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# The Use of Describing Picture Strategy to Teach Students Speaking Skills

Peni Astuti M.Pd, Amir Hamzah

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Faletahan, Serang, Indonesia  
Correspondent Email: [1peniastutiuf@gmail.com](mailto:1peniastutiuf@gmail.com)  
Email: [2amirhamzahk01@gmail.com](mailto:2amirhamzahk01@gmail.com)

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## ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of the Describing Picture strategy in improving students' speaking skills at SMK Negeri 1 Kramatwatu. A qualitative descriptive research design was employed to explore students' and teacher's perceptions of the strategy. The participants consisted of eleventh-grade students and an English teacher. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. The findings revealed that the Describing Picture strategy positively influenced students' speaking skills by enhancing vocabulary development, increasing confidence, and encouraging active participation in speaking activities. The use of visual media helped students generate ideas more easily, while group work and teacher feedback reduced anxiety during oral presentations. Overall, the strategy created an engaging and supportive learning environment that facilitated students' oral communication skills. The results suggest that the Describing Picture strategy is effective and can be applied as an alternative technique for teaching speaking in EFL classrooms.

**Key words:** describing picture strategy, speaking skills, EFL learners, qualitative study, visual media

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## INTRODUCTION

Speaking is one of the most essential language skills for effective communication, especially in learning a foreign language. Among the four language skills, speaking is often considered the most challenging because it requires learners to produce language spontaneously and accurately (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). For many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, the primary goal of learning English is the ability to communicate orally in real-life situations (Pakula, 2019). In today's globalized world, communication skills play a crucial role in academic and professional contexts, making speaking competence a vital skill to be mastered. Since English functions as an international language, students are expected to develop adequate speaking abilities to support their future careers. Therefore, the classroom becomes an important environment for fostering students' speaking skills through appropriate teaching strategies (Rao, 2019).

Despite its importance, many Indonesian EFL students still face significant difficulties in speaking English. Students often feel reluctant and unmotivated to participate in speaking activities because they perceive English as a difficult subject. Limited vocabulary, lack of confidence, and fear of making mistakes frequently prevent students from expressing their ideas orally. Even students who have learned English for several years may struggle to communicate effectively due to insufficient practice and exposure. Furthermore, conventional teaching methods that rely heavily on textbooks tend to make learning monotonous and fail to engage students actively in speaking practice (Farhanah Pratiwi & Ayu, 2020). As a result, students may lose interest and feel that English learning is not enjoyable or relevant to their daily lives. This condition indicates that students' learning difficulties are also influenced by the classroom environment and interaction patterns, as learning behavior is shaped through social contexts within education (Astuti et al., 2023).



To address these challenges, teachers are required to implement creative and interactive teaching strategies that can motivate students and support their speaking development. One alternative technique that can be applied is the Describing Picture strategy. This method utilizes visual media to stimulate students' imagination and encourage them to express ideas verbally. By describing pictures, students are guided to observe details, generate vocabulary, and construct meaningful sentences. The use of pictures can also help students activate their senses and prior knowledge, making the learning process more engaging and meaningful. As a result, students are expected to become more confident and active in speaking activities.

The Describing Picture strategy also promotes student interaction and collaboration. Through group activities, students can exchange ideas, support one another, and receive immediate feedback from peers and teachers. This collaborative environment helps reduce students' anxiety when speaking in front of others and gradually improves their fluency. According to Ismail, (2008), the steps of applying the describing picture strategy include preparing relevant pictures, asking students to observe the pictures carefully, organizing group work, listing vocabulary based on the pictures, constructing sentences, presenting oral descriptions, and concluding the lesson with clarification and reflection. These structured steps provide systematic guidance for students to develop their speaking skills.

Based on preliminary observations at SMKN 1 Kramatwatu, several problems were identified among eleventh-grade students, such as low interest in learning English, limited vocabulary mastery, and lack of confidence in speaking. Students were often hesitant to speak due to fear of making mistakes and being judged by their peers. These issues hindered their ability to communicate effectively in English. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the effectiveness of the Describing Picture strategy in enhancing the speaking skills of eleventh-grade students at SMKN 1 Kramatwatu. The main research question addressed in this study is whether the Describing Picture strategy can help students overcome their difficulties in speaking English. The findings of this research are expected to provide insights for English teachers in Indonesia

in designing more engaging and effective speaking activities tailored to students' needs

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore the effectiveness of the describing picture strategy in improving students' speaking skills. Qualitative research is appropriate for this study because it allows the researcher to obtain in-depth data regarding participants' experiences, perceptions, and responses within a natural classroom context. According to Sugiyono, qualitative research is a philosophy-based approach used to investigate natural conditions, where the researcher functions as the main instrument, data are collected through various qualitative techniques, and meaning is emphasized rather than numerical generalization (Sugiyono, 2017).

The research was conducted at SMKN 1 Kramatwatu and involved eleventh-grade students as the main participants. A total of 20 students participated in classroom observations during English speaking lessons in which the describing picture strategy was implemented. To obtain deeper insights, three students and one English teacher were purposively selected for semi-structured interviews. The selection of participants was based on their direct involvement in the learning process and their ability to provide relevant information related to the implementation of the strategy.

The research instruments were developed based on the procedural steps of the describing picture strategy. The instruments functioned as guidelines for classroom observation and semi-structured interviews rather than as tools for scoring or numerical measurement. The indicators were designed to systematically explore the implementation of the strategy and participants' responses during the teaching and learning process. Table 1 presents the research instrument blueprint used in this study.

