



## **THE IMPLEMENTATION OF COMIC STRIPS TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' WRITING SKILLS OF THE 11th GRADE STUDENTS OF SMAN 4 YOGYAKARTA**

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### **Abstract**

This study has the purpose to investigate the implementation of comic strips to improve students' writing skills. The method used in this research is classroom action research that was conducted in two cycles in SMAN 4 Yogyakarta from February 5th, 2020 to March 18th, 2020. There were 32 participants of XI MIPA 4 of SMAN 4 Yogyakarta. Each cycle in the classroom action research consisted of four stages, namely, planning, action, observation, and reflection. The research data were collected by observation checklists, field notes, tests, questionnaires, and interviews. The research findings showed that comic strips can improve students' writing skills in the English subject. Then, the mean score improved significantly from the pre-test to post-test 2, i.e. from 49.7 to 86.5.

**Keywords:** classroom action research, comic strips, writing skills

### **Introduction**

Writing is a complex process that needs practices and skills. Writing is a process that produces a written form so that, other people can read it and express their main ideas (Hornby, 2003). In the process of writing, the learners might struggle to find the appropriate topics and ideas that will be poured into their writing. Students need to pay attention to several aspects of effective writing. In creating effective writing, students might be cohesive, logical, clear, interesting, and properly organized. (Jacobs, 1981). Most of the students do not have basic knowledge about the text and they consider writing difficult. Thus, the teacher should focus on the students' needs such as materials, learning activities, skills, and sources in the process of writing. Teachers need to avoid several ineffective teaching strategies such as lack of modern technology during teaching, lack of motivation by teachers, and lack of use practical method to build the understanding of materials.

Based on the researcher's experience when doing the teaching practice in SMAN 4 Yogyakarta, several problems influence the students' skills in writing English. First, Students do not know how to write the correct word or sentence that they have said. Second, they are difficult to construct and express their ideas into a piece of writing. Third, they have several difficulties in dealing with English structure and grammar. Another problem might come from the teacher's way of

teaching. The teacher needs to make the learning process enjoyable and interesting for the students so that the students have more motivation to master their writing skills.

Another problem why students are not interested in writing is the lack of media or technology used in the writing activity. Students need interactive media to stimulate their ideas and thoughts in producing their writing. Comic strips can be the appropriate learning media to develop students' ability in producing writing. Mc Cloud (1993) says that comics are juxtaposed pictorials that consisted of colorful backgrounds and interesting characters to provide information that attracts people's attention. Through some bits of help from the comic strips, the students can also create a story, podcast, or even narrative story, and it is important to help students in organizing their thoughts into a paragraph (Bledsoe, 2010).

Learning media can be used to make students more active in the learning process. According to Azhar (2014), learning media is a tool that can be used by the teacher to deliver the learning messages. Comic strips can help students to develop their concentration through the provided visual elements (Levin and Mayer, 1993). There are several advantages of using comic strips in a learning activity. First, the majority of students are interested in the genre of comics. When talking about comic strips, students can imagine the daily situation, funny story, interesting characters, and the illustration. Second, the comic is easily accessible and it provides a visual element such as picture and text. Students can be motivated to produce their writing easily because of the visual aid. Students can also imagine the new ideas so they can pour those into a piece of writing. Comic strips are the form of a non-verbal sign that can encourage students to produce verbal language in their daily life.

The application or web that supports students in creating comic strips is *Pixton*. *Pixton* is an application that is free, easy to use, and interesting in encouraging students to think and collaborate creatively and critically (Lee, 2013). *Pixton* is one of the media which are often used by other researchers to improve students' speaking skills, reading comprehension, grammar, and vocabulary. However, this study investigates whether or not comic strips can improve students' writing skills because based on the researcher's experience, students often find difficulties in producing a piece of writing. Based on the problems, there are two research questions, namely (1) How is the implementation of comic strips to improve students' writing skills? and (2) How effective is the use of Comic Strips to improve students' writing skills?

## **Method**

This research was conducted by using Classroom Action Research (CAR). Classroom action research can be defined as a process to improve education by involving several changes and encouraging the teachers to work, collaborate, and participate together to improve their practices in this process (Ary, Jacobs & Sorensen, 2010). According to Kemmis and McTaggart (1982), action research is a collective form that can improve the educational practices so that the students can understand the learning practices in the classroom situation. In this research classroom action research aims to help the teacher to improve students' writing skills using comic strips in SMA N 4 Yogyakarta.

