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Empowering Students' Writing Abilities through Interactive Comics: A Vocabulary Achievement

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Abstract

Writing is one of the most challenging language skills, requiring strong vocabulary, grammar, and organization. However, many students struggle due to limited vocabulary and lack of engaging instruction. This classroom action research aimed to improve students' narrative writing through the use of interactive comics. Conducted in two cycles at SMKN 1 Pekalongan with 17 eleventh-grade students, the study followed the stages of planning, action, observation, and reflection. Data were collected through tests, observations, and documentation. In Cycle I, students' average score increased from 59.12 (pre-test) to 64.62 (post-test), with 37.5% of students reaching the minimum mastery criterion (≥70). In Cycle II, the average score rose to 83.70, with 88.2% of students achieving the target. Observations also showed a significant increase in student participation and engagement. The use of interactive comics not only enhanced vocabulary acquisition in context but also helped students generate ideas and structure their writing more effectively. The findings suggest that comic media is a valuable tool to support vocabulary development and improve students' writing performance. It also enhanced classroom interaction and teacher performance, making the learning process more dynamic and student-centered.

Keywords: Interactive comics, vocabulary, writing skills, action research

INTRODUCTION

Writing is generally seen as the most challenging language skill because it requires correct grammar, proper sentence structure, a wide range of words, and clear organization (Rashid et al., 2021). Vocabulary is especially important for good writing. Points out that knowing many words is linked to writing well; students who don't have a rich vocabulary often write pieces that are repetitive and unclear (Nurlatifah & Yusuf, 2022). Despite its importance, the way vocabulary is usually taught, through memorization and without much context, has been criticized for being boring and not helping students remember words or stay motivated (Laoli et al., 2025) .

The difficulty of writing has led to ongoing discussions among researchers about the most effective ways to teach vocabulary. Some scholars advocate for explicit instruction, which involves directly teaching word definitions and how to use them (Bulqiyah et al., 2021). Others support incidental learning, where vocabulary is picked up naturally through meaningful exposure to language, arguing that this contextual learning is more effective (Hao et al., 2021).

Writing is often more challenging than other language skills because it demands a high level of attention to detail to produce quality work. In practice, students at SMKN 1 Pekalongan show low performance in writing. A pre-survey of eleventh graders revealed that only 23.52% (10 students) passed the writing subject, while a significant 76.47% (13 students) failed. The scores ranged from a high of 85 to a low of 35, with the minimum mastery criteria for English being 70.

Based on an interview with a teacher at SMKN 1 Pekalongan, it's clear that

engaging teaching media are rarely used. The teacher primarily relies on presentations and worksheets. This approach often leaves students disengaged. Incorporating more attractive media could significantly boost student interest and, in turn, improve their English proficiency, particularly their writing skills.

Interactive comics are gaining traction in vocabulary learning because they effectively combine visual storytelling with user interaction, boosting student engagement and understanding through context (Nishonova, 2024). Research by (Mörth et al., 2023) indicates that digital comics with features like clickable vocabulary, animations, and branching narratives can significantly improve how well learners remember words and their motivation to learn. These tools align with (Marougkas et al., 2023) multimedia learning theory, which posits that presenting information through both visuals and words strengthens memory. Learners generally find vocabulary more meaningful when it's embedded in rich, emotionally engaging story environments.

However, some academics question how deeply and permanently vocabulary is learned through such media. (Wang, 2025) argue that without direct instruction and active use of the language, words acquired incidentally from comics might not effectively transfer to productive skills like writing. (Krajka, 2021) also warn that too much reliance on visual aids could hinder learners' ability to process words independently. Therefore, while interactive comics offer innovative potential, they are best utilized as a complementary tool rather than a complete replacement for structured vocabulary instruction.

To bridge the gap between traditional vocabulary instruction and effective learning, recent research has started looking into how multimodal and digital texts, such as comics and visual narratives, can help students build their vocabulary (Linder & Falk-Ross, 2024). Interactive comics, which are digital comic strips that include clickable elements, sounds, animations, or stories driven by the learner, are showing great promise as a tool for language learning (Berube et al., 2024). These comics offer words in context and also boost student engagement through their visual appeal and interactive features (Dewi et al., 2025).

Despite promising claims, there's limited research, particularly in English as an English Foreign Language (EFL) that directly examines how interactive comics improve both vocabulary and writing skills at the same time. Additionally, many previous studies haven't clearly linked vocabulary growth to better writing, leaving us with an incomplete picture of how word knowledge influences written expression.

Therefore, this study aims to contribute to the ongoing academic discussion by examining how interactive comics can enhance students' writing abilities through improved vocabulary. This research aligns with current educational trends that emphasize integrating digital literacy into traditional language instruction and addresses the need for more engaging, context-based teaching strategies that cater to the cognitive and emotional needs of students in today's classrooms.

