Visual Pedagogy: Students' Perception of Using Cartoons to Teach Descriptive Writing

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ABSTRACT

This study used a qualitative case study methodology to examine the use of cartoons in EFL classrooms. Through questionnaires, interviews, and observation, the data were gathered. Based on the students' perspectives, the results demonstrated that: (1) the teacher used cartoons effectively in the classroom; (2) the teacher believed that employing cartoons had the potential to foster a positive environment, motivating and engaging the students' intellect. ; (3) the teacher verified that the students thoroughly enjoyed the learning experience; and (4) The discovery revealed that a significant majority of students (80%) expressed a preference for learning to write descriptive text with the aid of cartoons. The key takeaway is that cartoons actively contribute to the teaching and learning process, enhancing ease and enjoyment and facilitating improved communication among students.

Keywords: cartoons, sociocultural theory constructivism, descriptive text, teaching writing

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INTRODUCTION

In secondary English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, students are anticipated to attain proficiency in four essential language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Among these, writing is considered a productive skill, along with speaking, and is crucial for students to develop. Proficiency in writing enables students to actively and practically engage in constructing sentences, forming paragraphs, and creating compositions.

Oshima (2007, p. 3) underscores that writing is a gradual and step-by-step process, indicating that commencing the act of translating thoughts into words triggers contemplation on what to convey and how to articulate it. This perspective aligns with Nunan's (1989) assertion, as cited in Fareed, Ashraf, & Bilal (2016), that writing is a highly cognitive activity demanding the learner's control over various factors, including academic background and personal interest.

Brown (2001) as cited in Mayza (2021) contribute to this understanding by stating that writing is a process through which students transform their knowledge into a written report, highlighting the intellectual effort involved. Acknowledging the complexity of writing, Harmer (2008) emphasizes that writing is a complex cognitive process demanding prolonged intellectual exertion over an extended duration. In essence, writing is not a simple task, and proficiency in it is not universally attained, as it demands significant intellectual engagement and effort.

Mastery of writing skills, particularly in the context of descriptive text writing, is essential for secondary students. This requirement aligns that descriptive text is a mandated text type for secondary schools in Indonesia (Saifudin, 2020). However, despite its importance, descriptive text is often considered the most challenging for students to comprehend, as noted by Rusmawan (2017). Consequently, teachers are advised to avoid monotonous teaching approaches and instead devise effective strategies that capture students' interest. Acting as facilitators, teachers should promote successful content learning while maintaining an enjoyable classroom atmosphere (Zainuddin, 2016).

Descriptive text, as a genre, serves to depict and elucidate the characteristics of an object, event, or person, encompassing their behavior and identity. According to Anderson and Anderson (2003:26), descriptive text involves detailing a specific person, place, or thing. Writers and individuals, in general, employ descriptive text to communicate information about a subject to a reader or listener (Knapp & Watkins, 2005). Essentially, descriptive text is focused on presenting information about a person, place, or group of objects without including personal opinions, as highlighted by Knapp and Watkins.

In the context of writing, students are not only tasked with conveying ideas but also with organizing these ideas and descriptions into a conventional graphic system, encompassing words, sentences, and proper structural elements. Effective communication in writing requires the

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mastery of these elements to ensure successful communication. Acknowledging this, it becomes crucial to enrich the course with the utilization of diverse instructional materials and techniques, including cartoons, songs, flashcards, and games. As noted by Arikan as cited in Ahmad (2019), these tools have the potential to spark the imagination and fantasy of young learners, thus enhancing the overall engagement in the learning process.

Among these instructional materials, this study specifically focuses on the utilization of cartoons. Cartoons, regarded as authentic materials, have demonstrated their effectiveness as tools in language learning, especially in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). They contribute to clarifying abstract concepts and adding humor to various topics. Keogh and Naylor (1996) assert that the incorporation of cartoons as an educational tool has an immediate impact in the classroom. Cartoons are recognized as facilitators in the second language learning process, leading to advancements such as a shift from negatively-worded to positively-worded statements and a transition from using single alternatives to multiple alternatives. Their role in enhancing language learning makes them a valuable resource for educators.

Similarly, Kayaoglu and Akbas (2011) conducted a study to examine the impact of cartoons on vocabulary. The research involved dividing students into two groups, control and experimental, and administering pre- and post-tests. The control group underwent traditional teaching methods, whereas the experimental group received instruction through cartoon movies.

Initially, the pre-test results indicated similar performance among the students. However, a significant difference surfaced in the post-test results, with the experimental group outperforming the control group. Utilization of cartoons demonstrated a positive influence on the improvement of post-test results, suggesting that cartoons have a beneficial impact on learning.

