their personal background. This context should be considered when teaching writing as the integration of cultural influences in writing allows them to express their identities and experiences authentically, fostering self-confidence and individuality. In learning process, students' culture serves as a vital resource for evaluating content critically and personally (Butković & Vidović, 2021) allowing them interpret ideas based on their cultural experiences. This makes emphasizing role of cultural influences in shaping writing proficiency as an issue that should be addressed when teaching writing.

To overcome this issue, teachers can integrate interculturalism into writing instruction that encourages students to engage with diverse texts. Teachers can also encourage students to collaborate with peers, bringing about their cultural backgrounds in the discussions (Amalia et al., 2021). By embedding cultural diversity into the writing process, students can develop a deeper understanding of different ideas and enhance their critical thinking skills while expressing ideas coherently. As Buzan (2006) showed that the use of mind mapping can enhance students' creativity and writing skills by helping them organize ideas and story structure more effectively.

Additionally, to boosts students writing skills, research by Al-Jarf (2009) found that the use of using media in teaching English can increase students' active participation, understanding of story structure, developing critical and creative thinking skills, enhancing idea organization skills, facilitating writing, increasing active participation, reducing writing anxiety, facilitating collaborative learning, boosting motivation and interest and helping retain information. Most common problem found in teaching writing is students find it difficult to start writing and to organize their ideas (Anggrayani et al., 2015; Abbas, 2018). To address this, visual media helps to make abstract or complex concepts more tangible (Chicho & Zrary, 2022), helping students to organize their ideas better before starting to write.

However, despite the growing attention to multimodal and intercultural approaches, few empirical studies explore the combined use of intercultural learning and visual media to improve short story writing in lower secondary EFL contexts in Indonesia. Most research focuses on either writing strategies, media effects, or cultural awareness separately. This presents a research gap where contextually designed, integrative instructional strategies are still lacking for seventh-grade EFL students. Therefore, this study is significant in investigating how the combined use of intercultural learning and visual media enhances students' short story writing skills in a multicultural Indonesian classroom. From those backgrounds, this study aims to prove the hypothesis of whether or not the intercultural learning and visual media could enhance students' writing short stories in seventh grade at MTs Tarbiatul Islamiah. Specifically, this study is aimed to answer the following research question: "How does the implementation of 7th-Grade Students' Short Story Writing through Intercultural Learning and Visual Media?".

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Importance of Vocabulary in Writing Skill

The vocabulary is essential for developing four language skills. It plays an important role in complex writing processes involving the coordination of many high and low-level cognitive skills (Wang, 2014). The more vocabulary students have, the more proficient they are in writing skills. This is due to the richness of the words they have, making it easier for them to express what they

want to express in written form. Furthermore, for reading skills, students are required to understand what they are reading. Deacon et al. (2024) stated that reading proficiency depends on high-quality lexical representations. The last one is speaking skills. Astika (2016) states that students who have less vocabulary knowledge will not be able to communicate with others effectively and cannot negotiate meaning in conversation. To properly negotiate meaning in interactions, students must understand the structure of the sentence and the vocabulary.

2.2 Intercultural Learning and Visual Media

Intercultural learning is known as the process of becoming aware of, comprehending, and appreciating various cultural viewpoints. Byram's (1997) proposed a model of Intercultural Communicative Competence, which places an emphasis on attitudes, knowledge, skills, and critical cultural awareness, is one of the main frameworks governing intercultural competency. Another intercultural practiced was also framed by Deardorff's (2006) Process Model, which emphasizes knowledge (cultural self-awareness), abilities (adaptability, interpersonal communication), and attitudes (respect, openness). Both studies emphasize on willingness to engage with different cultural perspectives without bias, understanding cultural norms, values, and historical contexts, the ability to interpret cultural symbols, texts, and practices, the ability to engage in real-time cultural exchanges, and the ability to reflect on one's own culture and evaluate cultural differences critically.

In addition, the use of visual media significantly could impact intercultural learning by presenting cultural narratives, behaviors, and values in a compelling and memorable way. There were three key benefits according to Kress & Van Leeuwen (2006) included enhancing cultural awareness which allow students to engage with different cultural perspectives, facilitating critical thinking enable students to encourage learners to analyze and reflect on stereotypes, biases, and cultural assumptions, and improving engagement and motivation. Some previous studies on intercultural learning and visual media also showed significant benefit for students like having stronger reflective skills, helping students to express their cultural identity, understand other perspectives and encourage students to engage in real time discussion (Pegrum, et al., 2018; Chun, 2016; Barret et al., 2013).

3. Research Methodology

A quantitative study is employed to answer the research question as well as to prove the hypotheses of this study. In respectively, the research design, participants, instruments and the analysis techniques are described in the following.

3.1. Research Design

This study used a quantitative research type with a quasi-experimental design method of the Non-equivalent control group type. In this study, there are two non-randomly selected groups. Both groups are given a pretest to determine the initial activity steps (Dabiri & Pourhosein Gilakjani, 2019). Subsequently, the experimental group is given a treatment using visual media as a strategy to improve writing skills, while the control group is given a treatment without using visual media. The research design can be seen in Table 1.

