

Authentic Visual Media and Descriptive Writing Development in EFL Classrooms: Evidence from a Classroom-Based Study

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ABSTRACT

Descriptive writing is a fundamental component of EFL learning at the junior secondary level, yet many students experience persistent difficulties in generating ideas, applying appropriate vocabulary, and organizing text coherently. This study examines the function of authentic visual media, specifically tourism brochures, in improving students' descriptive writing skills. The research aimed to investigate how the integration of tourism brochures supports idea development, vocabulary enrichment, and understanding of descriptive text structure. Employing a Classroom Action Research design, the study was conducted with 16 eighth-grade students at SMP Da'wah Pekanbaru. Data were collected through writing tests, classroom observations, field notes, and interviews, and analyzed using mean score comparison and descriptive qualitative analysis. The findings reveal a substantial improvement in students' writing performance, with mean scores increasing from 58.71 to 79.06 after the instructional intervention. Qualitative evidence further indicates enhanced student engagement, clearer genre awareness, and more elaborated descriptions. These results suggest that tourism brochures effectively reduce cognitive load and provide meaningful contextual support for descriptive writing. In conclusion, authentic visual media can serve as an effective pedagogical strategy for enhancing EFL students' descriptive writing competence. It is recommended that teachers integrate similar authentic materials and that future studies explore broader contexts and long-term effects.

Kata Kunci: Authentic Materials; Descriptive Writing; EFL Learners; Tourism Brochures; Visual Media

ABSTRAK

Menulis deskriptif adalah komponen mendasar dari pembelajaran EFL di tingkat sekolah menengah pertama, namun banyak siswa mengalami kesulitan yang terus-menerus dalam menghasilkan ide, menggunakan kosakata yang tepat, dan mengatur teks secara koheren. Penelitian ini meneliti fungsi media visual otentik, khususnya brosur pariwisata, dalam meningkatkan kemampuan menulis

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deskriptif siswa. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki bagaimana integrasi brosur pariwisata mendukung pengembangan ide, pengayaan kosakata, dan pemahaman struktur teks deskriptif. Dengan menggunakan desain Penelitian Tindakan Kelas, penelitian ini dilakukan dengan 16 siswa kelas delapan di SMP Da'wah Pekanbaru. Data dikumpulkan melalui tes menulis, observasi kelas, catatan lapangan, dan wawancara, dan dianalisis dengan menggunakan perbandingan nilai rata-rata dan analisis kualitatif deskriptif. Temuan menunjukkan adanya peningkatan substansial dalam kinerja menulis siswa, dengan nilai rata-rata meningkat dari 58,71 menjadi 79,06 setelah intervensi pembelajaran. Bukti kualitatif lebih lanjut menunjukkan peningkatan keterlibatan siswa, kesadaran genre yang lebih jelas, dan deskripsi yang lebih terperinci. Hasil ini menunjukkan bahwa brosur pariwisata secara efektif mengurangi beban kognitif dan memberikan dukungan kontekstual yang berarti untuk penulisan deskriptif. Kesimpulannya, media visual otentik dapat berfungsi sebagai strategi pedagogis yang efektif untuk meningkatkan kompetensi menulis deskriptif siswa EFL. Disarankan agar para guru mengintegrasikan materi otentik yang serupa dan penelitian di masa depan mengeksplorasi konteks yang lebih luas dan efek jangka panjang.

Kata Kunci: Materi Otentik; Penulisan Deskriptif; Pembelajaran EFL; Brosur Pariwisata; Media Visual

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INTRODUCTION

Writing competence occupies a central position in English language learning at the junior secondary level because it represents the most complex form of language production. Unlike receptive skills, writing requires learners to actively construct meaning by integrating vocabulary, grammatical knowledge, and discourse conventions into a coherent and purposeful text. In the context of descriptive text, students are expected not only to label objects or places but also to organize ideas logically, select precise lexical items, and present information in accordance with recognized textual structures. Previous studies have emphasized that writing functions as a medium through which learners consolidate linguistic input into structured output, making it a critical indicator of overall language proficiency (Hyland, 2021).