Through classroom action research, teachers have the opportunity to reflect on their practices. In the scope of schools, classroom action research has goals to improve the teacher's development in the teaching process and also address some students' problems (Ceprano & Garan, 1998). Classroom action research is essentially a diagrammatical model as a spiral of a cycle of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) develop a cycle of classroom action research. They propose a simple and helpful of a spiral model that comprises four steps: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (See figure 1).

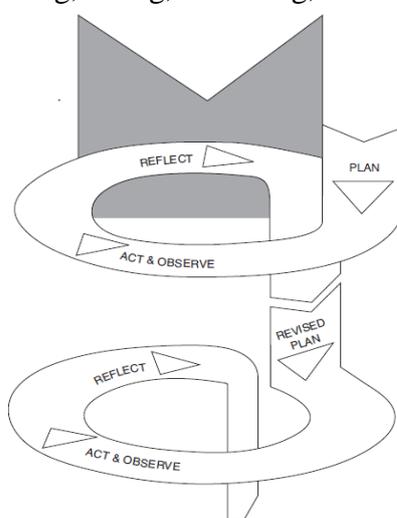


Figure 1. Kemmis and McTaggart's Action Research Spiral (1988)  
(As cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2007, p.278)

### **Findings and Discussion**

From the first observation result, the students did not fully know and understand what the goal of cause and effect is, and they did not even know the language features (signal words: because of, due to, thanks to) used in the cause and effect sentences. The pre-test was not administered directly to the students but there was a brainstorming activity with them with the video and some brief explanation. Then, the students were instructed to do the pre-test. They had to create dialogues of cause and effect with several topics.

In this step, the students did the pre-test without using the comic strips (Pixton app) that have been prepared before. After the pre-test was administered, the scores were collected and listed. The students' writing scores were given based on the assessment rubric that has been created previously to avoid bias. The maximum score will be four (4) and the assessment rubric consisted of idea and content, organization, written mechanics, vocabularies, and grammar. Another view about critical thinking is expressed by Santrock. His studies show that critical thinking is highly related to reflective thinking, productive thinking and evaluating evidence (Santrock, 2018).

**Table 1. Writing Score Rubric**

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Writing Aspect</b>	<b>Score</b>	<b>Description</b>
Performance in written	Idea and content	1	✓ Students do not focus on the theme and topics, a limited number of ideas are relevant to the topics, sentences are not clear and consistent. Sentences also contain very limited details related to the main idea and limited or even no cause and effect signal words.
		2	✓ Students repeat the same sentences and several irrelevant ideas. Sentences contain few supporting details to the ideas. Sentences contain a few of cause and effect signal words.
		3	✓ Commonly, there is a clear idea and theme. Most of the students' sentences are relevant to the topics. Sentences contain some supporting details to the idea and two or more cause and effect signal words.
		4	✓ All ideas in sentences are relevant to the topic. Sentences contain a lot of supporting details to the main idea. Sentences contain three or more cause and effect signal words.
	Vocabulary	1	✓ Many ineffective choices of words and a lot of misuse of vocabulary and word form. Students do not use any conjunction.
		2	✓ Less effective choice of words, some misuse of vocabulary and word form. Students only use simple sentences and limited conjunction.
		3	✓ Effective choice of words, few misuses of vocabulary, and words form. Students use the appropriate and correct conjunction.
		4	✓ Very effective choice of words, no misuse of vocabulary and word form. Students use several correct conjunctions.
	Grammar	1	✓ Dominated by errors of punctuation, spellings, and no control of the structure. So many grammatical mistakes make the reader feel difficult to understand the sentences. (There are 5 or more grammatical errors).