Table: 1 Research Design

Treatment	Cluster	Group
Using Intercultural learning and visual media	1, 2	Experimental
Traditional Writing Instruction	3, 4	Control

Remarks:

1: Short story writing skills in the experimental class before treatment

2: Short story writing skills in the experimental class after using visual media

3: Short story writing skills in the control class before treatment

4: Short story writing skills in the control class without using visual media X: Using visual media in teaching short story writing in the classroom

3.2. Participants of the Study

The total number of students in this study is 60 students. 30 students as experimental group was class VII A and 30 students as control group was class VII B. Those students were selected as sample based on the head master and class teacher advice.

3.3. Instruments

The instruments used in this study were writing test and observation sheets to enhance English writing skills. Tests are conducted using various topics and employing visual media. Prior to implementation, this assessment was validated by experts. The test assessments include vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, and writing mechanics (Ferris, D.R. 2012). As it can be described in Table 2.

Table: 2 Short Story Writing Skills Assessment

No	Aspect	Criteria
1	Vocabulary	Words used accurately to express ideas and emotions
2	Grammar	Clarity of the story in writing a short story
3	Cohesion	Clear structure with interrelated elements for a smooth storyline
4	Writing Mechanics	Grammar, tense choice, sentence structure, punctuation, and style that affects the clarity and effectiveness of writing

3.4. Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data will be analyzed. The first analysis involves evaluating short story writing using visual media in both the experimental, and control groups. Data is presented by describing the average student scores, from the highest to the lowest. The second analysis involves processing the data.

4. Results

The research findings of students' writing short stories is described in three sub categories; writing short stories pretest and posttest, the result of normality test and the independence sample test. Each categories displayed the result of both groups; experimental and control group. The results of writing short stories test demonstrated that the post-test scores have increased. Meanwhile the normality and independence sample test can all contribute to higher post-test results. Those categories are described respectively.

4.1. Results of Writing Short Stories Test

The writing short stories were taken in 6 weeks including 4 meetings that was held four treatments in both group (Experimental and Control group), and 2 meeting for conducting pretest and posttest. The experimental group was taken writing short stories through intercultural learning and visual media, while the control group took the writing short stories without intercultural learning and visual media. Table 3 is shown the results of writing short stories test from both groups.

Table: 3 Test Results for Writing Short Stories in English Using Media for Students

Statistic	Control group		Experiment Group	
	Pretest	Posttest	pretest	Posttest
N	30	30	30	30
Minimum	55	70	56	70
Maximum	83	88	88	95
Mean	67.27	77.10	76.23	85.33
Std.devination		6.593	81.62	6.593

Table 3 shows a significant improvement in shortp story writing among students in the experimental group after using visual media compared to the control group. The increase in minimum and maximum scores is evident after the introduction of visual media. The control group scored a minimum of 56 and a maximum of 88 on the pretest, which increased to a minimum of 70 and a maximum of 95 on the posttest. In comparison, the experimental group scored a minimum of 55 and a maximum of 83 on the pretest, which increased to a minimum of 70 and a maximum of 88 on the posttest.

4.2. Results of Normality Test for Pretest Data of Experimental Group and the Control Group

Normality test for pretest data of experimental group and the control group was done through SPSS system. The data were categorized based on Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a] and Shapiro-Wilk. Table 4 is shown the result of pretest and post-test for both groups.

Table: 4 The Results of The Normality Test for Pretest Data of the Experimental Group and Control Goup

		Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Writing short stories in English using visual media	Pre-Test Experiment	.119	30	.200[*]	.943	30	.113
	Post-test experiment	.125	30	.200[*]	.920	30	.026
	Pre-test control	.160	30	.050	.932	30	.056
	Post-test control	.190	30	.007	.931	30	.054
	Pre-Test Experiment	.119	30	.200[*]	.943	30	.113

Table 4 shows a significant improvement in students' short story writing skills in the experimental group through the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, with a value of 0.119 in the experimental pre-test and the Shapiro-Wilk test, with a value of 0.113. Thus, sig 0.119 > 0.05 and sig 0.113 > 0.05 indicate that the data on students' skill scores are normal. Meanwhile, the significant value for the control group is 0.160 > 0.05 and sig 0.050, indicating that using visual media contributes to normal distribution. The short story writing skills in English using media in the class contribute to normal distribution overall.

The analysis of using media in writing short stories in English and not using media shows a relative difference. The average score for short story writing skills in English using media is 90.30, and the score for short story writing skills in English without using media is 88.25. This proves that writing short stories in English is better after using media. However, this difference must be tested to see if it is statistically significant. The results of the improvement in short story writing skills can be seen in Table 5.