From a cognitive perspective, descriptive writing involves multiple mental processes that operate simultaneously. Learners must generate ideas, retrieve relevant vocabulary, and manage syntactic accuracy while maintaining coherence across sentences and paragraphs. Flower and Hayes' cognitive process theory of writing explains that writing is a recursive activity in which planning, translating ideas into language, and revising occur interactively rather than linearly. For junior secondary students, this cognitive demand often exceeds their current linguistic capacity, resulting in fragmented descriptions, repetitive vocabulary use, and weak text organization. Empirical research consistently reports that novice EFL writers struggle to transform mental representations into well-structured descriptive texts without adequate instructional support (Hsu et al., 2025).

In addition to linguistic and cognitive dimensions, discourse organization plays a decisive role in the quality of descriptive writing. Descriptive texts require students to understand and apply genre-specific conventions, including identification, detailed description, and the use of appropriate adjectives and relational processes. Genre-based pedagogy highlights that explicit exposure to text models and structural patterns significantly improves students' ability to produce coherent writing (Hyland, 2015). However, at the junior secondary level, many learners demonstrate limited awareness of these conventions, which leads to poorly sequenced ideas and unclear descriptions. This condition reinforces the argument that writing competence cannot develop naturally but must be systematically

taught through guided practice and meaningful input.

In other hand, classroom-based observations and preliminary assessments conducted at SMP Da'wah Pekanbaru indicate that students' low achievement in writing descriptive texts is not merely the result of limited practice, but rather reflects deeper cognitive and linguistic constraints. Empirical evidence from students' written outputs shows recurring difficulties in generating relevant and coherent ideas, particularly when students are required to describe objects, places, or people in a structured manner. This finding is consistent with Flower and Hayes' cognitive process theory of writing, which emphasizes that idea generation and planning are central components of effective writing. When learners lack sufficient support at the pre-writing stage, their texts tend to be fragmented, repetitive, and lacking in descriptive depth.

In addition to idea generation, limited lexical resources emerged as a significant barrier to students' descriptive writing performance. Vocabulary inadequacy restricted students' ability to elaborate descriptions and led to overreliance on basic and repetitive words, which weakened textual quality and clarity. Alhassan (2023) argues that vocabulary knowledge plays a decisive role in enabling learners to express meaning accurately and flexibly in written communication. The present classroom findings reinforce this perspective, as students with restricted vocabulary were unable to transform their conceptual ideas into linguistically rich descriptions, resulting in simplistic and underdeveloped texts.

Another critical factor contributing to students' low writing achievement is their insufficient understanding of the generic structure of descriptive texts. Many students demonstrated uncertainty in organizing identification and description components coherently, indicating weak genre awareness. According to genre-based pedagogy proposed by Nagao (2019), explicit knowledge of text structure is essential for guiding learners in producing purpose-driven and logically organized writing. The lack of such structural awareness among students at SMP Da'wah Pekanbaru further compounded their writing difficulties, as ideas and vocabulary, even when present, were not systematically arranged.

Collectively, these challenges point to a misalignment between existing instructional practices and students' cognitive needs in learning to write descriptive texts. Traditional text-based instruction that relies heavily on verbal explanation and written examples appears insufficient to address learners' difficulties in idea construction, vocabulary expansion, and text organization. Mayer's multimedia learning theory (2020) asserts that learners benefit more effectively when verbal information is supported by visual representations that reduce cognitive load and enhance comprehension. Within this context, the findings suggest an urgent need for instructional approaches that integrate visual and contextual support to facilitate meaningful writing development.

Therefore, addressing students' descriptive writing problems requires pedagogical strategies that move beyond conventional methods and actively engage learners in the writing process. Instructional media that provide concrete, familiar, and visually rich input can bridge the gap between abstract linguistic concepts and students' experiential knowledge (Maghfiroh & Indriastuti, 2021). By aligning teaching practices with established theories of cognitive processing, genre awareness, and vocabulary development, writing instruction can become more responsive to learners' needs and more effective in improving descriptive writing outcomes in junior secondary EFL classrooms.