Numerous studies have highlighted the advantages experienced by students when exposed to the incorporation of cartoons in their classrooms. Van Wyk (2011) observed that cartoon sessions are highly interactive, offering student's opportunities to engage in discussions and share opinions with their peers. This heightened engagement contributes to the improvement and development of students' individual learning methods, understanding, and higher-order cognitive skills. Kroehnert (1999) affirms that tasks involving cartoons are highly beneficial for improving lateral thinking, creativity, and challenging preconceived stereotypes in society. Bahrani and Soltani (2011) further support these findings, stating that the use of cartoons in the classroom enhances students' understanding, attitudes, productivity, creativity, and motivation to learn. The collective evidence suggests that cartoons play a valuable role in positively influencing various aspects of the learning experience.

In a study conducted by Algilasi (2010) in Southern Hebron, the impact of cartoons on English learning was investigated. Sixty female and 64 male grade 5 students were instructed in two chapters from their syllabus. The experimental group received teaching using cartoons, while the control group

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was taught using traditional methods. The results indicated that, particularly in vocabulary learning, the students in the experimental group surpassed those in the control group. Similar studies by Arikan and Taraf (2010), Nosia Pranatha (2005), and Sun and Dong (2004) followed a comparable pattern, reporting outcomes consistent with the hypothesis of the study – that the use of cartoons has a supporting effect on language learning.

Based on these findings, the current paper aims to explore how cartoons, serving as a pedagogical material, can be seamlessly incorporated into the language classroom, specifically in teaching descriptive text writing to secondary students from a constructivist perspective. Constructivism, as an educational approach, not only facilitates learning but also enhances higher-order thinking skills. By fostering an environment that encourages students to link their previous experiences with new concepts within a social learning context, constructivism allows them to actively construct knowledge. The familiarity of cartoon content or animated pictures with daily life facilitates this process, as cartoons represent habitual experiences easily relatable to students.

Theoretical Framework of Constructivism

The Constructivist Approach is defined as a teaching and learning methodology based on the active involvement of students in problem-solving and critical thinking related to a learning activity that they perceive as relevant and engaging (Islam, 2021). Phillips (2000) delves into various constructivist traditions, with a particular focus on the theoretical frameworks of the two most prominent figures associated with the constructivist approach: 1) Personal constructivism associated with Jean Piaget; and 2) Social constructivism connected with Lev Vygotsky.

Piaget, considered the pioneer of constructivism, believes that humans may create knowledge and meaning by engaging with their own experiences and ideas. According to Piaget, when people encounter new experiences, they filter them via a mental structure process that matches their past information, viewpoints, or beliefs with the new notions (Phillips, 2000). This process of mental adaptation allows individuals to integrate new information into their existing cognitive frameworks, leading to the construction of knowledge through active engagement with the learning environment.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, as cited in Rice & Wilson (1999), places significant emphasis on the influence of children's cultural backgrounds on their mental development. According to Vygotsky, cultural and social perspectives play a crucial role in shaping the cognitive development of children. He introduced the concept of the zone of proximal development, which posits that at a specific stage of mental development; a child can solve and comprehend complex structures more effectively with help from teachers, friends, or parents than on their own (Rice & Wilson, 1999). Dewey (1997) further explains that Constructivism is rooted in the idea of constructing knowledge by connecting the learner's prior experiences with the knowledge acquired through social interaction.

Drawing from Piaget and Vygotsky's theories (1978), it is highlighted that cartoons enable learners to engage in social interaction, contributing to the cognitive process of language learning. This social interaction aspect aligns with the constructivist approach, emphasizing the importance of connecting prior experiences with new knowledge gained through interactions within a social context. In the context of language learning, cartoons provide a medium for social interaction that aids learners in constructing and assimilating language skills.

In an alternative explanation, the teacher's role involves encouraging students in the classroom to utilize cartoons as a means of expressing their ideas. Students are prompted to articulate themselves and write based on their prior knowledge or experiences, and collaborative efforts are encouraged until they collectively generate their own knowledge to be shared with others. Throughout the process, the instructor serves as a facilitator, enabling students to analyze critically, look back, articulate ideas, and learn on their own.

Relevant to the current study topic, numerous researchers have conducted studies on teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) through a media and constructive approach, particularly in the context of writing descriptive text. Researchers such as Sarah Zalloum (2016) and Nimer Abuzahra (2016) explored the use of animated cartoons as pedagogical materials in language classrooms from a constructivist perspective.