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	2	✓	Many errors and fair control of the structure. Sentences have several errors of spelling, punctuation, and grammar. (no more than 4 grammatical errors)
	3	✓	Few errors and good controls of structures. Sentences have few mistakes in spelling, punctuation, and grammar. The readers can understand the sentences. (No more than 3 grammatical errors)
	4	✓	No errors and full control of structures. There are no spelling and punctuation errors. (no more than one grammatical error)
Mechanics	1	✓	Students' writing is too difficult to read for the readers. Too many mistakes in writing and there is no correct punctuation. The use of incorrect capitalization and dominated by errors in spelling.
	2	✓	Frequent errors in spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.
	3	✓	Few errors in spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.
	4	✓	No errors in spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.
Organization	1	✓	Students' writing and ideas are disorganized, lack logical sequencing. There is no coherence between the first sentence and the last sentence. The composition does not contain any generic structure of cause and effect text.
	2	✓	Loosely organized, somehow there is no correlation and coherence between the first and the last sentence. There is one generic structure of cause and effect text.
	3	✓	Fairly well organized and generally organized. There is an overall unity of ideas. The composition contains two generic structures of cause and effect text.
	4	✓	Well organized and perfectly coherent, the unity of sentences and ideas lead the readers to the conclusion about the topics. The

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composition contains a complete generic structure of a cause and effect text.

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Based on the students' results of the pre-test, it could be seen that most of the students got low scores. After that, the average and mean of the scores were calculated. KKM (*Kriteria Ketuntasan Minimal*) or the criteria of English passing grade is 75 and none of the students achieved the score above the passing grade thus their writing can be considered low.

From the pre-test results, the problems faced by the students in writing were summarized. The problems were a) the students had some difficulties in understanding the meaning of the signal words used in cause and effect. It could be proven by the dialogues that had been created, some students did not know how to use the signal words and some of them only knew *because*. b) The students did not know how to write some English words properly. It could be proven by the misspellings in the dialogues. c) The students did not pay attention to the punctuation and handwriting. It could be proved by their handwriting, they forgot to put the full stop, they did not put a comma in the required place, and they put the exclamation mark to the general sentences. Thus, the action research was carried out in five meetings for cycles 1 and 2 including the observation.

In this first cycle, the implementation of the steps, i.e. to plan, act, observe and reflect using the comic strips as media was conducted to improve the instruction or revise the lesson plan for the next cycle. After the observation and pre-test were conducted, the problems faced by the students in the English subject, especially in writing, were summarized. The students had no motivation in learning English because the teacher rarely used some interesting media in the teaching and learning process. On the other hand, students could not express their idea writing ability optimally. Then, comic strips using *Pixton* was introduced and used by the students to improve their writing skills. In this cycle, the teaching and learning process began. Then, comic strips to support the action part and also the students' worksheets were prepared.

The implementation of *Pixton* comic strips proved to improve the students' writing skills. The students enjoyed using *Pixton* in their writing process. However, some students sat in the back and did not pay attention to the explanation, so they missed the steps and tended to write their dialogues on the piece of paper first. There was one main weakness of this research, i.e. the internet connection. A few students who were enthusiastic to create comic strips and dialogues brought their laptops. For those who used their smartphone, they did not feel enthusiastic enough because the app was more difficult to use than on the laptop or computer. By concerning some problems that happened in the first cycle, some changes were made on the implementation of the action in the second cycle. From cycle 1, several students were still confused about the use of grammatical construction and punctuation. Then, the students' grammatical errors and the punctuation from the pre-test and first post-test were observed and reviewed.

Then, to recall the students' memories of cause and effect signal words, the observer gave a piece of advice that the students should do some exercises. After that, the students were asked to do the writing test as the first post-test. The students

were instructed to make dialogues related to cause and effect materials and based on the topics that they have chosen using *Pixton*. The students seemed enthusiastic to use the *Pixton* web in writing the dialogues related to cause and effect. Students were interested in using the app because they could combine some pictures and also dialogues or descriptions. Then, students could express their thoughts and feelings through writing because they were tired of having something to do with the task, paper, pen, and table. Then, other students also said that they were interested in the implementation because the web helped them to think about the new ideas and they can pour their ideas into a piece of writing. In this writing activity, the students were asked to focus on the grammar, content, organization of the dialogues and the story. The students then were shown examples of comic strips with the dialogues using correct grammar and good organization. After looking at the example, the students were motivated to make for a better comic strip than before.

Lastly, the research also showed that the implementation of comic strips using the *Pixton* app could improve the students' writing skills. Comic strips were considered as the effective media used in the writing activity. Based on the interview results, some students stated that comic strips were effective to use in the classroom and to improve writing skills. Besides, comic strips also helped the students to write creatively.