In response to persistent pedagogical challenges in teaching descriptive writing, the integration of tourism brochures is proposed as an authentic and visually supported instructional medium capable of bridging the gap between abstract language concepts and

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students' concrete experiences. Authentic materials have long been recognized as effective tools in language learning because they expose learners to real-world language use and meaningful contexts (Meşe & Sevilen, 2021). Tourism brochures, in particular, combine concise descriptive texts with rich visual representations of places, objects, and cultural elements, allowing learners to contextualize vocabulary and ideas more naturally. This contextualization is crucial in descriptive writing, where students are required to translate sensory impressions into coherent written discourse. By providing visual prompts and real-life references, tourism brochures reduce cognitive load during idea generation and enable students to focus more effectively on organizing content and applying appropriate linguistic features.

From a cognitive perspective, visual-supported media such as brochures facilitate dual coding processes, where verbal and visual information are processed simultaneously, leading to better comprehension and retention (Petersen et al., 2023). In the context of descriptive text writing, this dual input supports learners in identifying salient attributes of objects or places, selecting relevant vocabulary, and constructing detailed descriptions. Empirical studies have shown that students exposed to visual media demonstrate improved ability to elaborate ideas and maintain textual coherence in writing tasks (Mayer, 2020). Therefore, the use of tourism brochures does not merely function as supplementary material but serves as an instructional scaffold that guides learners through the complex processes of observing, conceptualizing, and articulating descriptive content.

The pedagogical rationale for employing tourism brochures is also grounded in communicative language teaching and media-based learning theories, which emphasize meaningful interaction with language and learner engagement. Communicative approaches argue that language acquisition is optimized when learners actively use language for authentic purposes rather than passively memorizing forms (Suhandoko et al., 2025). Tourism brochures encourage such active engagement by prompting students to interpret information, discuss visual elements, and reconstruct meanings through writing. This process aligns with social constructivist views, where knowledge is constructed through interaction with materials and peers (Vygotsky, 1978). As students analyze brochures collaboratively, they negotiate meaning, refine their understanding of descriptive structures, and internalize genre-specific conventions.

Within a classroom action research framework, this study systematically examines the extent to which tourism brochures can enhance students' descriptive writing skills while simultaneously identifying instructional factors that contribute to observed improvements. Classroom action research is particularly suitable for this purpose because it allows teachers to implement interventions, observe their impact, and refine instructional strategies based on empirical classroom evidence (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2006). Through iterative cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection, the use of tourism brochures can be evaluated not only in terms of learning outcomes but also in relation to student motivation, participation, and comprehension of descriptive text conventions. Consequently, this approach ensures that the instructional innovation is theoretically grounded, empirically tested, and pedagogically relevant to real classroom contexts, especially in EFL junior secondary education.

METHODS

Research design

This study adopted Classroom Action Research (CAR) as the primary research design to address instructional challenges in teaching descriptive writing and to improve pedagogical practices through systematic reflection. CAR is widely recognized as an empirical

and cyclical research approach that enables teachers to identify classroom problems, implement targeted actions, observe learning processes, and reflect on instructional outcomes in authentic educational contexts (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2006). By emphasizing continuous improvement rather than mere measurement, CAR aligns with the principles of reflective practice and learner-centered instruction. Previous studies have demonstrated that CAR is particularly effective in language classrooms, as it allows researchers to adapt instructional strategies in response to students' real-time learning needs and classroom dynamics (Pourdavood & Yan, 2020). In the context of this study, CAR provided a structured framework to evaluate the effectiveness of tourism brochures as instructional media while simultaneously enhancing the quality of writing instruction in a junior high school EFL setting.