According to Sarah Zalloum (2016), employing cartoon films as learning materials in language classrooms with a constructivist perspective has considerable pedagogical benefits for second language teaching and learning. Teachers provide exercises that allow pupils to build knowledge from cartoon films in interactive circumstances, stimulating energetic participation and enhancing skills in knowledge discovery, irrespective of students' varying achievement levels. The application of a constructivist approach to animated cartoons as learning materials is shown to contribute to the development of students' language performance for various reasons.

Expanding upon Nimer's research, the utilization of animated cartoons as a source of authentic language input and an expressive form of language was identified to demand less cognitive processing for comprehension, rendering it suitable for students at various levels. Nimer argued that employing a constructivist strategy with cartoons as valuable learning materials in language classrooms contributes to the development of students' language performance. This technique fosters an interesting learning environment in which students are engaged and motivated to find knowledge on their own.

In another study by Willy and Huda (2017), the implementation of animation clips in teaching writing for second-grade students showed improvement in writing quality. The mean score of the post-test increased from 74 to 79, indicating enhanced writing skills. While animation clips were deemed appropriate for teaching writing, the study also highlighted some drawbacks, such as increased cost due to the need for electronic devices and potential challenges

with slow internet connections, technology experience, and programming expertise.

In contrast to the previous studies, the present researcher aims to investigate students' writing abilities based on constructivist perspectives, particularly in writing descriptive text through the use of cartoons. The study examines three research questions: (1) How does the teacher use cartoons to teach descriptive text writing? (2) What is the teacher's opinion of utilizing cartoons to teach descriptive text writing? (3) How do students react to the employment of cartoons in teaching descriptive text writing? These questions are intended to provide insights about the effectiveness and reception of cartoons as a pedagogical aid for improving writing abilities in a constructivist learning setting.

METHOD

This study adopted a qualitative case study approach, chosen for its ability to provide in-depth insights into teacher and student activities within the classroom. According to Duff (2007, p. 23), the case study method offers a cohesive character to the researched data by connecting various facts from a single case. To gather data, the researcher served as a participant observer and utilized several instruments, including interviews, field notes, and a questionnaire, as data collection techniques. This study included a teacher and 20 sixth-grade students from a particular secondary school. The study was conducted at one of Metro Lampung's secondary schools that use cartoons in the classroom. The qualitative case study design allowed for a comprehensive examination of the dynamics within the classroom setting and provided a nuanced

understanding of the impact of using cartoons in teaching descriptive text writing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Implementing Cartoons in teaching writing descriptive text

The implementation of using cartoons in teaching writing descriptive text proves to be significantly impactful in capturing students' interest, as indicated by field notes derived from the observation of 20 participating students. Almost all students exhibited increased focus whenever the teacher introduced a cartoon into the lesson. They were observed actively trying to organize their ideas, responding to instructions from their teacher based on their individual understandings. To obtain a thorough understanding of the teacher's approach in implementing cartoons for teaching descriptive text writing, observations were carried out three times a week to ensure the accuracy of the data. The observations were carried out during instances when the teacher utilized cartoons in the teaching process.

The observations unveiled several crucial aspects spanning from the initial to the final session of class observation. In the initial observation, the use of cartoons aimed to facilitate students in the learning process. Many students demonstrated enthusiasm in participating in learning activities, as they enjoyed seeing images accompanied by interesting bubble text. The teacher actively engaged the students, encouraging them to read disrupted texts or the texts they had created themselves. At the conclusion of the lesson, the teacher aided students in constructing descriptive text by presenting questions that were

subsequently incorporated into a paragraph. Overall, the conclusion drawn from these observations is that the use of cartoons effectively enhances student engagement and facilitates the learning of descriptive text.

The teachers played a crucial role in assisting students to simplify the creation of descriptive text by formulating numerous questions, the answers to which could be incorporated into a paragraph. As emphasized by Brown, as cited by Mayaza (2021), "good writing should follow several criteria, among others, content, organization, vocabulary, and grammatical aspect, as well as mechanical aspects such as spelling and punctuation." As a result, writing is viewed as the capacity to express one's thoughts, with a variety of factors to consider, including content and structure, proper syntax and mechanics usage, and suitable word use. These variables combine to improve the overall quality of written work.

Teachers' perceptions of the use of cartoons in teaching writing descriptive texts

This study incorporated interviews to complement the data gathered through questionnaires. The researcher conducted interviews with an English teacher, using English throughout the process. Investigation into the use of cartoons to teach writing descriptive prose indicated that teacher responded well to this educational technique. Prior to teaching, the teacher made thorough preparations, including creating a plan and a mini-draft for the text to be presented through cartoons. Occasionally, the teacher even printed the stories generated by the cartoons.