METHOD

The research to be conducted is a classroom action research. According to Suharsimi Arikunto, classroom action research is essentially an investigation into teaching and learning practices carried out directly within the classroom environment. This means it's a type of inquiry that allows educators to examine and assess their own work within the classroom setting. time and place of research.

Therefore, this research will employ a collaborative research approach. The researcher is utilizing this method to ensure the objectivity of the research findings. This aligns with Suharsimi Arikunto's view that research conducted by multiple individuals tends to be more careful and objective (Assu'ada et al., 2023).

Classroom action research typically involves two cycles: Cycle I and Cycle II. Each of these cycles comprises four distinct activities: Planning, Action, Observation, and Reflection (Arikunto, 2022).

The participants in this study are the eleventh-grade science students at SMKN 1 Pekalongan. This particular class was selected because the majority of these students have low scores in English, especially in writing. The class comprises 17 students in total: 3 males and 14 females.

In order to collect data, the researcher will resort to tests, observations, documentation, and field notes. The researcher will take the students' scores from each meeting and compare them. If the students' scores improve from meeting to meeting, it suggests that comics can help eleventh graders at SMKN 1 Pekalongan.

Data analysis will be conducted by taking the average score of test in cycle 1 and cycle 2. This formula is used to calculate the average score by dividing the total score obtained by all students (∑X) by the number of students (N).

Where:
$\bar{X}$ = Mean or average score
∑X = Sum of all individual scores
N = Total number of students

Formula:
$\bar{X} = \sum X / N$

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

During this session, the researcher led the class as the teacher, with Mr. Toto Sugiarto, S.Pd, the English teacher, acting as the collaborator. The meeting followed the standard Classroom Action Research (CAR) framework, moving through the stages of planning, action, observation, and reflection.

In the planning stage, the researcher and collaborator meticulously prepared all necessary teaching materials. This included developing the syllabus, a detailed lesson plan, student worksheets, individual assignments, and observation sheets for both the teacher and the students.

The action phase began with all 17 students present. The teacher started by greeting the class, taking attendance, and reviewing their existing knowledge of narrative texts. However, only two students were able to correctly define a narrative text. The teacher then proceeded to explain the structure and linguistic features of narrative writing. Following this explanation, students were tasked with individually writing a narrative text on the topic of "Holiday," without the aid of comic media. Many students appeared confused and lacked confidence, with some engaging in off-task behaviour or seeking assistance from their peers. Despite these challenges, all students did complete the assignment.

During the observation stage, it was noted that even after the teacher's explanation of narrative elements, most students still had difficulty differentiating narrative texts from report texts. The results of the pre-test further highlighted this struggle, with only 6 out of 17 students scoring above 70.

Table 1. The Frequency of Students' Score in Pre-test at Cycle I

No	Score	Cycle I	
		Freq	Percent
1	20-29	-	--
2	30-39	1	5.8 %
3	40-49	2	11.8 %
4	50-59	5	29.4 %
5	60-69	6	35.3 %
6	70-79	3	17.6 %
7	80-89	-	-
8	90-100	-	-
	Total	17	

As presented in Table 1, none of the students scored within the ranges of 20–29, 80–89, or 90–100. One student (5.8%) obtained a score between 30–39, two students (11.8%) scored within 40–49, and five students (29.4%) fell into the 50–59 range. The majority, six students (35.3%), achieved scores between 60–69, while three students (17.6%) scored between 70–79. The highest score in the pre-test of Cycle I was 78, whereas the lowest was 39.

Table 2. The Students' Criteria an Teacher's Aspect in Pre-test at Cycle I

The Students' Criteria and Teacher's Aspect	Students		Teacher	
	Freq	Percent	Freq	Percent
Very Good	1	5.9 %	1	8.3 %
Good	1	5.9 %	4	33.3 %
Fair	6	35.3 %	4	33.3 %
Enough	5	29.4 %	1	8.3 %
Less	4	23.5 %	2	16.7 %
Total	**17**		**12**	

Based on the data, the teacher's performance in Cycle I, Meeting 1 was still lacking. Of the 12 assessed aspects (see appendices), only 1 aspect (8.3%) was rated "Very Good," 4 (33.3%) "Good," 4 (33.3%) "Fair," 1 (8.3%) "Enough," and 2 (16.7%) "Less." This indicates a need for improvement in the teacher's instructional performance

The table shows that out of 17 students, only 1 (5.9%) was categorized as "Very Good" in classroom activity, another 1 (5.9%) as "Good," 6 (35.3%) as "Fair," 5 (29.4%) as "Enough," and 4 (23.5%) as "Less." This indicates that the teacher needed to provide more motivation to encourage greater student participation in class.