Research site and participants

The research was conducted at SMP Da'wah Pekanbaru, a junior secondary school where English is taught as a foreign language and writing skills remain a persistent learning challenge. The participants consisted of 16 Grade VIII students with heterogeneous writing abilities, representing both male and female learners. This composition reflects the natural diversity of proficiency levels typically found in EFL classrooms, thereby strengthening the ecological validity of the study. Selecting a relatively small and intact class is consistent with the methodological characteristics of Classroom Action Research, which prioritizes depth of analysis over broad generalization (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2006). The varied writing proficiency among participants allowed the researcher to observe differential learning responses to the instructional intervention and to assess how tourism brochures supported students with diverse linguistic and cognitive backgrounds.

Data collection and analysis

To ensure methodological rigor and empirical credibility, data were collected through a combination of quantitative and qualitative instruments. Quantitative data were obtained from writing tests administered before and after the instructional cycle to measure students' improvement in descriptive writing performance. These scores were analyzed using mean score comparison to identify measurable learning gains. Qualitative data were gathered through classroom observation checklists, field notes, and semi-structured interviews, which provided in-depth insights into students' engagement, learning behaviors, and responses to the instructional media. The integration of multiple data sources reflects the principle of methodological triangulation, which enhances the validity and trustworthiness of educational research findings (Creswell & Clark, 2017). Data analysis involved not only statistical examination of learning outcomes but also descriptive interpretation of classroom interactions, allowing the study to capture both the product and process of writing development. This mixed analytical approach enabled a comprehensive understanding of how tourism brochures influenced students' writing skills within the instructional context.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

As part of a systematic evaluation of instructional effectiveness in EFL writing classrooms, the quantitative evidence obtained from this classroom action research clearly indicates a significant improvement in students' descriptive writing performance after the implementation of tourism brochure-based instruction. Therefore, the students' scores is

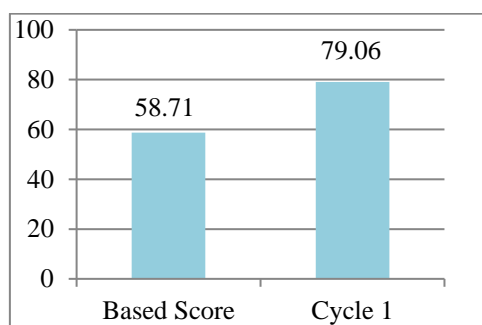
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displayed as follows:

Figure 1 The comparison of Students' Score



The above figure displays the mean score increased markedly from 58.71 in the baseline assessment to 79.06 at the end of the first cycle, reflecting a substantial gain in students' writing competence. This improvement suggests that the instructional intervention effectively addressed students' initial difficulties in generating ideas, selecting appropriate vocabulary, and organizing descriptive texts. From an empirical perspective, such score progression demonstrates that contextualized and visually supported learning media can enhance cognitive processing in writing tasks, as learners are provided with concrete references that reduce abstract thinking demands (Meşe & Sevilen, 2021).

In relation to institutional learning standards, the post-treatment mean score surpassed the school's minimum mastery criterion, which functions as a formal indicator of successful learning achievement. Exceeding this benchmark signifies not only statistical improvement but also pedagogical effectiveness within the school curriculum framework. This outcome supports the assumption that instructional strategies grounded in authentic materials are capable of aligning classroom practice with expected competency standards. In line with communicative language teaching principles, exposure to meaningful and contextually rich input facilitates deeper language internalization and promotes higher achievement levels among EFL learners (Ar, 2015). Consequently, meeting and exceeding the mastery criterion confirms the instructional value of tourism brochures in teaching descriptive writing at the junior secondary level.

Beyond measurable score gains, classroom-based qualitative evidence provides important insight into how the learning process evolved during the intervention. Observations, field notes, and interview data consistently revealed increased student engagement, more active participation in group discussions, and a clearer ability to identify the generic structure of descriptive texts. Students showed greater confidence in distinguishing key components such as identification and description, which are fundamental to effective descriptive writing. These findings resonate with constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes that knowledge is constructed through active interaction with learning materials and social collaboration (Vygotsky, 1978). The use of tourism brochures fostered meaningful peer interaction and scaffolded learning, thereby strengthening both cognitive understanding and collaborative writing practices.