**Table 1.** Research Instrument Blueprint for the Describing Picture Strategy

Variable	Indicator	Item Numbers
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Describing Picture Strategy	Preparation of pictures relevant to the lesson topic	1–4
	Students' observation and examination of picture details	5–6
	Grouping of students during describing picture activities	7–8
	Vocabulary identification based on picture observation	9–10
	Sentence construction using identified vocabulary	11–12
	Oral presentation of picture descriptions	13–14
	Teacher clarification, feedback, and reflection	15–16

As shown in Table 1, the instrument consisted of seven indicators derived from the steps of the describing picture strategy and was used to guide the data collection process during classroom observation and interviews.

Data were collected through classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Classroom observation was conducted to capture students' engagement, interaction, and speaking performance during the implementation of the describing picture strategy. Field notes were used to record important events and responses that occurred during the learning activities. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the selected students and the English teacher using the indicators in the instrument as guiding questions. These interviews aimed to explore participants' perceptions of the effectiveness, advantages, and challenges of using pictures to improve speaking skills. Documentation, such as lesson plans, teaching

materials, students' written work, and photographs of classroom activities, was also collected to support and strengthen the findings.

The data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of four interrelated steps: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification (Miles, 1994)). Data collection involved gathering information from observations, interviews, and documentation. Data reduction was carried out by selecting, focusing, and organizing relevant data related to the research objectives. The reduced data were then displayed in descriptive narratives and tables to facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusions were drawn by identifying patterns and recurring themes, and the findings were verified through comparison across different data sources.

Prior to conducting the research, formal permission was obtained from the school authorities, including the principal of SMKN 1 Kramatwatu. After receiving approval, the researcher coordinated with the English teacher to explain the research objectives, procedures, and instruments. Classroom observations were conducted during English lessons, followed by interviews with selected participants. All collected data were then analyzed systematically to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of the describing picture strategy in improving students' speaking skills at SMK Negeri 1 Kramatwatu. The findings were derived from qualitative data collected through interviews with teachers and students and classroom observations. The discussion is organized based on seven instructional indicators representing the stages of implementing the describing picture strategy.

The first indicator concerns the preparation of pictures according to the lesson topic. The findings show that the teacher consistently prepared relevant images prior to instruction, which helped students understand descriptive topics more easily and increased their



engagement. This finding aligns with Çakir et al., (2006), who states that well-selected visual media can enhance learners' motivation and comprehension by providing contextual support in language learning. Similarly, Tomlinson, (2023) emphasizes that meaningful visual input plays an important role in facilitating language acquisition, particularly in speaking activities.

The second indicator relates to students' examination of picture accuracy. Students were given time to observe and analyze images before describing them, enabling them to identify details and generate ideas. Although some students experienced difficulty with unfamiliar images, most reported that this stage supported idea development. This finding supports Derakhshan et al., (2016), who argue that visual stimuli help learners organize ideas and reduce cognitive load during speaking tasks. Visual input in this stage functioned as a scaffold for oral production.

The third indicator addresses the division of students into groups. The findings reveal that group work encouraged interaction and collaboration, allowing students to share vocabulary and ideas before speaking. This result is consistent with (Gillies, 2016), who highlights that cooperative learning enhances student participation and promotes positive social interaction. In speaking instruction, collaborative tasks provide a supportive environment that encourages learners to communicate more confidently.

The fourth indicator focuses on vocabulary identification based on picture observation. The results show that students were able to generate relevant descriptive vocabulary after observing images. Associating words with visual representations helped students understand and remember vocabulary more effectively. This finding aligns with (Nation, 2007), who emphasizes that vocabulary learning is more effective when words are encountered in meaningful and contextualized input. Pictures in this study served as contextual cues that supported vocabulary development for speaking.

The fifth indicator concerns sentence construction using the identified vocabulary. The findings indicate that students were able to form descriptive sentences and improve their

understanding of sentence structure through collaborative writing and teacher feedback. This result supports (Goh, 2017), who argues that planning and guided practice are essential components in developing learners' speaking performance. Writing sentences before speaking helped students organize ideas and increase confidence.

The sixth indicator relates to oral presentation of picture descriptions. The findings show that this stage was the most challenging for students due to limited vocabulary and lack of confidence. This finding is consistent with Teimouri et al., (2019), who report that second language anxiety negatively influences learners' speaking performance and willingness to communicate. In classroom contexts, students' confidence and participation in speaking activities are closely related to the type of speaking instruction implemented (Soraya et al., n.d.). However, the teacher's guidance and repeated speaking practice observed in this study helped students gradually reduce anxiety and improve their oral performance.

The final indicator concerns teacher clarification, feedback, and reflection. The findings indicate that teacher feedback played an essential role in reinforcing students' understanding and improving their speaking skills. Constructive feedback helped students recognize errors and develop greater awareness of language use. This finding aligns with Carless & Boud, (2018), who emphasize that effective feedback supports learner engagement and long-term improvement. Reflection activities also encouraged students to participate more actively in subsequent speaking tasks.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the describing picture strategy is effective in improving students' speaking skills, particularly in terms of vocabulary development, confidence, and engagement. The integration of visual media, cooperative learning, and reflective feedback created a supportive learning environment that facilitated students' oral communication development.



## CONCLUSIONS

This study investigated the effectiveness of the Describing Picture strategy in improving students' speaking skills at SMK Negeri 1 Kramatwatu. Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that the strategy was effective in addressing students' speaking difficulties, particularly in terms of vocabulary mastery, confidence, and classroom engagement. The use of pictures provided meaningful visual support that helped students generate ideas and express them orally. Group activities and teacher feedback also played an important role in reducing students' anxiety and encouraging active participation in speaking tasks. These findings indicate that the Describing Picture strategy can be used as an alternative teaching technique to support speaking instruction in EFL classrooms. Future studies are recommended to involve a larger number of participants and apply the strategy in different educational contexts to further explore its effectiveness.

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