The teacher expressed a positive perception of using cartoons in teaching writing descriptive text, believing that students have a strong affinity for cartoons and are engaged when presented with cartoon stimuli. The field notes from the researcher indicated that students actively tried to relate the context of the cartoons to their own experiences. They would write texts in their books, and the teacher could then use these texts to discuss various pictures related to the cartoons.

However, the teacher did encounter challenges in implementing this technique. Creating material in cartoons required more than twenty minutes, and the teacher faced the additional task of either drawing cartoons or searching for appropriate images on the internet to display in class. This process consumed time and internet data, especially when suitable cartoon templates were unavailable or deemed inappropriate. Despite these challenges, the overall response to using cartoons in teaching descriptive text was positive, both from the teacher and the students.

Student responses to cartoon image in teaching writing descriptive text

This study used a Likert scale questionnaire to examine the students' responses. The researcher used percentage computation to determine the frequency of respondents' responses to each questionnaire item , following the method outlined by Hatch and Lazaraton, as cited in Ramadhona (2022). The third research question specifically targeted student responses to the use of cartoons in writing descriptive text. To gather data for this research question, the researcher employed a brief rating scales

questionnaire, where students could express their perceptions on the teacher's strategy in implementing cartoons.

The questionnaire utilized a Likert scale with options such as Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree. All 20 respondents participated in responding to the questionnaire items, contributing to the study's dataset. This approach aimed to provide insights into the students' perspectives on the effectiveness and impact of using cartoons in the teaching of descriptive text writing. Description of the data can be seen in following Table 1.

Table 1. Responses of questionnaires

No	Questionnaire Items	SA	A	N	D	SD	Total
1.	Using cartoons to teach me how to write descriptive English texts has made me very happy.	3	15	2	0	0	20
2.	I'm excited to study how to use cartoons in my descriptive English writing.	8	12	0	0	0	20
3.	I find it easier to produce detailed English text because of the cartoons.	10	9	0	0	1	20
4.	The use of cartoons in class helps me enhance my English writing skills.	5	7	7	0	1	20
5.	Writing detailed English texts with cartoons feels boring to me.	0	1	2	14	3	20
6.	Using the Cartoon Story Maker software, I have trouble understanding descriptive English writing materials.	0	1	1	8	10	20
7.	I dislike using the Cartoons to teach me how to write descriptive texts.	0	0	2	11	7	20
8.	Learning to write English descriptive text with cartoons hinders me.	1	2	1	10	6	20

It's encouraging to note that many students responded positively to the use of cartoons in teaching descriptive text writing, as indicated in Table 1. While individual responses may vary, the overall sentiment seems to be positive, contributing to the overall impact of the research. The fact that students expressed happiness and motivation without feeling hindered in their learning efforts aligns with William's (2014, p. 129) assertion that

the involvement of more advanced equipment, such as cartoons, provides additional illustrations for students, particularly younger children, enhancing their appreciation for the learning process. This positive reception suggests that the use of cartoons has had a beneficial impact on students' engagement and enthusiasm in learning to write descriptive text.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study, derived from observations, interviews, and questionnaires, indicate that the use of cartoons has a positive impact on both teachers and students. In the initial session, the teacher provided an overview to stimulate students' imagination, followed by using cards in subsequent sessions to further enhance students' ideas and creativity. The teacher's role as a facilitator was crucial in these sessions, culminating in ample space for students to express their imagination through written descriptions of the cartoons.

During the class observation sessions, it was clear that many students were actively engaged in learning to produce descriptive writing. They were enthusiastic about seeing visuals complemented by fascinating bubble text. Teachers constantly encouraged students to participate by urging them to read texts, whether provided by the teacher or writings they had made themselves. According to the interview, the teacher was pleased to teach descriptive text using cartoons.

The questionnaires also yielded encouraging replies from pupils. Overall, the study found that students improved their capacity to write descriptive prose by asking and answering questions that could be expanded into paragraphs. The criteria for successful writing, which include content, organization, vocabulary utilization, grammatical accuracy, and technical factors such as spelling and punctuation, were highlighted. This means that good writing requires presenting ideas while adhering to specified standards, such as content and organization, adequate grammar and mechanics, and appropriate terminology.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

EN designed the project, main conceptual ideas and research outline. II corrects the theory and research model that will be used in research, EN undertakes almost all the technical details, reference collection, data collection and data processing in the suggested research, MT carried out thorough checks, especially the regularity of grammar and appropriateness of vocabulary as well as the types of references used, II provided feedback to EN to refine the research results to be included in a manuscript which was completely carried out by EN.

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