Table: 5 Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Significance	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Writing short stories using visual media	Equal variances assumed	2.395	.127	-5.354	58	<.001	<.001	-9.733	1.818	-13.373
	Equal variances not assumed			-5.354	52.247	<.001	<.001	-9.733	1.818	-13.381

Based on Table 5, the calculated t-value is 5.354 and the significance value is 0.001. Since sig=0.001<0.05, it means that Ho (null hypothesis) is rejected and H1 (alternative hypothesis) is accepted. This indicates that there is a significant difference in short story writing scores between the group that used visual media and the group that wrote short stories without using visual media. Therefore, using visual media for writing short stories in English has a significant effect on improving students' English short story writing skills.

5. Discussion

This study tested the hypothesis that integrating visual media can improve writing skills among students composing short stories. The research measured vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, and writing mechanics (Ferris, 2012). The results indicate that using visual media enhances English short story writing, as evidenced by the increased scores of the experimental group in the post-test. Previous studies also support the positive impact of visual media on improving English writing skills. For instance, Putri & Aminatun (2021) found that using media reduces students' boredom in writing short stories, making learning activities more engaging. This aligns with findings from Katemba (2022), who noted that multimedia enhances vocabulary mastery, and Sembiring (2022), who

confirmed improved narrative writing through animated visuals. One of the most challenging aspects of writing is knowing what to write and how to start. Visual media aids students in visualizing concepts, making abstract ideas clearer and easier to understand as they prepare to write. By using visual media, students can recall details and relationships between ideas with greater accuracy, which supports more organized writing. Engaging with visual media allows students to develop a richer and more nuanced understanding of the subject, thereby enhancing the depth and authenticity of their writing (Pramilaga et al., 2023).

This study's findings are consistent with Ahmed & Myhill (2016), who emphasized that cultural familiarity with visual content leads to more expressive narratives. Moreover, the role of cultural context in EFL writing cannot be overstated. Chen (2022) highlights that "cultural narratives presented through visual media can deepen students' understanding of diverse perspectives, enriching their writing." This is particularly relevant in multicultural classrooms, where students' backgrounds influence their writing. Integrating students' culture makes them more interested in the writing process, as they can draw on their personal experiences to generate ideas. This leads to richer, more personalized learning experiences (Seraphin, 2014). When teaching writing, teachers must provide guidance to help students develop their thinking. Choosing effective statements to "guide students' thinking and promote inquiry" (Seraphin, 2014) can be challenging, especially when students view writing as a daunting task. Even when using media, teachers must ask questions that help students clarify their understanding. In this study, the teachers' guidance while presenting visual media helped students understand the purpose of the activity and the expected outcomes. This approach fosters a better sense of their learning process, leading to improved learning outcomes. The findings of this study confirmed a significant improvement in vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, and writing mechanics for the experimental group. This supports the view that visual stimuli enhance students' understanding and organization of ideas (Chicho & Zrary, 2022; Pramilaga et al., 2023). Previous studies also corroborate these findings. Draha (2020) emphasized that video media assists in visualizing abstract ideas in writing. Similarly, Katemba (2022) found that multimedia enhances vocabulary mastery, while Sembiring (2022) confirmed improved narrative writing through animated visuals.

Furthermore, students' cultural familiarity with the visual content leads to more expressive and authentic narratives (Ahmed & Myhill, 2016). The integration of intercultural content makes writing more engaging and personally meaningful, fostering students' confidence and expression of identity (Butković & Vidović, 2021; Seraphin, 2014). As Chun (2016) noted, intercultural competence is strengthened through real-time cultural exchanges and reflection, which visual media can facilitate. Compared to previous studies, this research is novel in combining visual media and intercultural pedagogy tailored to young EFL learners in a local Indonesian context. While Barrett et al. (2013) and Byram (1997) discuss intercultural competence broadly, this study contextualizes it within writing pedagogy, demonstrating its practical value in developing both language skills and critical awareness.

Pedagogically, this approach has several implications: visual media can act as a bridge between abstract thought and written expression; culturally responsive teaching fosters student engagement, creativity, and confidence; and teacher-guided visual activities promote purposeful learning, clearer expectations, and better outcomes. Thus, the integration of intercultural learning and visual media provides a meaningful, multimodal, and student-centered framework for enhancing short story writing among EFL learners in Indonesian classrooms. However, this study

faced challenges due to students' lack of interest in short story writing activities. Additionally, the researcher suggests that teachers should use visual media to enhance short story writing in Bahasa Indonesia lessons. This study had several limitations in terms of technical aspects and time constraints. Future researchers are advised to explore the use of media to improve short story writing for other student skills.

6. Conclusion

Intercultural learning and visual media could enhance students' writing short stories. This study reflected the experimental group within two categories; moderate and high category in all the aspects of development such as vocabulary, grammar, and writing mechanics. On the contrary, the control group received a high category in only one aspect, which is development, while the other aspects were only in the moderate category. Based on the analysis, writing short stories using visual media in student learning helps them generate ideas and stimulates the discovery of new ideas for writing short stories. There is a clear difference between groups using media and without using media. In a brief, using visual media images could enhance the students' writing of English short stories in 7th grade at MTs Tarbiatul Islamiah.

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