According to Carry (2004), comic strips can be used to stimulate students' learning process as the media could help them in dealing with several complicated language in writing. Moreover, comic strips provide visual and linguistic aspects as the guidance for the students to generate their ideas while writing some stories. The results improvement of students' writing could be proven from the result of pre-test, post-test I, and post-test II done by the students in the classroom. Finally, there were a total of 27 students' scores out of 32 that were considered because there were five students that did not follow the tests.

**Table 2. The mean scores of the students' Pre-test, Post-test 1, and Post-test 2**

Pre-test	Post-test 1	Post-test 2
49.7	75.19	86.5

In the post-test 2, all of the students considered successful to improve their writing skills even though four students got 75 that is equivalent to the minimum criteria of mastery learning of the English subject. The result of post-test 2 improved significantly from the pre-test and post-test 1. In the pre-test, there were no students who got scores higher than or equal to the minimum criteria. They were considered unsuccessful in writing skills at that time because of several reasons such as feeling tired after Math daily test, having no preparation, and not yet understanding the materials. Meanwhile, in the post-test 1 in cycle I, there was a significant improvement from no one to 16 (59.26%) of 27 students who passed the passing grade. Those students were considered successful in improving their writing skills because they could achieve the minimum criteria of mastery learning. The improvement of students' mean scores is presented in the following figure 2.

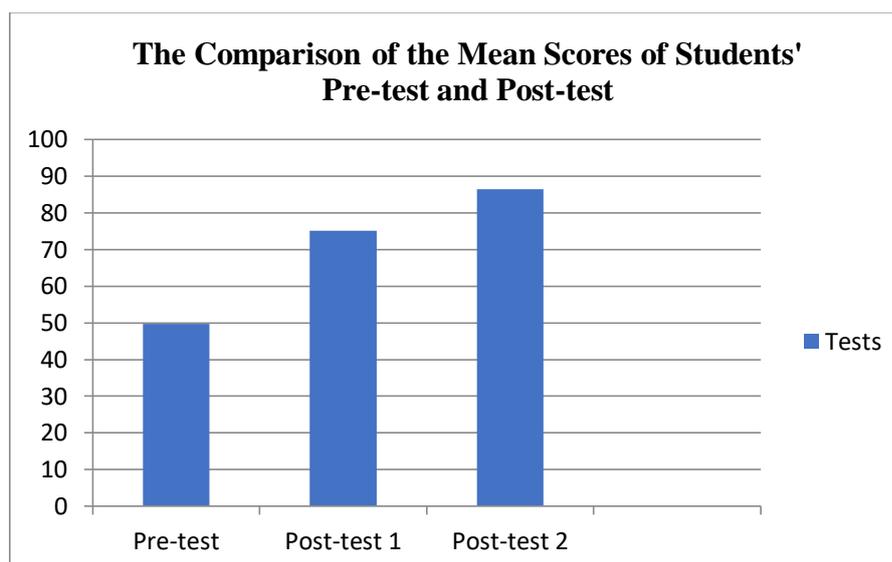


Figure 2. The comparison of the mean scores of the students' pre-test and post-test.

To answer the formulated question in this research, the results of the questionnaire were combined. The questionnaires were distributed to the students at the end of cycle II. In this research, the students were given some brief explanation, so that they could simply understand the content of the questionnaire. Then, the result of the questionnaire showed that the students got some benefits from the implementation of comic strips and the students could improve their writing skills.

### Conclusion

There were two cycles in this research. There were two meetings in the cycles. The activities in the first cycle were explaining the materials, implementing the comic strips, and writing the dialogues. The actions implemented in cycle two were the explanation of the materials, group discussion, and implementation of comic strips. The results of this research show that the implementation of comic strips can improve students' writing skills. It is proved from the comparison of the scores in their pre-test, post-test 1, and post-test 2. The mean score of the pre-test is lower than the mean score of the post-test. It means that comic strips through *the Pixton* app improve the eleventh-grade students' writing skills of SMAN 4 Yogyakarta. Then, the findings showed that the comic strips were effective to be implemented in the teaching and learning process. It can be seen from the observation during the learning process. The students in the classroom gave positive responses and paid attention to the teacher's explanation. The classroom situation became conducive and interactive because the students enjoyed writing and they were motivated in the learning process.

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