Table 3. The Frequency of Students' Score in Post-test at Cycle I and Cycle II

No	**Score**	**Cycle I**		**Cycle II**	
		Freq	**%**	**Freq**	**%**
1	20-29	-	--	-	-
2	30-39	1	6.2 %	-	-
3	40-49	1	6.2 %	1	5.8 %
4	50-59	3	18.7 %	-	-
5	60-69	5	31.2 %	6	35.2 %
6	70-79	3	18.7 %	4	23.5 %
7	80-89	3	18.7 %	5	29.4
8	90-100	-	-	1	% 5.8 %
	Total	**16**		**17**	

Based on Table 3, no students obtained scores in the 20–29 or 90–100 range. One student (6.2%) scored between 30–39, and another (6.2%) scored within 40–49. Three students (18.7%) achieved scores in the 50–59 range, while five students (31.2%) fell into the 60–69 category. Additionally, three students (18.7%) obtained scores between 70–79, and two students (18.7%) reached scores in the 80–89 range. The highest score in the pre-test of Cycle I was 84, while the lowest was 34.

No students obtained scores in the 20–29, 30–39, or 50–59 ranges. One student (5.8%) scored between 40–49, while six students (35.2%) achieved scores within the 60–69 range. Four students (23.5%) scored between 70–79, and five students (29.4%) reached scores in the 80–89 range. Additionally, one student (5.8%) obtained a score in the 90–100 range. The highest score in the first meeting of Cycle I was 90, whereas the lowest was 39.

Table 4. The Students' Activities Teacher's Aspect in Post-test of Cycle I and Cycle II

The Students' Criteria and Teacher's Aspect	Students		Teacher	
	Freq	Percent	Freq	Percent
Very Good	2	12.5 %	3	25 %
Good	4	25 %	4	33.3 %
Fair	3	18.8 %	2	16.7 %
Enough	4	25 %	2	16.7 %
Less	3	18.8 %	1	8.3 %
Total of students	**16**		12	

The table indicates that out of 17 students, 2 (12.5%) were "Very Good," 4 (25%) were "Good," 3 (18.8%) were "Fair," 4 (25%) were "Enough," and 3 (18.8%) were "Less" in their class activities. This suggests that students were beginning to be more active than before. Analysis of the data reveals that teachers' activities in the first meeting of Cycle I began to improve when compared to the pre-test results. Specifically, out of 12 assessed aspects, three (25%) were rated "Very Good," four (33.3%) were "Good,"

two (16.7%) were "Fair," two (16.7%) were "Enough," and one (8.3%) was "Less." This suggests a positive start, but also highlights the ongoing need for the teacher to further develop their teaching skills.

Table 5. The Increasing of students' score in Cycle I and Cycle II

No	Explanation	Cycle I		Cycle II	
		Freq	%	Freq	%
1.	Increase	14	82.3 %	16	94.1 %
2.	Constant	-	-	1	5.9 %
3.	Decrease	3	17.6 %	-	-
Total of Students		**17**		**17**	

The data shows that 14 students (82.3%) improved, 3 students (17.6%) declined, and none remained the same. As seen in the appendices, students' writing performance in Cycle 1 was still below expectation, with only 6 students (37.5%) meeting the minimum score of 70. Although there was some progress in the post-test, only 10 students (58.8%) reached the target, which still fell short of the 85% success criterion.

Based on the data, 16 students (94.1%) showed improvement, 1 student (5.9%) remained the same, and none showed a decline. As seen in the appendices, only 10 out of 17 students (58.8%) initially scored above 70, which did not meet the 85% KKM standard. However, in the post-test, 15 students (88.2%) achieved scores above 70, indicating the KKM was met.

These results show that using comic media improved students' writing skills and enhanced their vocabulary achievement. Students became more active, enthusiastic, and capable of expressing their ideas and opinions through narrative texts based on the comic stories.

This finding is supported by various national and international studies. (Permata et al., 2024) demonstrated that comic strips significantly enhanced students' narrative writing performance, with an increase in average scores. Similarly, (Amrizal, 2022) reported that students taught using comics reached an average score, showing clear improvement in writing quality and structure.

From a vocabulary perspective, (Purba & Rini, 2021) found that comic strip integration increased vocabulary mastery, raising students' average scores. (Girsang & Rini, 2021) also confirmed that students exposed to idioms in comic formats not only scored higher in vocabulary tests but were also more motivated and engaged in learning.

CONCLUSION

The students' average score in Cycle I increased from 59.12 (pre-test) to 64.62 (post-test), with students scoring ≥70 rising from 3 (17.65%) to 6 students (37.5%). In Cycle II post-test, the average score reached 83.70, with 15 students (88.2%) scoring ≥70. This shows a score improvement of 19.08 points, and indicates that the learning objective—at least 85% of students scoring ≥70—was successfully achieved.

Observation results also showed progress in student activity. In Cycle I, only one student was categorized as "very active" during the pre-test, increasing to two students in the post-test. In Cycle II post-test, 10 students were observed as "very active." This suggests that using comic media significantly improved students' engagement across the meetings.

Moreover, the use of comics supported the teacher's performance. Since comics contain the elements of narrative texts, students were better able to understand the structure and apply it in their writing. It also allowed them to express their creativity more effectively.

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