Taken together, the integration of quantitative outcomes and qualitative classroom evidence confirms that tourism brochure-based instruction produces both academic and pedagogical benefits in EFL writing classrooms. The combination of authentic visual input, familiar content, and collaborative learning activities created a supportive environment that enhanced student motivation and structured writing development. This finding is consistent with earlier research emphasizing the effectiveness of authentic and visually rich media in improving writing skills among EFL learners (Ariyanto et al., 2018). Therefore, the present

study provides robust empirical support for the use of tourism brochures as an effective instructional medium for improving descriptive writing skills at the junior high school level.

Discussion

Writing competence occupies a central position in English language education at the junior secondary level because it represents the convergence of linguistic mastery, cognitive processing, and discourse organization within a single productive skill. In the context of descriptive text writing, students are expected not only to apply grammatical and lexical knowledge accurately but also to organize ideas logically and present detailed representations of objects, places, or people in a coherent written form. From a cognitive perspective, writing involves complex mental operations such as planning, translating ideas into language, and revising output, which require sustained practice and appropriate instructional support. Scholars in second language acquisition emphasize that writing development is closely linked to learners' ability to transform abstract ideas into structured discourse, making descriptive writing an essential foundation for broader academic literacy at the secondary school level (Hyland, 2021).

Empirical classroom evidence from SMP Da'wah Pekanbaru demonstrates that students' low achievement in descriptive writing is not merely a result of limited language exposure but is strongly associated with specific learning barriers. Observational data and preliminary assessments reveal that many students struggle to generate relevant ideas, particularly when they are asked to describe unfamiliar topics without sufficient contextual support. This difficulty is compounded by restricted vocabulary knowledge, which limits students' ability to express descriptive details precisely and vividly. In addition, inadequate understanding of the generic structure of descriptive texts such as the distinction between identification and description further constrains students' writing performance. These findings are consistent with previous studies indicating that novice EFL writers often experience cognitive overload when they must simultaneously manage content development, language accuracy, and text organization (Widyastuti & Utami, 2018).

The persistence of these challenges highlights a misalignment between prevailing instructional practices and learners' cognitive and developmental needs. Traditional writing instruction that relies heavily on text-based explanation and isolated grammar exercises tends to place excessive demands on learners' abstract thinking, particularly at the junior secondary level where students still require concrete learning scaffolds. Research in pedagogy and educational psychology suggests that meaningful writing development is more likely to occur when instructional input is contextualized, multimodal, and closely connected to learners' real-world experiences (Mayer, 2020). Therefore, the limitations observed in descriptive writing instruction at SMP Da'wah Pekanbaru indicate that conventional approaches alone are insufficient to foster effective writing competence, underscoring the need for instructional innovations that align with students' cognitive processes and learning characteristics.

Consequently, instructional media that bridge linguistic input and real-world contexts become essential to enhance descriptive writing performance. Within this pedagogical framework, tourism brochures emerge as an authentic and visually supported learning medium capable of addressing these instructional limitations. Tourism brochures present real-life depictions of places, landmarks, and cultural elements through images and concise descriptive language, enabling learners to connect textual features with visual representations. Grounded in dual coding theory, which posits that verbal and visual

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information are processed through interconnected cognitive systems (Panagiotidis, 2018), the integration of brochures facilitates deeper comprehension and more effective retrieval of descriptive vocabulary. This multimodal exposure allows students to observe how descriptive language functions in authentic contexts rather than as isolated linguistic forms.

Moreover, tourism brochures play a strategic role in stimulating students' idea generation during the writing process. Visual stimuli provided by brochures activate learners' prior knowledge and experiences, which is a core principle of schema theory (Carrell, 1981). When students are exposed to familiar or interesting tourist destinations, they are more capable of generating relevant details, organizing ideas logically, and sustaining coherence within their descriptive texts. Empirical studies in EFL writing instruction have consistently shown that visual-based prompts significantly improve students' ability to elaborate content and maintain thematic focus (Syahdan & Lusandi, 2018).

In addition to enhancing idea development, tourism brochures support students' understanding of descriptive text conventions, particularly generic structure and language features. By analyzing brochure texts, learners are implicitly exposed to patterns of identification and description, adjective usage, and spatial organization commonly found in descriptive genres. This aligns with genre-based pedagogy, which emphasizes learning through model texts and guided analysis to develop genre awareness (Zhang & Zhang, 2021). Through systematic exposure to brochure content, students can internalize structural patterns and apply them more accurately in their own writing.

From a practical instructional standpoint, the use of tourism brochures also contributes to increased learner engagement and motivation. Authentic materials are known to enhance students' affective involvement by making learning tasks more meaningful and relevant (Sumargono et al., 2024). When students perceive writing activities as connected to real-world communication, they demonstrate greater participation and persistence during the learning process. Therefore, the integration of tourism brochures not only strengthens cognitive aspects of descriptive writing but also fosters a supportive learning environment conducive to sustained writing development.

Collectively, grounded in communicative language teaching theory, this study departs from the assumption that writing competence develops most effectively when learners are engaged in meaningful communication rather than isolated linguistic drills. Communicative approaches emphasize the use of authentic language input and purposeful tasks that mirror real-world communication, allowing learners to construct meaning through interaction and context (Yasuda, 2023). In the context of descriptive writing, this perspective underscores the importance of providing learners with concrete referents that can stimulate ideas and support textual coherence. Tourism brochures, as authentic materials designed for real communicative purposes, align closely with this theoretical orientation by presenting language in a functional, contextualized, and audience-oriented manner.

Within this theoretical framework, the present study examines the extent to which tourism brochures enhance students' descriptive writing skills by embedding instruction in authentic and visually supported contexts. Rather than focusing solely on final writing products, the study adopts a classroom action research approach that emphasizes reflective practice, iterative improvement, and context-sensitive problem solving (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2006). This approach allows instructional interventions to be continuously refined based on observed classroom realities, ensuring that pedagogical decisions respond directly to learners' needs. As such, the effectiveness of tourism brochures is evaluated not only through measurable gains in writing scores but also through changes in student engagement, participation, and understanding of descriptive text structures.

Overall, by synthesizing communicative language teaching principles, media-based learning theory, and classroom action research methodology, this study provides an empirically grounded examination of tourism brochures as an instructional medium for descriptive writing. The integration of established theories and previous empirical findings strengthens the argument that authentic visual media can serve as an effective pedagogical solution to persistent challenges in EFL writing classrooms, particularly at the junior secondary level.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTION

The findings of this study empirically confirm that the integration of tourism brochures into English writing instruction is effective in improving junior secondary students' descriptive writing skills. The use of tourism brochures provides learners with concrete visual and contextual stimuli that support idea generation, vocabulary enrichment, and the accurate application of descriptive text structures. From a cognitive perspective, such authentic materials reduce learners' abstract processing load by presenting real-world objects, places, and situations that are familiar and meaningful. As a result, students are better able to transform observations into coherent written descriptions, which is reflected in the significant improvement of their writing performance after the instructional intervention. Furthermore, this study demonstrates that authentic media can function as an instructional bridge between linguistic theory and classroom practice. Tourism brochures integrate visual, textual, and cultural elements, enabling students to connect language forms with real-life contexts.

Despite these positive outcomes, future research is recommended to extend the scope and depth of the findings. Subsequent studies may involve larger and more diverse student populations to enhance the generalizability of the results across different educational contexts. In addition, comparative research designs could be employed to examine the effectiveness of tourism brochures in relation to other authentic or digital media. Longitudinal studies are also suggested to investigate the long-term impact of authentic media on students' writing development, particularly in relation to higher-order writing skills such as coherence, critical description, and creativity. Such future investigations would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how authentic materials can be optimized to support writing instruction in EFL classrooms.

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